Key Experiences in the Adjustment of Academically Successful Chinese Undergraduate International Students at the University of Minnesota: A Qualitative Study

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Dedication

To My Mother
Thank you for your love, wisdom, kindness and strength

献给我的妈妈
感谢你的善良，智慧，坚强和爱

Abstract

There has been a rapid increase of Chinese international students from mainland China in the U.S. since 2001. Although extensive research effort has been made to understand the experience of Chinese international students in U.S. universities, the existing literature has not examined the factors that contribute to academic success and life satisfaction among Chinese undergraduate international students in U.S. universities. In this study, a sample (N=140) of Chinese undergraduate international students completed a survey assessing their level of global life satisfaction and demographic characteristics. Fifteen participants were interviewed about: 1) what they perceive as the contributors to their academic success, 2) what they perceive as the contributors to their high life satisfaction, 3) how they manage cultural adjustments and academic requirements transitions, 4) their suggestions for other Chinese undergraduate international students to achieve academic success and life satisfaction. Thirteen out of 15 interviews were analyzed using Consensual Qualitative Research methods (Hill, 2012). Twenty two domains and 20 categories were extracted. Some major contributors to academic success include seeking help, working hard, understanding and adjusting to education in U.S., having good knowledge base from high school, pursuing one's interest, etc. Major contributors to life satisfaction include having social support and network, staying academically successful, being independent, be grateful, growing as a person etc. Most interviewees discussed the challenges they experienced with the transition to the United States. All interviewees shared how they coped with the distress related to the transition. The interviewees also discussed their perception on the relationship between academic success and life satisfaction. Illustrative examples, clinical and practice implications and research recommendations are also presented.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

According to a recent Open Door report by the Institute of International Education (2015), the number of international students studying at colleges and universities in the United States (U.S.) reached 886,052 in the academic year 2013-2014. This number represents an 8% increase over the prior year, and is a record high. Thirty one percent of the international students studying in the U.S. during the academic year 2013-2014 were from mainland China. There has been a rapid increase of Chinese international students from mainland China in the U.S. since 2001, with 59,939 Chinese international students in 2000-2001, and 98,235 in 2008-2009. Over the next five years, the Chinese international student population expanded rapidly to 274,439 in 2013-2014. This number is over three times as large as the Chinese international student population from mainland China 14 years ago (Institute of International Education, 2015).

Among Chinese international students in the U.S., undergraduate students comprised 40.3% (*n*=110,550) in 2013-2014. The remaining 59.7% were either graduate students, students enrolled in non-degree programs, or students engaged in Optional Practical Training (OPT). Thus, a significant percentage of Chinese international students began their college careers in the U.S., and U.S. universities were not only their first encounter with a different culture, but also their first encounter with higher education in general.

The rocketing expansion of the Chinese international student population brings diversity opportunities and challenges to U.S. university campuses. Domestic students have more opportunities to study and interact with Chinese students who mostly grew up in a society and education system that are very different from that of the U.S. The cultural

diversity brought by Chinese international students has inspired more ideas in research, teaching and campus life (Pan et al., 2008; Yan & Berliner, 2011; Wang, Heppner, Fu, Zhao, Li, & Chuang, 2012; Yan & Berliner, 2013). At the same time, US universities have ongoing responsibility to improve their services and programs to make studying in the U.S. a rewarding and healthy experience for Chinese international students (Ellis-Bosold & Thornton-Orr, 2013; Yan & Berliner, 2013).

Developmentally, college is seen as a transitional period in which students can grow as "emerging adults." College students between the ages of 18 and 25 are still trying to solidify their sense of adulthood, key features of which involve exploration in areas of love, work, and worldviews (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adults may experience stress related to this developmental exploration. Such exploration may be further complicated for international students when it occurs in a new culture and educational system. Given awareness of the challenges international students may face, a number of researchers have begun to investigate various aspects of international students' lives (e.g. Hiseh, 2007; Wang et al., 2012; Yan & Berliner, 2009; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Zhang, Mandl & Wang, 2010).

Transitioning to life in the U.S. may require individuals to make behavioral and psychological changes in order to cope with the associated stress. One common hypothesis is that when stress exceeds an individual's ability to manage it, she or he will experience distress, and this distress will eventually result in physical disease, psychological issues and psychopathology. Han and colleagues (Han, Luo, Jacobs, & Jean-Baptiste, 2013) reported prevalence figures for depression and anxiety symptoms among American domestic students of 12.8% and 13%, respectively; these figures are

lower than the percentages in the international student sample they studied (45% for depression , 29 % for anxiety).

