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JOURNEYS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A DISSERTATION

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DANCING ON THE EDGE: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' TRANSFORMATIVE
JOURNEYS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

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DEDICATION

In Loving Memory of

My Father

龔鴻章

and

My Mother

邱玉梅

And

In the Name of Love from

My Siblings, Families, and Friends

And

In Honor of

Heaven and Earth,

and

All in Between

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Taken from here to the future to which I sail, I thank all the living creatures, our ancestors, and people I know and have not known for all the good they have done for me. I humble myself before them, before all the masters in academia, and before you.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored international students' experiences of studying in the United

States, including the motives that brought them to the United States, the challenges they

confronted, and the learning and development opportunities that arose. The theoretical

framework of the study was embedded in theories of adult learning and development,

chaos and complexity, and transformative learning. The qualitative methodology aimed

to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of these international students, and to

capture and represent their meaning making and their learning journeys. Data were

collected primarily from two in-depth interviews with eighteen participants, and analyzed

qualitatively following the guidelines of interpretivism.

The findings revealed that the journeys of these participants studying in the

United States comprised a process of cultural crossing, in which four major themes were

identified that, in turn, addressed the research questions. These included seizing

opportunities to determine their destinies, confronting difficulties and disequilibrium,

navigating between home and host cultures, and being and becoming authentic. The

major elements that contributed to these participants' adjustment and success were their

personal capacities, relationships with others including their new living environments,

and their capabilities to engage in transformative learning. Out of the research findings, a

conceptual schema of being and becoming was introduced to capture these participants'

change and growth during the process of cultural crossing.

Implications and recommendations arising from this study include the need for:

(1) American universities to undertake further research, conduct needs assessments, and

provide cultural learning training programs; (2) staff, faculty members, and classmates to

perform active listening and share their know-how with international students; (3)

international students to befriend others, form learning communities, and open

themselves to learning. Finally, researching the corresponding impacts, challenges, and

difficulties that American counterparts may experience while interacting with

international students may further contribute to both domestic and international students'

change and growth. Confronting challenges and difficulties leads these participants to

dance on the edge of disequilibrium and re-equilibrium in a foreign land; however, their

lives and the lives of those around them will never be the same.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The journey that international students pursue of studying in the United States of America entails constant learning and development in order to maintain balance between stages of disequilibrium and re-equilibrium. On the one hand, these students enter more chaotic, complex, and unknown life circumstances that require adjustments to function effectively in the host country. On the other hand, they begin a process of what Bridges (1980) calls "self-renewal" (p. 5) through undertaking new meanings, purposes, and value negotiations while working on their degrees at U.S. universities. Furthermore, being international students in the United States fractures these students' old identities and stimulates them critically to reflect upon issues of who they are and what they truly want to become. These students must recognize their new reality and learn to manage their cross-cultural transition to enable them accomplishing their desired goals of earning a degree from American universities (Arthur, 2004; Harris, 2003). Therefore, understanding the manner in which they learn and transform while studying in the United States may assist not only them in achieving their learning goals, but also benefit both the host and home countries from the interchange of knowledge and cultures. Finally, educators may become empowered to design programs in such ways that maximize the gains to both students and institutions.

Background of the Problem

International students are drawn to the United States for a variety of reasons. First, the United States is viewed as a place to fulfill goals and dreams. Also, the United States of America is highly developed economically and is an ethnically and culturally

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diverse country. Moreover, the image portrayed of the United States is a land of hope

with unlimited freedom and opportunities. According to the Institute of International

Education's (IIE) Open Doors 2006 report, approximately 564,766 international students

enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions during the academic year of 2005 and 2006

(Institute of International Education's Open Doors, 2006a). Clearly American colleges

and universities are more international than ever. After the terrorist attack on September

11, 2001, there was a significant decrease in international students enrollment in the

United States; however, it remains the country with the most international students in the

world. International students choose the United States to pursue higher education,

expecting a more prestigious higher education degree as well as a learning experience

that may improve their life opportunities, advance their careers, and enhance their

mobility after graduation (Barker, 1997).

Several factors arise concerning international students and their needs and

requirements with regard to U.S. government agencies (e.g., to maintain a full-time

student status) and institutions of higher education. To begin with, the trend toward

globalization and the digital revolution (e.g., telecommunication and internet) has broken

national boundaries. Studying in the United States is viewed as a gateway to enhance

one's competence and mobility in the global market. This in part occurs because the

United States is a technologically innovative country and its official language, English,

has become a universal language. This notion reveals the need for colleges and

universities in the United States to become international institutions not only to better

facilitate international students to achieve their educational goals, but also to promote

cultural exchanges to prepare students for global competition (Altbach & Lewis, 1998;

Harris, 2003). Secondly, the growing demand for international education worldwide has increased the competition for recruiting the world's best students for the United States. Bohm, Davis, Meares, and Pearce (2002) point out that in 2000, approximately 1.8 million international students studied in higher education institutions around the world. The number continues to climb and will reach 7.2 million by 2025. Therefore, educational institutions in the United States must recognize the increasing competition worldwide in order to continue to offer competitive higher education programs. Thirdly, the benefits from the economic and cultural contributions that international students bring to local communities in the United States signify the value of recruiting and retaining international students. According to the Open Doors 2006 report, international students contributed $13.49 billion to the United States economy during the academic year of 2005 and 2006 for tuition and fees, living expenses, and related costs (Institute of International Education, 2006b). The flow of these students not only changes the demographics with economic advantages in the United States, but also promotes cultural exchange among the United States establishing opportunity for mutual respect and collaborative relationships. Finally, yet most importantly, the potential leadership among international students after graduating from universities in the United States could facilitate global cooperation among nations. This global cooperation has potential to promote cooperation with various challenges and difficulties such as terror attacks, natural disasters (earthquake, hurricane, tsunami), global warming, and diseases (bird flu, AIDS). On this point, Harris (2003) proposes that international students who study in the United States have the potential to take on leadership positions in their home countries and succeed in their respective professions. For these students studying in the United

States, they are partaking in an educational leadership journey. To the United States, these students are "an important barometer of the new global interdependence" (Hughes, 1992, in Burrell & Kim, 1998, p. 81). International students who return home or move to a third country following a successful sojourn in the United States might become both good consumers and political allies of the United States (Harris, 2003).

The potential for foreign students to provide leadership in global commerce would suggest that it is crucial to learn from these students. What process do they undergo during their journeys of working on a degree in the United States? How do they learn, develop, and transform their perspectives?   At present, there is little research that addresses international students' educational journeys in the United States, especially their experiences of managing cross-cultural transitions, encountering unfamiliar situations, and responding to their experiences.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the many benefits of studying internationally, there are also challenges facing international students, some for which they are prepared and others for which they are not. Indeed, a new life in the United States creates not only challenges but also opportunities for international students to enrich their learning and development in their respective professions. International students come to the United States mainly to complete a degree within a specific timeframe. Some students might experience extreme loneliness or culture shock. They might suffer physical symptoms such as headaches, insomnia, and mental exhaustion due to the stress of adjusting to a new culture (Lacina, 2002). Additionally, these students need to overcome linguistic hindrances and cultural differences in order to learn and perform as well as their fellow American students.

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Finally, they have to manage their cross-cultural transitions with limited resources and support in the United States. If they fail to cope with the changes, they risk suspending their studies and returning to their home countries in failure, even disgrace. Even though these international students live in the safe ground of academia in the United States, their lives are unpredictable compared with those who are native United States citizens, as well as those who study in their home countries. For instance, if they get sick or have any problem that requires physical care, geographic distance or finances may prevent them from reaching their families or friends back home. They can only try to find help from their surroundings (professors, staff members, fellow students, and college communities) or manage their problems on their own.

From a developmental point of view, when international students study in the United States, they reside in a period of transition. While a few international students are in their middle adulthood, most are just at the point of entering early adulthood. According to Levinson's (1980) developmental stages theory, international students' journeys in the United States may be reflecting (in the case of men) the need "to work on the flaws and to create a basis" (p. 284) for the following period of "settling down and becoming one's own man" (p. 285). It is a conscious decision for these students to come to study at universities in the United States instead of pursuing other opportunities. The decision also leads these international students to a complex transition which they can never foresee. They not only are confused by the issues of being a minority and needing to make sense of their new status in the United States (Dhingra, 2003), but they also must let go of their old lives and separate themselves from the way they have been taught to understand reality. International students have to learn to integrate a new identity and

reality into their new life journeys; and for this they definitely need assistance (Schlossberg, 1984).

Psychologically, human beings tend to resist change (Bridges, 2001); however, the new life circumstance in the United States forces international students to learn and live differently in order to earn advanced degrees from U.S. universities. The need to manage their transitions in the context of chaos and the complexity of studying and living in the U.S. academia and society, these students experience a state of severe inner disequilibrium when losing their cultural identities in a foreign land. Their prior experiences, perspectives, and identities might not apply to their current situations in the United States. Thus, these students need to redefine themselves in order to find balance within their new life circumstances. Indeed, international students are dancing on one foot at the edge of two different worlds, a consequence of lacking information, resources, support, linguistic hindrances, and cultural differences. They cannot function as effectively as they are accustomed to in their home countries. Guarding themselves against change, these students constantly struggle to stay balanced and avoid falling off the edge.

As sojourners in a foreign land for the first time, Hayes (1994) observed that international students experienced a profound sense of loss and often felt less confident. The academic, personal, and social problems they encountered diminished their initial expressions of happiness about being in the United States. These students lost their self-identities in the new country and experienced unremitting tension. The extreme stress they experienced led them to take less time off to enjoy life or leisure. Failure to cope with their new life circumstances not only created more problems for these students such

as suffering depression, non-productivity, and feelings of meaninglessness, but also impacted those people around them including roommates, classmates, and professors. In turn, those consequences led to more social problems including different psychological and medical problems.

Therefore, it is important to understand the struggles confronting the international students. Prior studies (Dhingra, 2003; Gonzalez, 2004; Hayes, 1994; Harris, 2003; Lacina, 2002) discuss the challenges and difficulties international students have while studying across borders. Yet none of the studies offers an account of the dynamics of the process in which these students undergo the cross-cultural transition. Hence, to explore these students' life stories helps current international students better understand what their struggles have been and continue to be and prepare future international students for the obstacles they will encounter studying in the United States. For educators and administrators of institutions of higher education, this understanding is crucial as they help the international students learn while they undergo changes in the United States. Understanding will also enlighten educators and administrators in their efforts to provide valuable and essential services.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the way in which international students in an advanced degree study experience their new circumstances and give meaning to these experiences during the life transition they undergo while studying at universities in the United States. This study focused on the phenomenon of how the experiences of studying in the United States impacted eighteen international students' personal, academic, and professional development. It also explored the process

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of students' cross-cultural transitional journeys concerning the changes they undergo; how these changes impacted their learning and development personally, academically, and professionally; and how they transformed their perspectives to achieve their desired goals as they studied and lived in the United States. Therefore, the research questions of this study were as follows:

1. What factors brought these international students to study in the United States?

2. What challenges and opportunities did they encounter during their sojourn in the United States?

3. What personal and environmental factors enabled them to cope with the changes and to function effectively in the United States?

4. What have been the benefits or hardships of studying and living in the United States?

Definition of Terms

International Students

International students are neither citizens nor permanent residents of the host countries. The terms "overseas students" or "foreign students" are also used to designate these student populations (Burrell & Kim, 1998; Lewthwaite, 1996; McNamara, & Harris, 1997). On a broad scale, international students include [1] full-time degree seeking non-citizenship/non-immigrant students (high school, undergraduate, and graduate school); [2] study abroad students including exchange students (high school, undergraduate students, and graduate students) who do not need to pay tuition fees in host countries; [3] students who attend intensive language learning programs in foreign countries; [4] international students under practical training; and [5] those studying at

nonacademic institutions (vocational and technical schools). For the purpose of this study, international students are defined as non-citizenship and non-immigrant graduate students who enroll full-time at universities in the United States for more than two years as well as those who currently graduated and are undergoing practical training. These students stay in the United States for a restricted period of time to accomplish their educational goals (Lacina, 2002).

Transition

Transition is "the process of letting go of the way things used to be then taking hold of the way they subsequently become" (Bridges, 2001, p. 2). Bridges (2001) posits that a transition consists of three phases: "an ending, a neutral zone, and a new beginning" (p. 5). One must let go of something in order to move to a neutral zone and to allow a new beginning to evolve. Transitions not only "are the key times in the natural process of self-renewal" (Bridges, 1980, p. 5), but also open various possibilities for change and growth.

Perspective Transformation

Perspective transformation is a process of learning that entails expanding one's view of self and of one's situation. Mezirow (1991) defines perspective transformation as:

> . . . the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our
> assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand and
> feel about the world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to
> make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative

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perspective; and finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon this new

understanding. (p. 167)

As a result, the process of transformative learning enables the individual to

achieve "(a) an empowered sense of self, (b) more critical understanding of how one's

social relationships and culture have shaped one's beliefs and feelings, and (c) more

functional strategies and resources for taking action" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 161).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in offering both theoretical and practical

knowledge with regard to international students' journeys as they learn in the United

States. Theoretically, this study enhances educators' understanding of the situation

international students at U.S. universities endure as they dance on the edge of

disequilibrium and re-equilibrium. That is, it helps educators to gain a better

understanding of the process, challenges, and difficulties of undergoing a life transition of

studying and living in a foreign country. Further, it demonstrates how the concept of

transition (Bridges, 1980 & 2001), chaos and complexity theory (Briggs & Peat, 2000;

Prigogine & Sengers, 1984), and adult learning and development theory (Merriam &

Caffarella, 1999), as well as transformative learning theory (Mezirow & Associates,

1990, 2000; Mezirow, 1991) can be utilized to examine how these international students

encounter disorienting dilemmas and learn to manage the cross-cultural transitions,

challenges, and difficulties of studying in the United States. Specifically, it emphasizes

the role of learning through transforming their perspectives, especially their taken-for-

granted assumptions (Mezirow, 2000, p.8) in order to adapt to new life circumstances in

the United States.

Practically, this study provides a useful resource for educators, government agencies, international students, and those who are interested in studying overseas or work in a foreign country. First, this study promises to enable educators and universities to provide more effective assistance and needed services to international students. These are vital for these students in coping with the transition, integrating into the United States in higher education and society, and accomplishing their educational goals. Second, the research findings may help the host countries' citizens and government agencies become more aware of the values of cultural and intellectual exchange, as well as the economic contributions of having these international students as part of the society. It may foster government agencies, faculty and staff members, and local citizens to facilitate these students' learning and transformation. Third, this study may benefit international students in many aspects. To begin with, the research findings can serve as useful resources to encourage them to continue their learning journeys. This study can also assist people who plan to study overseas or work in foreign countries by showing them what they will face and how to prepare themselves before heading to the unknown. Lastly, to the research participants, the interview process creates opportunities for them to reflect upon their lived experiences in the United States. It may facilitate their abilities to gain new insights from their experiences and empower them to carry on their educational goals. Although this study focuses on international students' change and growth in the United States, their journeys also exemplify how changes lead adults to continue to learn and develop in the 21st century.

Assumptions of the Study

This study is based upon the overriding assumption that the decision to study in the United States brings many changes to international students that cannot be avoided. Furthermore, it is assumed that how international students handle the changes they encounter can be managed.

With respect to the theories used in this study through which to consider the findings it is assumed that indeed, the process of adult development is also a process of perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). Thus, the theoretical framework of this study is embedded in Bridges's (1980, 2001) theory of transition, Prigogine and Stengers' (1984) notion of chaos and complexity theory, Mezirow's (1990, 1991, 2000) transformative learning theory, and adult learning and development theory (Dewey, 1980; Kolb, 1984; & Schon, 1983, 1987).

Bridges (1980) views transition as "the natural process of disorientation and reorientation that marks the turning points of the path of growth" (p. 5). Therefore, it is assumed that going through life transitions not only is part of adult development, but also enables adults to renew themselves (Bridges, 1980). Bridges (2001) believes that in order "to achieve continuity, people have to be willing to change" (p. 1) and work through three different phases of transition, "an ending, a neutral zone, and a new beginning" (p. 5). Reeves (1999) further points out that human development is "a process of coming-to-be, a process of moving from its potentiality to actuality" (p. 19). Many scholars believe that adult students typically are in developmental transitions trying to utilize educational experiences to facilitate opportunity for meaning-making and transformation (Daloz, 1986, 1999; Rossiter, 1999; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1998). Based

upon the above scholars' notions, it is assumed that change, adult learning, and adult development coincide. Therefore, it is assumed that international students have opportunities to encounter change, learning, and development during their cross-cultural transitional journeys of studying in the United States.

Finally it is assumed that generally, individuals have the ability to adapt to changes and thrive. Life in the twenty-first century is filled with uncertainty, disorder, turbulence, and complexity. However, Prigogine and Stengers (1984) stress that human beings have the potential for both self-renewal and self-transcendence to create new order out of their chaotic life circumstances. Mezirow (2000) further proposes that we as human beings have a need to "learn to negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others—to gain greater control over our lives as socially responsible, clear-thinking decision makers" (p.8). Mezirow (2000) views adulthood as a transformative process—"involving alienation from those roles, reframing new perspectives, and reengaging life with a greater degree of self-determination" (in Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. xii). This process can be portrayed as "a praxis, a dialectic in which understanding and action interact to produce an altered state of being" (in Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. xii). This transformative learning experience may actually be a "long cumulative process" (Taylor, 2000, in Merriam, p. 20). It not only promotes change, but also impacts the way people see themselves and their world (Clark, 1993; Kegan, 2000; Mezirow, 2000; Karpiak, 1997, 1999, 2003). For instance, Roongrattanakool (1999) points out that international students try to use different conventional coping strategies (watching television, conscious thinking and writing in English, and frequent consulting with their

advisors) to overcome their language barriers while studying in U.S. universities. Yet, there are certain challenges or dilemmas these international students face that cannot be solved through their previous habitual ways gained from birth and brought to universities in the United States. They must transform their frames of reference and habits of mind to adapt to the new life circumstance in the United States (Mezirow, 2000).

In summary, the above theories suggest that going through a life transition of studying in the United States requires international students to continue to learn and develop. In order to cope with changes, they must reconstruct their knowledge, polish their skills, and transform their frames of reference to reorder their lives as international students in the United States. This process requires these students to identify what they are called to be in the United States and find the strengths within to empower their journeys of being and becoming.

Limitations of the Study

Based upon the purpose of the study and the research question, this study utilized a qualitative research approach, drawn on the guidelines of hermeneutics using an interpretivism research design to explore the way in which international students learn, develop, and transform. The nature of a qualitative research study emphasizes an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, and the researcher serves as an instrument during the data collecting, analyzing, and interpreting process. Therefore, certain limitations exist in this study that need to be addressed including the research design, the linguistic hindrances, the research participants and the findings' representation, and the researcher as one of the research instruments. Those limitations are detailed in the methodology chapter.

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Organization of the Remainder of the Dissertation

Chapter Two of the dissertation presents the literature related to this study. It comprises four parts: (1) international students in higher education; (2) challenges international students faced; (3) changes, chaos and complexity, and cross-cultural transition; and (4) learning, development, and transformation. Chapter Three outlines the methodology used in this study. It details the methodological orientation of the study, the research design, analytical procedures, trustworthiness and credibility, and limitations and benefits of the study. Chapter Four presents the research findings. It consists of three elements: the background of the research participants, four themes that were identified from the research findings, and a closing statement. Chapter Five discusses specific issues that arise from the findings related to these students' learning and transformation while studying in the United States. Summary of the study, implications, recommendations, and conclusion are addressed in Chapter Six. Following Chapter Six is a List of References and six Appendices. These appendices include: (1) informed consent form, (2) telephone/verbal recruitment script, (3) advertisement flyer, (4) Kolb's (1984) learning cycle and learning types, (5) sample of a clustering, and (6) tables.

CHAPTER TWO

Background of the Study

The purpose of this literature review is to examine and challenge the related theories and prior studies on international students. This chapter aims to generate a possible conceptual framework that focuses on the investigation of international students' change, learning, and transformation, as well as the guidelines for interpreting the findings. To begin with, the researcher addresses the demographic information regarding international students in higher education worldwide to explore the trend of studying across borders. The related theories and empirical studies intertwine. As a result, the background of this study is organized in the following subheadings: International Students in Higher Education; Challenges International Students Faced; Change, Chaos and Complexity, and Cross-cultural Transition; and Learning, Development, and Transformation. Based upon the review, a closing statement will propose the need for the present research study and the research questions for the study.

International Students in Higher Education

International students have become educational consumers worldwide because of the increasing competition in international education around the world. Bohm, Davis, Meares, and Pearce (2002) point out that in 2000, approximately 1.8 million international students studied in higher education institutions around the world. The number will continue to increase and is projected to reach 7.2 million by 2025. The growing demand for international education enlarges its potential economic and cultural contribution to host countries. It also changes the demographics and life patterns among people.

In recent years, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, France, Australia, New

Zealand, and China have begun to compete aggressively with the United States in

recruiting international students, especially after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

However, the United States still remains the number one country in terms of the number

of international students enrolled in its colleges and universities. According to the

Institute of International Education's (IIE) Open Doors 2006 report, approximately

564,766 international students enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions in 2005/06.

Within this figure, seven of the top ten countries sending students to the United States are

from Asia: India, China, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Turkey, and Thailand (the first,

second, third, fourth, sixth, eighth, and tenth). The total number of international students

from Asia is 325,112 (58% of the total international enrollment). Moreover, international

students contributed $13.49 billion to the United States economy during the academic

year of 2005 and 2006 for tuition and fees, living expenses, and related costs.

Approximately 64.4% of the international students reported their primary funding coming

from personal and family sources or other sources outside the United States (Institute of

International Education, 2006c). In the United States, the most popular majors for

international students are Business and Management (17.9%), Engineering (15.7%), and

Mathematics and Computer Sciences (8.1%). The percentage of international students

who major in Education is 2.9, up 5.4 percent from 2004/2005 (Institute of International

Education, 2006).

The United Kingdom is the world's second largest host country with an estimated

300,060 international students in 2003/4. Data from the Higher Education Statistics

Agency (the UK Council for International Education, 2006) showed that international

students comprised 8% of the undergraduate population, 38% of degree postgraduates, and 39% of research degree students in 2003/4. In the United Kingdom, the top five sending countries are China, India, the United States, Malaysia, and Hong Kong. In the United Kingdom, the subjects that international students study are Engineering and Technology (28%), Business and Administrative Studies (24%), Law (17%), Computer Science (16%), and Architecture, Building and Planning (16%). About 192,460 international students enrolled in Australian universities during the first semester of 2004. This number was 22.4% of the total student population in Australia (37.5% are in postgraduate programs and 62.5% undergraduate), and the leading sending countries are China, Malaysia, India, and Hong Kong (The Australian Government International Education, 2004). The Canadian Bureau of International Education (Savage, 2005) reported an estimated 104,662 international students studied in Canada in 2001/02. Within this figure, 48% of these students were from Asia. The top five sending countries were South Korea, the United States, China, France, and Japan. The top three university programs were Business, Management and Marketing; Engineering; and Social Sciences. The New Zealand Ministry of Education (2005) declared that in 2004, there were 102,154 Foreign Fee-Paying Students (FFPS) studying in New Zealand, and 86.5% were from Asia. The top five sending countries were China, South Korea, Japan, Thailand, and Taiwan. Management and Commerce, Mixed Field Programs, Society and Culture, and Engineering and Related Technologies were the most popular fields. In New Zealand, the economic contribution of FFPS was estimated at NZ$2.19 billion during 2004.

The number of international students worldwide continues to increase. In the 21st century, these students have more choices than ever of host nations for higher education programs. The flow of these students among nations not only speeds internationalism and globalism, but it also shapes host countries' higher education to become more internationally oriented. As Altbach (1991) has mentioned, international students are "at the center of a complex network of international academic relationships. They are the human embodiments of a worldwide trend toward the internationalization of knowledge and research in an integrated world economy" (p. 305). Concerns these students have regarding the choices of host countries include costs, visa process, college or university application procedures, learning and living environment, reputations of universities, varieties of services and assistance, and especially marketability of the degree (Altbach, 1991; Mata-Galan, 2003; Schneider, 2000). Understanding factors that influence these students' choices of host countries enables both home and host countries to better facilitate these students to achieve their learning goals, as well as to benefit from their achievements.

International Students as Adult Learners

International students are temporary sojourners in foreign countries working on degrees at foreign colleges or universities. They are adult learners in transition, who go through equilibrium, disequilibrium, and re-equilibrium (Bridges, 2001). These students expect the host country's more prestigious higher education will improve their life opportunities, advance their careers, and enhance their mobility after graduation (Barker, 1997; Zeszotarski, 2003).

Based upon Cross's (1981) chain of responses model, becoming international students may be viewed as a result of a chain of responses in relation to both psychological and environmental factors (in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). These students must evaluate their situations and have positive responses to issues regarding (1) financial, academic, and cultural preparations; (2) attitudes about studying overseas; (3) the importance of their goals and expectations; (4) developmental tasks; (5) needed information and resources for decision-making; and (6) capability of handling barriers and opportunities they might encounter in order to study across borders. Scholars (Arthur, 2004; Barker, 1997; Garrod, & Davis, Eds., 1999; Lewthwaite, 1996; McNamara & Harris, 1997) propose that studying across borders reflects international students' motives and desires to accomplish the following:

- to advance their professions (career-related motive);
- to seek new knowledge and skills (cognitive interest);
- to interact with people from different cultures (socio-cultural relationships);
- to fulfill a childhood dream or parents' expectations (internal and external expectations);
- to escape from oppression (war, political or socio-cultural issues such as racial or gender discrimination and poverty), home, or boring life and work routines (escape/stimulation); and
- to serve others (social welfare).

These students' motives match Malcolm Knowles's (1980, in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) concept that adult students are goal-oriented learners.

Impact of Studying in a Foreign Country

The literature shows that study across borders for higher education appears to be beneficial to these international students in many ways (Akande & Slawson, 2000; Altback, 1991; Tallman, 1991; Zeszotarski, 2003). These scholars identified the benefits and advantages of studying in a foreign country are as the opportunity:

- to broaden their knowledge and acquire new skills in order to support their families in the future and to contribute to the development of their homeland,

- to learn more about themselves,

- to promote personal change and growth,

- to learn the host country's language and culture,

- to comprehend their own cultural values and biases and extend their worldview,

- to become more comfortable socializing with culturally different people,

- to interact and network with Americans, local communities, and other international students,

- to have better employment opportunities,

- to advance their professions,

- to shape their outlooks, professional lives and orientations, and

- to obtain intercultural competencies.

Similarly, Zeszotarski (2003) conducted a mixed method study examining international students' goals, expectations, and experiences of studying in the United States in the context of globalization. She surveyed 110 first-year international students from Santa Monica College (SMC). Based upon the result of her survey, Zeszotarski created a student profile regarding demographics, language skills, previous international

experience, social networks, and goals. Additionally, she selected 20 students from the survey pool for in-depth interviews to explore the details related to these students' expectations about studying at a U.S. community college, the impact of their previous international experiences, and their definitions of global competencies. Findings showed that these international students expected to benefit from the flexibility of the United States educational system and to gain career training they could not obtain from their homeland. To these students, pursuing an American degree not only allows them to acquire a broader perspective and certify skills in a global language, but also demonstrates the ability to live in an international setting. In her study, research participants addressed the needed skills, strategies, and attitudes for success in a global society; however, Zeszotarski failed to provide the information regarding the issue of whether these students' expectations were met.

From the host countries' standpoint, international students benefit the host countries and their higher education institutions in several ways, including globalization, internationalization, cultural exchange, professional and knowledge exchange, and economics (Arthur, 2004; Cameron & Meade, 2002, McNamara & Harris, 1997; Woolston, 1995). To attract and retain these international students has become an important task in higher education among nations (Clark & Sedgwick, 2005). Additionally, the benefits that home countries gain from these international students after their re-entry lies more in professional integration and transfer of knowledge (Altback, 1991).

However, several issues may be considered disadvantages in this regard, such as divergent goals between sponsor agencies, family conflicts, and international students for

studying in host countries. For example, students with sponsorship or families' support sometimes find themselves having difficulty balancing the expectations of their sponsoring agencies or their families with their own learning interests and needs. As a result, these students might not be able to achieve or realize their full potential to learn, change, and grow (Spaulding et al., 1976). Additionally, international students experience difficulty readjusting themselves to their home countries when they return. Bochner (1972) reported that "the better a student adjusts to the host society, the harder it will be for that student to readjust once he or she returns to the original culture" (cited in Mata-Galan, 2003, p. 12). This account reveals both challenges and dilemmas international students encountered regarding studying in foreign countries. Some students from under-developed countries cannot find an opportunity to apply their newly-learned knowledge and skills and so might have to leave their country. Furthermore, Altbach and Davis (1999) point out sending talented students to study across borders might cause some home countries to run the risks of a brain drain, especially for those developing countries (in Mata-Galan, 2003, p. 12). Bach (2000) stated that "The nations that are sending students are getting poorer, while those who are receiving them are getting richer" (p. 2). Bach's statement further discloses this disadvantage vividly for those sending countries in this regard. To international students, the impact of studying in a foreign country is more positive than negative in relation to their personal growth and professional advancement.

Challenges International Students Faced

Like a stranger lives in a stranger land, international students involve themselves in the process of transforming their identities and perspectives because of the need to use

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the host country's language to learn and communicate (Bennett, 1999; Coward, 2003; Grabove, 1997; Gonzalez, 2004). They must constantly re-examine and re-adjust their prior assumptions, values, and belief systems in order to emancipate themselves from their disorienting dilemmas and to fit into the host country's culture, educational system, and living environment. During this transitional process, international students encounter issues related to their personal, academic, and professional development. The major challenges they face in host countries include challenges of living in a foreign country, challenges of adapting to the host country's higher educational system, and challenges related to self-esteem and self-identity (Arthur, 2004; Burrell & Kim, 1998; Furnham, 1997; Gonzalez, 2004). Indeed, international students experience problems and difficulties constantly during their sojourns in the United States.

Challenges Related to Living in a Foreign Culture

Most international students experience culture shock when surrounded with people who have different cultural norms and values (Arthur, 2004; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Furnham, 1997; Gonzalez, 2004; Harris, 2003; Lewthwaite, 1996). Arthur (2004) pinpoints four primary phases that these students experience during their cross-cultural transition. The first phase is the *honeymoon* or *tourist phase*. Most students enter host countries with positive expectations and look forward to their experiences. They are fascinated by cultural differences. The timing of entering the second phase, *the crisis* or *disintegration phase,* depends on students' prior preparation and their new learning and living environments. Some students might experience crisis (dissatisfaction with the host culture, language problems, accommodation difficulties, eating habits, and loneliness) immediately after arriving in the host countries, while others may encounter problem

situations several months later. Therefore, the fascinating host cultures may later irritate

or disappoint these students due to the challenges and difficulties they confront, which

lead to feelings of powerlessness, depression, anxiety, or other physiological symptoms

related to stress. The length of time that these students remain in this phase also varies.

Most students are able to make effective adjustments through learning the new culture

and utilizing different coping strategies. In phase two, international students develop the

needed attitude and skills to manage their new life demands. That also enables them to

move to phrase three, *reorientation and re-integration*. The last phase in cross-cultural

transition is *adaptation* or *resolution*. International students' cross-cultural transition is

an evolving, sequential, and cyclical adjustment process (Arthur, 2004). Arthur's notion

indicates that culture shock may be an important element that triggers individuals to learn

and develop in order to cope with change.

Furthermore, Zeszotarski (2003) suggests some key skills, strategies, and attitudes

for success in a cross-cultural adaptation.   These skills include language proficiency, the

ability to adapt to new situations and use social networks, knowledge of other cultures,

open-mindedness, and independence.   These researchers (Arthur, 2004; Zeszotarski,

2003) believe that once international students are able to balance home and host cultures,

they are able to experience a sense of stability. Those who fail to adapt to the new

culture may fail entirely.

Challenges Related to Academic Study

International students enter host countries' educational institutions with different

academic backgrounds and preparations; therefore, each of them encounters different

challenges and difficulties in different times and occasions during their sojourns (Mata-

Galan, 2003). Arthur (2004) points out that "lack of international standards for educational programs in many countries leads to variability in the knowledge base of students" (p. 35). These students feel overwhelmed and frustrated by the new academic culture and demands. The different teaching-learning approaches and educational systems force international students to seek extra explanations from professors to better understand lectures and homework assignments. They also need some more time to complete readings and assignments (Mata-Galan, 2003; Gonzalez, 2004). Most international students' background knowledge and learning experiences do not match the host academic program; they have to spend extra time and efforts to catch up with local students. According to Furnham and Bochner's (1986) observation, most international students "are primarily interested in getting a degree and/or professional training rather than learning a second culture or achieving personal growth. Uppermost in their minds are concerns about the tangible pay-offs a sojourn might provide shape of career advancement, prestige and upward mobility" (cited in Barker, 1997, p. 108). As a result, when the host country's curriculum is irrelevant to their life circumstances, they feel a sense of not belonging in that academic context. Some might feel they are wasting their time and money (Arthur, 2004).

The majority of international students did not learn the language in the context of the host country's culture. It is very difficult for them to fully understand and communicate effectively on and off campus in host countries. Coward (2003) indicates that in classroom learning, international students' learning experience is constructed and reconstructed moment-by-moment in response to the physical and social environment. These students often find that even if they understand the spoken words, they still have

difficulty interpreting the actual meaning due to cultural differences. Scholars (Coward, 2003; Foster, 1997) propose that increasing language proficiency and interacting with people from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds are an integration process. Through this process, international students are able to modify their ways of knowing, thinking, and communicating in order to fit into the host country's learning environment. This process also encompasses the transformation of a new personal identity and world view in the context of the host country's culture. Both Coward and Foster's assertions echo Grabove's (1997) assumptions that "the experience as emancipatory and transformative is most likely to occur among learners who develop a sense of identity with the target language and its culture" (p. 93). In this regard, Arthur (2004) and Gonzalez (2004) suggest that educators need to encourage international students to attain transformative learning goals because communication is closely linked with self-image and highly affect their academic success, communication competency, and self-identity.

To begin with, academic skills and coping strategies are critical elements for international students to succeed at U.S. universities. Roongrattanakool (1999) surveyed 303 international graduate students during the 1998-1999 academic year at Mississippi State University. Based on 194 students' responses, Roongrattanakool found that the major academic concerns of these international graduate students were writing and speaking skills (writing research papers, theses, dissertations; writing quickly and concisely; presenting ideas in a logical and organized manner in writing and while speaking; giving speeches or doing presentations; and expressing their thoughts). Obviously, language barriers drove international students to choose conventional coping strategies. Some approaches involved self-motivation and discipline, advanced

preparation, activities in improving listening and speaking skills such as watching television, conscious thinking and writing in English, and frequently consulting with advisors to overcome challenges and difficulties that they encountered.

Secondly, language proficiency is found positively correlated with international students' capabilities of learning and living in the United States. Couper (2001) insisted that language allows people to reflect, organize, and filter their experiences, perspectives, and world views. In other words, linguistic differences which represent, preserve, and perpetuate different world-views could "impact cognitive and perceptual performance and methods of categorizing and labeling events" (Couper, 2001). Barratt (1994) and Lam (1997) asserted that adequate English language skills could help international students build relationships with a new community, develop a sense of belonging, and enhance their current self-esteem. Coward (2003) and Lin (2002) also believed that language proficiency could assist international students to better participate in classroom learning and facilitate their adjustment while studying in the United States. Coward (2003) observed three graduate classes over a two-month period, followed by interviews with 18 international students (China, Korea, and Taiwan), who were selected from the observation pool, regarding the challenges they faced while participating in classroom discussions. She pointed out that language barriers and cultural differences require these students to understand the discussion topics in their new context of U.S. academic culture in order to determine when and how they should participate. As a result, this learning process not only enabled them to develop awareness of cultural differences in presenting their own views, but it also assisted them to identify their roles as graduate students.

Therefore, Coward (2003) proposed that the process of using a second language to learn and communicate was also the process of transforming one's self and perspective.

From Foster's (1997) point of view, learning is a holistic process. Foster proposed that language was used as a resource for both cognitive and affective learning. However, second language learners tended to view their learning as cognitive instrumental learning. Besides learning English grammar and vocabulary, international students needed the affective skill of expressing themselves, especially during the communication process, "the experience as emancipatory and transformative is most likely to occur among learners who develop a sense of identity with the target language and its culture" (cited in Grabove, 1997, p. 93). Since communication was closely linked with self-image, Foster further indicated that it was necessary for instructors of a second language to encourage students to attain transformative learning goals. Both Foster (1997) and Coward (2003) concluded that the process of increasing English proficiency and interacting with people from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds is an integration process. It helps international students modify their ways of knowing, thinking, and communicating in order to fit into the host country's learning environment. It also encompasses the transformation of a new personal identity and world view in the context of the host country's culture.

Change, Chaos and Complexity, and Cross-cultural Transition

Contemporary life trajectories are challenged and disrupted by uncertainty and dislocation. Prigogine and Stengers (1984) stress that all living systems have the potential for both self-renewal and self-transcendence to create new order out of their chaotic life circumstances. Change may happen at any given time and circumstance, to

human beings, Bridges (2001) asserts, "transition comes along when one chapter of your life is over and another is waiting in the wings to make its entrance" (p.16). Indeed, change, chaos and complexity, and transition intertwine.

Change, Chaos, and Complexity

Life can be simple and also complex because "what looks incredibly complicated may have a simple origin, while surface simplicity may conceal something stunningly complex" (Briggs & Peat, 2000, p. 79). The scientific culture perceives the world through the lens of analysis, quantification, symmetry, and mechanism. However, the social reality is often beyond the abilities of human beings to predict, manipulate, and control especially within an open system. Instead of arguing what life could or should be or resisting life's uncertainties, Briggs and Peat (2000) suggest people should embrace uncertainty and change and "envision the world as a flux of patterns enlivened with sudden turns, strange mirrors, subtle and surprising relationships, and the continual fascination of the unknown" (p.5). The process of "letting go, accepting limits, and celebrating magic and mystery" (p.7) are important elements that enable human beings to create the subtle nuances from irregular orders around them. In other words, undergoing changes not only leads people to uncertainty and chaotic circumstances, but also provides them with the opportunities to find truth that holds them together as a whole.

The notion of the butterfly effect emerged while Edward Lorenz (1963) was investigating the pattern of weather change through computer calculating. He accidentally discovered a significant result when comparing this particular outcome with a previous one because he submitted data with slightly different decimal places. Dr. Lorenz's weather research led him to recognize the way in which a small change might

generate radically different results. In his 1963 paper, "Deterministic Nonperiodic Flow," the weather expert shared with other mathematicians and scholars his discovery that a system's behavior is the result of its sensitive dependence upon initial conditions. Few scholars began to explore this nonlinear perspective in their studies. In 1975, Li and Yorke published a paper regarding the issue of "how deterministic equations could produce unpredictable values. They named this idea of unpredictability as 'chaos,' and that word has remained as the defining term ever since" (Smitherman, 2005, p. 155). Lorenz, Li and Yorke, and other scholars' researches "focus on concepts such as initial conditions, sensitive dependence, small changes can make big differences, randomness generated by deterministic equations, iterations, bifurcations, attractors, and complex patterns" (Smitherman, 2005, p. 157). Some of these concepts are later utilized in social science in such areas as curriculum design, classroom interaction, and higher education (Doll, 1993; Fleener, 2002; Karpiak, 2000, 2003; Smitherman, 2005).

Chaos theory is discovered within mathematics and represents nature in its creativity such as weather patterns and waterfalls. Complexity theory locates itself in science and looks for patterns and relationships within systems. Both chaos and complexity theories emphasize that systems are sensitively dependent on their initial conditions. Systems are open and non-linear and operate under conditions far from equilibrium. Through the process of reiteration, recursion, and reciprocity (feedback loops function), systems can frame or reframe their lives and continue to develop, progress, and emerge (Smitherman, 2005). Under this circumstance, predictability is limited because parameters are negotiated continuously.

In addition, Prigogine and Stengers (1984) suggest that all systems contain subsystems that modulate and fluctuate continually. A single fluctuation or a combination of them may result in positive feedback and shatter the preexisting organization of a system. During this revolutionary process, an emerging bifurcation point will change the direction of its system and lead to either chaos or a new, differentiated, higher level of order. Prigogine and Stengers (1984) name this new type of order "dissipative structure" (p.13). This new dissipative structure highly depends on the conditions in which the structure is formed. The external environment of a dissipative structure may play a critical role in the selection mechanism of self-organization. These two scholars utilize the concept of bifurcation to explain the process in which a dissipative structure organizes itself. For instance, when a system is in the stage of near-bifurcation, the system is experiencing large fluctuations and "hesitates among various possible directions of evolution" (p.14). It may be that a small fluctuation starts to evolve differently and ultimately changes the behavior of the whole system. Prigogine and Stengers (1984) indicate that the concept of nonlinear systems far from equilibrium also exists in social science. On this point, Lewthwaite (1996) observes that international students' cross-cultural adaptation in host countries is "a dynamic and cyclical process of tension reduction until an equilibrium is reached" (p. 169). He believes that international students are in a situation far from equilibrium trying to make adjustments in order to re-establish internal balance and be effective in the host countries. The complex process these international students undergo while coping with their cross-cultural transitions in host countries reflects the notion of disequilibrium and re-equilibrium in chaos and complexity theory.

Furthermore, Lohsiwanont (2001) indicates that adaptation may be viewed "as the process of evolutionary change by which the organization provides better solutions to the problems set by the environment" (p. 2). Two definitions of adaptation provided by Bennett (1976) can explain the phenomenon in relation to the concept of chaos and complexity as follows:

> [T]he process by which organisms or groups of organisms, through responsive changes in their states, structures, or compositions, maintain homeostasis in and among themselves in the fact of both short-term environment fluctuations and long-term changes in the composition or structure of their environments.
>
> [A]daptation implies maximizing the social life chances. But maximization is almost always a compromise, a vector in the internal structure of culture and the external pressure of environment. Every culture carries the penalties of a past within the frame of which, barring total disorganization, it must work out the future. (cited in Lohsiwanont, 2001, p. 3)

Based upon these theoretical assumptions, adaptation not only is a never ending process simply because environments constantly change, but also is filled with challenges and possibilities that may lead the individual to a whole new world.

Cross-cultural Transition

Individuals travel across borders and cultural boundaries for various reasons, such as for earning advanced degrees, for doing business affairs, and for vacations. The journey across borders fills the sojourner with turbulence and chaos because of countless changes and unknown challenges. However, these journeys may hold special meaning in

relation to the individual's learning and development. In other words, turbulence and chaos are gifts allowing these students to recognize and reorganize their inner world to further develop their potential.

To begin with, Peter Adler (1975) believes that the problems and frustrations during the cross-cultural transition enable individuals to shift to higher levels of personality development. He states that "The tensions and crises of change demand that the individual answer the confusions of life experiences with a reaffirmation of his or her uniqueness individual in relationship to others" (p. 20). In the article, "Transitional experience: An alternative view of cultural shock," Adler (1975) proposes a five-stage culture shock model and indicates that each of the five stages may not flow sequentially in every case, however, it portrays the way in which people cope with a cross-cultural transition. Adler's five-stage transitional experience model is addressed as follows:

Stage 1: Contact — Individuals are excited and curious about the new culture. However, they view the new culture through the lens of their own cultures.

Stage 2: Disintegration— Individuals may experience lower self-esteem, isolation, inadequacy, and loneliness as sojourners due to the feeling of confusion and disorientation living in a different cultural and value system.

Stage 3: Reintegration— Individuals strongly reject the new culture because of stereotyping, generalization, evaluation, and judgmental behavior. This feeling of discomfort may push individuals to seek security from persons of their culture. The increasing negative feelings of living in a different culture enable individuals to form a perception of cultural differences. However, certain characteristics can be evoked during this period, which include self-preoccupation, self-assertion,

and growing self-esteem. Under such a circumstance, individuals have to choose either to return to the contact stage or move forward and face the challenge. This is also the time that some might choose to return home. The decision of reintegration, Adler (1975) believes, is determined by three elements: "the intensity of the experiences, the general resiliency of the sojourner, or the interpretation and guidance provided by significant others" (p.17).

Stage 4: Autonomy— Individuals feel more assured, relaxed, friendly, and empathetic in the new culture due to the increasing sensitivity to cultural differences and acquiring more coping skills. Their growing personal flexibility and effective coping skills allow them to begin to feel like experts of the new culture even through their understanding of the culture is still limited.

Stage 5: Independence—Individuals' attitudes, emotions, and behaviors become more interdependent according to the influence of the old and new cultures. In this stage, differences are valued, accepted, and enjoyed.

Greater independence occurs when individuals are responsible for their own behavior and are able to make their own choices in any given situation even though they might re-experience emotions from earlier stages of their transitions. Adler (1975) believes that when "the individual is capable of undergoing further dynamic transitions in life along new dimensions and of finding new ways to explore the diversity of human beings" (p. 18), their new attitudes emerge holistically and will be incorporated into their identities to heighten their sense of self. Indeed, a cross-cultural, transitional experience encourages individuals to develop their personalities in many dimensions. Adler (1975) proposes that these dimensions include:

1. Perceptual Level: Personality moves through a symbiotic state of single reality to a differential state of awareness and acceptance of many realities;

2. Emotional Level: Change from dependence to independence;

3. Self-Concept: Change from a monocultural to an intercultural frame of reference.

The concept of adaptation Adler (1975) proposed tends to emphasize the psychological aspect and not simply the need to make adjustments such as learning a new language, culture, and skills during one's transition. Chaotic situations and complex differences may distort individuals' lives during their transitions; however, these two elements have the potential of engendering a self-organization process. Adler (1975) believes that "The transitional experience is, finally, a journey into the self," especially when new emotions and reactions are seen and understood through experience, self-awareness and personal growth (p. 22). He also points out that not everyone achieves growth in personality and awareness during their journeys of studying in foreign countries.

To address the issue of the way in which international students manage their cross-cultural transitions, Harris (2003) explored 10 undergraduate and graduate international students' abilities to accomplish change and personal growth at a U.S. university. Harris believed that "the transition process does not occur simply by being on foreign soil" (p. 45). She utilized a narrative inquiry research approach through the theoretical perspectives of leadership and change to examine these students' learning journeys in the United States. Harris indicated that being a cross-cultural learner was not easy and "required a certain amount of risk, courage, determination and persistence to succeed in doing so" (p.106). Findings suggested cultural shock brought extreme anxiety

to these students and was the major factor in these students' transitional adjustment. Harris viewed cross-cultural transition as "part of personal transformation from one culture to another. It was an experience in change, in self-understanding, and in developing new capacities for understanding different worldviews" (p. 130). She stated that international students were able to find greater personal strength, autonomy, resiliency, and growth once they had learned how to function in the United States.

Harris's study supported Shougee's (2000) research findings that studying abroad fosters transformation of students' selves and perspectives. Shougee (2000) had presented the transformation ideas in his study *The Experiences, Meanings and Outcomes of Studying Abroad: A Qualitative Multiple-Case Study*. He interviewed 14 study-abroad students to explore the learning process involving three temporal phases: before, during, and after. First, Shougee found that parents had significantly impacted the research participants' desire to study abroad. Secondly, the preparation phase was bittersweet and influenced greatly by the amount of support the individual received. Next, participants experienced cultural shock while studying abroad. However, the re-entry phase caused issues of mourning for the loss of attachments created abroad and of reconstructing relationships at home. Shougee concluded that the transformation of the self and of the perspectives of these exchange students happened while studying abroad.

Change, chaos, and complexity may lead international students to experience many disorientating dilemmas. Based upon Adler's (1975) notion of transitional experience, these students must determine whether to stay and complete their studies in the host countries or to return home. Harris (2003) suggests that if these students choose to continue their learning journeys in the host countries, they must interact with members

of the host countries and develop meaningful interpersonal relationships with them. In so doing, these students can better understand their host cultures and manage a more successful transition in the foreign land.

Learning, Development, and Transformation

Learning is a continuous process and occurs either in formal settings or non-formal settings. Formal educational programs allow individuals to obtain meta-cognitive skills more effectively and enhance their abilities of learning on their own. Individuals also learn from their daily life routines. They acquire knowledge through non-formal learning activities or self-directed learning projects.

Additionally, life events and transitions may alter individuals' life patterns drastically from their previous ones and from other persons' patterns of living. Their prior accumulated life experiences might not apply to what they face in new circumstances. In light of Mezirow's (1991, 2000) theory and features of transformative learning, these individuals may undergo some transformative learning. That is to say, they may need to critically reflect upon their experiences in order to integrate their previous experiences with the current one. Furthermore, their professional and personal development may need to be explored in action. The unfamiliar new life circumstances force these individuals to critically re-evaluate their assumptions and situations before, during, and after their actions. They not only find themselves at a time of transition, but they also link their learning with changes in their new living environment and their personal, academic, and professional development. Indeed, learning, development, and transformation coincide. For the purpose of this study, this review intends to explore related theories that can provide a framework to better understand adult international

students' change, learning, and transformation in the following three major areas:
theories related to adult learning, theories related to adult development, and theories
related to perspective transformation.

Theories Related to Adult Learning

Experiences occur in individuals' daily lives that have different meanings and
contributions to understanding and perspectives. Some experiences happen and then
disappear forever without making any impact. Other experiences are able to lead us to
change and grow. Many scholars (Bernett, 1999; Dewey, 1980; Knowles, 1975; Kolb,
1984; Mezirow, 1991, 2000; Schon, 1983, 1987) emphasize the importance of learning
from experiences and present their models or theories to further explain the way in which
adults learn to better manage their problem situations and to make meaning of their lives.
The more an individual matures, the more she or he tends to become self-directed as a
learner (Knowles, 1975). This section explores Dewey's notion of experience and
education, Kolb and Schon's experiential learning theories, and self-directed learning
theory. Each theory provides a different perspective regarding learning in adulthood.

Experiential learning theories

Adults' life experiences can enrich their learning and development (Dewey, 1938,
1980, 1997; Kolb, 1984). From the experiential learning theory perspective, "learning is
the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience"
(Kolb, 1984, p.38). Dewey (1980, 1997) describes learning as a dialectic process
integrating experiences and concepts, observations, and actions. He believes that
learning can transform our concrete experiences such as impulses, feelings, and desires
into higher-order purposeful actions. According to Dewey (1938), experience interfaces

two principles, *continuity* and *interaction*. The principle of continuity suggests, "every experience lives on in further experience" (Dewey, 1938, p.35). Each experience will have some impact on an individual's future because it "takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (Dewey, 1938, p. 35). The principle of interaction emphasizes the importance of the situational influence on an individual's experience. Dewey (1938) explains:

> As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts. He does not find himself living in another world but in a different part of aspect of one and the same world. What he has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow. The process goes on as long as life and learning continue. (p. 44)

However, not every experience is educative, depending on the quality of experience that one has. An educative experience not only increases an individual's knowledge and skills in various directions, but also "promote[s] desirable future experiences" (Dewey, 1938, p. 27). Dewey (1938) proposes that educators must facilitate students to have educative experiences in order to inspire their continued desire for learning and growth.

Learning is the continuous and holistic process of adaptation to the world. During this adaptation process, individuals not only interact with the environment, but also integrate and reframe experiences both objectively and subjectively to form new knowledge. Dewey's (1980) theory of experience stresses the importance of both the process and the experiences in learning. Additionally, Piaget looks at adult learning

through the lens of cognitive development. Piaget describes learning as twofold and insists that "the twin processes of accommodation of ideas to the external world and assimilation of experience into existing conceptual structures are the moving forces of cognitive development" (Kolb, 1984, p.29). Dewey and Piaget perceive learning through different aspects but emphasize the importance of learners' experiences.

In 1984, Kolb proposes his experiential learning theory and identifies four distinct learning abilities such as concrete experience abilities (CE), reflective observation abilities (RO), abstract conceptualization abilities (AC), and active experimentation abilities (AE). Kolb explains that individuals must fully and openly involve themselves in new experiences (CE) to reflect on and observe their experiences from different perspectives (RO). They must be able to create concepts by integrating their observations into dependable theories (AC) and use these theories to make decisions while solving problems (AE). Kolb names this process as a learning cycle. Four learning styles—Diverging (CE/RO), Assimilating (AC/RO), Converging (AC/AE), and Accommodating (CE/AE)—emerge from this learning cycle. Each represents a combination of two preferred types of learning and can be viewed as a two-by-two matrix (See Figure 2-1). For example, an individual who prefers to think about the task and watch the experience will have a learning style which combines and represents these two processes, which Kolb names the "assimilating" learning style. Kolb indicates that each individual has his or her preferred learning style. However, she or he must be able to use all types of learning styles and apply the most appropriate one in the given situation.

	Active experimentation (AE): Doing/Planning	Reflective observation (RO): Reviewing/Watching
Concrete experience (CE): Sensing/feeling	Accommodating (CE/AE)	Diverging (CE/RO)
Abstract Conceptualization (AC): Thinking/Concluding	Converging (AC/AE)	Assimilating (AC/RO)

Figure 2- 1: Kolb's Four Learning Styles

Furthermore, two central modes related to reflective practice in experiential learning theories are labeled reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. The reflection-on-action mode requires the individual to think through a situation after it has happened. For example, most people are used to retrieving their prior experiences and to re-evaluating these experiences in order to decide what to do or to try to do things differently when encountering a given situation. Schon (1987) challenges this notion and proposes a reflection-in-action concept to explain the importance of "what we are doing while we are doing it" and "thinking on your feet, and keeping your wits about you" (cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 236).

Reflection-in-action is triggered by surprise. When individuals encounter surprise, they critically think about what happens that gets them into trouble and try to figure out the problem and to solve it (reflection-in-action). They immediately reconstruct strategies of action by trying to locate the problem and trying to interpret the problem within a context (experiment). In so doing, they can go beyond their habitual ways of managing things around them. Schon (1987) asserts that knowledge is mastered and embedded in action. Knowledge emerges automatically during the process when individuals are organizing problems and trying to find solutions. In short, the individual's knowledge is in his or her action. Schon suggests that solutions are the basis

for framing problems because individuals cannot identify their problems until they have solutions. Sometimes, individuals can only understand problems through solutions.

The above scholars' learning models share many similarities. Indeed, these experiential learning theories emphasize that learning is the continuous and holistic process of adaptation to the world. During this adaptation process, individuals not only interact with the environment, but also integrate and transform experiences both objectively and subjectively to form new knowledge. Experiential learning theory stresses the importance of both the process and the experiences in learning.

Self-directed learning

The notion of self-directed learning is first introduced by Bryson, whereas Houle, Tough, and Knowles are pioneers. Houle (1993) reports that adults participate in various learning activities during their daily life routine as self-directed learners. They are goal-oriented, activity-oriented or learning-oriented learners. Tough (1971) builds on Houle's concept and describes self-directed learning as a form of study, and names it self-planned learning (in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Knowles (1975) defines self-directed learning as a process wherein individuals initiate a learning activity with or without others' help. Individuals first diagnose their learning needs in order to form learning goals and identify resources for learning. They also select learning strategies and evaluate their learning outcomes.

Tough publishes his self-directed learning model in 1971. Tough's linear model consists of thirteen steps in relation to the way in which individuals plan learning projects and reach their learning goals in a self-directed manner. From Tough's perspective, the term self-education, self-instruction, self-teaching, independent study, self-directed

learning, and individual learning may sound similar to his concept of self-planned learning projects; however, they are not identical simply because in self-planned learning the learner assumes the responsibility for the detailed decisions and arrangements associated with the learning activities.

Similar to Tough's model, Knowles's linear self-directed learning model points to six major elements—"climate setting, diagnosing learning needs, formulating learning goals, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 295). Knowles (1980) states that mature "adults have a deep psychological need to be generally self-directing" (cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 305). In sum, Tough and Knowles' linear self-directed learning models magnify the importance of learners' commitments and ways of evaluating learning outcomes.

Garrison (1997) proposes a multidimensional and interactive self-directed learning model. He suggests a thorough self-directed learning model needs to include the following four different dimensions: self-management (control), self-monitoring (responsibility), motivation (entering/task), and self-directed learning. In the self-management dimension, learners need to take control of the contextual conditions using learning materials and opportunities within the context to reach their stated goals or objectives. The self-monitoring dimension requires learners to be able to monitor both their cognitive and meta-cognitive process. In other words, self-directed learners must be able to reflect and think critically. The motivation dimension is related to concerns of what influences people to participate or enter into a self-directed learning activities and what keeps them continuing the learning until reaching the learning goals and objectives.

Garrison indicates that self-direction can assist learners in initiating learning goals, upholding intentions, and endeavoring for quality outcomes. Furthermore, Garrison suggests that self-direction or self-directed learning is a necessary process for achieving worthwhile and meaningful educational outcomes.

Theories Related to Adult Development

Adult development is a holistic process including biological, psychological, cognitive, and socio-cultural aspects (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Scholars discuss adult development from different angles, such as development versus change or stages versus no-stage. For the purpose of the study, this review focuses on Erikson (1959), Levinson (1996), and Riegel's (1975, 1977) theories in order to portray adult international students' characteristics and their developmental process.

Erikson's theory of adult development

Erik Erikson's theory of identity development is viewed to be the most influential developmental theory. Erikson (1959) perceives a human's psychological development as a continuous process of interacting between inner instincts and drives over the entire life span. He proposes an eight-stage theory and suggests that over the course of one's lifetime, each individual must go through and successfully solve these eight crises or dilemmas. Erikson's stages build on one another and also affect one another. If an individual cannot resolve crises of any given stage, he or she will carry that unfinished business or unresolved conflicts to the next stage. Under this circumstance, it is more difficult for the individual to manage the next stage successfully. Additionally, Erikson states that individuals' biological maturation, social pressures, and the demands of the roles they take on will push them continuously toward the next stages. The tasks

individuals fail to deal with in each stage will remain as unfinished issues and hinder their ability to reach the last stage, integrity.

The target participants of this study are adult international students. Erikson's stage six and seven of psychological development theory provide a framework regarding these students' developmental process. Therefore, the review of Erikson's theory focuses on stage six and seven. Erikson proposes that in stage six, the major crisis or dilemma is intimacy versus isolation. Erikson (1959) defines intimacy as "the ability to fuse your identity with somebody else's without fear that you're going to lose something yourself" (as cited in Bee, 1987, p. 61). From Erikson's point of view, young adults who have a clear self-identity can successfully build intimate relationships with others. Those who have weak or unformed identities will experience a sense of isolation or loneliness. Adults in stage seven—generativity versus stagnation—have their places in society and are capable of helping the next generation's development or make contributions to the society. However, those adults who cannot achieve a satisfying sense of generativity may experience a sense of stagnation.

Levinson's theory of adult development

Levinson (1980) portrays adult development through the concept of life structure. He describes life structure as "the pattern or design of a person's life, a meshing of self-in-world" (p. 278). Adults create their own life structures by integrating, adapting to, or filtering through all the roles they hold in the workplace, at home, and in relationships. Indeed, adults develop a pattern to their own lives while trying to adapt to the environment and the demands made of them. Individuals of different ages with the same roles to perform will create different life structures.

Levinson (1980) suggests that adults' life structures are based on adapting to a set of inner and outer conditions in relation to their social roles; therefore, they are always fluctuating throughout entire life cycles. When the individual's life conditions change, she or he must change. Levinson's structure theory proposes that adult life consists of both four alternating periods of stable life structures (childhood and adolescence, early adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood) and three transitional periods (early adulthood transition, mid-life transition, and late adult transition), and each stable period or transition has particular content. Each transition period requires the individual to reexamine, readjust, or transform. Levinson organizes his structure theory into four major overlapping stable periods or eras and transitional periods, where each transitional period may last approximately 3 to 5 years. The periods Levinson proposes are listed as follows:

- the Early Childhood Transition and the Childhood and Adolescence era (birth to age 17);

- the Early Adult Transition and the Early Adulthood era starts from entering the adult world, age 30 transition, and ends at settling down (age 22-40);

- the Mid-Life Transition and the Middle Adulthood era starts from entering middle adulthood, age 50 transition, and ends at culmination of middle adulthood—(age 45-60); and

- the Late Adult Transition and the Later Adulthood era (65 +).

From Levinson's (1980) point of view, he asserts the concept of life structure or life cycle can apply to all adults:

[T]he periods constitute a source of order in the life cycle. This order exists at an underlying level. At the day-to-day level of concrete events and experiences, our lives are sometimes rapidly changing and fragmented, sometimes utterly stationary . . . At the level of personality, we change in different ways, according to different timetables. Yet, I believe that everyone lives through the same developmental periods in adulthood . . . though people go through in their own ways . . . Our theory of life structure does not specify a single, "normal" course that everyone must follow. Its function, instead, is to indicate the developmental tasks that everyone must work in successive periods, and the infinitely varied forms that such work can take on different individuals living under different conditions. (p. 289)

Levinson (1980) asserts that these sequences of life structures move from worse to better or less mature to more mature. No one period is better or more advanced than others. Each period builds upon the work of the earlier and represents a later phase in the cycle. Not everybody passing through each stage experiences greater growth or wisdom; however, certain age-linked tasks or roles adults play in life, such as a parent, cannot only impact them significantly, but can also shape the structure of their lives. In light of Levinson's notion of development and feature of his structure theory, international students may be said to be creating their new life structures in foreign lands by learning to integrate, adapt to, or filter through all the given roles or challenges that they are holding or encountering.

Riegel's theory of adult development

Riegel (1975, 1977) suggests that there are two major sequences of change within each individual: inner-biological change and cultural-sociological change. For example, when one's body changes, he or she is forced to develop a new coping mechanism that will also affect his or her social conditions. The same issue occurs when one's socio-cultural conditions change, which forces the individual to develop new adaptations that affect his or her biological system. Therefore, growth or development occurs whenever the individual is experiencing the patterns of change in either domain. In other words, a crisis not only disturbs one's inner balance, but also motivates one to change his or her self-concept and strategies for living life.

Additionally, Riegel borrows the dialectic concept (i.e., thesis, antithesis, and synthesis) from philosophy or logic and uses it to explain how change in development, physical or social disequilibrates the old synthesis, fostering a new antithesis or a new synthesis. His statement indicates that a formative change comes from the process of reciprocal adaptation of biological and social changes. Riegel's theory proposes a more complex view of adult development simply because of the existing dynamic interaction between inner-biological change and cultural-sociological change. Riegel's notion offers another lens for exploring adult international students' journeys of studying in a foreign country.

Theories Related to Perspective Transformation

Learning in adulthood is not only for acquiring knowledge or skills and developing one's potential, but also for enhancing one's self-awareness, extending worldviews, and shaping attitude and perspectives (Freire, 2001; Mezirow, 1991, 2000).

Indeed, continuing to learn and transform have become important paths to better adapt to the rapidly changing world. Scholars (Daloz, 1986, 1999; Freire, 2001; Mezirow, 1991, 2000) perceive transformative learning through different lenses, and each enriches the understanding of the way in which individuals undergo a learning and transforming journey.

Based upon the experience of working with poor illiterate Brazilians, Paulo Freire (2001) suggests the concept of emancipatory education in his book, *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. Freire asserts that learning or education can emancipate the learners from oppression through the process of discussing and reflecting on relevant issues of their lives, recognizing the oppressions, and identifying or formulating ways to overcome these barriers. Freire believes that learners can be empowered to change their world.

Mezirow (1991; 2000) takes on Freire's (2001) notions of emancipatory education and proposes a cognitive-rational approach to transformative learning. He agrees with Freire that adult education should lead to empowerment (Mezirow, 1991); however, Freire's work focuses more on social justice and social reform, while Mezirow's transformative learning theory aims to explore the importance of rational thought and reflection in the learning process that transforms individuals' perspectives.

According to Mezirow's transformative learning theory, perspective transformation is central to transformative learning. First, Mezirow (1991) defines perspective transformation as:

> the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions
> have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our

world; of reformulating these assumptions to permit a more inclusive,

discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspective; and of making

decisions or otherwise acting on these new understandings. More inclusive,

discriminating, permeable, and integrative perspectives are superior

perspectives that adults choose if they can because they are motivated to

better understand the meaning of their experience. (p. 167)

Mezirow (1994) indicates that perspective transformation can come from a

sudden insight of a major crisis in one's life or of a long accumulating process of

transforming one's meaning schemes. A meaning scheme is defined as "the particular

knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, and feelings that become articulated in an

interpretation" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 44), while meaning perspective is a set of meaning

schemes that construe meaning for an experience. Individuals' meaning perspectives also

provide criteria for them to make judgments or evaluations and to determine the way they

see themselves and the world.

Both meaning perspectives and meaning schemes have significant impact on an

individual's interpretations and actions, especially when an individual realizes that his or

her current experiences do not match the existing meaning schemes or perspectives. The

individual is more likely to compromise his or her perception and cognition in order to

release the tension or anxiety of their disorienting dilemmas. In cases where the

disorienting dilemma is too threatening, the individual may "tend to block it out or resort

to psychological defense mechanisms to provide a more compatible interpretation"

(Mezirow, 1990, p. 4). Individuals may also transform meaning schemes and

perspectives to accommodate new interpretations of experience.

Since perspective transformation is the core of transformative learning, Mezirow's (1991) ten-phase process explains the way in which an individual transforms his or her perspective as follows:

1. A disorienting dilemma

2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame

3. A critical assessment of epistemic, socio-cultural, or psychic assumptions

4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change

5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions

6. Planning of a course of action

7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans

8. Provisional trying of new roles

9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and

10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (p. 168-169)

Transformative learning, Mezirow (1991) asserts, starts from a disorienting dilemma. A disorienting dilemma is a crisis event—such as a death of loved one or an illness—that cannot be solved through prior experiences. The disorienting dilemma forces individuals to undergo the above ten phases. In sum, transformative learning involves "(a) an empowered sense of self, (b) more critical understanding of how one's social relationships and culture have shaped one's beliefs and feelings, and (c) more

functional strategies and resources for taking action" (Mezirow, 1991, p.161). The new,

transformed perspectives enable the individual to live a life more freely and fully.

Additionally, Mezirow (1991) pinpoints that individuals' meaning schemes can be

examined and transformed through critical reflection.   He indicates that critical reflection

requires individuals to critically analyze the way in which they "perceive thinking,

judging, feeling and acting" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 106). Critical reflection occurs

especially during the time the individuals sense the inconsistency of their lives and need a

guideline to negotiate for action or to understand their new experience.