Tochkov, Levine, and Sanaka (2010) noted that cross cultural adjustment leads to inevitable stress in international students' lives, and these students tend to feel "homesick" as they transition. Moreover, anxiety and depression are positively correlated with homesickness. Discrimination and limited socialization with US students have been found to be strong predictors of homesickness (Tochkov, Levine, & Sanaka, 2010). Duru and Poyrazli (2011) found that for Turkish international students studying in the U.S., higher language proficiency and lower perceived discrimination were related to lower adjustment difficulties. One study of Korean international students studying in the U.S. revealed that female international students had a higher level of acculturative adjustment than males, and that the level of adjustment was positively related to the number of Korean international students in one's major (Lee, Park & Kim, 2009). Overall, research findings suggest international students may be a population at high risk of developing psychological problems or suffering from poor mental health due to various stressors (Pan, Wong, Joubert, & Chan, 2008).

In a recent study of Chinese international students at Yale University, Han et al. (2013) found that 45% of their participants ($N = 130$) reported symptoms of depression, and 29% reported symptoms of anxiety. A self-evaluation of poor current health, a poor relationship with one's advisor, and a limited exercise regimen were associated with a higher prevalence of both depression and anxiety symptoms. With the goal of characterizing adjustment patterns of international students, Wang et al. (2012) measured the level of psychological distress of Chinese international students prior to and after

their arrival to the U.S., as well as during their second and third semesters in the U.S. They found four adjustment patterns: (1) Students in the "well-adjusted" group had the lowest level of acculturative stress immediately after their arrival in the country, and they exhibited very little fluctuation in stress at subsequent assessments. (2) Students in the "culture-shocked" group reported high levels of distress during their first two semesters, but reported reduced distress in the third semester. (3) Students who were "consistently distressed" had high levels of psychological distress across all data collection points. (4) Students in the "relieved" group showed a sharp decrease in psychological distress after their arrival to the U.S. Many students in this group reported that they had overestimated the level of difficulties in their transition to the U.S. and therefore felt "relieved" after having actual living and studying experience in the U.S. This group's reported level of psychological distress remained at a low level in subsequent assessments.

Different from many other researchers, Wang et al. (2012) used pre-arrival distress as a comparison reference, and their measurement of distress was more longitudinal. Thus, their findings shed light on what the process of transition to the U.S. and higher education may be like for Chinese international students. The multiple data collection points provide a more dynamic view of how psychological distress may change over time. One important finding of this study is that Chinese international students' transitioning experiences vary as a function of individual differences.

Wang et al.'s study (2012) informed the design of the present research. In particular, their findings inspired this researcher to reflect upon the uniqueness of Chinese undergraduate international students' lives and education experiences in the U.S. As mentioned earlier, Chinese undergraduate international students may have their first

encounter with higher education in the U.S., which means that, similar to their American peers, they need to face and accomplish novel tasks inherent to American university life (e.g., registering for classes, declaring a major, connecting with students and faculty on campus, making friends, exploring their identity, etc.). Yet Chinese undergraduate international students' experiences in US universities may also differ. For instance, many who come to the U.S. arrive with specific career goals, and many choose to leave the U.S. upon completing their degrees. Indeed, a report by China's Ministry of Education (2014) indicates that 459,800 Chinese students from mainland China went abroad to study in 2014. In the same year, 364,800 Chinese students completed their education abroad and returned to mainland China, which is 85.4% of the Chinese international students who went abroad to study that year. These figures indicate a majority of Chinese international students may return to their home country upon completion of their education abroad. Given the complex and unique transition experiences of Chinese international students, it is important to explore their experiences in U.S. universities and colleges.

Research Questions

The present qualitative study was designed to investigate the higher education experiences of a purposively sampled group of academically successful Chinese undergraduate international students from mainland China. The primary aim of this study was to understand factors promoting their academic success and life satisfaction while studying in the US. There were four major research questions:

1) What are Chinese undergraduate international students' perceptions of the factors that contribute to their academic success?

2) How do academically successful Chinese undergraduate international students maintain a high level of life satisfaction while studying in the U.S.?