Reflection takes more than one form. Mezirow (1991) delineates his version of

reflection and proposes three types reflection—content reflection, process reflection, and

premise reflection. Reflection requires individuals to criticize their assumptions about

the content or process while solving problems. Content reflection demands that

individuals think about their actual experiences, while process reflection leads them to

reexamine their problem solving strategies. Premises reflection involves examining

one's long held, socially constructed beliefs, assumptions, and values about the

experience or problem. Mezirow (1991) further discusses the difference between

reflection and critical reflection. He explains that critical reflection is a way of

challenging one's presuppositions of previous learning. Critical reflection tends to reflect

on premises, not on assumptions; therefore, he names this kind of reflection "premise

reflection" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 105).   As a result, reflection is related to problem solving

while critical reflection is associated with problem posing. From Mezirow's (1991)

viewpoint, problem posing involves "making a taken-for-granted situation problematic,

raising questions regarding its validity" (p. 105). Mezirow also asserts that premise

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reflection has its own "inferential logic" and he characterized it as "dialectical-presuppositional, a developmental movement through cognitive structures" (p. 110). Reflection on the content, process, and premises of problem solving can enhance learning outcomes either in a hypothetical-deductive problem solving or in a metaphorical-abductive problem solving oriented learning environment.

Although Mezirow's theory focuses on individuals' cognitive functioning, he also recognizes the impact of social interaction on the learning relationship. Thus, the process of both socialization and modernization provides opportunities for adults to learn to negotiate meanings that they have given or are going to give to their experiences through integrating assumptions or belief systems that they have formed with what they are currently experiencing in the context of a given time, space, and culture.

Closing Statement

In conclusion, the above theories and studies indicate that studying in a foreign country involves a holistic learning process of changes and growth. Issues such as linguistic hindrances, cultural differences (including the culture of academia), identities, and interpersonal relationships complicate international students' cross-cultural transition. Any life event or transition will put people into a new life circumstance to work on their whole being. International students initiate their journeys of studying in the United States, for better or worse and with or without needed resources and support; they must do their best and work on achieving their goals. Research shows that this journey expands international students' world views and enhances their competence in a given profession. Those benefits indicate the importance of exploring how international students transform through learning and living in the United States. However, little

research exists that explains the following: (1) What processes do international students undergo while studying in the United States? (2) What triggered them to study in the United States? (3) What are milestone events they undergo? (4) What triggers them to change their taken-for-granted assumptions, and how do they transform their frames of references in the context of United States academia and society? (5) How do they envision themselves and go from their sojourn experiences of learning and living in the United States to the future?

CHAPTER THREE

Mode of Inquiry

Introduction

This study aims to uncover the lived experiences of international students'

educational journeys in the United States, for the purpose of gaining an in-depth

understanding of the way in which international students undertake U.S. higher education

to enhance their academic, personal, and professional learning and development.

Additionally, the study explores the necessary transformation of assumptions and

perspectives acquired in their homeland in order to become effective within the U.S.

cultural and higher educational system and society. The research questions for this study

were:

1. What factors brought these international students to study in the United

    States?

2. What challenges and opportunities did they encounter during their sojourn in

    the United States?

3. What personal and environmental factors enabled them to cope with the

    changes and to function effectively in the United States?

4. What have been the benefits or hardships of studying and living in the United

    States?

This chapter describes the way in which this study was conducted. It consists of

five major elements: the methodological orientation of the study, design of the study,

analytical procedures, trustworthiness and credibility, and limitations.

Methodological Orientation of the Study

International students in the United States come from diverse cultural backgrounds and nationalities to study at different universities and in various majors. Each of them reconstructs his or her new reality in the United States within the context of his or her specific academic culture, developmental time frame, and geographic location. For instance, international students from underdeveloped or developing countries studying at U.S. universities are likely to possess vastly different experiences compared to those who come from highly developed countries. Students of the same nationality who study at different U.S. universities often engage in various academic cultures and living environments, i.e. the East Coast, the West Coast, or the Central region of the United States, and the variation of their learning environments leads these students through quite different and unique journeys. As a result, international students' learning experiences vary simply because their new realities in the United States are reconstructed according to where they reside and with whom they are interacting.

Unique life experience calls for a unique response, especially from the perspective of the human sciences, where each individual's reality is assumed to be socially constructed and re-constructed according to each one's perceptions (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Eisner, 1981, 1988; Feinberg & Soltis, 1986; Scott & Morrison, 2006). Not only is human reality multiple and complex, but it must also be understood in the context of individuals' everyday lives: namely, how individuals assign meaning to their experiences. Therefore, the investigators must gain access to the site in order to explore and mediate the meanings the individuals give to their experiences through the investigators' own perceptions (Merriam, 1989). The notion of the

qualitative research approach, in emphasizing "the experience the individuals are having and the meaning their actions have for others" (Eisner, 1981, p. 6), as well as "focusing on process and understanding" (Merriam, 1989, p. 166), is the most appropriate design for this study. Utilizing the qualitative research approach allows the researcher to provide an insider's view with regard to how international students make sense of their journeys in the United States; what they experience in terms of learning, change, and growth; how they interpret these experiences; and how they structure their worlds in a foreign environment. Through the qualitative research paradigm, international students' unique experiences at U.S. universities and the meanings they give to their experiences can be understood in depth and breadth.

Design of the Study

In order to acquire insights into international students' experiences of working through transitions in the United States, the design of this study must allow the researcher to gain access to the research participants' lives and to uncover the meaning that they give to their experiences. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2005), a research design should focus on the research question and on the purpose of the study, especially on the most effective strategies for collecting the appropriate data to answer the proposed research questions. A research design must also provide a flexible set of guidelines that (1) connects theoretical paradigms to strategies of inquiry and methods for collecting empirical material, (2) situates researchers in the empirical world and connects them to specific sites, and (3) specifies how the investigator addresses issues of representation and legitimization (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2005). For the purpose of this study, the

researcher chose a qualitative research approach utilizing interpretivism as the research design to uncover the phenomenon under investigation.

The design of this study is embedded in the hermeneutic, interpretive mode of inquiry provided by Denzin (2001) and Feinberg and Soltis (1986). Denzin (2001) indicates that "every human situation is novel, emergent, and filled with multiple, often conflicting, meanings and interpretations" (p. 46). In the social sciences, raw behavior has no meaning, or might have many different meanings, depending on context and on how the actor and his or her community determine it (Feinberg & Soltis, 1986). Interpretive studies, Denzin (2001) proposes, focus on how subjects experience, define, and weave meaningful life events, and it therefore follows that such a research design can provide meaningful descriptions and interpretations of social processes. The interpretive research design can also "explain how certain conditions came into existence and why they persist" (Denzin, 2001, p. 43). In order to reach a sophisticated, higher level of understanding of a social phenomenon, the concept of hermeneutics is also utilized during the interpretation. Indeed, hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. Feinberg and Soltis (1986) explain that researchers who are in favor of the hermeneutics approach to interpreting human phenomena will take "the rules, roles, and norms that are operative in the social situation into account" (p. 103). In this study, the researcher intended to utilize Denzin's concept of interpretivism without losing sight of Feinberg and Solitis's notion regarding hermeneutics and interpretivism.

Since "there is neither a single, absolute truth in human reality nor one correct reading or interpretation of a text" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 2), the use of an in-depth interview approach helps researchers directly collect unique

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perceptions and rich data from research participants. Based upon the proposed research

design, an in-depth interview approach was used to uncover the phenomenon of the way

in which international students learn, develop, and change in the United States. In sum,

the methodology of this study was qualitative and drew on the guidelines of

interpretivism, utilized in-depth interview for data collection, and analyzed data through

the lens of adult learning and development theory, transformative learning theory, and the

notion of chaos and complexity theory. This study was reviewed and approved by the

University of Oklahoma Institutional Review Broad.

Participants

In qualitative studies, the researchers select purposive samples (or participants)

and study them in their natural settings using multiple methods to collect a variety of

empirical materials in order to understand, interpret, and describe the phenomenon under

investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). For instance, Patton (1990) proposes that

qualitative researchers tend to purposefully ". . . select information-rich cases for study in

depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about

issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (p. 169). Merriam (1989)

further explains that when conducting research, if one aims to "discover, understand, gain

insights . . . one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most" (p. 48).

Regarding the technique for selecting desired participants in a qualitative study, Creswell

(1998) points out that the use of the combination or mixed sampling technique because it

focuses on "triangulation, flexibility" in order to "meet multiple interests and needs" of a

study (p. 119). Utilizing the combination or mixed sampling technique allows the

researcher to select participants across some range of variation, such as participants of

different genders, ages, nationalities, disciplinary backgrounds, and so on (Glesne, 1999). Based upon scholars' (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1989; Patton, 1990) suggestions, both the purposive sampling method and the combination or mixed sampling technique were chosen to find desired participants regarding the phenomenon under investigation.

According to the proposed research design, the research participant pool (and criteria for selection) of this study comprised of international students in the United States including both female and male international graduate students, ages ranging from 21 to 64, who have studied at American universities for a minimum of two years and were willing to be interviewed. In order to gather rich data to better understand the experiences of these students, the research participants included both those currently enrolled in a university located in the Midwestern United States and those who have graduated recently from the university and are now working in the United States under practical training (including H1 visa). The research participants' majors and countries of origin were expected to be diverse and represented different disciplines and cultures.

To find the desired participants, the researcher distributed the recruitment flyers both on and off campus in person and also with the assistance of classmates and friends. A total of twenty-two international students initially responded to the notice to participate and were contacted to schedule for interviews; however, four did not wish to pursue further, and therefore only eighteen international students were actually interviewed. During the data collecting process, it became clear that one of these eighteen participants was an undergraduate (rather than graduate) international student and one came as a refugee holding American citizenship. The researcher decided to include them because

the information they gave provided another perspective from which to view international students' learning experiences in the United States. Thus, this study consisted of eighteen international students including seventeen international graduate students (twelve female and five male) and one female international undergraduate student. Among these eighteen research participants, nine participants have earned their degrees from U.S. universities—five hold a Ph.D. degree, while another four received master's degrees. These nine research participants were either working or looking for a job under H1 visa or practical training program, and two have decided to return to their home countries. The other nine research participants consisted of six doctoral students, two master's students, and one undergraduate student. These eighteen research participants came from seven different countries: China, Japan, Jamaica, Korea, Liberia, Malaysia, and Taiwan. Their ages range from the early 20s to late 40s. Among these participants, ten were single, one was engaged, seven participants were married, and three of them had one to three children. Their length of study in the United States ranged from two years to fourteen years. Their areas of study included eleven different disciplines at three different colleges (College of Art and Science, College of Education, and College of Engineering).

The Design for Data Collection

The proposed design of data collection of this study integrated Denzin's (2001) notion of interpretive research design, Karpiak's application of the "clustering" technique, and Karpiak's (1990) concept of "Valued Images." To begin with, Denzin (2001) suggests that in using the biographical, interpretive method, researchers need to collect, analyze, and perform "stories, accounts, and narratives that speak to turning point

moments in people's lives" (p. 59). Researchers can "obtain stories through structured, semistructured, and unstructured interviews, through free association methods, and through collectively produced autobiographies" (Denzin, 2001, p. 59). Additionally, Karpiak (1996) points out that the clustering technique is a valuable tool for collecting data while conducting research. Having adapted it from creative writing (Rico, 1983), she notes that applying the clustering technique helps the researcher to evoke a narrator's ability to recall his or her experiences, generate images, ideas, and feelings. It allows the researcher to begin the dialogue with the research participant, as well as the dialogue between the research participant's current status and his or her past status. Karpiak (1996) notes that the clustering technique not only eases the participant's anxiety about doing a one-on-one interview, but also helps the participant to explore her or his feelings and experiences with minimal (non-directive) researcher influence during the interview course. Furthermore, utilizing the clustering technique at the beginning of the initial interview enables the researcher to build rapport with the participant.

It should be noted that the research participants' responses may not be able to cover fully the research questions. Therefore, the best way to handle this challenge is to include designed, open-ended questions. In so doing, the researcher is able to gather specific information and data to not only answer the proposed research problem, but also assist the research participants to recall their memories.

In order to better understand international students' changes and growth in the United States, the researcher designed the "I" images exercise to help participants to indirectly and directly describe themselves. The "I" images refer the how individuals imagine that they are portrayed by others as well as how they portray themselves. This

exercise was inspired by Karpiak's (1990) "Valued Images" exercise that allowed her

participants to consider individuals whose identity they shared. For the purpose of this

study, the use of the "I" images exercise to assist the participants discussing and

comparing those "I" images (from others and their own) was expected to facilitate the

research participants in recognizing their developmental changes and transformations

while studying in the United States. This process also enabled participants to

acknowledge the personal and environmental elements that support and sustain them

while encountering challenges and difficulties in the United States. In so doing,

participants have opportunities to reorganize their experiences by linking their clusters,

milestone events, and transformative experiences with their 'I' images in order to see the

pattern of their change and growth, identify which of their perspectives have been

transformed, and make sense of their journeys in the United States. Ultimately, this study

undertakes the clustering technique as one information-gathering technique in the initial

interview and follows with designed, open-ended interview questions and "I" images

exercise.

To conclude, data was collected primarily through two series of in-depth

interviews with the research participants from June 2006 to May 2007. The researcher's

observation field notes were also included. Eighteen participants of this study were

contacted to schedule interviews. Each participant was interviewed on two to three

occasions, depending on the need for further data. The length of each interview varied

based upon each participant's responses. The shortest interview of this study lasted

approximately 70 minutes, while the longest one lasted approximately 300 minutes. Each

interview was tape-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality.

Data collection Procedure

The data collecting procedure consisted of three stages, Stage I: Recruitment, Stage II: The initial interview, and Stage III: The follow-up interview. Each stage is described as follows.

Stage I: Recruitment

After distributing the recruitment flyer, the researcher started to contact the potential research participants by telephone, email, or face-to-face conversation to invite them to participate in the study. During the initial contact, the researcher began by introducing the general procedures of the study, then answered questions for participants, gained the participants' agreement to participate in the study and to attend approximately two series of interviews, and arranged the date for the first interview. The researcher also informed the participants that the published results would be presented in narrative and summary form only. All information the participants provided will remain strictly confidential.

Stage II: The initial interview

At the beginning of the initial interview, each participant was requested to sign an informed consent form after the researcher had restated the purpose of the study and research procedure. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym in the study records. All participants were aware of the purpose of the interview and possible concerns before the interview was actually conducted. They understood that they were free to choose what to share and to withdraw from the interview or the study at any time. A series of

two interviews were conducted. The initial interview included three components. The

first component (Phase I) was a non-directive clustering exercise; the second (Phase II)

comprised designed, open-ended questions; and the last component (Phase III) was an "I"

images exercise.

Phase I: Non-directive clustering exercise

To begin the initial interview, the researcher started with the clustering exercise

by asking participants to free associate their thoughts regarding their experiences as

international students in the United States. The researcher then placed "My experiences

as an international student in the United States" in the center of a paper (see Appendix D)

for the participant to draw his or her clusters and to express any idea that came into his or

her mind at that moment. Participants were free to draw their 'clusters' according to

preference. They could draw as many clusters as they wanted until they were satisfied.

The clustering technique gave freedom to the participant to share his or her experiences.

Additionally, the researcher was able to obtain diverse data beyond the prepared open-

ended questions.

After finishing the drawing, the researcher turned on the tape-recorder and then

invited the participant to take the researcher through his or her clusters, describing them

in detail. Each participant was then asked whether she or he wanted to add additional

information or modify his or her clusters. The researcher followed by inviting the

participants to make any summary comment and also to talk about their insights after

doing the cluster exercise. At the end of the clustering exercise, every participant was

asked to rank all of the clusters in relation to their importance to him or her, as well as

offer a rationale for doing it.

Phase II: The designed, open-ended questions

In Phase II, each participant was asked a set of designed, open-ended questions comprising the major or significant events or situations that they have encountered and experienced before and after studying in the United States. The designed, open-ended interview questions are listed as follows:

- What brought you to study in the United States?

- How did that impact your learning journey in the United States?

- What is it like to be an international student in the United States?

- What are the major or significant events that you have experienced while studying in the United States?

- How have you managed and learned from those major or significant events?

- What, if any, event or thing have you experienced that shapes the way you see yourself and the world around you while studying in the United States?

- What have you learned from the experience/experiences that has/have shaped the way you see yourself and the world?

- What are the differences and similarities in your life after studying in the United States?

- What does the journey of studying in the United States mean to you personally, academically, and professionally?

During this process, special attention was given to the specific information regarding the circumstances that brought the participants to study in the United States, the significant or milestone events that they have encountered and managed, and changes undergone to their frames of reference (perspectives) while adapting to their new lives in

the United States. Before ending this phase, each research participant was asked to identify some main points that he or she had shared during the open-ended questions phase. At the end of the Phase II: Designed open-ended questions, each participant was invited to share the new insights she or he had gained during this section regarding his or her learning, development, and transformation while studying in the United States. After a set of open-ended questions, the participant was also asked whether or not she or he wanted to take a break before moving into Phase III: the "I" Images Exercise.

Phase III: The "I" Images Exercise

In Phase III, participants were invited to share their "I" images portrayed by themselves and their associates to extend the data collection. The researcher began with explaining the design of "I" images exercise to each participant. Depending on each participant's preference, she or he could either verbalize his or her "I" images (offered by him- or herself and her or his associates) or use paper and pencil to write down or cluster them. To begin with, the researcher asked each participant to recall his or her memory or to interpret the way in which his or her families and friends back home viewed her or him before and after coming to the United States to pursue higher education. Next, each participant was invited to discuss the way in which his or her professors, classmates, and friends, whom he or she had met at American universities, portrayed her or him both in the early stage and late stage of his or her sojourn in the United States. The last portion of the "I" Images Exercise focused on each participant's perception in his- or herself. Questions designed for obtaining each participant's "I" images are listed as follows:

- How did people (significant others such as parents, relatives, and close friends) back home portray you before coming to the United States?

- How do people back home portray you now?

- How did people (roommates, advisors, professors, classmates, or close friends) with whom you interacted in the United States portray you when you first arrived in the States?

- How do these people with whom you associate in the United States view you now?

- What are the differences and similarities of the above images?

- How did you view yourself before studying in the United States?

- How do you view yourself after studying in the United States?

- How do you envision yourself in the future? And why?

Before concluding the "I" Images Exercise, the researcher invited each participant to talk about what, if any, new insights he or she had gained after reviewing her or his different images, and also to share his or her new insights. In so doing, each participant had an opportunity to integrate his or her experiences in a broader context. In the end of the initial interview, each research participant was asked to identify some main points that he or she had shared during the first interview. The participant was free to add more information or make any modification if it was needed regarding his or her learning and transformation in the United States.

Stage III: The follow-up interview

The follow-up interview was conducted at least two weeks after the initial interview to allow for a respondent check. In the second interview, the researcher first addressed the topics discussed and information discovered during the initial interview (the meaning units that were recognized from the first interview transcript). The

researcher then asked the participants whether or not they wanted to make additional comments or to modify the materials from the first interview. Before closing the second interview, the researcher requested each participant to summarize his or her experience of studying in the United States. The research participants were invited to confirm the major changes that they have noticed and/or identified and what they may have learned from these two interviews in relation to their journeys in the United States. They were invited to respond to and comment on the major themes or main points that the researcher had identified or shared with them during these two interviews.

Analytical Procedures

Data from the taped interviews and field notes were analyzed qualitatively following guidelines of interpretivism through the lens of adult learning and development theories, chaos and complexity theories, and transformational learning theories. According to Denzin (2001), interpretivism "attempts to make meanings that circulate in the world of lived experience accessible to the reader . . . and to capture and represent the voices, emotions, and actions of those studied" (p. 1). Following upon Denzin's (2001) interpretive orientation, the analytical procedures of this study consisted of ten steps. Those steps are described as follows.

Step One: After the initial interview, the researcher listened to each participant's interview tapes and transcribed them into the text. The researcher organized the interview transcript encompassing her field notes and displayed them as a unit.

Step Two: The researcher carefully read through each transcribed interview and the researcher's field notes to get a sense of the whole regarding each participant's experience as an international student in the United States. The researcher identified and

organized major points or statements from each interview transcript that spoke directly to the phenomenon being studied.

Step Three: The researcher deconstructed and subdivided each participant's initial interview transcript into key units and analyzed them through the lens of earlier identified theoretical framework in order to distinguish each participant's specific experiences as they related to turning points, meaning making, and perspective transformation. During this data deconstructing and analyzing process, a special attention was paid to the language employed by the participant, especially the metaphor the participant used, to recognize the meaning the participant gave to his or her experience (Bodgan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin, 2001; Moustakas, 1994).

Step Four: The researcher consecutively unfolded and interpreted the meanings of these key units and major points or statements to the participants. She also inspected these meanings for what they revealed about "the essential, recurring features of the phenomenon being studied" (Denzin, 2001, p. 76). The identified meaning units from the interviews were reviewed in consultation with the researcher's major professor and one of her colleagues.

Step Five: All the identified meaning units from each interview transcript were also grouped, compared, and connected across the whole sample set. The researcher designated the meaning patterns or themes from these particular experiences across the whole sample set.

Step Six: The researcher provided a tentative statement about the phenomenon of these participants' journeys in the United States after integrating her interpretations with

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participants' experiences gathered from interviews and the proposed theoretical framework.

Step Seven: The researcher consulted with her major professor regarding her tentative statement including four major themes and two patterns/conceptual schemata of these participants' learning, development, and transformation. The researcher also invited two participants to review and examine the statement for clarity and modification.

Step Eight: During the follow-up interview, the researcher reported the major points, meaning units, and her tentative statements to each participant for modification and confirmation. The researcher began with asking each participant to read through the organized major points from his or her initial interview and the tentative statement purposed by the researcher. Each participant was free to add comments or modify the presented major points and the statement. The research participant was also invited to confirm both the major points and the statement of the phenomenon under investigation.

Step Nine: The researcher organized the follow-up interviews and integrated them with the initial interview findings. After the follow-up interview, the researcher listened to the interview tapes and transcribed them into text. The researcher carefully read through each participant's follow-up interview transcript to modify or confirm her statement of the phenomenon being studied. After integrating all the initial interview with follow-up data across the entire sample set, the researcher identified how the four major themes in relation to four proposed research questions and these participants' patterns of learning, development, and transformation cohered into the central phenomenon—cultural crossing—of these participants' journeys in the United States.

Step Ten: The researcher displayed the findings and her interpretations from the data analysis using the thick, rich description utilizing specific comments from the participants to support the statements concerning themes and patterns identified by the researcher.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The terms *validity* and *reliability* do not generally apply in qualitative research approaches. In qualitative research, validity is defined as "how accurately the account represents participants' realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 124-125). Eisner (1981) uses the term *credibility* to address the validity issue in qualitative studies because researchers seek "illumination and penetration" (p. 6). *Dependability* is the term that addresses the reliability of the investigation in a qualitative study. Triangulation is the approach used most frequently regarding the issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. Researchers often use the following procedures to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative studies; they include multiple methods (field notes, tapes, interviews, follow-ups) in data collection, collecting data on multiple occasions over time, performing member checking, using rich, thick description, and engaging an external audit of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In this study, the researcher utilized the following procedures to increase the trustworthiness of the study as follows:

- theory triangulation (chaos and complexity theory, adult learning and development theory, and transformative learning theory)
- prolonged engagement in the field (data were collected through two series of in-depth interviews over ten months period of time),

- member check (the identified meaning units from interviews were checked and corrected by each participant during the follow-up interview) ,

- the researcher's field notes,

- peer consultation, and

- using thick, rich description to write the report.

Limitations and Benefits of the Study

This study is qualitatively oriented and draws on the guidelines of interpretivism. In-depth interview and clustering research techniques were used for data collection. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as an instrument during the data collecting, analyzing, and interpreting process. Therefore, certain limitations within this study need to be addressed in terms of research methodology (sampling, data collection, and date analysis) used, the linguistic hindrance, the research participants and the findings' representation, and the researcher as one of the research instruments. Additionally, the benefits from participating in this study from participants' perspectives were also included.

The Selected Research Methodology

The first limitation of this study regards methodology. When choosing the in-depth interview research approach for data collection, the researcher must be aware of its limitations (Yow, 1994). First of all, using life reviews to collect data, the researcher may only get a narrow, idiosyncratic, or ethnocentric picture. With limited time and occasions for data collection, the researcher may not fully explore the life events and experiences of participants. Secondly, data from the in-depth life review presents only retrospective evidence. Some valuable information might be left out. Finally,

participants might forget or omit certain important information during the data collecting process due to both physical and psychological conditions. For example, health problems might cause the participants to have difficulty remembering what has happened in the past. Other special concerns, such as trying to make oneself look good while recording past events, might impact how stories or experiences are told during the interviews. The limitations are there and really can't be solved.

The Linguistic Hindrance

The linguistic barriers were another challenge in terms of the limitation of this study, because English is the second language of both the researcher and the participants. To begin with, when using a second language to think and communicate, one might not be able to articulate his or her stories, ideas, and thoughts fully. Next, the techniques used and questions asked during data collection required the research participants to be able to perform critical reflection, in-depth thinking, and integration in order to articulate their experiences. Of course, some words within certain languages do not directly translate to another language. The possibility remains that the obtained responses may not be adequate to completely reveal the participants' experiences because of the direct translation problem. According to a Chinese scholar, Fung (1948), who specialized in Chinese Philosophy, "Words are for holding ideas, but when one has got the idea, one need no longer think about the words" (p. 12) because "A translation, after all, is only an interpretation" (p. 14). Not every insight, meaning, or feeling can be articulated through language. There are alternatives for understanding the meanings that one gives to one's story, such as non-verbal communication. In addition, while translating and presenting one's story through words, the translation of the story might have already lost much of its

inherent richness. Thus, Fung suggests, "when words are used, it is the suggestiveness of the words, and not their fixed denotations or connotations" (p. 13). Consequently, in qualitative research, the linguistic issue is always one that might impact the research findings whether the language used is the participant's mother tongue or a second language. It is important for both the researcher and the readers to be aware that "Words are something that should be forgotten when they have achieved their purpose" (Fung, 1948, p. 13).

To reduce the impact of linguistic hindrance, the researcher described and explained the research background and design to the participants before the interview to allow time to reflect upon their experiences and organize their thoughts. During the interview, the researcher encouraged participants to take their time to reflect and re-organize their thoughts before sharing their experiences and responses. The participants also felt free to stop anytime to go back to the prior section either to add more information or to modify their responses. Before the end of each phase in both the first and second interviews, the researcher always asked participants to talk about their insights after sharing their experiences with the researcher to ensure the information collected was sufficient and complete in terms of the participants' experiences on that specific topic.

The Research Participants and the Findings' Representation

The third major limitation of this study was related to sampling. In qualitative research, researchers often look for the subjects who could best represent or reveal the phenomenon under investigation. However, the selected eighteen international students of this study cannot represent all the international students from all over the world in the

United States. Therefore, in this study, participants' experiences and stories can only portray a portion of international students in the Midwestern United States.

The Researcher as a Research Instrument

The last limitation related to the researcher, to her background knowledge and experiences in research. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) indicate that qualitative research is an interactive process shaped by both the researchers' personal history and the people in the research setting. Outcomes of a qualitative study will represent the researcher's understandings and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis. Due to the researcher's position as an international student from Taiwan, her unique insider's viewpoints and experiences enable her to empathize in terms of the research participants' lived experiences. However, her insider's perspective might create biases while analyzing, interpreting, and explaining data. Therefore, member check, the researcher's reflective journal and field notes, and peer consultation were included in this study to preserve trustworthiness. The above concerns and limitations suggest that more follow up studies were needed to explore international students' learning and transformative journeys both in depth and in breadth.

The Benefits of Participating in This Study

Human beings have a need to understand themselves and also be understood by others and the world. Being able to tell one's story with regard to why he or she made the choice she or he did enables the individual to uncover his or her true self. Through reflecting upon his or her experiences, the individual can take advantage from his or her lived experiences in terms of recognizing his or her inner desires, understanding the underlying assumptions, and clarifying the direction for actions to look forward to the

future. The key element that enabled the research participants to benefit from this study is the research design. Based upon the feedback gathered from the participants, the research design of this study made the research participants feel less anxious and more comfortable while sharing their stories. Indeed, these eighteen participants pointed out that these interviews were very meaningful and valuable to them with regard to the opportunity of revisiting and integrating their experiences studying in the United States. The research participants declared that the interviews enabled them to realize the value of the challenges and difficulties they have gone through, as well as to recognize the efforts that they have made to adapt to changes. Indeed, the process of revisiting, re-organizing, and integrating these past few years' learning experiences in the United States not only helped these participants make better sense of their learning, development, and transformation as international students in the United States, but also empower them to look forward to the future, either in their home countries or in the United States.

Concluding Statement

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of international students' learning and transformation while studying in the United States. Based upon the purpose of the study and the proposed research questions, the researcher then organized this chapter into five sections: the methodological orientation of the study, design of the study, analytic procedures, trustworthiness and creditability, and limitations. In the end of this chapter, the researcher outlined the following three chapters with regard to the findings and discussions of this study.

First, this study took on the qualitative research approach and utilized interpretivism as a research design to discover the way in which international students

undertake U.S. higher education to fulfill their educational goals. Second, this study included eighteen international students (males and females) of different nationalities and disciplines who have studied at U.S. universities for more than two years, including those who were under H1 visa. Data was collected through two in-depth interviews, audio-taped and transcribed, and the researcher's observation field notes. Third, data was analyzed qualitatively following the guidelines of interpretivism through the lens of adult learning and development theory, chaos and complexity theory, and transformational learning theory. Fourth, techniques and procedures were used to increase the trustworthiness of the study including theory triangulation, prolonged engagement in the field, member checking, peer consultation, and thick, rich, descriptive writing. Last, limitations of this study regarding the research methodology, the linguistic barriers, and the researcher's background were discussed. Solutions to these limitations were also described.

The findings, discussions, implications and recommendations, as well as conclusion of this study are organized into three different chapters: Chapters Four, Five, and Six. Chapter Four focuses on presenting the research findings in terms of answering the four proposed research questions. It consists of five components: (1) background of the participants; (2) Theme One: Seizing opportunities to determine their destinies; (3) Theme Two: Confronting differences and disequilibrium; (4) Theme Three: Navigating between home and host cultures; and (5) Theme Four: Being and becoming authentic. Chapter Five discusses the research findings. It deliberates upon these participants' experiences regarding the journey, evolving and transforming, and being and becoming. Chapter Six begins with a summary of the study. It then presents the implications and

recommendations for practice in relations with educators and institutes of higher

education; faculty, staff members, and classmates; international students; and both the

host and the home countries. It also provides a concluding section to the work as a

whole.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Research Findings: The Journey of Cultural Crossing

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore why international students came abroad to pursue their educational endeavors as well as explore their experiences during their studies at institutions of higher education in the United States. The findings revealed that the central phenomenon of these eighteen participants' journeys in the United States was embedded in the issue of cultural crossing. For the purpose of this study cultural crossing refers to Gendlin's (1997) notion that

> . . . a person who has lived in two cultures, and is now "marginal" to both. The
>
> person cannot help but understand each culture better and more perceptively than
>
> people who have lived only in only place, because the situations of both cultures
>
> have crossed in the person's experiential mesh. Then each new situation crosses
>
> with all those. Many new, more precise meanings and perceptions arise, which
>
> did not exist in either culture. (para. 15)

Cultural crossing required these participants to negotiate both visible borders and invisible customs and boundaries to succeed at American universities. In this study, visible borders refer to geographic locations from their home countries to the United States or from one continent to another, while invisible customs and boundaries refer to different languages, cultures, values, beliefs, and perspectives. To begin with, one primary invisible border is that these students had to use English to learn and communicate in the context of the American educational and socio-cultural environment in order to earn advanced degrees. Next, they needed to develop their characters and

transform their perspectives to relate to surrounding communities. In so doing, they

connected with themselves and others. Out of the research findings, the central

phenomenon was one of cultural crossings, in which four major themes were identified

that, in turn, addressed the main research questions. These represented the phases of their

journeys of cultural crossing:

Theme One: Seizing opportunities to determine their destinies

Theme Two: Confronting differences and disequilibrium

Theme Three: Navigating between home and host cultures

Theme Four: Being and becoming authentic

Chapters Four and Five address the phenomenon of these eighteen international students'

learning journeys in the United States. Specifically, Chapter Four presents the findings

of the proposed research questions, while Chapter Five focuses on the discussions of

these findings. Beginning with the background of these eighteen research participants,

Chapter Four introduces the four major themes identifying from the findings. It ends

with a closing statement.

Background of the Research Participants

The research participants consisted of eighteen international students, including

thirteen females and five males (see Appendix F: Table 4-1). At the time of the data

collection, these individuals were active students except one, Kohn who had previously

graduated. Among them, ten participants were in different stages of various doctoral

programs, including education, social work, mathematics, biochemistry, and engineering.

While six participants were working on master's degrees, one was an undergraduate

student (see Appendix F: Table 4-2). At the time of the completion of the data collection,

eight participants had earned doctoral or master's degrees (see Appendix F: Table 4-3).

Subsequently, five of them (Betty, Colleen, Nan, Kevin, and Yumiko) looked for

employment in the United States either under an H1 visa or with an optional practical

training program (OPT). Wayne decided to further pursue a doctoral degree in

Education, while, Alison and Michelle returned to their home countries to resume their

careers.

Furthermore, these participants shared common academic goals of earning an

advanced degree from the United States. For Alison, Kevin, Ling, Nan, and Ivy,

pursuing a doctoral degree was their primary motive. Helen continued in her Ph.D.

program. Others postponed a higher degree until a later time. Similarly, another five

participants, Betty, Colleen, Maya, Paul, and Yumiko, first began their learning journeys

in undergraduate programs. They later progressed to master's and Ph.D. programs. By

the time data were collected, Betty and Yumiko had earned their master's degrees. Later,

Colleen received her Ph.D. in Fall 2006. Meanwhile, Paul and Maya became a doctoral

candidate and Maya was in her second year of a doctoral program. Among these eight

participants, only Ling had formerly earned a master's degree from an American

university, and this had been twenty-two years previously. In 2004, Ling returned to the

States for two reasons. Ling not only began her doctoral study, but her daughter also had

an opportunity to be educated in an American secondary school.

Some of the participants completed undergraduate degrees in their home countries

prior to coming to the United States. However, Kohn, Sarah, and Wayne were not in this

category. During their sophomore or junior year, they transferred to American

universities. Among these eighteen participants, only Amy came to the United States

early in her academic pursuit. After middle school graduation in her home country, she continued as a high school student in the United States.

As a result, their lengths of study in the United States varied greatly. They ranged from two years to thirteen years. Michelle was the participant who had the shortest period of two years; both Amy and Paul studied at American universities for thirteen years and lived in the United States over fifteen years. The lengths of study of the other fifteen participants ranged from three to ten years (see Appendix F: Table 4-4).

Concerning country of origin, these eighteen research participants came from seven nations: four from China, two from Japan, one from Jamaica, three from Korea, one from Liberia, two from Malaysia, and five from Taiwan (see Appendix F: Table 4-5). While their ages range from the early 20s to the late 40s, their marital statuses reflect different stages of life. Among these participants, ten of them are single, one is engaged, seven are married, and three out of these seven have one to three children.

The above background information suggests that the unique process or personal situation of each research participant led her or him to study in the United States. Some of them chose the opportunity of studying in the United States to advance careers or to explore new life patterns. Others viewed the journey as a solution to their struggles back home. Thus, the first theme of the research findings reveals the reasons and the similar desire to seize the opportunity of studying in the United States.

To preserve the actual lived and spoken experience of these participants, material quoted from the interviews is unaltered. These interviews reflect the realities of trying to convey the cultural crossings in a language that they are not comfortable with. Their

struggles to convey their insights into their journeys are presented as authentically as possible.

Theme One: Seizing the Opportunity to Determine Their Destinies

Life is calling. How far will you go?

--Peace Corps

Multiple reasons led these eighteen participants to come to the United States; however, the key factor was to seize the opportunity of studying at American universities to enable them to determine their destinies. This incentive not only encouraged these participants to cross customs and borders, but also sustained them to endure much hardship during the cultural crossing. Findings show that, despite coming from different continents (Asia, Africa, and South America) with unique cultural backgrounds, these eighteen participants share similar goals and desires to earn higher educational degrees from American universities, to broaden their horizons, and to extend their worldviews. The great eagerness for changes triggered them to leave their comfort zones for uncertain journeys. These changes included their careers, their lives, and their ways of existence in the world.

To capture these participants' stories of undertaking the journey to the United States, theme one, seizing the opportunity to determine their destinies, includes five components. The components of theme one are: (1) the desire to receive a quality education, (2) the hope of professional advancement, (3) the recognition of a time for change, (4) the need to fulfill their family's expectations or childhood dreams, and (5) the determination to escape from oppression in their home countries. In discussing these

components, each sub-theme is introduced. Supporting evidence from interviews will then be presented. In conclusion, there is a summarizing statement.

The Desire to Receive a Quality Education

Formal education provides effective learning opportunities and needed environments for individuals to obtain knowledge and skills, as well as to modify or transform attitudes and perspectives. From these research participants' points of view, the decision to study at American universities encompasses various opportunities to improve their English competence, to enrich their knowledge of American culture, and most importantly, to gain freedom in terms of receiving a quality education. To begin with, these participants believe that the educational system in the United States is better than in their home countries and other countries. Earning a higher American degree will enhance their professional competence and mobility in global competition. Since English has become a widely used language internationally, being able to use English effectively and being familiar with American culture are essential in terms of communicating and conducting business affairs with people from other countries, especially those who from the United States. Furthermore, these participants agreed that the American higher educational system provided them more options and opportunities that were not available in their home countries. Indeed, in their home countries seventeen participants had experienced constant high pressure in stressful competition among many students to gain admission into their "dream" high schools and, eventually, universities. They chose to study at American universities to obtain quality education.

For instance, the major task of Carl's education in the United States is twofold. One is to polish his English ability, while another is to master his profession in

mechanical engineering in order to satisfy both his parents' expectations and own personal and career goals. Carl's family owns a factory in southern Taiwan and has an international operation. There is a great need to provide effective quality of service to their customers worldwide. Carl's parents expect him to be able to communicate competently in English with their foreign business partners and engineers. They also anticipate that being educated in the United States will enable Carl to direct their factory operations and employees more efficiently in terms of technical innovation in the industry in order to compete globally. As a result, studying in the United States fulfills Carl's need in terms of achieving his goals of receiving a quality education not only for himself but also to benefit his family.

In addition, in comparing her opportunities in the Japanese higher educational system, Yumiko found that she could easily obtain a quality higher education and major in her desired field in the United States. Helen confirmed Yumiko's assumptions about the desire to receive a quality education when she said, " . . . getting a degree in the United States is like getting yourself some kind of a golden card." Hence, receiving a quality education in the United States, to these participants, served multiple purposes with unlimited possibilities.

The Hope of Professional Advancement

Seeking advanced knowledge and employment skills with the hope of professional advancement was a main focus that brought many participants to the United States. For instance, the main purpose Nan and Kohn came to the States was to learn the advanced knowledge and technology in their fields. Michelle, an English teacher from Korea, came to study in the States because her major is English. Meanwhile, Alison's

future academic goal was to become a university professor in the discipline of early childhood education in her home country. As an undergraduate student in Korea, Alison recognized the value and the necessity of studying at an American university. Because most authors of her textbooks were from the United States, Alison assumed that if she really wanted to master her field, she had to study in the United States. Inspired by the famous authors from the textbooks she read, Alison first began her journey to the United States as an exchange student for a year. During that year, she suffered from many difficulties including insomnia from the stress of linguistic barriers, cultural differences, and loneliness. The majority of faculty members in Korean universities typically had received doctoral degrees from the United States or Japan. Therefore, studying in the United States carried an important element of status for Alison that made her decide to return, because a degree in early childhood would facilitate her ability to be employed as a university professor. Subsequently, she came back to the United States in January of 2003 and completed her doctoral degree in December of 2006. In the early March of 2007, Alison obtained a faculty position at a university in Korea. Finally, all her struggles, suffering, and hard work in the United States brought rewards of professional advancement.

Kim was the only participant in this study who was not a graduate student. During Kim's freshman year in Korea, her brother decided to study in the United States to improve his English proficiency after his college graduation. Following her brother, she completed the process of finding and applying for universities in the United States. Unexpectedly, the opportunity opened for Kim as her brother no longer desired to go because a new job came his way. Consequently, the reason that Kim, a college junior,

transferred from a Korean university to the United States was " . . . to learn English and architecture in a broader way." By the time of the follow-up interview, Kim was preparing for studying in England as an exchange student in the spring of 2007. She wanted to utilize this opportunity to learn more about European architecture. Certainly, studying in the United States opened up more opportunities for Kim to advance her profession in architecture in unpredictable ways.

Ling's academic pursuit for professional advancement involved a family factor. Ling earned a master's degree in social work twenty-two years ago. After graduation, she returned to her home country, Taiwan, and resumed her career. Ling had worked and taught at the levels of public school and university. She especially enjoyed teaching English and was more fascinated and excited to teach at the university level. Hence, obtaining a Ph.D. degree became essential in shifting and advancing her profession. Meanwhile, Ling's teenage daughter was having difficulty in adapting to the educational system in Taiwan. After considering both her own professional needs and her daughter's education, Ling and her daughter came to the United States in the fall of 2004 with the support of her husband, who remained in Taiwan. The above participants' stories indicate that studying in the United States not only assists Ling as she shifts her profession from social work to reading education, but also helps Kim, Alison, Michelle, Kohn, and Nan to advance their professions in depth and breadth.

The Recognition of a Time for Change

Feeling unsatisfied in life or career often motivates people to seek change. Findings reveal that for some participants, changing their lives was the motivation for studying abroad, while others longed for a change in their career. In the case of Ivy,

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Maya, and Yumiko, grasping the opportunity of studying in the United States enabled

them to change their destinies. For a long time, they had disliked the monotonous and

unchallenging lifestyles in their home countries. In addition, one of the reasons Ivy

pursued an education in the United States was dissatisfaction she experienced in her life.

Ivy reported:

> . . . deep down in my heart, I was discontented with my life. I did not
> want to stay in a familiar living environment in which I could foresee what
> my future life would be. It is like I could see how I would look like and
> what kind of life I would live at the age of 50 or 60. I do not want to live
> that kind of life that I have already known, too calm and too normal.

Ivy was uneasy about who she was and where she was. Moreover, the " . . .

spectacular outside world . . ." enormously attracts her to undertake an adventure despite

the worry of encountering difficulties and obstacles. For Ivy, studying in the United

States not only afforded her the possibility to earn a Ph.D. degree, but also shifted her life

to a totally different direction. Despite repeated rejections of the grant of an F1 Visa by

the United States Embassy in China, Ivy did not give up. The fifth application brought

her success. She received a student visa and came to the United States in the fall of 2004.

A year later, her husband joined her. They participated in various activities on and off

campus. In the fall of 2005, Ivy and her husband became Christians. Subsequently, he

began a second doctoral degree in the fall of 2006.

Echoing Ivy's story, Helen yearned for both a career and life changes. As an

assistant professor of chemistry at a university in southern China, Helen never felt happy

about her career because she was not interested in chemistry. Since her husband worked

in Beijing in northern China, they often were separated. After thoroughly considering

their career and future plans, Helen's husband made the suggestion of her studying in the

United States. Later, he moved to the States to join her. Consequently, coming to the United States for higher education gave Helen an opportunity to change her profession from chemistry to education. Furthermore, the new life in the United States included a reunion with her husband and the beginning of a family. Helen became a mother in the spring of 2003.

As shown, the decision of studying in the States extends and enriches Helen and Ivy's lives. Indeed, it was a life changing decision. Recognizing that it was a time for change, they broke their life routines in China and rebuilt their lives in a very different way within the context of the United States culture. Some undertook new studies for different careers. Some had families and developed different religious beliefs. For each of them they embarked on life choices that resulted in significant change.

The Need of Fulfilling Their Family's Expectations or Childhood Dreams

People have dreams to live a better life, and they also set higher expectations for themselves and their offspring. Those dreams and expectations might lead the individual to a totally different life journey. For Colleen, pursuing education began simply as an obligation. As the youngest daughter of the family, Colleen was sent to the United States for higher education by her parents. Although Colleen did not choose to study in the United States, during the past ten years, she has earned three different degrees, including a four-year bachelor's degree, a two-year master's degree, and another four years for a Ph.D. Upon her most recent graduation, she found a research position at a university. Her education in the United States began as an endeavor to fulfill her parents' expectations, but with ten years of diligent effort, this college student became a faculty member at an American university. In the voice of Colleen:

I am very disciplined and pretty much my parents make every decision
and I will obey. So, when they say go to the United States to study. . . .   I
did not say no I don't want to.   . . . I was hoping I can stay in Taiwan . . .
Other participants eagerly embraced American education. In the case of Maya,

higher education in the United States opened a door for her to fulfill her childhood dream.

She said, " . . . everybody has a dream. Mine was more practical . . . I wanted to work for

the media." Unable to find a university with a curriculum of journalism or mass

communication in Japan, Maya decided to study in the United States to fulfill her dream

to work in the media.

For Ivy, fulfilling a childhood dream was coupled with meeting her father's

expectations. Ivy's father was a very ambitious person and held high expectation for his

children. Ivy recalled,

When I was little, my father always talked about the need for him to work
harder and to make more money in order to support his children to have a
better tomorrow. Oftentimes, he talked about how successful his friends'
children were, either being able to study overseas or coming back with
degrees from foreign countries. I grew up with his talk and influence.
Even though my father did not really teach me how to do school works, he
took our academic processes very seriously. Thus, whenever I got a good
grade, I saw his smile. I studied hard for good grades to make him happy
and feel proud of me. My father passed away while I was in high school.
As his daughter, I really wanted to make my father's dream come true and
also to fulfill my personal goal, so I decided to study in the United States.
I think I am just like my father, who was an adventurer and liked to
explore the world.

From Ivy's story, the journey of studying in the United States accomplished both

Ivy's dream and her father's goals. Ivy's father not only painted the picture for her

future, but also inspired, encouraged, and supported her to keep walking toward the end

goal. As shown, studying in the United States serves two functions; one is to fulfill

family's expectations, while another is to satisfy these participants' personal goals and dreams.

The Determination to Escape from Oppression in Their Home Countries

Political and socio-cultural oppressions such as wars, poverty, crime, and a rigid educational system blocked many international students from receiving a quality education in their home counties. These oppressions became the key element that brought Paul, Wayne, Betty, and Amy to study in the United States. These four participants were the victims of oppression. They emerged as fighters and winners from undesirable conditions. For instance, Paul came to the United States to escape the civil war in Liberia. Meanwhile, Wayne utilized an athletic scholarship at an American university as a gateway to escape from poverty, drugs, and crime in Jamaica. Amy and Betty disliked the rigid educational system in Taiwan. Amy had difficulty adjusting to the spoon-fed teaching-learning approach, while Betty was rejected admission to a university in Taiwan after graduating from a vocational junior college.

Escaping from war and death

To secure safety, Paul acquired an opportunity for higher education in the United States. Paul spent years in moving around the country to locate a safe place to hide from unsafe conditions caused by the civil war in Liberia.   In 1992, he found a chance to leave his home country and arrived in New York City as a refugee. Even though Paul did plan to come to the United States for higher education before the war affected him directly, "being a refugee actually opened the door" for him. Paul insisted that "Being a refugee does not mean you come in to go to school." In fact, pursuing higher education was his

decision. He wanted to improve his competence in order to make a difference in his own

and his country's destinies.

Escaping from poverty and crime

For some students, studying in the United States means an opportunity to flee an

environment filled with poverty, drugs, and crime. Wayne arrived in 2002 as a junior

transfer student with an athletic scholarship. In Jamaica, Wayne lived with his

grandmother and his three brothers in a two-room apartment. The economic conditions

were poor. Both his parents worked outside the country to support the children and their

schooling in Jamaica.

Having competed in the United States previously, Wayne realized that sport was

his "passport for freedom and mobility." It would allow him to escape from poverty and

to live the kind of life he desired. Indeed, being an athlete was Wayne's "passport to a

new life." He not only appreciated the value of the American educational system, but

also relied on the resources and assistances provided by his university to help him

achieve his goals and change his destiny. Within four years after arriving in the States,

Wayne has earned both a bachelor's and a master's degree. Instead of becoming a

professional athlete, Wayne prefers academic education. Presently, he is in the process of

applying for a doctoral program at the university.

The fight against a rigid educational system

A quest for a different educational system brought other participants to the United

States. From Betty's experience, the American educational system not only gave her an

opportunity of becoming a *" real"* college student, but also helped her enjoy learning.

In Taiwan, educational choices were limited. Entrance examinations were a screening

tool and an enormous obstacle for many. Middle school graduates were confronted with an entrance examination for public high schools or vocational junior colleges. Meanwhile, there was the college entrance examination awaiting the high school graduates. To secure good results, students were expected to attend after-school tutoring programs.

After her middle school graduation, Betty wanted to study at a high school. However, as the oldest child of three in her family, Betty followed her mother's request and chose the alternative of a vocational education. Five years later, earning a junior college degree did not satisfy Betty. She desired an education from a four-year university like many of her middle school classmates did. Unfortunately, under a rigid educational system, it was very difficult for her to cross the gap of two different educational paths to study at a university in Taiwan. The curriculum design in vocational institutes differs greatly from public high schools and traditional colleges. Furthermore, there are differences in the teaching-learning approach and educational focuses. The vocational educational system is career-oriented while the tradition liberal arts educational system is more theory based. Going through a few transfer-student entrance examinations and some job-hunting, Betty's family finally suggested and also encouraged her to study in the United States. Her mother saw it as a compensation for her missing the opportunity to study at a university in Taiwan.

In the summer of 1999, Betty transferred to an American undergraduate program at a city university. One and half years later, she earned her bachelor's degree from her American university. In Betty's voice, " . . . at that time, I just think maybe this is not enough to me. So, during the last semester, I apply for a graduate college." As shown,

Betty's desire for a university education was not fulfilled in her home country but in the United States. Moreover, she carried that desire further. By the spring of 2006, Betty had earned one bachelor's and two master's degrees from two different universities in the United States.

Somewhat different than Betty, Amy searched for a new educational experience earlier. Among these eighteen research participants, Amy was the only research participant coming to the United States after middle school graduation. She began her sojourn as a high school student in California. Disliking the teaching-learning approach, she rejected the spoon-fed lecturing method in her home country. In addition, there were the endless competitions for admission into reputable high schools and colleges in Taiwan. As a middle school student in Taiwan, Amy was not happy. Refusing to memorize materials taught by the teachers from textbooks, she did not like the way schools were operated. Amy pointed out that her grades at middle school were affected by her anger toward the system. Indeed, Amy hated school while trying to do whatever was needed to survive. At the same time, she anticipated the difficulty of achieving a high score at the entrance examination. As a result, when one of her family members proposed the idea of studying in the United States, Amy quickly accepted it. She knew nothing about the American educational system. However, Amy said, "I know it's got to be different. Difference at that time sounds pretty good."

Amy came to the United States in the summer of 1992 and started English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at a high school in California. The ESL program allowed her more time to learn the language and adjust to the new culture. Living with a family member in a city with a diverse population in California, Amy's new American

life was challenging, but manageable. Overall, studying in the United States was the way Amy chose to escape from a spoon-fed educational system in her home country.

It is evident that, in the beginning, the main purpose of studying in the United States for all participants was to earn advanced degrees but that each participant's adjustment was complicated by various concerns as mentioned above. During their journeys, the initial purpose expanded into opportunities to explore many aspects of their inner selves and of others in a much broader scale. These unlimited possibilities serve to enhance their competence in determining their future.

Theme Two: Confronting Differences and Disequilibrium

What is to give light must endure burning.

~Viktor Frankl

Differences between home and host countries thrust these eighteen participants to a brand new life circumstance with experiences of fluctuations and disequilibrium. From the moment these students arrived in the United States, they encountered various challenges and difficulties. These included linguistic barriers, cultural differences and culture shock, dislocation and alienation. Isolation and loneliness, financial burden, and heavy workloads from their studies and personal life would soon follow. In light of Viktor Frankl's concept of "What is to give light must endure burning," these participants must manage the incoming challenges and difficulties to achieve their learning goal of earning advanced degrees from American universities for a brighter future. Hence, Theme two: Confronting difficulties and disequilibrium consists of 1) linguistic hindrance, 2) cultural differences and culture shock, 3) physical and psychological

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fluctuations and discomfort, and 4) the opportunities for various novel experiences. These four sub-themes are described below.

Linguistic Hindrance

Using English proficiently was a difficult hindrance confronting these participants. Before coming to the States, these participants mentally prepared themselves to face the difficulty of using English to learn and communicate in the United States. They knew their linguistic abilities would be a crucial element in determining whether or not they would survive and succeed at American universities. Despite the fact that these participants had prepared to deal with the linguistic challenges, they did not learn the language in the context of American culture and educational systems. Even though the official language in Paul and Wayne's home countries was English, the dialect and semantic use greatly differed from what is taught and practiced in the United States. After arriving in the States, these participants found that their linguistic limits, indeed, interacted with various issues that they were not able to prepare for in advance. In other words, their linguistic problems went beyond not being able to use English effectively; they struggled with not being able to pronounce words correctly, speak English fluently, and choose the right vocabularies or phases to precisely express their ideas and feelings. The essential difficulty came from the unfamiliarity with the American educational system and culture, as well as American customs and social norms. These participants found that the American ways of thinking and doing things in daily life was vastly different from their home countries. These participants' linguistic barriers became one of their major struggles. The linguistic problems not only initially limited these

participants' learning and academic performance, but also challenged their confidence in speaking out and standing up for themselves.

In addition, these participants had varied English abilities and as a result were faced with different linguistic hindrances. For instance, some participants had difficulty in pronouncing certain words correctly, while others could not articulate their thoughts or feelings due to limited vocabularies. They lacked the background knowledge to choose the right words or phases to communicate with others or to understand the meanings behind words. Thus, regarding linguistic hindrances these participants encountered, Michelle recalled the beginning of her master' program and said:

> Two years ago, I was very young, kind of shrink a little bit because of my lack of English ability and lack of the culture knowledge. . . . I just listen . . . I mainly listen. I could not [be] involve[d] in the discussions actively.

As stated, having linguistic difficulties not only discouraged Michelle from participating in classroom learning, but also devalued her self-concept. In this regard, Carl shared a similar feeling but responded in different way. He reported, "when I first came here, I feel that I don't want to open my mouth to talk to people, I just want to listen because I am afraid to speak in the wrong way."

Carl and Michelle both knew they did not learn English in an American cultural context. Hence, they were extremely fearful of making mistakes in using English. Besides, lacking background knowledge of the American classroom setting also limited their confidence and hindered them from participating in classroom discussions. By contrast, Wayne and Paul were not afraid of speaking English; however, they faced different linguistic problems because of their strong accent. In their home countries,

Wayne and Paul spoke English in public and their dialects at home. To illustrate, Wayne commented:

> . . . I could not understand the language because my accent was so thick. They could not understand what I was saying because I talked so fast. . . . My ideas were okay but my writing was not the same as American people.

As a result, the difficulties with understanding and being understood were impacted by their prior complex language situations at home.

In Maya's case, the linguistic barriers has undermined her academic performance and has become more challenging as she moved forward to her doctoral program. Maya reviewed her linguistic difficulties in the beginning of her journey and addressed:

> I might not understand some people not because I cannot hear it, but because the meaning or concept doesn't make sense [to me]. . . . In class though, if the topic is very complicated, I will have the problem to understand what's going on.

Becoming a doctoral student at the university, Maya still had difficulty to pronounce certain words. She voiced her struggle with a pain in her chest, "It gets to be harder and harder now. You know, I am at the Ph.D. program [and] people expect me to be able to communicate better."

The above linguistic struggles show that English is a medium, on the one hand, for these students to obtain new knowledge and skills, to exchange ideas and insights, and to express their feelings and thoughts. On the other hand, English is also the major factor that discourages them from participating in classroom learning activities, as well as communicating and building relationships with others.

Cultural Differences and Culture Shock

Encountering cultural differences or culture shock was one of the issues that these participants had prepared to face. Until they arrived in the States, however, none of them had any idea regarding how seriously the cultural differences or culture shock could impact their learning at their American universities. In the beginning, experiencing U.S. cultures and the educational system was very exciting to these participants because it was new and different. However, the new, different learning and living environments constantly challenged their confidence and competence in managing these situations. Because of their lack of knowledge concerning the culture, these participants experienced tremendous cultural shock. As Yumiko mentioned during the interview, her background knowledge about U.S. culture was vastly different from what she found. Hence, these participants learned the culture through experiencing it in various encounters, but not without experiencing the heat of the flame and the char of the ash.

Different academic culture and educational system

In many Asian cultures, students and parents respect instructors and view them as role models to learn from. Without a doubt, the common way the Asian students show their respect to their instructors is to listen to their instruction without questioning them. Coming from this kind of academic culture, many Asian international students have difficulty adapting to their American professors' way of teaching, especially when they are asked to speak up and share their thoughts. Not only were these participants unaccustomed to this kind of teaching-learning approach, but also conversely their culture had trained them to remain silent. In this circumstance, to build a good

relationship with their professors became very challenging to these participants. For

instance, Alison pointed out that:

> In Korea . . .the teachers have been respected and trusted as a perfect
> person even though they are not perfect persons, . . . So, expressing my
> ideas, especially [when] my ideas [are] not consistent with my teachers'
> ideas is kind of insulting their abilities. . . That means that I am a really
> bad student. I was accustomed . . . not presenting any my idea in front of
> my professor. But my professor asked me what is your idea? Always,
> where is your idea? . . . I believe that as long as I know my advisor's
> opinions I just express my ideas more consistent with my advisor. I feel
> that way I am able to respect them. So, I was really hesitant to express my
> ideas even though I have my ideas . . .

Alison was unable to voice her idea simply because the culture she came from has

trained her not to do so. Therefore, when the professor asked her to speak out, her

difficulty was not merely with words but also with tradition. Her professors might not be

able to understand Alison's struggle. Thus, the academic cultures frustrated both Alison

and her professors although they shared the same learning objectives.

In addition, Carl compared the academic cultural differences between the United

States and his home country, Taiwan. He discovered the importance of learning

American academic culture in order to avoid being expelled for misconduct. In the voice

of Carl:

> . . . in Taiwan, I am the one [student that] finish. . . early so I can share
> the homework with my friends . . . But after I came here, they won't share
> any homework with you. They won't because you need to do [it] on your
> own. . . . I feel kind of frustrated because I already don't know how to
> solve this question in this way and they told me I needed to think about it
> in the other way. So, this makes me more confused because I thought
> maybe I can see your answer I will try to figure out by myself or we can
> discuss it. But they won't. They . . . care about the plagiarism.

Carl's story shows that sharing homework assignments with his fellow students was expected as part of learning in his country, but unacceptable in the United States. Not knowing the academic culture in the United States, the consequences can be very serious to these participants. They may unconsciously put themselves in danger of committing academic misconduct. Even though Carl feels frustrated and confused about the United States academic culture, he recognizes that he has to learn the culture and make adjustments to prevent himself from making a mistake.

Ivy learned from her professors regarding the importance of maintaining academic integrity. Ivy pointed out that, ". . . here, my professors take research seriously. They won't write or say what they did not do or know. They are very responsible [with] their research and seek truth . . ."

The way Ivy learned about the professional attitude in research was through observing how her professors conduct and present their research. Ivy was impressed by her professors' meticulous scholarship. Knowing one of her professors " . . . really seek truth from facts and does not varnish over his academic performance with all the beautiful words . . ." helping her also recognize the need to be a responsible scholar in her field.

In the beginning, Ivy, Alison, and Carl were shocked by the issues that they encountered with academia in the United States. Those issues not only were new and different to them, but also challenged their preexisting assumptions in education. After experiencing them, they were able to understand and adapt to the culture.

Different ways of communicating and relating to others

In addition to the linguistic hindrances, these students found that people in the United States also communicated differently on and off campus. The manner in which Americans handled human relationships sometimes confused them. Because U.S. socio-cultural norms were different from those of the participants' home countries, misinterpretation or miscommunication with the people around them happened very easily. For example, Michelle got into difficulty because she did not correctly understand what her professor expected her to do for the assignment. Michelle recalled:

> [At] the end of the summer course, my faculty member returns my paper that I have submitted. She said, "[Michelle] I think you could revise this thing a little bit. You need to add some more." I ask her do you want me to revise it and resubmit it again. And she said that "if you want to." . . . so, I thought that. . [it] is just optional. But she thought . . . it is mandatory . . .

Lacking the background knowledge and dealing with the linguistic hindrances, Michelle misinterpreted her professor's message. This event made Michelle ponder, "I found out there is a wall, language wall, . . . [a] cultural wall. . . . I have lived in the America for just two years and I could not learn the differences." In Michelle's school curriculum, there is no subject called 'cultural learning.' However, it has great impact on whether or not she can successfully graduate from the program. Michelle as well as other participants had to sometimes learn the culture from mistakes that she made.

Another cultural difference that frustrated these participants is related to different ways of managing human relations. To illustrate, Betty had a hard time adjusting to the United States culture in terms of her relationships with her American classmates. Betty recalled,". . . my first year at the undergraduate, I was not very happy . . . because in the

United States friends is friends, classmates is classmates. But in Taiwan, your classmates become your friends." To Betty, her life in the United States was centered in schooling. She not only wanted to make friends with her classmates, but also needed to befriend them to better adapt to the learning environment. Thus, when she found out her classmates could not naturally become her friends, her frustration and loneliness surfaced. In short, the above cultural differences have made Michelle and Betty suffer; however, they grew stronger and more resourceful as they learned more about the United States culture.

Different educational emphasis

Students from Asian countries are accustomed to taking exams to enter good universities. Once they reach a doctoral study level, the frequency of exams decreases. However, what works in other countries does not necessarily work in the United States. Unlike her prior learning experience in China, Ivy was surprised by her department's educational emphasis when she first began her Ph.D. program. Ivy said that she had to readjust herself and let go her Chinese way of learning in order to meet the academic requirements. Ivy recalled:

> . . . in the United States, I think I study harder than in China because there are too many exams and you have to study harder in order to pass those exams. . . . I think the learning focus in China and in the U.S. are different. In China, we focus on research. As long as you know how to find information and how to do research, you don't need to memorize the knowledge. But in the United States educational system, the graduate school training requires you to take a lot of exams like the undergraduate students. I was not used to that at the beginning and had a hard time adjusting to that. So, I had to force myself to study and memorize the knowledge.

To maintain her student status, Ivy changed her attitude and tried to study more diligently to memorize the learning materials in order to pass exams. The cultural differences concerning academia are critical because education is the major reason these participants came to the United States. These participants pointed out that the academic culture in the United States values active learning and participation, which are different from their home culture. As illustrated, these participants needed to make adjustments to fit in the American educational climate. They also needed to learn how to properly interact with their professors and classmates so that they could be part of the group more effectively.

Physical and Psychological Fluctuations and Discomfort

The findings show that from the moment these participants arrived in the United States, they felt disoriented because of the linguistic hindrances and cultural differences. The linguistic difficulties and cultural challenges not only led them to experience severe physical and psychological discomfort, but also magnified their feelings of dislocation, alienation, isolation, loneliness, and being ignored by the people around them. Most of them struggle with financial burdens from continuously increasing tuitions and living expenses. Others are overwhelmed by their multiple roles as a student, graduate assistant, parent, and spouse. These psychological and emotional fluctuations are explored below.

Dislocation and alienation

Regardless of the preparation these participants did beforehand, once they arrived in the United States, they still had to learn the new environment from the very beginning. These participants often felt dislocated and alienated from the American society. For

instance, Nan experienced tremendous discomfort because the American life style was very different from her Chinese one in many aspects. In the voice of Nan:

> . . . when I was in China, my job [was] to study. . . . I do not need to do anything because my parents have only one child, me. I [did] not need to worry about anything; I just study. On the weekend, I could find friends to . . . do something to relax… and spending time with my family. You will feel affection, the family affection. But now . . . everything is new. You found out that friends couldn't be so close to you. It's hard for you to find friends with same schedule as yours. Even [if] they like to, even sometimes [if] they agree to go out with . . . they change [their mind] because they also have the pressure from their study.

Living alone in the United States required Nan to learn how to take care of her daily life routines independently, in which she had never learned before. In the interview, Nan was laughing while recalling her memory of learning how to cook. She reported that it was a very painful process because she had to call her parents in China and ask them to coach her step by step.

In addition, being an international student in the United States, Yumiko reflected on what it was like to be alienated:

> . . . I feel more like an outsider. And up to now, we cannot really say, really consider as a student who study here. Yes, officially we study and enroll [at the university], but it is very different from being the domestic students . . . It doesn't mean you can fully be involved into those like community . . . I feel like we are not part of the university.

Thus, the distance separating Yumiko, the domestic students, and her university made Yumiko felt alienated, like an outsider. From Amy's point of view as an international student, she continued to be a silent observer in this country. In the voice of Amy:

Most challenging thing to me is… to speak for myself, to express myself, or to share my opinions. … I think in my mind, [it] is still part of me don't feel like that I know the culture. So I am still observing.

As shown, the gap between living at home and in the United States intensified Amy, Yumiko, and Nan's feelings of dislocation and alienation.

Isolation and loneliness

Feeling alienated as well as being away from families, friends, and familiar culture, these participants felt lonely and isolated in this foreign land. To illustrate, during the first interview Betty had difficulty counting how many American friends she had made. Betty has been studying and living in the States for about seven years; however, she could not point out which American classmates or people from the local community could be counted as her friend. Indeed, Betty said she had a hard time interacting with Americans because of a lack of opportunities. Fortunately, she was able to make friends with other international students; otherwise, her sojourn in the United States would be completely isolated from other human beings. In this regard, Nan agreed with Betty's experience and added:

You feel uncomfortable because that is different from your traditional culture, just like the food, people, the way of their talking. Sometimes, you will feel lonely . . . You cannot use your old way to think about the same thing. . . So, sometimes I feel I am lost . . . you feel that you are a baby because you need to learn everything . . .

Being stereotyped by people around them

Another psychological discomfort these participants have experienced while studying at American universities was to be stereotyped by people around them. Being stereotyped caused these participants to feel devalued and often judged unfairly. For

instance, Wayne was upset because of his skin color and the stereotypical notions

regarding his country. He said:

> . . . [the] obstacle I have faced is when I got here people assumed that I
> came from Africa. When I say I am not from Africa, I came from
> Jamaica. And they say, you smoke weeds because that's stereotype. If
> you came from Jamaica, you smoke weeds because in Jamaica, there is a
> lot of Marijuana . . . . they do not know people in Jamaica are very hard
> working academically and try to get a job . . .