3) How do Chinese undergraduate international students manage cultural adjustments and academic requirements transitions?

4) What are Chinese undergraduate international students' suggestions for other students in their situation might improve academic performance and life satisfaction?

Definition of Terms

Chinese Undergraduate International Students. An international student is defined as anyone studying at an institution of higher education in the United States on a temporary visa that allows for academic coursework. These include primarily holders of F (student) visas and J (exchange visitor) visas (Institute of International Education, 2015). In this study, Chinese undergraduate international students are defined as those who are from mainland China, and held F-1 student visa at the time of the study.

Academic Success and Academic Achievement. Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2006) defined academic success as a complicated construct with several important components: academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, and post-college performance. York, Gibson, & Rankin (2015) proposed a new model that defines academic success as inclusive of academic achievement, acquisition of desired skills and competencies, satisfaction, satisfaction, persistence and post-college performance. Academic achievement, sometimes used interchangeably with academic performance, refers to the outcome of an educational experience. It was found that GPA has been the most used measurement of academic success, making academic achievement

the   most commonly assessed aspect of academic success (York, Gibson & Rankin, 2015). In this study, academic success is used interchangeably with academic achievement. GPA is used as the measurement of academic success in this study.

Subjective Well-Being and Life Satisfaction. Diener (2015) defined subjective well-being as "how a person evaluates his or her own life" (para.1), and life satisfaction as "a cognitive evaluation or judgment of one's life"(para. 26). There are various ways to evaluate subjective well-being. Life satisfaction is considered one important construct of subjective well-being (Pavot & Diener, 2008). In this study, life satisfaction is used as one important indicator of subjective well-being.

Significance of the Problem

While literature on adjustment difficulties of international students provides guidance for university staff and helping professionals as they conceptualize potential challenges for this student population, it fails to present a complete picture. Although a number of studies indicate that certain international students are at high-risk for experiencing physical and psychological problems, a few studies indicate positive outcomes for other international students. Hsieh (2007) asserts that the outcomes are not necessarily negative, and, in fact, international students may experience positive transformative processes that are often overlooked. Wang et al. (2012) found 65% of their sample of Chinese international students had become well-adjusted to their life in the U.S. after one semester, and their stress levels did not fluctuate much in their second and third semesters. Fourteen percent of their participants actually reported feeling relieved after starting school because they had overestimated the difficulties they expected to encounter. Thus, extant research suggests international students' transitioning

experiences to the U.S vary and may be influenced by their individual characteristics. To date, scant research explicitly investigates the positive transitions of international students studying in universities in the U.S., and even fewer studies focus on Chinese international students. Accordingly, this study investigated Chinese (from mainland) undergraduate international students' academic success and life satisfaction in the U.S.

Academic success is important to Chinese undergraduate international students for several reasons. First, academic success, measured by GPA in the present study, is seen as a proud achievement by most students and parents in China, and thus, Chinese students typically come to the U.S. with an expectation of obtaining good grades in school (Sue & Zane, 1985; Yan & Berliner, 2009). Second, academic success is closely related to Chinese international students' future careers. As mentioned earlier, over 80% of Chinese international students return to mainland China after graduation (Ministry of Education of People's Republic of China, 2014). Given the large number of international students going home each year, the job market has become highly competitive (Chinese Education Online, 2014). Therefore, it is especially important for Chinese undergraduate international students to obtain a high GPA because it serves as an indicator of their level of knowledge and capacity for learning.

Third, study in the U.S. requires extensive preparation (e.g., for the SAT and/or ACT exams and the TOEFL; completing applications) and garnering of financial support. Study in the U.S. is quite expensive for an international students. Thus, they may feel additional pressure to do well in school in order to justify the time and money invested in their education.

Research on Chinese undergraduate international students' life satisfaction is important as well. Life satisfaction is measured in this study as participants' perception of their global functioning for the following reasons. First, their life satisfaction may be indicative of their overall happiness while in the U.S. Satisfaction implies a level of comfort with college life in the United States. Research has also shown that students' overall life satisfaction is positively related to academic performance (Pan, Wong, Joubert & Chan, 2008; Sam, 2001; Singley, Lent & Sheu, 2010). Identifying factors associated with life satisfaction may help other international students be more satisfied and successful. Second life satisfaction contributes positively to motivation and hope for the future. Third, investigation of life satisfaction is strength-oriented. As mentioned earlier not all international students are as distressed as some research has indicated (Duru & Poyrazli 2011; Han et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2009; Tochkov, Levine, & Sanaka, 2010).