In contrast to Wayne's case, the linguistic hindrances made Alison feel ignored by

her peers, especially in classroom learning at the university. Alison reported:

> . . . I feel that [my professors and classmates] think that I am not a smart
> person as much as I believe . . . [that makes me] feel more shameful and
> hesitate to talk with them in any situation.   In the first semester, I try to
> make more effort to participate in the discussion. But as time goes by…
> my English has been more improved and I understand more [about] the
> environment and the American classroom. . . . .[BUT], I hesitate to
> participate in the discussion because I am more afraid of being ignored by
> my colleagues. So, the best way is to keep seating and just pretend that I
> know [what they are talking about], but I don't want to talk. I don't want
> to be evaluated by my colleagues and professors as a stupid person.

Fear of being judged and feeling unaccepted by professors and domestic students

discouraged Alison from engaging in classroom learning. In addition, Yumiko's

experience added more detail in terms of feeling ignored in class:

> . . . [in] my culture, I never speak up, so I am kind of quiet in the class.
> [Often times], I am maybe the only one or two international students and
> the rest of students are domestic students. If I addressed some issues or
> some opinions, a lot of time they did not value. (Laughing . . .) It meant
> that those were not what the professors wanted me to answer. And I
> always come to wonder why the professor never really agrees [with] my
> perspectives … they didn't think, they [did not] understand. So, I think
> maybe they view me as I don't understand English . . .   They don't really
> try to understand [me]. Maybe they shut down their ears right away if
> they see me talking.

In the case of Paul, he felt ignored by his professors and classmates whenever he talked about his ambition of making a difference in his home country. He recalled:

> I think the talk is cheap, even though I have been talking about the equality and the rights for all across the board and these are classroom discussion . . . Maybe when I get back [to my home country] and put these into practice, [they will then say to others that] this guy was my classmate or this guy was my student and this is what he said . . .

Generally speaking, the more international students became accustomed to American culture and English, the better they were able to participate in American classrooms and society. However, as its apparent from Wayne, Alison, Yumiko, and Paul's stories, the more they learn about the culture, the worse they feel about being stereotyped and judged by people around them.

Insecurity, fear of failure, and the loss of families

Findings show that the distance between the United States and their home countries made these participants undergo emotional fluctuations for various reasons. First of all, the new living environment not only excited these participants, but also scared them. If they did not want to feel like aliens or treated as outcasts, they had to learn how to properly behave or how to react appropriately to various situations. Next, these students had fears in terms of making mistakes in life or failing at school. Lastly, they worried about their families and friends back home. As a result, loss, fears, or feelings of insecurity not only caused their emotional state to fluctuate, but also became part of the challenges these participants were forced to overcome.

To demonstrate, Colleen said that the first day in the United States, her feeling of being "scare[d] and lost" went beyond the feeling of excitement about the new

environment. Later, she experienced homesickness and loneliness. Colleen recalled,

"So, you basically like an infant and you have to learn everything from the scratch. . . .

like different custom, different people, and especially like the language you need to learn

how to communicate with people."

Colleen used *"like an infant"* as a metaphor to illustrate her experience of

studying alone in the United States. Colleen's metaphor echoed Nan's, *"you are a baby"*

as mentioned early. Both of them viewed their new lives in the United States as

challenging because of their vulnerable natures.

Another element that caused these students to experience extreme emotional

distress was facing the death or illness of family members. For instance, the third year of

her doctoral program, Nan's mother had a car accident in China. By the time she got

back home, her mother had already passed away. Nan suddenly realized the last time she

saw her mother was the day she had flown to the United States. After the funeral, her

father encouraged her to return to the States and finish her degree. Six months later, her

father suffered a severe heart attack and was hospitalized. As the only child of the

family, Nan went back to China to take care of her father. After her father's health

condition became stable, Nan left him in a nursing home and came back to the States.

It was very painful for Nan to leave her father alone under such a circumstance.

However, she had no other alternative. She possessed limited resources with which to

better manage such a family crisis. In fact, Nan found out that without a degree, her

teaching assistantship at the university was the only financial support for her father's

needed medical care. Hence, Nan came back to continue her study. According to Nan's

roommate and close friends, after coming back from China, Nan did not cry or talk about

her crisis. For that, Nan's explanation was "I wanted to cry, but I could not. Besides, there were so many things I needed to take care of. There was no time for being emotional." As shown, Nan chose to freeze her feelings and emotions in order to carry on both hers and her father's life in both countries.

In addition, Paul was another participant who has faced the death of his elder brother back home. Paul was still emotional while talking about the loss. Paul said, "You know sometimes you called. But this [news] took almost two weeks [for me to] receive it." Because the civil war was still going on in Liberia, Paul could not contact home directly but relied on friends who lived close to his home country to pass on messages. Paul recalled:

> . . . it is completely difficult and there was no message to really identify with it. And that is part of the isolations . . . [the] person who wrote the letter [to inform me] was the cousin of mine. What he did is he gave me a telephone number . . . so that I could call the number in the letter, so I was able to get more details of what had happened . . .these things turn me to be a worrier . . .

Paul felt isolated while facing the death of his brother back home. He was sorry about not being able to know the news immediately, to do something to help, and to attend the funeral. In fact, Paul had difficulty in handling this tragedy and almost reached the point of dropping out of school. He shared that his brother was like a father to him. He was overwhelmed by the loss, and could not eat or sleep, and never talked about paying attention to his studies. As a result, this event made him anxious and insecure. He worried about what might happen next. This emotional trauma also affected his ability to concentrate on his academic work.

Unlike Nan and Paul's physical and psychological fluctuations, Betty's not being admitted for a doctoral program was a failure that not only diminished her confidence, but also led her to question her value. Betty explained:

> . . . [I] enjoy study, that's the reason why I get my second master's degree.
> . . I did not get into the doctoral program that is some kind of failure to
> me. . . the first moment I heard the news is like okay maybe I am not good
> enough to get in to the Ph.D. program. At that time is pretty much like
> think about myself very negatively maybe I was not smart enough.

As mentioned earlier, because of the fixed educational system in her country, Betty came to the United States to earn a bachelor's degree. She was not really interested in learning. Spending six years studying at one undergraduate program and two graduate programs, Betty finally realized that she really did enjoy learning and wanted to study more. Hence, being rejected by a Ph.D. program made Betty feel an oppressive sense of failure for two reasons. On the one hand, it challenged her confidence and led her to question herself and her ability to carry on a doctoral study. On the other hand, Betty had a hard time telling her parents why she did not get admitted to a Ph.D. program.

Sarah shared an experience related to her academic work in the States. In Sarah's case, "I doubt about myself, that's why it makes me feel like that I am not capable of competing with other people. . . . You know when you start feeling inadequate that makes you feel depress." Sarah's experience indicated that the process of managing the given challenges and difficulties sometimes led these participants to question their competence in studying in the US. Their self-doubt blocked them from seeing things objectively; even worse they started to feel inadequate and depressed.

Stress from representing home countries

Many international students have noticed that whatever they do and say, the Americans will view that as part of their home countries. In short, these participants sense that they must do well in the United States because their performances represent their home countries. Carl shared his thought in this regard:

> . . . you are presenting your country. When you came here, people ask you where you came from. You answer them you are from Taiwan. If your behavior is good, they might think Taiwanese people are kind and good. If you behave very bad they will think Taiwanese people are not too good.

Alison echoed Carl's insight regarding the stress from representing her country. Alison realized that in the States, she was not just an international student from Korea. She, indeed, represented all the students in and from Korean. In the voice of Alison:

> I felt like kind of stress. If I am not doing right; if I am not surviving here; if I am not giving good impression to my faculty members in the United States; they might think that all Korean students are stupid; all Korean students are not good students. I was afraid . . .

Both Carl and Alison's stories pointed out that the insight of representing their home countries added extra stresses on them.

Financial burden

The research findings show that the financial burden from constantly increasing tuition, fees, and living expenses became as one of the major problems that disturbed these participants and affected their concentration on their studies. Some of the participants were supported by scholarships from either their universities or their home countries' governments, while others depended on their families or their prior savings. In Carl's case, his parents own a factory in Taiwan and were willing to give him all the needed financial support. However, the

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constantly increasing tuition, fees, and living expenses not only added extra

financial burden to his parents, but also upset Carl.

As an international student in the States, Maya also felt stressed because of her

financial situation. Maya has been studying in the United States for almost ten years

from language school, through undergraduate and graduate school, and to the doctoral

program. In the beginning, her parents supported her. Later, Maya tried to find ways to

reduce her parents' financial burden. Maya recalled her financial struggle and explained,

"It's hard; it's really hard. . . . because you have to always worry about money, like

[worry about] being sick . . . Most of my international student friends are all poor

either." Both Maya and Carl's stories revealed that to these participants and their

families, it was predictable that the cost would be high in terms of receiving higher

education from the States. However, they could not know how high the cost would be or

how much stress the expenses would cause until they experienced the reality.

Heavy workloads

Heavy workloads from school and their private lives, such as playing multiple

roles added extra pressure on these participants. For instance, among these eighteen

participants, seven of them were married and four had children with them while working

on degrees at universities. For the single participants with assistantship, their additional

roles as research assistants or teaching assistants added to their workload. Those who did

not work, like Betty and Kim, struggled with meeting all the deadline for the courses they

took. In short, these participants were overwhelmed by their duties and responsibilities

from school, home, and work. To begin with, Michelle mentioned that before coming to

the States, she always played multiple roles and performed multiple tasks as a teacher,

mother, wife, and student, and others. However, studying and living in the United States

was different, " . . . because America is my new place, new culture, and new language.

That's why the multiple roles or multiple identities were much harder than before."

Paul agreed with Michelle's opinion and admitted that:

> . . . Taking care of children here is so difficult. If somebody (his relatives)
> ha[d] been here, I would have completed my study by now. [When] my
> wife goes to work, I am home with them (their children). And if I am
> home with them, I am not doing anything. I also work at night. And
> when I come home, I need to rest. . . . it is very, very tough.

Not surprisingly, linguistic barriers and cultural differences increased the

difficulty for Michelle to manage her multiple roles while studying in the United States.

Those multiple roles also encompassed duties and responsibilities that slowed down

Paul's progress at school. However, none of these participants were willing to give up

any of their multiple roles.

To reiterate, the above findings pointed to these participants facing various

physical and psychological fluctuations and discomfort because of linguistic hindrences

and cultural differences. Those fluctuations and discomforts were related to issues of (1)

dislocation and alienation; (2) isolation and loneliness; (3) being stereotyped; (4)

insecurity, fear of failure, and the loss of families; (5) stress from representing home

countries, (6) financial burden, and (6) heavy workloads. Even though these participants

had been overwhelmed by the above issues and suffered from different levels of physical

and psychological fluctuations and discomfort, none of them gave up. In fact, they tried

harder and did more to survive and succeed.

The Opportunities for Novel Experiences

Studying at American universities gave these students various unexpected opportunities to explore many first-time experiences. Their novice experiences varied, most likely, centered on the need to live alone in a foreign country, to explore American culture and customs, to attend professional conferences and different activities, to work part-time or full-time on and off campus, and to pass important exams for graduation or moving onto next learning stages. During those life encounters, these participants experienced surprises, excitement, stress, disorientation, and also struggled with the issue of how to find balance between the home and host culture. In the following section, the above-mentioned novel experiences are addressed.

American experiences

Before coming to the States, these participants had prepared themselves for adapting to U.S. culture and customs using media, such as newspapers, television programs, and the Internet. Until they had a chance to experience the culture directly, their knowledge of snowing, Thanksgiving dinner, and Christmas did not really belong to them. Nan's American experience is a good example.

In China, studying was the only thing Nan needed to work on because her parents took good care of her. In the United States, she had to do everything by herself. This included studying in her doctoral program, working as a teaching assistant, and taking care of daily chores like doing grocery shopping, laundry, and cooking. Because those tasks were new to her, they then became Nan's novel experiences. Nan shared her first time grocery shopping experience as follows.

> When I get to Wal-Mart, we go shopping. I found everything I wanted.
> And I found food in the U.S. is so cheap[er] than in China and with good

quality. You can buy what you want. When you go to the grocery stores, you just feel everything is so clean and so cheap. And if you go to the . . . Mall . . . you can find . . . clothing on sale . . . everything is new and just like the fresh new air in your mind. You . . . think . . . Wow . . . America is so good; it is like [being] in heaven. You will feel happy.

Different from Nan's situation, instead of depending on someone for

transportation, Kevin decided to buy a car. In so doing, he could move freely. In fact,

Kevin had a driver's license in China, but never had a chance to drive on the road. Not

only he did not have a car, but also did not need to do so because the public

transportation was so convenient. To enhance his mobility in the States, Kevin purchased

his first car in the States:

> . . . . driving a car is a totally new experience for me and very excited. . .
> you drive a car for the first time and got the ticket and crash the car. . . but
> everything is so exciting because I never drove a car before.
> Different from Nan and Kevin's novel experiences, Carl shared his excitement

regarding his rich American cultural experiences. Carl was very excited to talk about his

rich American cultural experiences. He began with the most famous, sports,

> . . . football is a very important sport in [the United States], so when I
> came in 2004, [our university] was playing the National Championship. . .
> that was very impressive because the first time I saw people so crazy
> about a sport. . . .

Carl continued with other novel experiences:

> The first time I saw the snow on the ground in 2004. . . . I was very
> excited . . . I talked to my parents, my host parents and they all laughed at
> me like I am a country boy comes to the big city. And I had my first
> Thanksgiving with my host family. . . .You bake a big turkey and
> everybody drink wine …everybody toast and share [about] the year . . . I
> had a Christmas in Colorado with my host parents and their parents. . . .
> we climb the rock. It was very cool and icy kind of dangerous, but it was
> fun. We spent all day climbing the rock . . .

Carl arrived in the States in January 2004. Most of his first time American experiences happened in 2004, such as the first Fourth of July, the first Thanksgiving dinner, the first Christmas. From Carl's perspective, his American cultural experiences brought him surprises and pleasure. But it also made him think about his own culture and the place he called home.

As stated in these examples, these students had experienced various cultural events and tried to live their lives in the American way. Their joy came from exploring the new learning and living environment, the same as the challenges and difficulties. Indeed, these participants enjoyed the new life, at the same time, they also missed the old.

American academia and professional experiences

Professional advancement was one of the key elements that brought these research participants to the United States. Among these eighteen participants, eleven of them had studied at doctoral programs at three different colleges. Hence, they were required to participate in professional activities in their fields to enhance their professional competence. These participants' novel experiences in relations to their professional development consisted of two types. One was conducting research and participating in professional activities, while the other was related to their working experiences on and off campus.

Conducting research and participating in professional activities

In order to apply theories to practices, eleven research participants were required by their departments to conduct research, present their findings at conferences, and publish their research. For these participants, participating in professional activities was necessary in terms of developing their professional competence. To do and to complete a

dissertation was mandatory for them to earn their doctoral degrees. Each of these

activities or assignment was new to these participants. Thus, the process of their

participations in this regard not only enhanced their competence in the given profession,

but also enriched their learning experiences during their sojourns. In the interviews,

Alison talked about her experience of doing a dissertation. Kevin and Nan also shared

their insights from attending professional conferences in their fields.

During the initial interview, Alison was in the final stage of her doctoral program.

She had just completed the data collecting process and was writing her dissertation. She

expressed her insights from conducting the research for her dissertation. Alison began

her sharing with a deep breath followed with minutes of laughing and said:

> . . . writing a dissertation, I really [had] no idea what to expect. . . . It
> [was] really an ongoing process . . . I recognize that how important of
> writing a dissertation in a way of my ability of doing a research. . . .
> When I take the course work, I have many ideas about how to collect data.
> As I enter to data collecting, there are many unexpected things happen; I
> need to handle those things. . . . when I faced the real situation it was an
> amazing learning experience, how I struggle and how I handle those
> things. . .

As shown, from her data collecting process, Alison realized that learning theories

through taking courses was just a beginning to enter the profession. Being able to apply

those theories learned from classrooms into practice was more important and

complicated. In fact, the process of working on a dissertation was also a journey that

enabled Alison to discover different aspects of herself and her learning and development

in her profession.

Since conducting research was part of learning at most doctoral programs,

attending and presenting research findings at professional conference became the next

arena for these participants to explore. To begin with, Kevin talked about his excitement

and the importance of attending and presenting at a conference during the initial

interview. He shared that:

> . . . it is very important for my professional growth. Because you have to
> have those kind of experience to build up your confidence to present in a
> group of audiences, which has a higher level or have more experiences in
> research than you. . . .

As shown, attending and presenting at conferences advanced Kevin professional

competence. It also enhanced his confidence of being a researcher in his field. In the

case of Alison, her fist time conference experience not only broadened her horizons in

her profession, but also made her ponder how to improve herself in her field. Alison

added:

> In the conferences, I have met a lot of faculty members across the world
> and that makes me feel like I was in a very small place. I was very
> shock[ed] that there are so many people who are study the same major
> around the world. They brought a lot of different perspectives. . . . There
> are a lot of very, very famous people. I think they are so perfect to me. . . .
> It was kind of shock[ing] to recognize that there are a lot of different
> persons and different students who have different perspectives and
> different backgrounds in my major, and different expertise. So after
> attending the conference, my perspective has been changed.

Meeting researchers of her field from all over the world not only was an eye-

opening experience to Alison, but also broadened her perspectives. Interacting with those

outstanding scholars and listening to different research findings led Alison to ponder how

she should position herself in this profession once returning to Korea.

Participating in professional conferences helped Alison and Kevin to gain new

insights in how to do research in their fields. From Nan's perspective, attending

professional conferences made her to realize the importance of finding her own voice in

the field of mathematic. In China, especially in her province, Nan's talent in

mathematics was well known. Indeed, she was one of only a few students recommended

for admission to college for undergraduate and graduate studies. Hence, when she first

began her doctoral program at a U.S. university, Nan was confident in her field. Nan

recalled one of conversations with her major professor that challenged her assumption

about learning math:

> . . . if you want me to explain some theories or some technique of some
> math skills, I can explain it very well just like a tutor . . . But, my advisor
> tells me that is not enough because you just use other persons' knowledge
> very well, not yours. Ph.D. means . . . you should find the value of
> yourself and you should find the new idea.

Until Nan attended a math conference, she could not understand her professor's

viewpoint, nor could she agree with him. Nan recalled her learning experience from

attending conferences as a graduate student to presenting her first paper at a conference

and stated:

> . . . I went to the math conference many times, but at the beginning I had
> no rights to give a talk. I had to listen to other persons or other professors'
> talks . . . all of the professors present[ed] their own ideas. Maybe they can
> use other professors' technology but they also modify . . . [their] thoughts.

From Nan's description, listening and modeling other scholars' research

and academic works at the conferences shaped Nan's learning focus and

professional attitude. Indeed, the above novel experiences of conducting research

and participating in professional activities such as attending conferences and

working on their dissertations played a very important role in relations to building

and enhancing their professional competence in their fields.

In addition to conducting research and participating in professional conferences, another way for these participants to apply theories in practice was to work in the field such as teaching courses, doing internships, and working part-time on and off campus. In so doing, not only could these participants make connections between theory and practice, but also they had chances to get involved in local communities in a wider and deeper manner. For instance, as a doctoral student with a graduate assistantship, Kevin began his first time teaching at his American university. Kevin reported:

> . . . the first time teaching a class is most beneficial event both on my English improving and on my teaching . . . I learn how to communicate with my students. I appreciate them because they help me to learn English and that is really beneficial. They are very supportive. . . .

As stated, Kevin's first time teaching experience showed that how challenging it was for Kevin to get on stage using a foreign language to teach domestic students and to be corrected by them.

Unlike Kevin, Alison did not teach a whole course. Alison was invited by her advisor to teach on some days in one of the advisor's undergraduate courses. Alison shared her first-time experience of being a substituted teacher at one undergraduate course as follows.

> . . . In the doctoral residency plan, I need to teach. . . . My advisor asked me: why don't you participate in one of her undergraduate program and teach two or three topics, which she assigned me in that class? It was really, really (trying to grasp her breath in order to continue) shock. Being a teacher is also shock to me. But more than just being a teacher, being a teacher in the United States and teaching American students is not just a simple way of just teaching. I have no idea how to interact with American students. I have no ideas how I present my ideas to the American students. . . . I am not just a teacher. I must also manage the classroom.

But in the American classroom, especially, in my advisor's classroom, there is no lecture. Everything is based on discussion . . . student activities and participations. So, being a substituted (sic) teacher is really a challenge to me. I really don't know how to interact with students. When students asked me something, I was so afraid of standing in front of students . . . what, what did you say . . . ?

Due to linguistic struggles, Alison had difficulty in precisely expressing her ideas in English. Her way of managing classroom discussions was to sit still and be quiet. Therefore, when her advisor suggested that she teach sections of a class, Alison's shock was understandable.   Being a guest lecturer, Alison realized:

I have learned a lot of deeply how the pre-certified teachers have to learn . . . . I have read a lot of books regarding teacher's education, but I don't have any experience. But as I experienced interacting with them and observed how they study, [it] was kind of [a] very, very "Aha moment" like Oh—theory in the textbook is really, really happens in the real classroom that I observed and I experienced. I also learned that applying the theories of teacher's education in the classroom is such a big, big, big task. So, those two things are what I have learned as a substituted teacher. And those two things are important to me not just I learn [something new], but also my research topic has been changed. . . .

As stated, Alison's teaching experience not only enlarged her learning from theories, but also re-focused her research direction in the long term.

In addition, Kohn got his first job in 1997 as an undergraduate research assistant. Kohn noted, "I never work before. …my professor gives me the chance to do some research. That's kind of the milestone event; some sort the first job and the responsibility." He also shared his insight gained from working at lab as a research assistant. Kohn addressed:

. . . I kind of interested in working at the lab. I guess that's why I end up with going to graduate school because I was really interested to do something experimental …and I got opportunities to do new stuffs.

The part-time undergraduate research assistant job not only gave Kohn the first taste of working, but also evoked his interest in doing research. Kohn also recognized his desire to carry on to graduate studies. In terms of how he managed his first time working assignment as a research assistant, Kohn recalled:

> It is a process of learning. . . . the professor tells me what to do and they ask me to read the memo. Yes, it is kind of challenge too. I read and try to read some texts. The key is many international students are very shy to ask [questions]. They are afraid of being stupid if [they] ask questions. That's the thing as international students we need to learn how to ask questions. I guess after few mistakes, I learned how to ask if I don't understand something. And then he explains to me how to do it. . . . He is a good coach and he tells me: Okay, you do this for this reason and try to think over in your mind that what is the process and everything; what are you doing and why you do it? . . . He has been a good mentor and good coach also.

As shown, Kohn learned three important lessons from his first part-time job. First, making mistakes was not too bad because he actually learned from his mistakes. Second, asking questions was not equal to being stupid. On the contrast, asking questions was the best way to get needed information to do his job right. Lastly, Kohn also noticed the need for him to learn how to ask good questions to broaden his horizon in the field. Indeed, this first-time working experience as an undergraduate assistant, not only encouraged Kohn to carry on his study to master's and doctoral programs, but also helped him identify his mentor and coach to master his profession.

Furthermore, Kohn had done an internship with a private company in 2004. Kohn remembered how he got his internship:

> . . . one of my old friends in school …was asking me if I was interested in an internship. Somehow I was interested because I haven't had a chance

to work as an engineer . . . And also I was not very sure if I wanted to go to work first or [go] straight try to do teaching. . My advisor advised me at least to work two to three years at the industry, the real world, so I can really understand what happens in the real world.

Kohn's professional learning and development began with undertaking a part-time research assistantship and was extended by doing an internship at a private company. His ambition of becoming an outstanding scholar in his field surfaced. From Kevin, Alison, Nan, and Kohn's working experiences, to them, teaching courses or doing an internship was challenging. The nature of those tasks not only was new to these participants, but also required them to overcome their linguistic barriers and the lack of background knowledge about the United States workplace.

The above American academic and professional learning experiences gave these participants opportunities to integrate their learning from theories and practices. It also facilitated their discovery of their own learning interests, as well as the development of their professional competence. Indeed, what these participants saw and learned from their American academic and professional experiences enabled them to make a quantum leap into another academic dimension. What made those experiences so important was that from those experiences, these participants saw the possibilities of what their future would be for first time.

After-school events

International students came to the United States not only to work on academic degrees, but also to begin a new life. Hence, these students' after-school lives were similar to the ones existing in local communities. They worked hard; they also took time to participate in some after-school activities. Especially during the summer or winter break, most of these students liked to explore and see different areas of the States. They

traveled around the States to sightsee in different places, to attend conferences, or to visit friends. Building a new life in the United States also encompassed some new roles, such as becoming a leader of a student organization. Those events added new dimensions to these participants' sojourns in the States as addressed in the following.

For example, Kevin was very happy while talking about his first time performance at one of the Chinese community activities. He remembered that:

> . . . was a China Night (a cultural event at the university). One thousand people in the audience and you're standing there and the lights were on you. You sing and you have people dance for you. It is kind of cool.

Surely, it was very exciting and honorable for Kevin to present his Chinese culture to the diverse audience. Moreover, Kevin was active academically in school. He shared:

> . . . the first time to be the president of a student organization. . . . From that you actually learned a lot about how to organize activities, how to coordinate with people, because you cannot do everything by yourself. You have to have the skills to handle all the people that willing to work for you.

As stated, Kevin not only had fun to perform in front of an audience a thousand and to serve at a student organization, but also he learned from those events how to be a team player and a leader as well.

In addition, while crossing geographic boundaries in the States, these participants not only were eager to learn advanced knowledge and skills, but also wanted to see the country themselves. All eighteen participants enjoyed traveling around the States either for pleasure or to attend conferences. They liked to see different parts of the States for various reasons. For instance, Michelle brought her family to study in the United States. Other than working on a degree, traveling around the States was also important:

I came here with my family and I needed to show the big world for my children. . . We traveled several times. . . . we went to Florida, . . . Disney Land. That was the first trip for my family in America. We drove to Florida and it took almost three days. So, my family and me (sic) found out "what a big land!" (Laughing . . .) but Florida and our travel were valuable . . . my kids were very, very glad to see the different sceneries in Florida. . . . In Florida, I enjoy the ocean and smell . . . it was so, so wonderful. But I was so tired.

Without a doubt, the Florida trip made Michelle and her families realize that the United States was bigger than what they had imaged.

In conclusion, differences exist between home and host countries led these participants to undergo fluctuations and discomfort. They struggled with linguistic hindrance, cultural differences, as well as physical and psychological fluctuations and discomfort during their sojourns. In the journeys, these participants also, however, gained opportunities to have many novel experiences regarding American life, academic and professional experiences, and some other special events such as performing and traveling. The above encounters challenged their capabilities of adapting to the new country and culture. How did they cope with changes and challenges? Each participant had his or her unique way to manage her or his cross-cultural adaptation. It is like dancing on the edge of two different culture and life circumstances. These participants' every step, every effort would lead them to totally different life situations, which would produce different futures.

Theme Three: Navigating Between Home and Host Cultures

We can discover this meaning in life in three different ways: (1) by doing a deed; (2) by experiencing a value; and (3) by suffering.

--Victor Frankl (2000, p. 176)

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Living in an unfamiliar culture and society led these participants to experience fluctuations and discomfort during their sojourns in the United States. They had to overcome challenges and difficulties encountered to settle their bodies, minds, and spirits in order to concentrate on their studies. Indeed, they were required to learn how to fully live a life in the United States. For instance, these participants needed to effectively manage their daily life routines and to lower their financial burden caused by the unexpected higher cost of tuitions and fees. They also had to overcome socio-cultural inconsistencies prompted by different cultures, values, beliefs, and ways of communicating in order to re-connect themselves with others. In accordance with Victor Frankl's (2000) notion, these participants needed to discover the meaning of their journeys in the United States by thoroughly immersing themselves in the country to live with local communities. Their new life in the States also forced these participants to think and do things differently from their accustomed cultural training. For that, they suffered a great deal of discomfort and experienced emotional turbulence. In other words, ever since their arrival, these eighteen participants had been navigating between two different cultures and living contexts. They tried to find balance between disequilibrium and re-equilibrium. According to the research findings, theme one, navigating between home and host cultures, consist of three elements that contribute to the success of these participants in managing their cross-cultural transitions. These elements are the selves (their individual selves); the others (people around them and the environment); and learning and development. These three elements also answered the third research question: What personal and environmental factors enable these

international students to cope with the changes and to function effectively in the United States?

Their Selves

Coming to the United States for higher education was a conscious choice these participants have made for themselves. Hence, their individual selves (e.g., characters, values, beliefs, and prior learning and life experiences) played an important roles that influenced the ways in which they managed challenges and difficulties encountered. The different aspects of their selves also contributed to how the participants would utilize available resources and information to help them achieve their desired goals. Those characteristics included attitude of determination, positive thinking, and never give up.

Determination

It took great deal of determination for these participants to manage their linguistic barriers and cope with cultural differences, as well as to endure physical, psychological fluctuations and discomfort in order to earn advance degrees from American universities. For example, Alison chose to work on a Ph.D. degree in the United States to advance her profession and to enable her to find a faculty position at a university in her home country. However, since her arrival in the States, each day was about surviving. Alison believed that surviving in the United States and at her doctoral program was very important because if she could not make it, she would ". . . never overcome many other struggles in her life. I was so, so, so stress[ed], and at the same time I was so, so strong." Alison repeatedly pounded the table and said, "I can survive" with a firm voice. It was obvious that every single day in the United States was extremely stressful and challenging for Alison. However, she was determined, as indicated by her resolve, "I can do it. If I

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cannot overcome, I will die." As stated, Alison's realization of her need to overcome her

fears and discomfort of being alone in the US, indeed, reinforced her determination to

succeed without fail.

Paul also revealed how determination was an important element to helping

himself navigate between his home and host country. Indeed, the secret that sustained

him in carrying out his studies from undergraduate through Master's degree to a Ph.D.

program came from his attitude of determination. Paul explained that as a survivor from

wars in Liberia, pursuing higher education in the States was his choice. He was

determined to succeed, to make use of it, and to go as far as he could.

Both Paul's and Alison's stories implied, once the journey began, that they were

determined and would not stop until they accomplished their goals. They studied

diligently and endured all the hardship they encountered. Because of their attitude of

determination, Alison earned her Ph.D. degrees in December 2007, while Paul has moved

to the writing stage of his dissertation.

Positive thinking

Living in a foreign land, these participants faced various issues and problems that

required them to think positively in order to find solutions to those problems. Indeed,

whatever the new life in the States presented to them, they chose to view it as an

opportunity in order to make the best out of difficult situations. For instance, in the prior

section, being ignored was one of factors that caused Alison and Paul to experience

psychological discomfort. However, Maya was able to see the bright side of being

ignored by her American counterparts. As the only international student at her

department for many years, Maya said, " no one tried to judge me" because there was "no

reference group" to compare her performance. As a result, her classmates and professors

view her as "a non-native English speaker." Instead of feeling ignored Maya was able to

have a positive attitude by realizing that she did not need to be perfect, but was able to be

herself. Her unique Japanese cultural background became her niche as she pursued her

graduate studies in sociology.   Her cultural background enabled her to offer different

cultural perspective to assist her and her fellow students' research projects. Without a

doubt, Maya's positive attitude helped her not only to enjoy her studying, but also to find

her niche in her department.

In addition, positive attitude enabled theses participants to better manage their

nervousness while interacting with others. To illustrate, it was very challenging for Ling

to work with doctors and nurses when she first began her internship. The impression

those doctors and nurses had toward Ling, a 23-year-old international graduate student

from Taiwan, was that she was "very quiet and too young to do the community work."

However, she told herself no matter how difficult it would be, she needed to learn the

profession in a practical way not only to satisfy the internship requirement, but also to

enhance her professional competence. Staying positive helped Ling overcome inhibitions

and even show a gregarious tendency while working with American colleagues at a

hospital. It, thus, facilitated her to befriend her colleagues. She was able to receive

assistance to help her learn the profession and the culture, as well as overcome challenges

and difficulties she encountered. Ling concluded her recollection of her internship

experience with a joyful voice, ". . . they even offer me a job. . . . I really thank [them]

for whatever they have done for me." As shown, maintaining a positive attitude not only

assisted these participants as they managed challenges, but a positive attitude also opened up possibilities for them.

Never give up

Interacting with professors, classmates, and local communities, these participants realized that their linguistic inadequacy often blocked their abilities to learn and express themselves. It also diminished their ego. Hence, these students promised that they would never give up, whatever the cost, they would do their best and never surrender till they could catch up with the domestic students, if not surpass them.

To illustrate, Wayne pointed out that as an international student, he was not allowed to fail. Being an international student in the States, he viewed himself as at "the bottom" of the society, which meant he had to do things perfectly. He concentrated on fulfilling the requirements in athletics in terms of practice, as well as being successful with his schoolwork and effective with campus employment. With an objective of earning advanced degrees from the United States, he realized that he had to sacrifice attending many social events. For instance, Wayne insisted on finishing all his homework assignments before the deadline in order to get good grades. After classes, sport practice, and work, he stayed at the athletic learning center to study or to write his papers. Living off campus without his own transportation, Wayne frequently had to walk back home in the middle of night or during the weekend after hours of study. It did not matter if it was a snowing day or raining day, Wayne would put on his coat and shoes to walk to school to study. He reported:

> I do not care how people think about I am crazy . . . That's what I chose to do. . . . My mind set up to be: You work to achieve. You work hard and you will achieve what you want.