The present study contributes to existing literature in several additional ways. Researchers who study international students' life satisfaction, academic success and acculturation typically use quantitative methods. The present qualitative study used in-depth, semi-structured interviews to explore factors contributing to Chinese undergraduate international students' high life satisfaction, academic success and their experiences transitioning to college life in the U.S. The data were expected to be richer than data obtain in quantitative research, given the personal nature of the interviews. As stated previously, few researchers have focused on the academic success of Chinese undergraduate international students. This study was designed to understand the "secrets" of their success, and ultimately share their words of wisdom with other Chinese

international students. The findings may help school personnel (faculty, advisors, career coaches, counselors) understand the strengths of Chinese undergraduate international students and use more strength-based approaches in their work with this population. The findings may also help prospective Chinese undergraduate students better prepare themselves before coming to the U.S., thus facilitating their transition process.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Academic Success of International Students

Many researchers have explored and examined the predictors and contributors to students' success in U.S. colleges and universities, despite the lack of clarity around the definition of college student success. Grades (e. g. GPA) are commonly used as an indicator of college success in research studies, as academic performance is at the heart of college experience and is closely related to career exploration and development (Lounsbury, Fisher, Levy & Welsh, 2009). Studies have shown that college student involvement is another indicator of college success. College students who are actively involved in academic and extra-curriculum activities, such as classroom discussion, and on-campus programs and events, are more likely to benefit more from college (Astin, 1977; Webber, Krylow & Zhang, 2013). Students' demographic characteristics, such as gender, social and financial status, and whether they are first-generation students, have also been found to be related to college success (Voung, Brown-Welty & Tracz, 2010; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004).

Some researchers have examined factors related to international students' academic success. Grayson (2008) noted that researchers need to consider the complicated internal and external environments of international students. Furthermore, he concluded that international students who have a *sense of coherence*, that is, perceive their problems as comprehensible and manageable, are more likely to perform better academically than others.

Personality traits have also been found to be related to international students'

academic success. Geramian, Mashayekhi, and Ninggal (2012), examined the

relationship between personality profiles (assessed by the Big Five Inventory; John &

Srivastava, 1999) and GPA for 146 international students studying at a university in

Malaysia. They found that three personality traits were positively related to academic

success: Conscientiousness, Openness, and Agreeableness. International students who

scored higher on these personality characteristics reported more flexibility in adjusting

their study strategies, were more capable of communicating with students and teachers in

school, were more willing to put forth needed efforts in school, and were more likely to

have a higher GPA, compared to those students who had lower scores on the three

personality traits.

Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, and Kommers (2012) found that

academic adjustment, as opposed to social integration, was a better predictor of academic

success for their sample of 958 undergraduate international students in the Netherlands.

Their participants completed two major questionnaires: Student Adaption to College

Questionnaire (Baker & Siryk, 1999) and the Student Social Integration Questionnaire

(Rienties, Grohnert, Kommers, Niemantsverdriet, & Nijhuis, 2011). The Student

Adaption to College Questionnaire consists of questions assessing academic adjustment,

social adjustment, and personal-emotional adjustment. The Student Social Integration

Questionnaire contains questions regarding perceptions of faculty, study support,

student's satisfaction with social life, and the student's level of financial support. The

researchers found that students' adaption to college, especially academic adjustment, is a

better predictor of academic success (measured by GPA) than social integration. They

suggested that higher education institutions should help international students become familiar with the local education system prior to their arrival to the new environment. The researchers recommended providing information about the local educational culture of the host country, offering summer courses online to international students so they can get a sense of how classes work in the host country, and pairing international students with "buddies" who can help with their academic transition.

Studies of factors contributing to academic success of Chinese undergraduate international students are very limited. Yan and Berliner (2010) postulated that Chinese international students may experience greater challenges in US universities and colleges because they come from a country that differs fundamentally in language, culture, social structure and political ideology. In China, high school education is more test-oriented. Students need to be fully prepared for the very competitive College Entrance Exam because their exam scores are the sole determinant of which university they can be admitted to for their undergraduate study. Therefore, education in high school may focus more on learning facts and knowledge, as well as solving test problems. The authors argue that American education, on the other hand, seems to value a balance between learning in the classroom, applying knowledge through practice, and involvement in interest-based activities such as music, sports, and/or arts. The transition from Chinese to American education may require more flexibility of students to navigate the differences between two educational cultures and adapt accordingly.

Acculturative Stress and International Students

Many researchers have taken an acculturation perspective in their examination of international students' transitions to the United States (U.S,). This perspective is

important because cultural shifts play such an important role in international students'

experience in the U.S. (Pedersen, 1991; Wei et al., 2007). For instance, some authors

(e.g., Berry, 1997; Pedersen, 1991) believe that when someone who develops in one

cultural context migrates to another cultural context, the person will experience changes

due to the differences between two cultural contexts. The concept of acculturation refers

to the cultural changes resulting from these encounters. Acculturation can be both

collective and individual. Collective acculturation involves a change in the culture of a

group; individual acculturation usually refers to the change in the psychology of an

individual, also known as psychological acculturation (Berry, 1997; Graves, 1967). Either

way, acculturation arguably is an inevitable variable in international students' experience

in the United States.

For international students, life satisfaction may not be fully understood without

understanding acculturation. For instance, during an acculturation process, there may be

unique challenges that prevent individuals from feeling satisfied with their experience as

international students. One limitation of existing literature, however, is that researchers

have not thoroughly investigated the link between international students' life satisfaction

and acculturation. Pan et al. (2008) conducted preliminary explorations of how

acculturative stress relates to international students life satisfaction. They found that some

factors which cause acculturative distress tended to lower the participants' life

satisfaction (e.g., such as perceived discrimination, lack of social support, and academic

performance). Thus there appears to be some overlapping factors related to both

acculturative stress and life satisfaction for international students. A more

comprehensive model is needed, however, to understand the ways in which acculturation and life satisfaction interact.

Berry (1997) proposed a comprehensive model for acculturation research that captured key variables which should be attended to when conducting studies of psychological acculturation. The model portrays acculturation as a contextual process. Features of the society of origin and the society of settlement play important roles in an individual's psychological acculturation. Society of origin refers to the places from which immigrants come. Society of settlement means the places immigrants immigrate to and finally settle. Political, economic, and demographic factors in the country of origin describe where the person is coming from, and in part establish cultural features for comparison with the society of settlement. The general orientation towards immigration and pluralism decides the society of settlement's "attitude" towards migrants. Berry (1997) believed every acculturation process is moderated by factors prior to and during acculturation. Factors prior to acculturation include age, gender, education, one's place in the economic world, push/pull motivations and expectations, cultural distance, and personality. Factors during acculturation include phase (length of time), individual's acculturation strategies, coping strategies, social support, and social attitude.

The Berry (1997) model provides guidance to the research on immigrants' acculturation process, but there are some limitations to the model when it comes to the research to international students. First, international students usually are driven by clear goals, when they come to the U.S. Different from many immigrants who come to the U.S. due to changes in life circumstances in their home countries or other reasons, Chinese international students mostly come to a new culture by personal choice. Their motivation

and clear goal of finishing their education (Eland, 2001) in the U.S. may buffer some of the potential stressors included in Berry's model (1997). Second, the amount of time Chinese international students' stay in the U.S is relatively brief; they may not necessarily complete the whole cycle of acculturation before they leave the country. In other words, different from other types of immigrants, international students may have an option to avoid and or better manage certain stressors arising from acculturation. For example, international students may perceive their acculturative stress as more temporary and be more hopeful that their situation will improve.

Despite its possible limitations, the following literature review of acculturative stressors uses Berry's (1997) framework to discuss major factors related to international students' acculturation stress. This review includes research on the acculturative stress of international students in general, as well as the few studies of Chinese international students. These studies provide insight regarding factors that may contribute to the distress international students experience as they transition from home culture to another culture.

Personality Factors Related to International Students' Acculturative Stress

Psychological acculturation focuses more on the emotional components of adjustment, or the process by which individuals attempt to maintain a sense of mental and physical well-being in new environments (Swagler & Jome, 2005). Arguably, the process of psychological acculturation varies due in part to individual differences. In order to determine the influence of individual differences, some researchers have explored the link between acculturation and personality.