As shown, Wayne persevered and never gave up his desire to succeed in school for comfort or pleasure. He further emphasized, "Being an international student for me, I was not allowed to fail. . . . I cannot allow myself to fail. Even [if] everybody fails; I cannot allow myself to fail. I cannot fail, unless I die . . ." To Wayne, everybody could give up or fail, but not him. In other words, having the mindset of never surrender not only kept Wayne on the right track toward his goal, but also pushed him to break through the obstacles in front of him.

In short, to study in the United States is a conscious decision made by these eighteen participants. They are the protagonists during their cultural crossing. The different aspects of their selves included attitudes of determination, positive thinking, and never give up. These attitudes not only influenced the way in which these participants coped with changes, but also contributed to their success at American universities.

The Others

Traveling alone to the United States for advanced degrees required these particpants to build a new life in a foreign land. To maintain equanimity during their cross-cultural adaptations, these participants had to physically and psychologically settle into the new country among other people. To settle down, they first had to learn about their living environment and also find some friends or resources to support them, so that they were able to move from disequilibrium to re-equilibrium. In order to function properly, these participants needed assistance from others, especially from those with whom they interacted intimately and most frequently. These significant others included their faculty members, classmates, and the services from universities. They also relied on

friends that they found from local communities and from other countries--other international students studying in the United States.

Faculty members and classmates

Academic support and guidance from faculty members were crucial in terms of helping these participants succeed academically. For example, writing papers was very challenging to Amy. The way she managed this challenge was to tell herself, "Just do it." However, receiving support and encouragement from her instructor was essential in terms of helping her improve her writing. In the voice of Amy, " the teacher plays a big role. She is very encouraging . . . gives a lot of opportunities like extra point. That encourages you to write even more." Amy's experience with her faculty members motivated her and made her eager to write better.

Similar to Amy's story, Carl's experiences added more details in this regard. As an international student, the linguistic hindrances and cultural differences impaired Carl's classroom learning experiences. He could not fully understand the lecture and questions that were discussed in class. He needed extra help from both his professors and classmates in order to make sense of what had taught in class and to understand what the assignment was. Carl shared the importance of receiving help from his professors in relations to his academic learning and growth.

> . . . professors are very kind because they have a lot of patience. If I don't
> know exactly the problem is or how to ask [questions], they will try to
> help me ask [questions] for me. Because my expression is not good, they
> will try to catch my mind . . . They will explain to me step by step.

With help from his professors and classmates, Carl has successfully completed his course work at his Master's program and is now conducting the experiment for his thesis.

Furthermore, Alison's professional competence was enhanced through consistently learning and improving with her advisor's effective supervision. To demonstrate, Alison had difficulty interacting with some of American students while guest lecturing in her advisor's course involving undergraduate students. She went to consult her advisor for solutions to manage her problem while teaching undergraduate students. She found out that her advisor did not want to give her any direct answer in this regard, but kept asking her more questions. As shown, Alison's advisor used inquiry to support and encourage her to see things from different perspectives. Her advisor's supervision not only comforted Alison's frustration and eased her stress and nervousness with respect to teaching at an American classroom, but also stimulated her mind to critically think about issues related to being a teacher at an American classroom with a group of pre-service teachers.

Each of the aforementioned illustrations reveals how the support and encouragement from faculty and classmates facilitated these international participants' success with their studies in the United States.

American friends and colleagues

As a stranger living in a foreign land, these participants needed to befriend Americans in order to learn more about the culture and the language. To demonstrate, Nan shared her change and personal growth through interacting with her American friend, Ann. Nan believed that Ann truly understood her feelings of living in a foreign land. The two met through Ann's husband, another graduate student in Nan' department. Ann had been to China for two years to learn Chinese. Ann wanted to continue learning Chinese. As a new student in the department, Nan was invited by Ann's husband to teach

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his wife Chinese in exchange for improving her English. Nan reported that Ann understood her feelings of confusion and loss living in the States away from her home country. Ann also respected her and her culture. Interacting with Ann, Nan had a sense of equality. Nan said that since, "We are equal," it encouraged her to befriend other Americans. Indeed, Ann's friendship not only eased Nan's discomfort of being in the foreign land, but also "open[ed] a new window" facilitating her to see the commonness among Americans and herself as human beings. From the process of sharing feelings, ideas, and experiences with Ann, Nan found out, "sometimes the Americans think the same way as Chinese."

From Nan's experience, interacting and communicating with Ann served as what Dewey (1938) called, "educative experiences" (p. 80) that allowed her to find the common ground between home and host countries. This educative experience also encouraged Nan to make friends with other Americans. Indeed, Ann was like Nan's learning partner during her sojourn in the States. This friendship not only helped Nan adapt to the American cultural more effectively, but also assisted both Nan and Ann to expand their horizons.

In addition, Carl pointed out that living in the States required that he request a lot of help and support from his American friends, especially from his host family. Lacking background knowledge of American culture and system, he highly relied on his host family's assistances in order to adapt to the new environment and concentrate on his studies. For instance, one time Carl's wife got sick and was sent to an emergency room. He could not communicate with doctors and nurses because of the unfamiliar medical

terminology. Fortunately, with his host parents' help, he was able to understand his wife's medical condition to make a wise decision for needed medical treatment.

As shown, in crisis or in regular life, Carl's host parents and Nan's American friend gave them unconditional support and help. Their stories reinforced the importance of befriending others within the local communities. Both Carl and Nan not only received needed support, help, and resources from their American friends, but also learned from their friends in terms of how to handle whatever challenges were presented to them during their sojourn in the United States.

International friends

Befriending other international students assisted these participants in comprehending that their problems and difficulties were normal and that they were not alone in this foreign land. For example, Alison reported that befriending students from Asian helped her realize that other international students also had difficulty communicating and interacting with professors and domestic students, especially during the classroom discussion. This realization not only relieved Alison's stress and anxiety of participating in classroom discussions, but also focused her attention on solving those problems rather than allowing herself to get depressed. Indeed, Alison and her Asian international friends formed a learning community to support and comfort each other. She reported:

> We are as one group as international student in the America universities.
> We have our power and we have our voices. So, even [if] the American
> students think that we are stupid or whatever they [think] about us. I
> believe that's no problem.

Alison's experience suggested that befriending other international students helped these participants better manage their cultural crossing. Not only they felt like they

belonged to their international community, but they were also empowered by their community of international students to carry on their journeys.

The environment

Situating in different majors at different universities required each participant to adapt to different environments in order to fit in the new life circumstance. For instance, Amy chose to start her college life in the Midwest United States. Being alone living at a dorm, Amy learned to be part of the community in the dorms. She recalled, "You cannot be shy; otherwise, you kind of left alone and you don't get to go anywhere." Landing in a totally foreign place forced Amy to recognize the need to reach out and meet other dorm residents. Due to her living environment, Amy became an active freshman. Similar to Amy's case, majoring in philosophy, psychology, and sociology, Maya got used to being the only international student in her department. Being the only foreigner in her classes, in the beginning, made her feel lonely and isolated. However, little by little, the environment facilitated her to be independent and to become an autonomous thinker.

In addition, to the living and course environments, these eighteen international students were also supported by various church environments. Christianity is not only well known in the United States, but also was accessible to these participants during their sojourns. Most participants reported that participating in church activities helped improve their English and assisted them in learning the American culture, as well as helped sustain them as they endured all the hardships. Hence, in searching for resources or information to assist them in adapting to the American culture, Ivy turned to religious teaching. Ivy pointed out that the "Bible teaches me a lot of principles that I can apply in

my daily life…" The Bible became Ivy's dictionary and reference for evaluating her assumptions and for making decisions in relation to what to do and how to modify her prior frames of reference and habits of mind. As stated, Ivy not only embraced new ideas of living a life as a Christian, but also as a way to blend into American society. In short, Ivy, Maya, and Amy's stories showed that the environment these participants were in provided rich resources and opportunities to foster their ability to learn and adapt as they studied.

In sum, being alone in the United States encouraged these participants to find others to connect with physically, emotionally, and psychologically. As a result, some participants became Christian because they found help, support, and love from their church families. Other participants chose to make friends with individuals in the local communities. These participants also had experiences with their professors and classmates that facilitated their learning and classroom experiences. Each of the relationships with other people allowed these participants to establish relationships and obtain assistance, so that they knew where to go and whom to ask for help when they needed information, encouragement, or support of one kind or another. To defeat the feeling of loneliness and isolation, these participants took actions to overcome life's challenges. In fact, the environment these participants were in also played a very important role in terms of their change and growth. It not only forced them to fight the obstacles they encountered, but also allowed them to confront resistances and their fear for changes. The environment the participants discovered in America as they studied also created opportunities for them to learn more about their selves and the world. As a result, these participants had chances to make choices about who they want to become.

Learning and Development

The findings suggest that in adjusting to the American culture and learning environment, these participants had to learn how to develop their abilities and characters in the context of American culture. As stated in Theme Two: Linguistic hindrances and cultural differences made these participants feel inferior to domestic students. Being different constantly reminded them to study extra hard and put more effort in their schoolwork; otherwise, they would not succeed in their studies, never mind compete with their American peers.

In the case of Amy, she has benefited from extra care while studying at a high school in an English as Second Language (ESL) program. Becoming a college student, she could not expect her university to give her a special treatment. Amy learned that she had to "get better" to catch up with her American counterparts. Living in the dormitory with students from diverse backgrounds, Amy reported, " That kind of make you set (*sic*) back and think about yourself either something you got to work on or how luck were you." In addition, being educated in a completely different system, Amy recognized the need to be an active learner, to express herself, and to stand up for her opinions. Participating in various group projects in class and on campus made her understand the importance of being a good team player. Furthermore, before coming to the States, she just followed whatever her parents and teachers asked or assigned her to do. During the thirteen years studying and living in the States, she became an independent thinker and learner. Amy said:

> . . . my personalities and my characters have changed and become more
> stronger. . . . I know what I want [and] what takes to achieve what I want; .
> . . I know when I need to seek for help and when I need to get it done by
> myself.

Amy's journey, in the beginning, focused on academic learning then moved to personal development. Her personal growth also promoted her professional development.

In addition, eagerness to improve his English and to fit into the American university and society drew Carl to befriend Americans. The process of reaching out and making new friends helped him realize that in terms of polishing his English, "Even everyday you speak one sentence or one word they are still learning." Carl stated that to mingle with Americans not only helped him improve his English in the American way, but also, in Carl's words, "I change my personality to become the [extrovert]."

Different from Carl's reaching out to learn and develop his competence, Nan looked inward to her way of thinking. With five years of working on a doctoral degree, Nan recognized that polishing her way of thinking was more important than passing exams or earning a Ph.D. degree. As mentioned in Theme Two, experiencing the death of her mother and managing medical care for her father, Nan learned that "the way of your thinking can affect your philosophy in life. Exam is only the milestone in your career." To Nan, to improve the way in which she made decisions, behaved, competed, and related to others in the society were more important than earning a degree, especially in managing crises. Furthermore, she recognized, "The biggest change came from my biggest mistake." That was because her failures made her spend more time to think and reason, so that, she learned more about herself and the environment.

Likewise, Michelle was not serious about her religion in Korea. However, studying in the United States gave her an opportunity to see Christian religion from a different angle. Michelle recalled that she used to be "a Sunday Christian" and criticized

those Christians who did not behave kindly. Ever since she arrived in the States, she obtained a lot of helps from her Korean church. That was the first time in Michelle's life to experience the "real love from God and people." As shown, receiving unconditional support from church members, on the one hand, touched Michelle's heart and helped her and her families to settle down in the States more smoothly. Observing how church members and American people did things to make a difference in others' lives, on the other hand, changed Michelle's perspectives on Christian religion. As a result, Michelle got baptized on April 25, 2005.

As shown, Michelle, Nan, Carl, and Amy's stories disclose that learning the differences and developing their abilities and characteristics are essential for these participants to fit in and succeed in the United States.

Theme Four: Being and Becoming Authentic

"How does one become a butterfly?" she asked pensively.

"You must want to fly so much that you are willing to give up

being a caterpillar."

~Trina Paulus

Undergoing changes in the United States facilitated these participants to observe themselves and their surroundings mindfully in order to understand their selves, others, and the environment in an authentic manner. To fit in to American society, these students were forced to examine their assumptions by comparing (1) their prior experiences with current ones, (2) their beliefs, values, and culture with the Americans' beliefs, values system, and cultural norms, and (3) other international students cultural and belief systems with their own. In the midst of examining their assumptions and

comparing them with those in America, these participants faced countless challenges and difficulties. Those challenges and difficulties further shaped the way they view themselves and others. During their sojourns, these participants obtained new knowledge and skills, broadened horizons, and enhanced professional competence. Some of them also encountered crises, losses, and physical and psychological discomfort, such as losing family members and undergoing physical illness. However, these participants admitted that revisiting the journey of being international students in the United States helped them identify the benefits they gained and the costs they paid. Being aware of their changes and growth, as well as the gains and losses, helped them recognize the meaning of this journey. Thus, these participants understood their journey as one of being and becoming authentic in a different cultural context, as well as being and becoming a better person for a better life. As a result, Theme Four: Being and Becoming Authentic, speaks to these participants' journeys of learning, development, and transformation in light of the benefits they gained. It also answers the fourth research question: What have been the benefits or hardships of studying and living in the United States? Hence, at the present stage of their journeys, most of them are able to envision a better future for themselves that includes the ability to help others.

Benefits Gained

Living in between home and host countries, these participants experienced a cultural clash that led them to experience disequilibrium. In addition, the disorientating situation of cultural crossing challenged these participants' capacities of becoming accustomed to American culture without giving up their original cultural identities. The journey of studying at American universities not only opened up the opportunity for these

participants to earn degrees, but also provided opportunities for them to learn and develop their characters and professional competence. Thus, the benefits they gained from their journeys in the United States included: (1) acknowledging the individual self, (2) learning to be assertive, (3) learning to be independent, (4) becoming autonomous thinkers, (5) being grateful to others and being aware of their desires to serve others. These benefits that these participants gained are addressed in the following section.

Acknowledging the individual self

Confronting cultural differences fostered these participants to critically examine themselves and their surroundings to acknowledge the different aspects of their individual selves. Reflecting upon their past and current experiences facilitated them to recognize the differences and similarities that exist between their home and host cultures regarding to values, beliefs, and social norms. This increasing awareness assisted them to utilize available resources to handle problems.

To illustrate, Michelle came to the States for higher education. During the past two years, what she has gained from this learning journey went beyond studying at an American university to discovering different aspects of her individual self. She named her journey in the United States as a "new discovery." Michelle explained that this journey provided her "a kind of new path to live" her life. She found that she had to navigate between the Korean and the American cultures, work diligent, and be passionate in order to discover important things in and for her life. Michelle concluded, ". . . life takes time to find ultimate goals. And as time goes by, I can become a good person and I can re-find myself." As stated, not only has Michelle acknowledged her changes, but also recognized the different aspects of her self and the world. In fact, she grew from this

journey. Upon graduation, Michelle was able to identify a new path for herself and her

family. Instead of carrying on her doctoral study in the United States alone, Michelle

chose to move back to Korea with her husband and two children.

Accordingly, Yumiko shared her thoughts regarding the benefits from studying in

the United States. In the beginning, she thought studying in a foreign country was a very

special thing. She believed that having different learning experiences would shape her

personality and make her become an educated person. While approaching the end of this

journey, Yumiko started to think about what this journey of studying in the United States

meant to her. Has this journey made her a special person? If so, in what way? If not,

why not? She then realized that all these years studying and living in the United States

was all about her personal growth. After experiencing all the ups and downs, learning the

differences and similarities between Japan and the United States, Yumiko started to think

about how to apply acquired knowledge and skills in practice—to make a difference both

in her life and in others' lives. Pondering the meaning and the purpose of her being and

becoming, Yumiko not only acknowledged her change and growth, but also identified the

need to give back to society.

Learning to be assertive

Surrounded by assertive American classmates and friends, these participants

realized that they had to learn to express themselves so that people could understand them

better. For example, Amy, as mentioned in Theme One, has been studying in the States

for thirteen years from high school to a master's program. Compared to the public

educational system in Taiwan, she began a completely different educational journey in

the United States. Studying in the United States, indeed, helped Amy develop herself and

search for her learning interests.   Later, Amy recognized that the benefits she gained from studying in the United States went deeper than being able to speak up for her opinions and stand up for herself. To become assertive, Amy first had to learn more about herself, who she was and how she became who she was, as well as her environment. She realized, "coming from a culture that is not . . . encourage[d] to speak up. Most of time, you are told and encouraged to observe." Thus, the American academic culture forced her to face the reality that her long held cultured beliefs and perspectives did not work in the United States. Amy said, "it took me a while to have the courage to speak up." As a result, the journey in the States facilitated Amy's ability to recognize the impacts of the home and the host cultures in terms of being and becoming an assertive person.

Learning to be independent

Three elements contributed to the need for these participants to become independent while living in the United States including: cultural differences, a lack of resources, and the living environment. Rather than collectivism, the American culture values privacy and individualism. Americans are trained to be independent. In contrast, sixteen out of eighteen participants came from Asian countries. They were accustomed to the collectivist culture and tended to rely on their families and friends. The conflict between collectivism and individualism not only was disorienting to these participants' minds and emotions, but also forced them to learn how to live a life less dependent on others. Next, because these participants traveled more than a thousand miles to the United States, the geographical distance and the cost of traveling back home to visit their families made it increasingly difficult to receive direct help from others in their home

countries. Most participants came to the States alone. They did not have any close

friends or family members standing beside them to support or take care of them. Without

a doubt, they had to learn to manage their new life circumstances on their own. In

addition, living in a foreign land, these participants lacked background knowledge to

easily access existing services, resources, and assistance. Even with friends or faculty

members' help, there were certain things they had to handle by themselves, such as doing

grocery shopping, banking, studying, and acquiring student services. Based upon the

above reasons, these participants were forced to learn and become independent while

studying and living in the United States. As a result, learning to be independent was

viewed as one of the benefits of studying in the United States.

To illustrate, Colleen remembered how she learned to be independent after she

arrived in the States. She recalled her experience and shared, ". . . the difficulty is you

cannot always depend on someone else, so you have to be independent. It is kind of like

the mindset no matter what happens you are the only one making the decision." Colleen

also pointed out that becoming a Christian helped her become more independent.

Lacking control over many things led her to put whatever she could not mange ". . . on

God's hand." Thus, believing in God was the solution Colleen took to solve the problem

of not being able to rely on human beings.

In Chinese culture, most Chinese parents emotionally and financially support their

children's education until their graduations. At school, classmates become friends to

hang out with. In contrast, most young adults in the United States have to work to

support themselves. Hence, the new life in the American society made Betty realize that

finding friends to hang out with was very challenging. Besides, most of their classmates

or schoolmates were busy taking care of their own lives, schoolwork, and jobs. It was hard to make time for others. Under this kind of circumstance, she learned to be independent and did things by herself.

In Helen's case, giving birth to a son in the United States, she learned to be a mother in the American way. In China, people would request and obtain a lot of help from their parents, in-laws, or other people to take care of their children. Living in the United States without family and relatives around, she and her husband had to be independent and learn how to take care of their son without assistance from family. As shown, the environment fostered Helen's ability to rely on herself and learn how to be an independent Chinese American's mother. Betty and Colleen were unique individuals as a result of developing within the context of their home cultures. However, the new life circumstances and American culture changed them as they became more independent.

Personal, academic, and professional growth

As mentioned in theme one, concern for their personal, academic, and professional growths was the central reason that attracted these participants to the United States and, indeed, it was beneficial. To illustrate, studying in the United States forced Kim to modify, cultivate, and alter her negative attitude and habitual reaction of running away from things that she disliked or did not expect. Many factors contributed to the need for Kim to change and grow. Those included her linguistic barriers, not knowing the culture well, being in a diverse learning environment, and interacting with different ethnic groups. Kim stated that in Korea there was only one ethnic group and one language used. She did not need to take time to think twice in order to understand or be understood by others. In the United States, communicating with people from diverse

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cultural and linguistic backgrounds was very challenging to her. She had to really listen in order to understand what others were talking about. While expressing her opinion, she needed to think more deeply and take others' perspectives into account. Thus, she was forced to be patient and more understanding. Kim pointed out, ". . . by all the experience here, I got to think twice." As a result, her attitude toward enduring things she disliked has been changed. She is no longer the person who used to reject things without trying to understand them. In contrast, she changed her attitude from passively avoiding problems to actively learning from the problems and making the best out of them.

Alison's case was different from Kim's. Alison's ways of thinking were shaped because of the decision of changing her advisor. Alison disliked confronting problems because of a lack of confidence in her ability to handle them. Changing advisors was not in Alison's plan. Enrolling in a class taught by a professor she had not worked with before brought her a graduate assistantship to work with her closely. The assistantship opportunity later led Alison to switch her research area and necessitated a change of her advisor. She discussed her growth through the experience of changing her advisor and shared:

> . . . I feel like this is a learning process of how I handle such a problem in
> my life. I cannot avoid every problem because I will face [it]. But I need
> to learn how to handle [problems] and not just avoiding them or escaping
> from them.

Alison learned from the incident of changing her advisor that problems existed one way or another. Instead of running away from problems, the best way to handle the problems was to learn how to solve them in a proper manner with courage.

In the case of Helen, two years after earning her master's degree, she recognized she wanted to go for a Ph.D. She shared that coming to the United States and "Starting a

new discipline in this country, experiencing academic [pursuit is] very different and very valuable . . . ." On the one hand, receiving two assistantships at the same time, she was responsible for many things related to researching and teaching, as well as her own research and course work. On the other hand, she had to take care of her son, a six-month-old boy, and her family. She did not expect, nor did she prepare for such a heavy workload. Helen reported, "I just gradually accept, accept, accept, adjust, adjust, and adjust." With the research and teaching experiences at the university, she got a job offer in the third year of her doctoral study. Helen switched her status from F1 to H1 as of January 2007. She now works full-time and takes classes during the evening.

Surely, the journey of studying at American universities enhanced Helen's personal and academic growth and fostered her professional development. It equipped her with the needed competence to undertake a career in the United States. Kim learned the importance of being patient and thinking more thoroughly, while Alison realized that she could neither avoid causing problems nor escape from problems. Those new insights encouraged these participants to reflect constantly and to think critically. As a result, Kim and Alison conquered their fears of dealing with tasks they disliked or facing problems. They were willing to learn how to handle unexpected personal, academic, and professional changes more effectively. Their growth in these areas fostered them to become responsible individuals not only for themselves, but also for others in the personal, academic, and professional aspects of their lives.

Each of these stories reveals that the benefits of studying in the United States are unpredictable. To these participants, they came to the States to begin a new educational journey; however, on the journey they developed their personal character as they studied

in the United States, which over time enhanced their professional competence. For Kim and Alison, they learned to face whatever life presented to them and tried to make the best out of it. Thus, the core of these participants' journeys was centered in their personal, academic, and professional growth. It also allowed them to shift much of their focus from themselves to others.

Becoming an autonomous thinker

Living in a totally different socio-cultural environment required these participants to think constantly and critically in order to make sense of things around them. For example, taking the first Introduction to Philosophy course made Maya start to think more critically regarding the meaning of learning and the subject discussed in the class. She realized that she wanted to study for the sake of subjects or the knowledge, not just for finding a job. This insight fostered Maya's ability to pursue graduate studies in order to get a job that ". . . won't waste the knowledge that I gain from school." In addition, the experiences she gained in the States also cultivated her to be an autonomous thinker. She remembered:

> It changes me because in terms of decision-making I think I am more
> autonomous now that I make my own decision. I think when I was in high
> school I was more passive, I just do what every body says that I should do.
> I was not that motivated and I was not a good student either. I thought I
> am going to live a life like any body else. You know, just going with the
> flow. But now, I think that the experience changes me because I am more
> a responsible [person] in terms of my own decisions with the way I think.
> I am more active in terms of changing my own life. I am more serious
> about what and why I am doing and more conscious with what I am doing.
> [I] try hard . . . And it is different from [who] I was in high school. . . . I
> don't think if I was in Japan I [would think] about going to the graduate
> school or anything like that, like working this hard.

As stated, the American education and her American learning and living experiences changed Maya in many aspects, especially enabling her to become an autonomous thinker and, as a result, a responsible individual. If she did not choose to come to the United States for education, she might never have thought about going to graduate school, much less going further and working on a Ph.D. She not only studied harder than she has ever imagined at school, but she also viewed her autonomous decision-making and action-taking more seriously.

Being grateful and aware of their desires to serve

Receiving a lot of assistance from their surroundings at times, these participants felt grateful for being able to carry on their studies even though they had to undergo various challenges and difficulties. Being in a foreign land with limited resources and background knowledge, these participants required a lot of help from their local support systems at times. A given event or crisis such as a health problem, a financial difficulty, or a car accident could easily stop them from pursuing higher education at their university. Indeed, it took more than their personal efforts to succeed in the journey of earning advanced degrees in the United States. Hence, they felt grateful for being able to carry on their studies even though they had to undergo various challenges and difficulties. For example, Yumiko's story spoke to the need to give back to society. Yumiko noticed that she felt grateful for being able to complete her degrees in the States without any interruption. She recalled:

> *I am glad that I am able to talk [about] my experiences. That make[s] me* think okay, I have done a lot of things for these years. It makes me think more clearly what my experiences are. . . . I really grow and become more mature. . . . I feel very grateful . . .

Being grateful to what she has earned and gone through enabled Yumiko to appreciate all the experiences she has had in the United States. As mentioned in the section, Acknowledge the Selves, the journey in the States not only helped Yumiko grow and be grateful, but also recognize the need to give back to the society.

Different from Yumiko's experience, Amy felt grateful after her observations and reflections during her past thirteen years' journey of studying in the States. Recognizing her change and growth, Amy explained,

> . . . as an international student has to overcome those challenges and difficulties, not just the language, but [also to live] … not at a place where I am comfortable. . . I think it makes me appreciate things and life more.

In brief, the journey in the United States presented Amy opportunities to count her fortune. She not only appreciated what she had been through and accomplished, but also was thankful for what she could look forward to. In Yumiko's case, her gratitude allowed her to appreciate what she has experienced in the States including all the good and bad.

In addition, the need or desire to serve was identified by Michelle through observing and interacting with others who demonstrated the generosities of helping people in need. Michelle said:

> I found out there are a lot of . . . good doings, valuable doings like serving people and just volunteering people who want to learn English. . . . I learn that I need to serve people who might need help. So, I need to do that because we debt from many people, so we need to pay back.

From observing others to modeling how people benefited others, Michelle became generous. She also acknowledged the need to give back to society through her desire to serve others. In fact, participating in this study was as way to give back to

society. In Michelle's words, participating in this study was one of the "good doings" to help researchers, educators, and others better understand international students' learning and transformation.

Both Carl and Kohn agreed with Michelle's insight of the need or their desire to serve. Having been studying in the United States for three and ten years respectively, they were able to assist new students to adapt to changes by sharing their experiences and resources with them. In comparison, Paul's ideas of giving back to society focused more on educational reform in his country. As a refugee in the United States, Paul did not forget about his home. Since the day he arrived in New York City, he thought about what he could do to make a difference in his country's destiny. Paul felt the need to serve others on a broader scale. The education and experiences he gained from the United States not only made him a good example for people in Liberia to model from, but also enhanced his competence to shape and transform his people's inadequate assumptions, so that everybody could be treated equally.

Each of these stories reflected how the various benefits these participants have gained from the journey made them grateful and contributed to their desire to give back to others. For instance, Amy summed up her journey of studying in the United States "is priceless." Indeed, the benefits and the impact she has experienced on her life and career providing her with things that money cannot buy. For that, she as well as the other participants were extremely grateful and that also created a strong desire to give back to others in their lives and when possible to society.

Despite the benefits gained during their time as international students, these

participants face diversified hardships during their sojourns. The hardships they had to

endure or the loss they faced varied but included personal and family sufferings such as

the death of family members back home. As mentioned in theme two, Paul did not know

his brother was killed in the war until receiving a letter from his friend weeks later. He

did not have a chance to go back to Liberia for the funeral. Thus, he had to manage his

grief as well as the guilt all at the same time in the United States alone. In addition, Nan

lost her mother in a car accident in China. Later, her father had a heart attack and almost

died. As an only child in her family, Nan did not even cry for her loss, but continued her

study in the States in order to provide support to her family for her father's huge amount

of medical bills.

Unlike the hardship Paul and Nan have experienced, Michelle's children have

been through cognitive, physical, and psychological difficulties in the first year of living

in the United States. She recalled her four-year-old son's story to illustrate this issue.

Michelle's son was just a two-year-old little boy when they first arrived in the States. He

never learned English, nor has he been taken care of outside their house. Coming to the

States changed his life completely. Not only he had to go to a daycare center, but also

interacted with other children who speaking the language he could not understand.

Michelle stated:

> Before we came here, . . . my son lived so happily and had no problem and
> he was so healthy. . . . But when we moved here, he had to go to like a
> daycare center. . . . he did not experience being in [that] kind of
> institution. . . . He had to be alone without mommy and families. And
> also he needed to understand English. He needed to make friends. . . . I
> cannot imagine how hard he worked at that time. It's so, so hard. . . .

every morning, he cried and cried, "no, no, don't leave me alone . . .
mommy, mommy". . . I was so, so sad . . . I am so, so sorry, very, very
sorry to my son. How hard he worked, I cannot imagine that. English,
friends, circumstances, loneliness, the new culture, the public system . . .
Can you imagine that?

As illustrated, Michelle's children had to cope with the change at such a young

age, seven and two. She watched how her two children made the cross-cultural

adjustment and survived in the totally new world. On the one hand, she felt guilty for

putting them in such a painful situation of living in a foreign country.   On the other hand,

she was very proud that her daughter and son not only survived during the process, but

also gradually coped with the change.

To sum up, the journey of studying in the United States encompassed both

benefits and hardships, as the proverb describes, "No pain, no gain." Furthermore, if

these participants wanted to change their destinies, they had to have the willingness to

handle all the challenges and difficulties like the butterfly gives up being a caterpillar. In

other words, to benefit from studying in the United States, these participants had to also

undertake the hardships through the changes that occurred during their journey as

international students.

<div align="center">Concluding Comments Concerning Findings</div>

The journey of studying at institutions of higher education helped these

participants discover their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats so that they

were able to utilize the obstacles or difficulties as opportunities to empower them to

continue to learn, develop, and transform. In other words, through the process of the

many disorienting dilemmas and challenges, these participants gave up their prior

insufficient frames of reference and habits of mind and replaced them with a set of more

objective and effective perspectives in order to re-connect to themselves and others. The way these eighteen international students interpreted the processes of their struggles, reflections, realizations, and transformations not only was very tangible, but was also very personal. They each went through a unique process of change resulting in transformation. From their journey these participants were not as they were before they came, nor would they revert to the old way. As a result, at the end of their journeys, they had transformed in one way or another. Some, in fact were able to say that their journey was not just a degree; it is life itself. It is a journey of discovering who they truly are in such a way as to be in the world authentically.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussions: Transformation Through Cultural Crossing

'Life is a promise; fulfill it.'

~Mother Theresa

Studying at American universities forces international students to confront profound linguistic and cultural challenges, opening them to the possibilities of learning and transformation. The new cultural and living environment prompts them to see their realities differently, to reflect on their struggles, and to achieve some form of accommodation. As pronounced by Mother Theresa, these students must embrace change in order to meet their learning goals. During the process, they meet new friends, develop new response patterns and often assume a new standard of living. For some, it means the development of a whole new way of living and the possibility of unprecedented personal and professional growth. Four major processes, related to these themes of decision, confrontation, navigation, and development in the United States, identified above, were drawn from the research findings and will be addressed in the following sections. These processes include the journey, evolving and transforming, and being and becoming.

The Journey

The research findings reveal that these eighteen participants have been undergoing momentous internal and external fluctuations before and during their sojourns in the United States. This journey usually begins long before their actual date of arrival and is initiated by one or more of five major motives, as outlined in the Chapter Four, leading them to study in the United States.

In addition, once they arrive in the United States, they are situated in a disequilibrium situation in which they experience turbulences as they confront changes, challenges, and difficulties. Their initiatives of studying in a foreign land force them to evolve non-linearly. Some participants change their learning focus from learning for degrees to learning for the sake of knowledge, while others shift their vocations to other directions. Indeed, this journey, to these eighteen participants, is an evolving learning, developing, and transforming process. The impacts that the journey has brought forth to these participants cannot be estimated. To better illustrate how their journeys begin and proceed, three aspects—the ending, the new life, and the new space—are addressed as follows.

The Ending

In terms of the way in which these participants began their journeys in the United States, Mary Oliver's (1986) poem, The Journey, captures the emotional turbulence that they typically undergo long before arriving.

> One day you finally knew
> what you had to do, and began,
> though the voices around you
> kept shouting
> their bad advice—
> though the whole house
> began to tremble
> and you felt the old tug
> at your ankles.
> "Mend my life!"
> each voice cried.
> You knew what you had to do,
> though the wind pried
> with its stiff fingers
> at the very foundations, though their melancholy
> was terrible.

It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do—
determined to save
the only life that you could save. (p. 38-39)

As shown, the poem gives some sense of these participants' discomfort and

yearnings that resulted in their leaving their respective countries. These participants have

let go of the way their lives used to be in their home countries and have entered into a

neutral status to prepare them for undertaking a new chapter of their lives. In addition,

the research findings reveals the five major concerns that preceded their decisions to go

abroad: (1) the desire to receive a quality education, (2) the hope of professional

advancement, (3) the recognition of a time for change, (4) the need to fulfill their

family's expectations or childhood dreams, and (5) the determination to escape from

oppression in their home countries. These concerns match the motives found in the

research of other scholars who investigated this phenomenon (Arthur, 2004; Barker,

1997; Garrod, & Davis, 1999; Lewthwaite, 1996; McNamara & Harris, 1997). Finally,

these individuals were motivated by a deep sense of longing to break through the existing

boundaries, both visible and invisible, in order to study in the United States. Their decisions of studying in the States reflect their ambitions to navigate their own destinies.

Accordingly, it is instructive to consider another perspective: these students were also selected by American universities on the basis of intellectual, cultural exchange and economic benefits and concerns (Altbach, 1991, Bohm, Davis, Meares & Pearce, 2002). As indicated in Chapter One, during the academic year of 2005 and 2006 the total economic contribution in the United States from international students was $13.49 billion (Institution of International Education, 2006b). There were 564, 766 international students enrolled in American universities in 2005/06 (Institution of International Education, 2006a). This number contributed 3.9 % of the total U.S. enrollment. As shown, having international students around not only increases U.S. economic profits, but also enhances diversity on and off campus. Therefore, this journey can be viewed as a set of win-win collaborations between the students and the American universities, including their faculties, domestic students, and surrounding communities. Just as these participants are changed by immersion in a new country and culture, so too do they influence their adopted places.

The New Life

In an unfamiliar physical and socio-cultural environment, everything around these participants not only was new and different in a positive or negative way, but also challenged their cultural and habitual ways of thinking and responding. As described in Chapter Four, ever since arriving in the States, these participants have experienced various challenges and difficulties, most related to linguistic hindrances and cultural differences. The need to communicate with others in English brought to these

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participants the recognition of their linguistic barriers, but not so, at least initially, of their linguistic potentials. They noticed a feeling of inferiority in relation to the American students simply because they could not use English in the same manner as the domestic students did. The linguistic challenges plus a lack of background knowledge regarding American culture and the educational system required them to spend extra time and effort figuring out what to say and how to behave, both on and off campus. The above linguistic and cultural struggles these participants have been undergoing correspond to scholars' research findings (Arthur, 2004; Coward, 2003; Foster, 1997; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Furnham, 1997; Gonzalez, 2004; Harris, 2003; Lewthwaite, 1996; Mata-Galan, 2003). Those scholars similarly found that lacking background knowledge about American academic culture and social norms, international students, as second language learners, experienced linguistic barriers and culture shock especially during the classroom learning. Therefore, were it not for their willingness to learn, and expectations of improvement, they could have easily been overwhelmed.

At first, they tended to pay more attention to what they did not have or did not know than to their general ability to use the language. Indeed, their perceived shortcomings became the source of their motivation to learn and to change. After all, they displayed enormous courage and desire by taking the risks to break free from the geographic, psychological, and socio-cultural boundaries of their home countries to study in a foreign country, while many others had chosen to stay in their comfort zones back home. It takes time, as well as vast dedication and confidence, to become a successful international student. In Chapter Four, it was noted that these eighteen participants were able to speak more than two languages, including their native language, dialects, and

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other foreign languages. To sixteen out of eighteen participants, English was their second language. They struggled with issues of not being able to express themselves and their ideas accurately and freely while communicating with others. Even though Paul and Wayne's native language was English, the official language in their home countries, their thick accents hindered their linguistic abilities of being understood by others.

In addition, the need to maintain full-time student status (to pass certain required credit hours) added to these participants' sense of being emotionally and physically overwhelmed. Some participants reported that they were too busy in completing all the assigned readings and homework to even digest what they were learning. Although these participants were willing to spend extra study hours, their unfamiliarity with American culture and the educational system places them at an enormous disadvantage with respect to the material they were expected to learn. In addition being unable to express their ideas or ask questions effectively during classroom interactions or in regular communications led to frustration, stress, anxiety and insecurity. They suffered both physical distress, including physical symptoms (such as stomachache, insomnia, and anxiety) and psychological distress (such as depression, low self-esteem, and lacking confidence). This suffering made them constantly question their abilities and the likelihood of completing their degrees. They also worried about the possibility of dropping out due to physical illness or mental breakdown, as well as about the well-being of their families back home. To conclude, changes and challenges led these participants to experience uncertainties and fluctuations that demanded that they learn American culture, develop their characteristics and potentials, and undertake a transformative learning process.

The New Space

The process of adapting or assimilating to U.S. culture led these participants to a new life circumstance of being neither fully Americanized (fully integrated or accustomed to the U.S. culture and society), nor pure citizens of their home countries. Among the differences existing between the home and the host countries, between these participants and the American people, Michelle and her family found some similarities. Despite language, cultural, and geographic differences, Michelle noted, ". . . the New York City is just like Seoul in Korea, [a] very crowded, noisy, and unfriendly city. . . . We could not find any difference between Korea and New York." In addition, Yumiko pointed out that at the beginning of her sojourn, she tried very hard to learn the differences between Japan and the United States, between herself and others. Consequently, focusing on the differences distracted Yumiko from recognizing the similarities between her and the others. Yumiko concluded that it was the appearances and ways of thinking and expressing that made human beings different from each other. In fact, whoever she ran into in the United States were still human beings and human beings shared more similarities than differences.

Both Yumiko's and Michelle's experiences point out that being an international student give them various opportunities to see themselves through the eyes of their American counterparts. They sensed their two statuses—as a Japanese or Korean and as an international student in the United States. Although they have sensed their two different cultural selves and identities, it does not necessarily mean that their two selves must be in conflict. What matters is how they handle their dual selves or identities and under which cultural context—the home culture, the host culture, or in between.

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Furthermore, globalization has broken the boundaries among nations. In order to obtain needed natural resources, business opportunities, and other economic concerns, each nation competes with all the others. At the same time, each nation has to collaborate with the others to secure its best interests (such as fighting against terrorists, natural disasters, global warming, and diseases) to keep the earth alive for incoming generations. It is clear that competition is in conflict with collaboration; however, in the twenty-first century competition and collaboration also coexist among nations.

The use of English in the American cultural context may exclude people of other linguistic orientations and cultures from participating in the community; however, these participants were able to find ways to connect and relate to the culture and their American counterparts. For instance, Kohn has developed a close relationship with his advisor. To Kohn, his advisor has been "a good mentor and good coach" guiding him from master's program to a Ph.D. degree. The advisor is also a good friend of Kohn's, who is willing to tell him "what is good to do." In Carl's case, his host family not only has brought him to experience and enjoy various American cultural events, but also has helped him manage his wife's medical crisis at a hospital emergency room. As stated in Chapter Four, Ann's friendship and support eases Nan's homesick and isolation of being alone in a foreign country. With Ann's encouragement, Nan has started to befriend other Americans. Indeed, the above stories serve as evidences that these participants (Nan, Carl, and Kohn) and their American counterparts (Ann, Carl's host family, and Kohn's advisor) have successfully created a new space that has enabled them to break the limitations of linguistic hindrances and cultural differences to relate and connect with each other.

The new space that both these participants and their American counterparts have created is not located purely in the context of the American culture with the usage of English to communicate, nor in these participants' home cultures and native languages; rather, this space has taken both cultures and languages into account. English is one of the tools for communication, while culture is the by-product of human interactions (including communication). Human beings can always find ways to communicate with each other. For example, Carl uses sign language and gestures to support him while using English to communicate with his friends (both Americans and other international students). Thus, outside the space of *your culture/your language* and mine, there is a space that we can all meet to appreciate the similarities and to learn from the differences. Indeed, the journey of studying in the United States fosters these participants and their American counterparts to create a new space and form a new frame of reference so that all the different voices have an opportunity to be expressed and heard. In this new space, people of different nationalities, races, genders, and religions are all partakers/sharers. In this shared space, these international students need not become fully Americanized to fit in the American society during their sojourns. They can maintain their unique cultural backgrounds while becoming accustomed to American culture. The domestic students and local communities have opportunities to see the beauty of diverse cultures and customs from these sojourners. It seems to be that the similarities that bind us together as human beings, while at the same time the differences stimulate us to keep learning and improving.

To sum up, these participants' journeys in the United States begin with an ending of their inner fluctuations and personal turmoil in their home countries. The new life in

the States then forces them to deal with various challenges and difficulties, as outlined in

Chapter Four. They learn, develop, and transform themselves to build new relationships

with their selves, others, and the environment. The efforts both these participants and

their American counterparts have put in to befriend each other enable them to create a

new space within to connect and relate. Thus, the journey of studying in the United

States not only helps these participants make a difference in their own lives, but also

impacts people around them in a positive manner.

Evolving and Transforming

When the springs dry up and the fish are left stranded on the ground, they

spew each other with moisture and wet each other down with spit—but it

would be much better if they could forget each other in the rivers and

lakes. Instead of praising Yao and condemning Chieh, it would be better

to forget both of them and transform yourself with the way.

-- Chuang Tzu (1968, p. 80)

The act of confronting challenges and difficulties placed these participants in

disorienting dilemmas in which their prior cultured selves and operational frameworks no

longer work at American universities and in local communities. Those disorienting

dilemmas not only broke their life routines apart leading them to chaos, confusion, and

uncertainty, but also shook their belief and value systems of how things are and should

be. To reclaim the ownership of their lives, these participants undertook a process of

learning, development, and transformation during their cultural crossing. This

phenomenon echoes scholars' (Arthur, 2004; Bennett, 1999; Coward, 2003; Grabove,

1997; Gonzalez, 2004; Zeszotarski, 2003) assertions that studying in a foreign country

requires these participants to modify or transform their identities and perspectives. Two components are discussed in this section including the need for transformative learning and perspective transformation.

The Need for Transformative Learning

Studying and living in the United States did not simply *add* another chapter to the lives of these participants, but changed and transformed each participant in all manner of visible and invisible ways too complex to be detailed. Lacking a point of reference, they did not have anything to hold onto and to make them feel firm and certain while facing each life encounter in the United States. These participants constantly struggle with such issues as *Am I doing what is right? Am I doing enough? Am I talking with correct English in the right manner?* Those struggles drove them to live in another world, which neither their parents, relatives, and friends back home, nor their professors, classmates, and local communities in the United States could imagine. Even though these participants made friends with other international students and Americans to support them during their cultural crossing, they still needed to face the reality that their prior frames of reference no longer worked in their new life circumstances. The research findings revealed that most participants tended to stay close to students from their home countries or other countries because these were the people who could better understand their struggles and needs. However, being in the same or similar situation with limited, means, these international students did not have a lot of relevant resources (information or 'know-how') to share even though they did their best to support each other. It brings to mind the powerful image of the fish left stranded on the ground trying to wet each other by spitting. While this kind of human quality, a treasure that can only be found

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during one's 'down' time, each of these participants still has to live within his or her given life circumstance.

The research findings reverberate with Chuang Tzu's notion of transformation and more specifically, Mezirow's (1991, 2000) theory of transformative learning that these eighteen participants have been undergoing during their sojourns. This process includes: (1) observing and examining their surroundings, (2) reflecting upon their feelings and actions, (3) engaging in dialogues with others to challenge and assess their beliefs and assumptions, (4) making friends with Americans and other international students for intellectual and cultural exchanges, (5) thinking through their decisions and integrating their experiences, and (6) modifying or transforming their beliefs and assumptions. Turning to the study participants, because of individual differences in terms of their respective ways of thinking, personality characteristics (such as introvert or extrovert), and each given life circumstances, each has gained differently from each step of the above-mentioned transformative learning process. For example, Sarah described herself as a quiet and shy person. During the past seven years she changed significantly and became more assertive and active in learning and in life. Because her personality tended to be rather introverted, whenever confronting problems, she spent more time observing and examining her surroundings, as well as to reflecting upon her feelings and actions. Different from Sarah's case, Maya paid more attention to engaging in dialogue and befriending Americans and other international students for intellectual and cultural exchanges to help her manage problems and difficulties. With a social work training background, Ling focused more on reflecting upon her feelings and actions to help her think through her decisions and integrate her experiences. Ling believed that

transformation was a process of changing, negotiating, and compromising. She viewed herself in the stage of modifying and extending her beliefs and assumptions. In sum, these participants' stories point to transformative learning as an ongoing and recurring process.

Learning and Transformation

As addressed in Chapter Four, these eighteen participants came to the United States for obtaining quality education to determine their destinies; however, confronting difficulties and disequilibrium led them to undergo a process of learning and transformation. For instance, studying at American university, Nan has experienced very different processes of learning and development. Nan pointed out, "The biggest change came from my biggest mistake." The process of pondering what went wrong fostered her ability to change and grow. Through the process of transformative learning, Nan was able to manage her grief of losing her mother, support her father for needed medical care, and complete her doctoral study in summer 2006.

Furthermore, Michelle's attitude and perspective toward her Christian religion has changed during the process of observing and interacting with members of her Korean church in the States. She is no longer against the religion but appreciates and follows its teaching. In other words, not only has Michelle transformed her perspective to shift her focus from self-serving to serving others, but she has also started to help people around her overcome their problems and difficulties.

As described above and also in Chapter Four, these participants were standing at the edge of home and host cultures through their own body, mind, and spirit. They were eager to find balance to avoid falling apart in a foreign land. They were leaning out.

They were listening. They were observing. They were wondering and thinking. They were doing whatever they were capable of and trying to find a space to connect their uniqueness—their linguistic, cultural, and historical background—to the differences—the host country's linguistic, cultural, and historical living environment. As a result, to adjust successfully from the home culture to the host culture required these participants to undergo a transformative learning process.

Perspective Transformation

The findings revealed that for these participants, as sojourners, their learning and development in the United States were ongoing and evolving process. The challenge or challenges (problem or problems) these participants confronted intertwined with their learning, development, and transformation and also reoccurred spirally. To illustrate, a given challenge or problem might force them to undergo a process of learning and development, in the course of which they would extend or modify their frames of reference and habits of mind, in order to regain a balance or a stable state. Once their pre-existing frames of reference and habits of mind could not manage the given challenge or problem, they had to transform their frames of reference and habits of mind in order to persist and continue the journey. This process reoccurred spirally each time when they (1) encountered a new challenge or challenges, (2) learn new knowledge and skills or develop their characteristics and competences, or (3) transform their frames of reference and habits of mind (perspectives). Furthermore, for some participants (e.g., Paul), their perspective transformations were a long, cumulative process. For others (e.g., Maya), it was evoked by one specific event or incident. These participants' processes of learning and development are better portrayed by a conceptual schema of learning, development,

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and transformation (see Figure 5-1). In this regard, Paul, and Maya's cases served as examples to better illustrate this phenomenon as follows.

New Challenge or Challenges

A Challenge or Challenges

Transformation or
Transformative Learning

Learning & Development
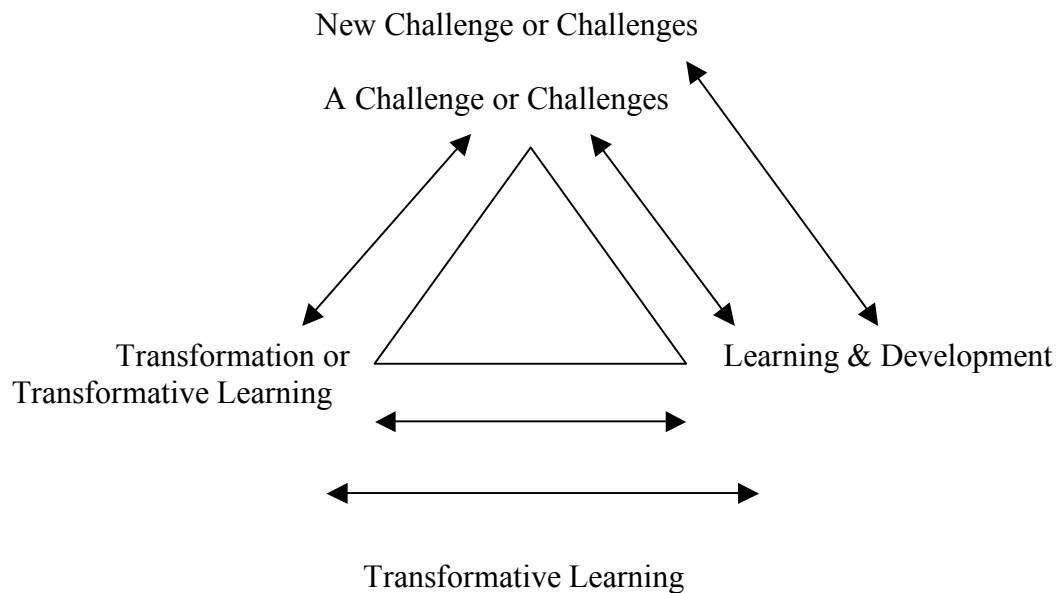
Transformative Learning

Figure 5-1: The Conceptual Schema of Learning, Development, and Transformation

In the case of Paul

Paul's perspective transformation was a long, cumulative process. Paul came to the States in 1992 as a refugee. He began his undergraduate study at a theological school and hoped to become a minister in Liberia. He started his first master's degree in 1998; at that time the civil war was still going on in Liberia. That made Paul ponder, "what effort am I able to make a difference?" Reflecting upon the history of his country, Paul found that both racial issues and religious differences have caused Liberians suffering from countless fights. If he returned to Liberia as a minister to impose the Christian religion, he would be in the fight again. Thus, he started to think more critically about his country's problems and his future that brought him to search for alternatives from other countries' histories.

Being educated in the United States not only gave Paul the opportunity to learn how democracy worked in the U.S., but also enabled him to view his home county from an outsider's viewpoint. Many people, including Paul's family members, were killed during the civil war in Liberia. Grief brought him to think initially about revenge. But being in the States enabled him to think more deeply and wisely. Paul decided to major in education because as an educator, he would be more accepted by Liberian people than was he a minister. Besides, if violence did not solve the racial and religion problems existing in his country, then perhaps the alternative of non-violence was needed, to help people appreciate the various differences. Becoming an educator would allow him opportunities to initiate educational reform to promote inclusion and tolerance. Paul admitted that studying both Gandhi and Martin Luther King's civil right movements and how they approached this issue changed his perspective. Reading these two men's stories and works reinforced his decision of becoming an educator.

In addition, Paul came from a cultural background where women were not valued as equal to men. For example, women could not go to school to receive an education. Most men had more than two wives. Paul's father, a leader of his tribe, had eight wives. If he had not come to the United States and reach up to this level as a doctoral candidate at his university, he would never have thought about the issue related to how women have been treated, especially in his country. Paul proudly addressed that he has changed completely because of the knowledge and experiences gained from studying and living in the United States. Therefore, "try[ing] to allow that the equality across the broad" in his country becomes Paul's ultimate goal of his life.

As illustrate, Paul transformed his perspective through reading, reflecting, critical thinking, and modeling the ideas of Martin Luther King and Gandhi. His perspective transformation did not happen over night; in contrast, it was a long, evolving, and cumulative process, whereby his values, approach, and attitude in relation to education and human rights were also changed. Before, he was thinking about avenging his dead family members. After, Paul came to value diversity and he tried to embrace differences, including the difference represented by those who killed his family. In addition, Paul's approach to finding a way to serve his country has been changed from studying theology in order to become a minister to majoring in education to become an educator. Paul was now in the last stage of his doctoral study. After earning his Ph.D. in the United States, he planned to return to Liberia to work on educational reform. Lastly, studying the U.S. civil rights movement transformed his attitude toward human rights in his home country, especially which of women's rights. Reflecting upon Liberian women's destinies (including his mother, stepmothers, and sisters) and thinking about his daughter's future, Paul understood the importance of equality and determined to work to emancipate Liberian women from oppression. As a result, Paul started to research Liberian female leaders to help him better supported the women's rights movement in Liberia.

In the case of Maya

Maya's perspective transformation was evoked by an Introduction to Philosophy class. As was mentioned in Chapter Four, Maya came to the United States to major in mass communications or journalism in order to fulfill her childhood dream of working with media. Because of the linguistic hindrance and cultural differences she encountered, Maya believed that no matter how hard she tried, she could never become a good student.

However, during her junior year at the university, she enrolled in her first philosophy class. All the subjects discussed in that philosophy class not only fascinated her, but also related to issues that she has been questioning for years. She was very surprised and excited by the fact that there were people who studied those issues. Maya explained, ". . . since then my attitude toward the schooling [has] completely changed, I was not studying just to get a degree, I was like studying for the sake of topic and the subject. I was very, very happy." Without a doubt, taking the Introduction to Philosophy course transformed Maya's perspective and attitude toward learning. It also made her study harder than ever at the library just to learn more and to be good at it. Because of this philosophy course, Maya even changed her educational objective from mass communication to philosophy. She earned her undergraduate degree in Philosophy in 1997.

Although studying philosophy made Maya happy, she had a hard time to identifying a job relevant to philosophy either in the United States or in Japan, and this difficulty prompted her to undergo another process of transformative learning. After one year working in Japan, Maya chose to pursue a master's degree in the United States to enable her to build a career that she would enjoy. To apply for graduate school, she not only needed to know what she wanted to major in, but she also had to improve her grade point average (GPA). Thus, after returning to the States, Maya began another undergraduate program in psychology and soon decided to double major in both psychology and sociology. Knowing her goal of getting into graduate college, Maya studied extremely hard everyday at the library. Maya explained why she chose to study psychology and sociology.

> Philosophy is [the] doubt of the meaning of the term, of the love, of the knowledge . . . how you get your knowledge, where you get your

knowledge. And that's also my interest, epistemology. That's why I went
from there to psychology, cognition psychology.
. . .
. . . when I major[ed] in psychology in cognition, I started to get interested
in developmental psychology and social psychology. That makes me
switch to sociology, which is very, very related.

Maya's story demonstrated how a given challenge (the first philosophy course)
drew her to learn, develop, and transform her values and attitude from studying for a
degree to studying for the sake of knowledge. The more she studied philosophy, the
more learning interests she developed and the more she appreciated about further options
for her study. In other words, Maya's perspective transformation recursively led her to
discover her learning interests in psychology and to develop her passion in sociology.
From fall 2002 to spring 2007, Maya has earned another two bachelors' degrees and one
master's degree. She recently completed all her course work for doctoral study in
sociology and became a doctoral candidate. She was also preparing to teach one
undergraduate course fall 2007.

To reiterate, undertaking a transformative learning process is essential for Maya
and Paul, as well as these participants to adapt to changes and challenges of studying in
the United States. This process has also led some participants to transform their
perspectives. As illustrated above, to Maya and Paul, studying in the States transformed
their frames of reference. Their values, beliefs, and attitudes have been shaped, as has
also the way they see themselves and the world.

Being and Becoming

An authentic person is not a vessel.

An authentic person has a profound understanding of the truth of being,

while a petty person understands only the practical utilities of things.

-- Confucius

Theories related to adult learning and development provide frameworks to understand these participants' journeys of studying in the States; however, there is no correct or rigid process for each individual to be and become who she or he is, especially for these eighteen research participants who are crossing cultures trying to determine their destinies and discovering how to live meaningful lives. As Confucius proposed, mankind is not like a vessel that can function only in a certain manner. On the contrary, human beings are gifted to learn, develop, and transform themselves in response to the given environment and the stage of their being. Human beings not only are eager to find their true colors, but they are also inclined to evolve and transform their selves to live a life fully. Their desires and eagerness mirror Confucius's notion that "an authentic person has a profound understanding of the truth of being" and that such a person will continue to put her or his efforts into being and becoming authentic.

The research findings reveal that the phenomenon of these eighteen participants' sojourns in the United States is centered on cultural crossing. It is also an evolving journey that engages them in a process of learning, development, and transformation. Scholars (Cranton, 2002, 2003, 2006; Cranton & Roy, 2003; Kegan, 1982; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow & Associates, 2000) insist that adult learning and development is a continuous and lifelong process. Kegan (1982) further proposes

that this development is a process of an evolving self and can be best described by "a spiral or a helix" (p. 108). With further reference to the study findings, during the data analysis process, a conceptual schema of being and becoming began to take shape; it not only illustrate the changes and growth that these eighteen participants undergo in the United States, but also echoes these scholars' assertions. In the following section, the researcher first introduces this schema of being and becoming and then illustrates it with Kohn's story—the schema of Kohn's being and becoming. The section ends with a brief summary.

A Conceptual Schema of Being and Becoming

Out of the research findings, a conceptual schema of being and becoming (see Figure 5-2) began to take shape, concerning these participants' change and growth during the process of cultural crossing. It is introduced below and is illustrated following with Kohn's story of his own being and becoming. This schema of being and becoming is non-linear, evolving in nature, and addresses more than one dimension depending upon each respective participant's unique life encounters in the United States.

As shown in Figure 5-2, each dimension represents each participant's learning and development while studying in the United States in relation to personal, interpersonal, socio-cultural and environmental, academic, professional, and spiritual arenas, respectively. Because of individual differences, each participant's schema might contain four dimensions (personal, interpersonal, socio-cultural and environmental, and academic) to six dimensions (personal, interpersonal, social-cultural and environmental, academic, professional, and spiritual).
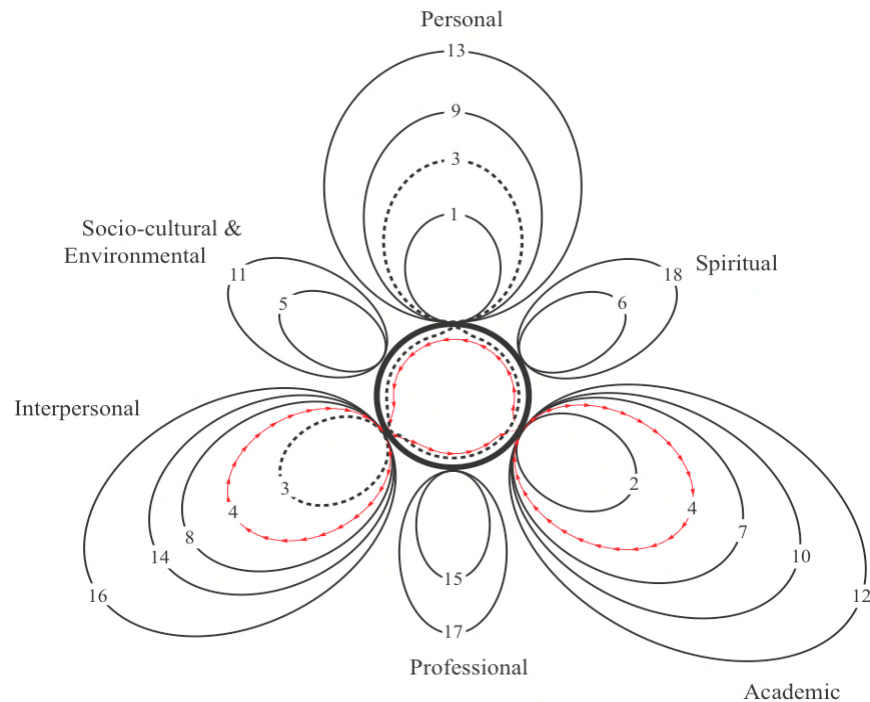
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Figure 5-2 The Conceptual Schema of Being and Becoming

Secondly, in this schema, the 'core' represents where each participant is and who she or he is. It is the base from which each participant can learn, develop, and transform. The core also contains each participant's unique characteristics, strengths, beliefs, value systems, and prior life and learning experiences that sustain him or her during the journey. Those characteristics and strengths include features of initiative, ambition, goal-orientation, determination, positive attitude, perseverance, self-motivation, over achieving, critical thinking, and never give up.

Thirdly, in this schema, each trajectory within each dimension represents a different process in accomplishing its learning need or a piece of a developmental task. The first trajectory (parabolic curve in shape similar to a flower's petal) symbolizes each participant undertaking the first learning and developmental process in accomplishing his

or her learning need or a piece of one developmental task. The subsequent trajectories embrace the prior one and extend widely to carry on different or new learning needs or developmental tasks. The number of trajectories of this pattern will continue to increase because of the experiences of change, learning, and development, and these experiences are represented numerically. Usually, the first trajectory is short. Because of limited knowledge and experiences, an individual usually takes small steps to try at the beginning. The more an individual learns and develops, the more tasks he or she undertakes each time (i.e., more and longer trajectories will result).

Fourthly, because learning and development is a continuous process (Levinson, 1980; Mezirow, 1991; Riegel, 1975, 1977), this schema will not only keep extending horizontally further in size, but also keep shifting its directions from one dimension to another. It does not matter how far this schema is extending and in what dimension it is shifting, each trajectory (parabolic curve) always centers in the core (characteristics, strengths, and prior experiences that sustains a person as a unique human being). In other words, the core serves as the base or platform of the schema. Each trajectory launches from the core to encompass learning and development of new knowledge, skills, and attitude. Once its particular mission is completed, the trajectory not only travels back to the core, but also circles around the core repeatedly to reorganize and integrate that specific learning or developmental objective with the core.

Fifthly, two circumstances will lead a trajectory to travel in a figure-eight manner, circling among two or more dimensions and the core. One is that the individual undertakes a set of learning objectives or developmental tasks; another is that one learning objective or developmental task intertwines with two or more dimensions.

Lastly, certain challenges or dilemmas (including accumulated challenges or dilemmas) require the individual to transform his or her habitual ways of thinking and doing things. In this case, the individual's schema is pushed to shift from its current level to a higher one in order to continue evolving. In other words, the individual's long-held beliefs and value system cannot handle the confronted challenges or dilemma. He or she has to transform her or his frame of reference and habit of mind in the direction of greater complexity. Thus, a new core is formed, which embraces the prior core and the prior entire schema, allowing a new (second) schema to develop. As with the first schema, the new or second schema is also evolving in a non-linear way, but located in a different dimension. Kohn's journey of being and becoming is detailed to better evidence this schema as follows.

Schema of being and becoming as illustrated by Kohn

During the past ten years, Kohn, a Chinese Malaysian, has confronted various challenges and difficulties prompting him to learn, develop, and transform his perspectives to be who he is now. Kohn came to the States in July 1997 at the age of nineteen. He has earned three different degrees (a bachelor's, a master's, and a Ph.D.) from an American university in the Mid-Western United States from 1997 to 2005. He is now working as a consultant in civil engineering at a private company under H1 visa. Twenty-nine learning or developmental tasks (trajectories) and two perspective transformations have been identified and verified through interviews with Kohn that reveal the process of Kohn's being and becoming in the United States as an international student. A schema with two forms emerged from the research findings that illustrates Kohn's journey of being and becoming who he is while studying in the United States—

Schema Forms I and II of Kohn's being and becoming (see Figure 5-3 and 5-4). Schema Form I (see Figure 5-3) shows Kohn's learning and developmental process before experiencing his first perspective transformation, while Schema Form II (see Figure 5-4) shows how Kohn's being and becoming proceeds after his first perspective transformation has occurred.

Kohn transferred to a university in the United States in July 1997 at the age of nineteen. Before coming to the States, Kohn studied at a two-year college that specialized in preparing students to complete their undergraduate education in foreign (English-speaking) countries. Therefore, he did not have a problem with learning and communicating in English. However, once he arrived in the United States, he found that he had difficulty getting his ideas and thoughts across to others. Speaking English with a pronounced accent and talking too fast caused people in the States not to understand him. Kohn felt frustrated, and he had to make adjustments. Further, studying in the States, he encountered a totally different teaching-learning approach. He found himself enjoying two-way interaction more than passively listening to the instructor's lecture. In this regard, he felt he had made the right choice in studying in the United States.

Kohn made many personal, interpersonal, and financial adjustments during his sojourn in the States. Surrounded by people from different cultural backgrounds and with different nationalities, on the one hand, Kohn started to reach out and befriend both international and domestic students to learn more about American culture and to help him cope with his cross-cultural transition. On the other hand, he also needed to learn how to interact with professors. Being away from home for the very first time, Kohn missed his home country very much, especially the foods and the cultural events. To ease his

homesickness and to satisfy his appetite, he had to learn how to cook. In addition, learning in an American university demanded that he participated in classroom discussions and group projects. Those two things were new to him. He had to learn how to build relationships with his classmates and teammates in order to complete the assignments. The more Kohn interacted with domestic students, the worse he felt about the U.S. college students' drinking culture. Kohn could not find any fun in drinking to get drunk. Although Kohn befriended many Americans, as a sojourner, it was hard to feel at home in a foreign land. Linguistic hindrance and cultural differences made Kohn feel lonely from time to time and also felt left out by his American counterparts. Meanwhile, the tuition fees kept increasing; that added an extra burden to his family. Kohn had to find ways to better manage his limited budget.

Early work experiences played an important role in shaping Kohn's perspectives regarding professional assertiveness in the workplace and the ultimate goals of education. In 1997, Kohn found his first job working as an undergraduate research assistant at his college to earn some pocket money. In Malaysia, Kohn had never worked before. His parents provided everything for him. Working at a lab signaled the beginning of a journey toward Kohn's transformation. Kohn recalled that in the beginning of his sojourn, all he tried to do was to get his undergraduate degree. He did not think about going to graduate school. As a research assistant, he was expected to be responsible for his work. He started to learn how to work under his professor's instruction and also to read memos and textbooks. Fear of being seen as a stupid person had prohibited him from asking questions when running into problems at the lab. After making a few mistakes, Kohn learned to overcome his fear and to ask questions. His professor also

taught him to think more critically while conducting an experiment. In addition, working

at the lab gave Kohn many opportunities to do new things. That also got him interested

in doing research and in going to graduate school. Indeed, this research assistantship

enabled Kohn to transform his frame of reference and shaped his values and attitudes in

many respects. The goal of education, for Kohn, was about getting an 'A' in class. He

used to study to get a degree. The new Kohn valued learning for the sake of knowledge

and for discovering something new. He wanted to learn more and to think critically

more. As a result, he became more open-minded, more patient, and more understanding

in his interaction with others. Kohn acknowledged that he had a short temper and got

irritated and agitated easily. However, working at the lab, doing experiments, and

interacting with his professor and other fellow students trained him to be patient, to

become less judgmental, to learn to accept people as they were, and to reason why people

behaved in certain ways (see Figure 5-3).