The most-commonly used personality model is Costa and McCrae's Big Five personality model (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The five personality domains include Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. The trait of Neuroticism is related to how susceptible an individual is to stress and negative affect. Extraversion indicates the tendency for social interaction. Openness to Experience refers to how open someone is to new ideas and experience. Agreeableness is the extent to which an individual trusts and cooperate with others. Conscientiousness refers to the degree to which individuals are motivated to achieve goals, preferring structure and dutiful.

Ward , Leong and Low (2004) conducted a large scale study investigating the Big Five personality model and sojourner adjustment (sojourners are people who live at a place temporarily). They sampled 165 Singaporean and 139 Australian students in Australia; and 244 Australian expatriates and 671 Chinese Singaporeans in Singapore. They found that four of the Big Five personality factors were significantly related to cross-cultural adjustment. Specifically, psychological adaptation was positively associated with extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, and negatively associated with neuroticism. Sociocultural adaptation was linked to greater extraversion and less Neuroticism, and in the case of Singaporean students in Australia, it was also related to greater agreeableness and conscientiousness. The researchers also found that sojourners who were more willing to reach out for social interactions, more able to interact socially, and more motivated to make changes happen, were less likely to experience psychological distress.

Ward, Leong and Low (2004) findings are supported by those of Zhang, Mandl and Want (2010) who investigated the effects of personality traits and acculturation variables on cross-cultural adjustment. One hundred thirty nine Chinese international students in Germany completed a survey assessing their personality traits, level of acculturation and social-cultural adaptation, academic adjustment level, self-esteem, and satisfaction with life. The sample had 66 men and 73 women, with ages ranging from 20 to 35 years (Mean= 25.3; SD=2.9). Hierarchical regression analyses showed that difficulties in general domains of socio-cultural adjustment were predicted by higher Neuroticism and lower Agreeableness. More difficulties in academic settings were predicted by higher Neuroticism, low Conscientiousness, and low Openness. They also found that psychological adjustment could be predicted by personality. In this study, international students' depression was predicted by higher Neuroticism and lower Conscientiousness. Their self-esteem was predicted by lower Neuroticism, higher Conscientiousness, and higher Openness. There were no significant relationships between Extraversion and psychological adjustment.

In summary of the section on personality and acculturative stress, existing research has shown there is a significant relationship between personality traits and psychological as well as sociocultural adjustment. Individuals rated lower on Neuroticism have a lower tendency to experience psychological distress, and therefore, they are more likely to manage the stress well over the acculturation process. Conscientiousness is found to be significantly related to better psychological adjustment. When transitioning to another culture, the new environment may pose difficulties to international students who have highly adaptive personality characteristics. The international students, who are more

aware of their challenges and more driven to solve problems, may be more likely to reach out for resources in order to find solutions.

Findings are not consistent in regard to Openness to Experience and Extraversion. Despite limitation in study designs, there may be a few reasons that the results in regard to Openness and Extraversion were mixed. Openness to Experience helps someone to stay flexible and open-minded in a new culture. However, solely understanding what is going on in a new culture, and the differences between host and home cultures may not be sufficient to help someone find answers to "what to do" in a new culture. The confusion may lead to distress, and affects psychological adjustment. Students who carry more Extraversion traits may be more comfortable building social connections. However, the quality and type of social support they get may be more important than the amount of support they get. One shared limitation of these studies is the lack of recommendations for international students about how to manage the acculturative stress related to personality traits.

Perceived Discrimination Related to International Students' Acculturative Stress

Perceived discrimination refers to a judgment that one has been treated with prejudice because of one's racial and ethnic membership (Major, Quinton & McCcoy, 2002). Research has demonstrated a significant correlation between perceived discrimination and homesickness of international students (Poyrazil & Lopez, 2007). Homesickness, in the context of college students' well-being, is usually seen as one result of being away from a familiar environment. Research has confirmed that homesickness affects people's psychological well-being. Homesickness may be relieved if someone has

better social support and fewer differences between the home and host cultures (Phinney, 2003; Lee, 2003).