Kohn found his professional affirmation from being accepted into the graduate

program, where he experienced multiple new roles, personally as well as professionally.

Kohn had received his undergraduate degree in spring 1999 and started to work on a

master's degree the following fall. He continued to work at the lab with a graduate

assistantship. In 2000, he met his girlfriend (an international student from Indonesia who

later became his wife) and began to join church activities with her. In December 2000,

he earned his master's degree in civil engineering. In Spring 2001, Kohn passed the

qualifying exams and was officially accepted by the university as a Ph.D. student. Kohn

recalled, "The moment I knew I passed [the exam], that's my credibility." As a doctoral

student with a teaching assistantship, Kohn played multiple roles: a doctoral student at

the college, a researcher at the lab, and an instructor in the classroom. Those roles required him to voice his opinions and speak up for himself. In 2003, Kohn married his girlfriend, a Christian, and started to attend Sunday worship regularly with his wife. Even though Kohn was not a Christian, he was willing to learn about different religions. Attending Sunday worship regularly also changed his values system and life style.

In spite of successes in his career and family, Kohn sensed a growing unease about his place in the world. Being in the United States for more than six years (from 1997 to 2003) and having built his nuclear family, Kohn found that he had lost his sense of belonging to either Malaysia or the United States, especially during the holiday season. Because of cultural differences, Kohn felt left out by both home and host countries. For example, when Kohn's original family was celebrating some cultural events in Malaysia, he was in the States and missed those events. When people in the States were celebrating Thanksgiving or Christmas, he felt those were not part of who he was growing up. Kohn shared that he had to learn how to manage the feeling of "hanging in between, not sure which culture or which society or norm you belong to." Meanwhile, becoming a husband also changed his life. There were duties and responsibilities to fulfill. He also needed to compromise and learn how to cooperate with his wife.

After Kohn passed his general exams in spring 2004, his advisor encouraged him to get some real world working experience to enhance his professional competence. He got an internship opportunity at a private company under the curriculum practical training program to work off campus. As a result, Kohn worked twenty hours a week at the company, taught lab classes, and wrote his dissertation. Kohn earned his Ph.D. in May 2005 and got his current job the following month.

During the past ten years, Kohn has earned three different degrees (a bachelor's, a master's, and a Ph.D.) from the same university. Time did not only age Kohn, it also transformed him into manhood. He is no longer the boy who left his hometown to get a quality education in the United States. He is a married man working at a company as a consultant and living in a new custom-built house in the United States. He has also learned how to manage his finances to support his own family. Although he enjoys his life in the States, as the only son in his family, Kohn is still debating whether or not to move back to Malaysia to be with his parents. To Kohn, this journey of studying and living in the United States is a journey of being and becoming who and what he is.
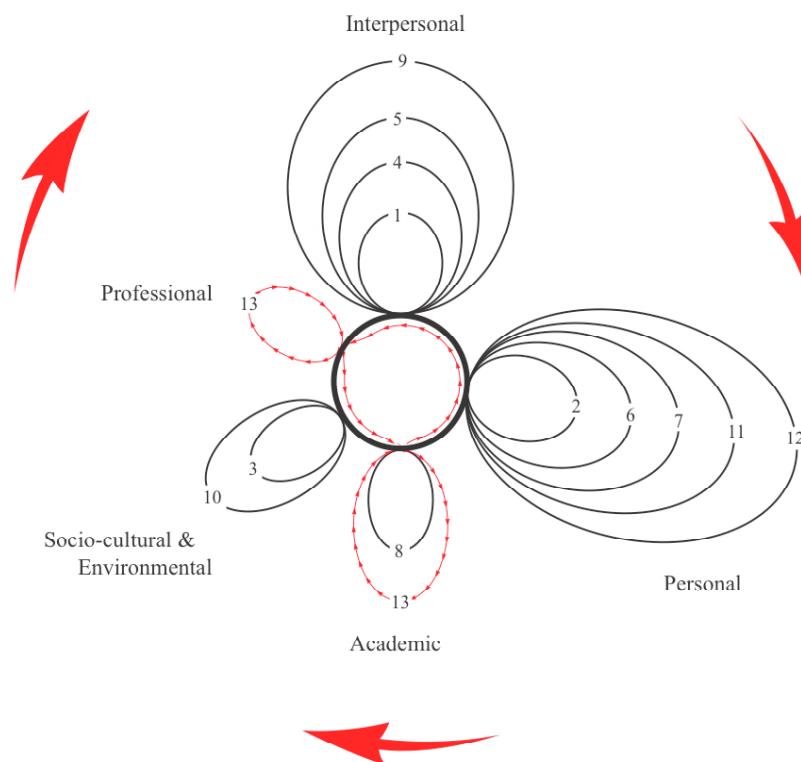

Figure: 5-3 Schema I of Kohn's Being and Becoming

Spectrum of milestone events Kohn encountered in the United States as found in the following descriptions: I—Personal, II—Interpersonal, III—Academic, V—Socio-cultural & Environmental, VI—Professional, and VII—Spiritual.

The chronological list of Kohn's journey of being and becoming in the United States before his first perspective transformation:

1. II—Communication problem: Having difficulty getting his point across to others

2. I—Linguistic barriers: Accent

3. V—Different teaching-learning approach: Two-way interaction, more practical, and not memorizing

4. II—Befriend others (international students, domestic students, and local comminutes)

5. II—Build relationships with professors

6. I—Homesick: Foods, culture, and so on

7. I—Learn how to cook

8. III—Classroom discussions and group project with people from totally different cultures

9. II—Build relationships with classmates and teammates for group projects

10. V—Culture shock: College students' drinking culture—drink to get drunk

11. I—Loneliness: Feeling of being left out by American counterparts

12. I—Financial burden: With assistantship hr is okay because there is no need to pay for tuition. He also learns how to manage budget.

13. III & VI—Undergraduate research assistantship in1997: It was his first job in the

United States and also in his life (working as an undergraduate research assistant

at a lab)

Perspective transformation:

    a.   Value change—from studying to earn a degree to learning for the sake of

        knowledge

    b.   Attitude change—becoming more patient and more open-minded while
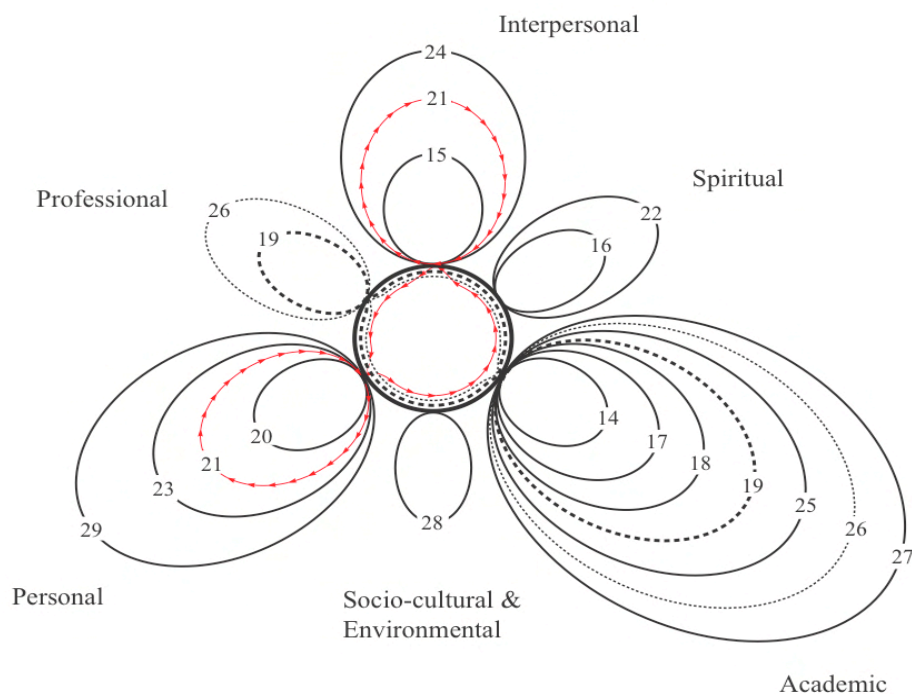
        interacting with others

Figure: 5-4 Schema II of Kohn's Being and Becoming

14. III—Earn his undergraduate degree in Spring, 1999

15. II—Meet his girlfriend (now his wife) at the university in 2000

16. VII—Join church activities with his girlfriend

17. III—Earn his master degree in December, 2000

18. III—Pass qualifying exams in Spring, 2001: He was officially accepted by the university as a Ph.D. student.

19. III & VI—Teaching assistantship

20. I—Stand up and speak up for himself: "It's okay to voice you opinion."

21. I & II—Get married in 2003

22. VII—Change life style: Attending Sunday worship regularly

23. I—Losing a sense of belonging to both sides (home and host countries)

24. II—Manage his marriage: Learning to compromise and cooperate with his wife

25. III—Pass the General Exam in Spring 2004

26. III & VI—Doing an internship off campus with a private company

27. III—Earn his Ph.D. in May 2005

28. V—Get his current job in July 2005

29. I—Learn to manage his finance: "I learn to allocate certain amount for tuition and basic expenses. Later, I learn how to spend my money wisely instead of impulsive buying . . ."

Compared with when he first arrived in the United States, Kohn now looks at both sides of things and thinks more positively. At the same time, he tries to learn from the negative side of each life encounter. Kohn recalled, "Before I felt a loss of belonging. But, right now I just look at the bright side." As shown, Kohn has experienced another perspective transformation.

Closing Statement

To reiterate, each life encounter in the United States calls upon these eighteen participants to demonstrate how much they know and how much they still need to learn. The findings show that each participant has his or her unique way of navigating his or her new life in the United States. However, the key to succeed in the journey is their ability to undertake a process of transformative learning and the courage to face changes and challenges. As a result, they have a chance to be and become who they are and become what they want to be.

CHAPTER SIX

Summary, Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Summary of the Study

We are sailing, we are sailing,

Home again cross the sea.

We are sailing stormy waters,

To be near you, to be free.

--Lyrics: Sailing (Rod Stewart, 1972)

This study investigated the experiences of international students at American universities and how these experiences affected their learning and development, as well as any long-term changes that might have accrued as a result. The research included an examination of (1) those factors that brought them to study in the United States, (2) the challenges and opportunities they encountered while here, (3) the personal and environmental factors that contributed to their adjustment and success in their new environment, and (4) the benefits and hardships of studying and living abroad, particularly in the United States.

The research design was qualitative in nature and included eighteen international students from seven different countries and eleven disciplines. Data was collected primarily from two in-depth interviews with each participant. The length of each interview varied from approximately one to five hours, depending on the individual responses. A purposive sampling method and a combination or mixed technique were selected to identify the research participants. Data was analyzed qualitatively, based on

interpretivism from the perspectives of adult learning and development, chaos and complexity theory, and transformational learning theory.

The research findings point to the importance of the 'cultural crossing' phenomenon and the four major themes identified in Chapter Four: (a) seizing opportunities to determine their destinies, (b) confronting difficulties and disequilibrium, (c) navigating between home and host cultures, and (d) being and becoming authentic. The journeys of these participants began with their determination to take on the educational challenges, and initiated their confrontations of the difficulties that included profound differences in language, culture, and the educational system. Both the journeys and the confrontations resulted in distress and disorientation that, in turn, led to change, development, and even transformation. These alterations were evident in both their personal and professional lives. The major elements that contributed to their adjustment and success were their personal capacities, relationships with others including their new living environments, and their capacity to engage in transformative learning. Indeed, their journeys in the United States echoed the song *Sailing*. These participants have been sailing cross the seas and stormy waters to be true to themselves, to be near others, and to be free.

Implications and Recommendations for Education

In dreams and in life, nothing is impossible.

-- Mamma, Italian Fortune Cookies Company

From the existing literature and other empirical studies to these participants' personal experiences, to succeed in this journey of studying in a foreign country not only requires these participants to put every effort they can into it, but also demands support

and assistance from many other people to make many impossible things possible. On the one hand, these participants' presence at American campuses adds multiple cultural dimensions that enrich the life of the citizens of the United States and makes American society more vivid. On the other hand, the given environment not only allows these participants to learn from American culture and from other international students' cultures, it also stimulates them to reflect upon their cultural identities enabling them to appreciate and question their own cultures. The benefits from intellectual, cultural, and economic exchanges between each of these participants and Americans can be maximized when these two parties collaborate with each other effectively. As the Italian Fortune Cookies Company's advertisement asserted, "In dreams and in life, nothing is impossible." To make challenging things become possible, the implications for practice are provided with respect to educators and institutions of higher education; faculty, staff members, and classmates; international students; and both the host and the home countries.

For Institutions of Higher Education

After recruiting international students to study in the United States, most American universities offer various services to help these students cope with the cross-cultural transition. Those services include: mailing out some general information related to studying at the university, hosting orientations for international students upon their arrival, and providing consultations at several offices at the school (e.g., the International Students Office, Counseling Center, Center of Student Affairs, and Student Clubs/Organizations). The research findings show that other than attending the new students' orientation and going to the writing center to proofread their papers, these

participants seldom used the services that their universities provided for them. Therefore, to effectively assist these students in adapting to American campuses and society and to help them achieve success in attaining learning goals, American universities need to thoroughly identify and understand these students' cultural background/orientations, struggles, and personal and academic needs. Armed with this understanding, universities can work to provide services and training programs that better meet these students' demands to smooth their cross-cultural adaptations.

The implications for institutions of higher education are three-fold—one aims for long-term improvement, while another two focus on achieving the short-term goals of satisfying international students, domestic students, and faculty and staff members' immediate demands. From the long-term standpoint, in order to better understand the challenges and difficulties international students faced while studying in the United States, it is essential for institutions of higher education to undertake further research. Researching international students' learning, development, and transformation in the United States will help institutions of higher education identify pitfalls for new students to prepare themselves in advance. Findings from the research will assist American universities to develop new programs/courses and to modify the existing curricula in order to better meet these students' learning objectives. The result of the research will also help American universities identify the most needed information, resources, and services; so that they can facilitate international students to effectively adapt to the universities and the new socio-cultural living environment. For example, findings of this study suggest that it is essential for institutions of higher education to provide

transformative learning workshops in order to assist international students to cope with the changes and challenges of studying in the United States.

In the short-term point of view, there are two services that can enhance institutions of higher education efforts to better assist the teaching and learning among faculty and staff members, international students, and domestic students. One is to conduct needs assessments with international students in order to provide needed services and assistance during their cross-cultural transitions. Another task is to design and provide training programs for international students and faculty and staff members on how to manage challenges and difficulties that arise during classroom learning.

To illustrate, periodically conducting needs assessments with international students, especially before and after international students arrive in the United States, would help educators and American universities better design programs or provide services that match these students' needs. Conducting needs assessments with international students prior to their arrival will not only enable American universities to create a welcome atmosphere for these new international students, but also to provide the needed guidelines for these students to better prepare themselves as them embark on their journey to the United States. In other words, because international students come from different cultural background with different cultural preparations and mindsets entering into American campuses, the results of the needs assessment will allow universities to offer information and resources related to immediate demands and to answer questions that confuse them. In addition, the information gathered from the needs assessment and further research can help universities design different training programs to enhance these students' resilience and American cultural knowledge. It would also be beneficial to help

these students form support groups among international students with domestic students, as well as offering mentoring programs with faculty and staff members and the citizens of local communities. The most important thing in terms of helping these students and their American counterparts to benefit from each other is to create a common ground to include them in a respectful and appreciative way. Furthermore, the results of the research and the needs assessments will enable American universities to develop more effective training programs to help faculty and staff members better understand international students' unique cultural backgrounds, the difficulties encountered, as well as how to facilitate international students learning and transformation while studying in the United States.

For Faculty, Staff Members, and Classmates

The research findings suggest that these participants rely highly on their faculty and staff members' guidance, as well as their American classmates' assistance during their cross-cultural transitions to the American universities and society. In this regard, it is important for faculty and staff members and domestic students to understand that their willingness to be attentive to these international students' feelings and needs is crucial. It would further be helpful if they would become more patient and supportive while interacting with international students. Even though they cannot eliminate whatever challenges and difficulties these students have been encountering, their care and support helps these students feel empowered to endure the hardships and overcome challenges.

Next, active listening is another key component to facilitate faculty and staff members and domestic students to better understand these students. International students are different from one and another not only because of their unique cultural

backgrounds, but also because they change moment-by-moment, visibly or invisibly, while situating themselves into a brand new learning and living environment. To avoid stereotyping, faculty members, staffs, and American students must not label them according to their countries of origin, but actively listen to them and try to understand them without pre-existing biases. Learning can be playful and productive all at the same time, especially when faculty members empathically try to see the problem the way these international students see it and allow time for them to think and to express themselves. In so doing, they create a welcoming learning climate to engage students of all kinds, as well as typical international students, to participate in learning. Also, the domestic students, by modeling what they have observed on the part of the faculty and staff members, can benefit by enriching their learning from these international students.

Lastly, but of no less importance, the most effective way faculty and staff members and domestic students can facilitate international students to overcome their barriers at school is to show them the "How": how to do things, how to find resources, and how to ask questions. This echoes the phrase, "Give a man a fish, he will eat for a day; teach him to fish, he will eat for a lifetime." Faculty members need to remember that the feeling of inferiority to their peers renders these students to be more eager to learn to improve their competence in any way. As Carl mentioned in the interview, "I try very hard to show my professors that even though I cannot speak English well, I am eager to learn from you and please teach me." As a result, these participants' eagerness for success enables them to mobilize their capacities to learning and transformation. Indeed, whenever faculty members teach, these students not only have the opportunity to learn the subject, but they also combine and integrate their learning with their prior

experiences from their home countries. Hence, the quality and quantity of their learning, as well as their personal and professional development, increases and extends non-linearly.

For International Students

The journey of studying in a foreign country and being away from home is challenging physically, psychologically, and financially; it requires these students' efforts and wisdom to manage. International students must be objectively responsible for their decisions and actions because they are in the process of going through a cross-cultural transition after entering a foreign land or re-entering their home countries. For those who decide to stay in the United States and continue the journey, it is important that they know when and where to ask for help whenever they need it. For those students who have difficulty adjusting to the cross-cultural transition after a certain period of time of trying, they must objectively evaluate the cost-effectiveness and have the courage to acknowledge the need to stop the journey. In so doing, they are able to switch gears to another direction when challenges and difficulties go beyond what they can handle in the United States. Those who decide to complete the journey can find ways to smooth out hardships encountered. To illustrate, these students need to reach out to find resources, to befriend others, to find and form support groups, and to build a learning community within the American universities and local communities, as well as with other international students. As these eighteen research participants' stories have demonstrated, "Where there is a will; there is a way." For these participants, it is important and necessary for them to believe in themselves, to reach out, to befriend

others, and to form their learning communities during the journey. Indeed, this journey

can be a mission that is incredible and interesting, and enriching of their entire lives.

Suggestions for Further Research

Exploring these eighteen international students' transformative journeys in the

United States demonstrates the need to conduct more research in order to find solutions to

better assist these students, while at the same time benefiting their American

counterparts. From a philosophical point of view, researchers and educators outside the

journey can learn from these students' experiences as a way of inspiring them to take on

different cultural perspectives, as well as to enrich their own worldviews. Those

researchers, like myself, inside the journey will benefit from deepening their

understanding in an empathic way and will be empowered by the journey of conducting

the research while making sense of both those participants' and their own lived

experiences.

The research findings reveal that these participants came to the United States to

learn, develop, and transform themselves. During the journey, they befriend their

American counterparts for support and cultural learning. As discussed earlier in this

chapter, these participants have found ways to relate and connect with their American

counterparts. Therefore, to investigate the way in which those American counterparts

interact with international students is essential in terms of finding ways to bridge the gap

of linguistic and cultural differences among nations. Findings related to the impact of

having international students around, as well as the challenges and difficulties their

American counterparts have experienced while interacting with international students,

would help educators and institutions of higher education better assist both domestic

students and international students to benefit from cultural and intellectual exchange. In other words, concerning future research, it would be beneficial to study the following issues: (1)What is it like to be a professor or advisor of international students? (2) What are the benefits professors, staff members, domestic students, and local communities gain while interacting with international students? (3) What are the challenges, difficulties, and hardships these students' American counterparts undergo in the interaction with international students? Subsequent research will provide additional information to assist educators and institutions of higher education to better understand adult students' learning and transformation from different cultural perspectives, to design curriculum, to advocate educational reform, as well as to create a shared space for these journeying students, faculty and staff members, and their classmates to enjoy each other and share their knowledge and lives together.

In summary, for generations the gentle words of encouragement, support, and wisdom have helped people embrace whatever difficulties they encountered so that they can continue to work hard until reaching their final destination. Implications suggested above aim to achieve a goal of promoting education while helping individuals look inward for strength and outward for hope. These eighteen participants' stories speak to the human desire of wanting to become a better person for themselves and for others as well.

Conclusion

Keep asking, and it will be given to you.

Keep searching, and you will find.

Keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks receives, and the one who searches finds, and to

the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Matthew 7: 7-8 HCSB

Contact with American culture provokes a profound turbulence in these eighteen participants' lives, bringing them to see themselves and their worlds differently. Relocating in an unfamiliar environment not only forces them to learn the differences and to develop their characters and competence in the context of American culture, but it also requires them to adapt and integrate their cultural traditions, the American socio-cultural norms, and their novel experiences. Often, these students have to modify, most likely to transform their frames of references and habits of mind for new purposes in order to live fully. In addition, the journey of studying at American universities, for these eighteen participants, is a journey of cultural crossing that encompasses a wide range of issues, including linguistic hindrance, cultural differences, as well as physical and psychological fluctuations and discomfort. In the journey, the major elements that influence the way in which they cope with changes, overcome challenges, and undertake chances are their own selves, the impact of others, and their new living environment.

Despite all the challenges and hardships, these eighteen participants' stories reveal the process of their being and becoming authentic under the context of American culture. Their stories also suggest that to transform their frames of reference and habits

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of mind and to create a new, shared space are the best ways that best enable them to connect and relate to their selves, to others, and to the environment around them. Taken from 'here' to where these participants are heading, this journey empowers them to embrace differences and appreciate similarities so that they may in the future be able to compete and collaborate with each other as world citizens. These participants are dancing on the edge of disequilibrium and re-equilibrium trying their very best to stand up for themselves and to live a meaningful life. In light of the passage in Matthew, because they keep asking, searching, and knocking, the opportunities are given to them to be in the United States, to learn about themselves and the world, and to conquer their inner fears and external obstacles. Once the door is opened to them, the process of evolving and transforming never ends. Since walking through that open door, these eighteen participants' lives and the lives of those around them, will never be the same.

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INFORMED CONSENT
TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

PROJECT TITLE: Dancing on the Edge:
International Students' Transformational Journeys
in the United States of America

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Huei-Chu Kung

CONTACT INFORMATION: 204 Wadsack Dr. Apt. E. Norman, OK 73072 or

17312 Iron Lane, Edmond, OK 73003

You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. This study is being conducted at universities or companies in the United States. You were selected as a possible participant because you read the advertisement flyer of this study and are willing to participate in this study. Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to take part in this study.

Purpose of the Research Study

The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of how international students learn, develop, and transform themselves while studying at U.S. universities. The research questions include what changes these international students undergo during their cross-cultural transitional process of studying in U.S. universities; how these changes impact their learning and development personally, academically, and professionally; and how they transform their perspectives to achieve their desired goals as they study and live in the United States.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:
being asked open-ended questions and doing two exercises concerning your experiences as an international student in the United States. Each interview will be audio tape recorded. It involves two interview sessions and should only take about one to two hours each, depending on the length of your responses. Your involvement in the study is voluntary. You will be given a pseudonym instead to use during the interview.
.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

The study has the following risks:
Because the nature of the interview may touch some of your personal experiences both positive and negative, you may possibly feel some discomfort during the interview process of this study. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, please let the interviewer know. You may choose not to answer any question or stop the interview process at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits.

The benefits to participation are:
Benefits may include opportunities for reflections or gaining new insights on participants' own experiences of studying in U.S. universities and understanding how they become who they are now.

Compensation: None

You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not result in penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. In published reports, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify the research participant. Research records will be stored securely in a locked file box separately from the transcriptions and recordings with permission of the participants for the possible use of future investigation. All records will be retained on CD or Flashdrives (One that is utilized only for research purposes) and will be retained in a professional setting with the research data that is gathered throughout the course of the investigation, and only approved researchers will have access to the records.

Participants' names will not be linked with their responses unless the participant specifically agrees to be identified. Please select one of the following options.

☐ I prefer to leave my identity unacknowledged when documenting findings; please do not release my name when citing the findings.
☐ I consent to the use of my name when recording findings and that I may be quoted directly.

Audio Taping Of Study Activities:

To assist with accurate recording of participant responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording device/video recording device.   Participants have the right to refuse to allow such taping without penalty.   Please select one of the following options.

☐ I consent to the use of audio recording.
☐ I do not consent to the use of audio recording.

Video Taping Of Study Activities:

To assist with accurate recording of participant responses, interviews may be recorded on a video recording device.   Participants have the right to refuse to allow such taping without penalty.   Please select one of the following options.

☐ I consent to the use of video recording.
☐ I do not consent to the use of video recording.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher(s) conducting this study can be contacted at Huei-Chu Kung at (405) 325-9850 or send an e-mail to Huei-Chu.Kung-1@ou.edu or Dr. Irene Karpiak at (405) 325-4072. ikarpiak@ou.edu. You are encouraged to contact the researcher(s) if you have any questions.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405.325.8110 or irb@ou.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records. If you are not given a copy of this consent form, please request one.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received satisfactory answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature	Date

APPENDIX B

ADVERTISEMENT FLYER

I am Seeking to Interview

International Graduate Students
who have studied at a U.S. University for at least two years

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of international graduate students who have studied at U.S. universities for at least two years. This study intends to uncover the phenomenon of how the experiences of studying in the United States impact international students' personal, academic, and professional development. As an international graduate student, I understand each of us might have very different learning experiences at U.S. universities. We also need to manage different changes and challenges while pursuing an advanced degree in the United States. However, little is known about how these changes and challenges impact international students' learning and development personally, academically, and professionally; and how we transform our perspectives to achieve our desired goals as we study and live in the United States. The results of the research will provide information enabling educators and institutions of higher education to provide sufficient assistance to international students in accomplishing their learning goals.

If you are interested in being a participant, please contact Huei-Chu Kung at 405-325-9850 or Huei-Chu. Kung-1@ou.edu. I will get in touch with you, describe the study, and answer any questions you may have. I will inform you about your rights, which include our assurances of confidentiality.

If you agree to participate, I would contact you either by email or phone to schedule time for two interviews regarding your experience about what it is like to be an international student in the United States. I will be asking you questions and doing two exercises that have no right or wrong answers. Each interview will take approximately one to two hours depending on the length of your response. If you consent, I will audio record the interview. At any time during the interview, you are free to decline to answer questions or request that the interview be discontinued.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the Institutional Review Board at the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus, United States, at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

APPENDIX C

TELEPHONE/VERBAL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Hello, this is Huei-Chu Kung. I am a doctoral student at OU.
May I speak to Mr. /Mrs. X? Thank you!
Hi, how are you?
This is Huei-Chu.
We met at the XX activities (for example, Eve of Nations) on April 21.
Is now a good time to talk to you?

Remember, last time I mentioned my research topic and interest to you. I am interested in finding out how international students learning and transform their perspectives during the time they studying at U.S. universities. Today I would like to share with you my research purpose and procedures. So, you can decide whether to participate or not. If you have any question or concern, please feel free to ask me.

First of all, the purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the way in which international students experience their new circumstances and give meanings to these experiences during the life transition of studying at U.S. universities for advanced degrees. I will invite you to talk about your experiences as an international student in the States. There will be two interviews. During the initial interview, I will invite you to share your experiences as an international student at your university through clustering exercise and open-ended questions. The follow-up interview will be two to four weeks later for you to add some more information or to confirm the transcription. Each interview will be about one to two hours depending on the length of your responses. The interview will be audio tape recorded. I want you to know that your involvement in the study is voluntary and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. You will be given a pseudonym instead to use during the interview. In fact, the published results will be presented in narrative and summary form only.   Participants' names will not be used nor will they be linked with their responses in any way.

On the other hand, it is possible that you may experience some discomfort while recording your memory as an immigrant during the interview. Although, I will not ask any question that will invade your privacy.   There might be a possible invasion of the privacy of you or your family during the interview. If so, please do let me know, and you may choose not to answer any interview question that might cause you discomfort. The potential benefits may include opportunities for reflection or gaining new insights on experiences of how you become who you are now.

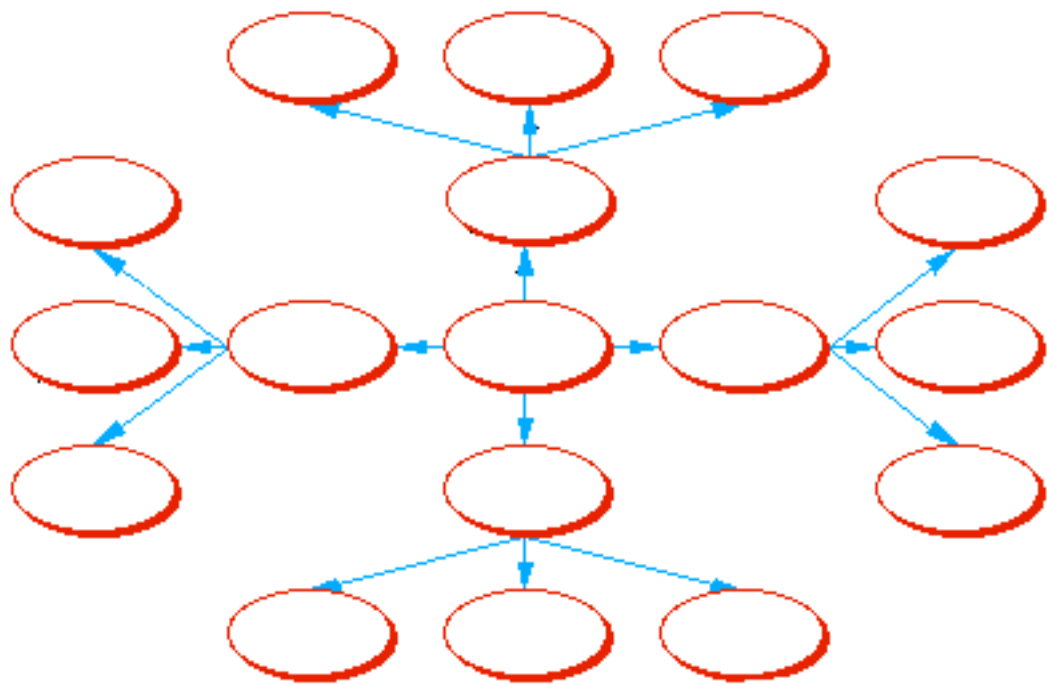Do you have any question or concern that I can answer for you at this moment?

Do you agree to participate in the study?

If so, would you please share with me when is a good time to interview you? And where is a good place to meet you?

Thank you so much! I am looking forward to learning from you.

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE OF CLUSTERING

TABLES

Table 4-1: Participants' Gender

Males (5)	Carl, Kevin, Kohn, Paul, Wayne
Females (13)	Alison, Amy, Betty, Colleen, Helen, Ivy, Kim, Ling, Maya, Michelle, Nan, Sarah, Yumiko

Table 4-2: Participants' Degree Programs --at the Time of Data Collection

Undergraduate	Kim
Master's Students	Amy, Carl, Wayne
Last Stage of the Master's Program	Betty, Michelle, Yumiko
Doctoral Students	Helen, Ling, Maya
Doctoral Candidates	Alison, Colleen, Ivy, Kevin, Nan, Paul, Sarah
Ph. D.	Kohn,

Table 4-3: The Length of Studying in the United States

Two Years	Michelle
Three Years	Alison, Ivy,
Four Years	Carl, Kevin, Kim, Wayne
Five Years	Nan, Helen,
Six Years	Betty, Sarah, Ling
Eight Years	Yumiko
Ten Years	Colleen, Kohn, Maya
Thirteen Years	Amy, Paul

Table 4-4: Participants' Status-- After the Interview

Undergraduate	Kim
Master's Students	Amy, Carl
Doctoral Students	Helen, Maya
Doctoral Candidates	Ivy, Ling, Paul, Sarah,
Master's	Betty, Carl, Michelle, Yumiko
Ph. D.	Alison, Colleen, Kevin, Kohn, Nan

Table 4-5: Countries of Origin

Name of the Country	Participants
China	Helen, Ivy, Kevin, Nan
Jamaica	Wayne
Japan	Maya, Yumiko
Korea	Alison, Kim, Michael
Liberia	Paul
Malaysia	Kohn, Sarah
Taiwan	Amy, Betty, Carl, Colin, Ling