In Poyrazil and Lopez's (2007) study, 198 international students and 241 American students rated their level of homesickness. Sample items include "I dream about my friends at home," and "I get really upset when I think about home." (Scale: 1 = strongly disagree; five = strongly agree). To measure perceived discrimination, the participants responded to the statement "I feel that I receive unequal treatment because of my race or ethnicity" (Scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree). Correlation analysis of the two sets of responses showed that international students who were likely to experience discrimination were also more likely to feel homesick. International students also reported higher level of homesickness and perceived discrimination than their American peers. The researchers speculated that international students were more likely to perceive discrimination because of their non-American status, they may speak English with an accent, and/or because they belonged to a visible racial minority group.

Facing discrimination, international students may draw upon resources to protect themselves from the distress, or to reduce the impact of the distress. Phinney (2003) asserted that ethnic identity is one of the most important psychological resources that enable people to be resilient against discrimination. International students may avoid potential situations where perceived discrimination is likely to occur. They may also seek support from people from the same ethnicity group, or from other minority ethnicity groups, in order to cope with the distress from perceived discrimination.

Lee (2003) investigated ethnic identify as a potential protective factor against perceived discrimination. The sample consisted of 91 Asian American undergraduate

students on a major research university campus in the U.S. Fifty one were born in the States, and 40 immigrated to the country. Minority group discrimination was measured by perceptions of a racially hostile university climate. Personal ethnic discrimination was measured by perception of unfair individual treatment. The researcher found that personal ethnic discrimination was moderately correlated with lower personal and social well-being and higher psychological distress, while minority group discrimination was correlated only with lower community well-being. Contrary to a hypothesis of the study, however, ethnic identity did not have any significant protective effects against perceived discrimination. Lee (2003) concluded that ethnic identify may function primarily as a psychological asset that contributes to well-being, but it may not necessarily protect against the effects of discrimination.

Another study by Lee (2005) yielded similar results. The study participants were Korean American undergraduates on a major research university campus in the US, which reduced the heterogeneity within the sample. Lee defined psychological well-being more precisely in this study (i.e., lack of depressive symptoms, social connectedness, and good self-esteem). The author hypothesized that ethnic discrimination would be significantly associated with higher depressive symptoms, lower social connectedness and lower self-esteem, but these effects would be moderated by ethnic identity. As hypothesized, ethnic discrimination was significantly related to higher depressive symptoms, lower social connectedness, and lower self-esteem. Only one aspect of ethnic identity---affective pride---acted as a buffer to the distress caused by ethnic discrimination. In addition, as the level of perceived discrimination increased, the buffering effect of affective pride decreased.

To sum up the section on perceived discrimination and acculturative stress, perceived discrimination is one source of psychological distress to immigrants, including international students in the United States. Perceived discrimination may cause international students to feel more distant with the host culture, and thus less motivated to be engaged with the culture. One shared strength of the studies cited is that they examined the impact of perceived discrimination on their participants, which highlights the fact that reducing perceived discrimination is important to people's well-being. These studies have a few limitations. First, in some samples, participants may be from different minority backgrounds, and thus may have different experience with discrimination. Second, some samples have participants from one specific ethnic background, but they were not necessarily born and raised in the U.S. The participants' level and length of their life experience in the U.S. may affect how they experience and perceive discrimination as well.

According to Berry's (1997) acculturation strategies, it is preferred that immigrants have an interest in both maintaining one's original culture, while in daily interactions with other groups. This strategy is called *Integration* where there is some degree of cultural integrity maintained, while at the same time a person seeks to participate as an integral part of the large social network. For international students experiencing more perceived discrimination, it is hard to naturally and comfortably interact with the social network, and maintain a genuine interest in the host culture. In this sense, perceived discrimination may prevent international students from getting to know the host culture, or moving to a more advanced stage of acculturation.

Age, Language Proficiency, Gender as Factors Related to International Students'

Acculturative Stress

Based on Berry's (1997) acculturation model for research, other individual level variables also play an important role in acculturation, including: age, gender, education level, pre-acculturation status, migration motivation, expectations, language, and religion. Some researchers have examined the relationships between these variables and acculturative stress.

Findings are mixed in regard to how much acculturative stress is predicted by age, gender, or relationship status. Poyrazil, Arrona, Bullington, and Pisecco (2001) found no correlation between adjustment difficulties and school, gender, marital status, selected major, and socio-economic status. They did find age was found to be a predictor for acculturative stress, such that younger students seemed to have fewer problems compared to older students. These researchers found Turkish international students whose education in the U.S. was funded by their government reported more acculturative stress than those who were self-funded. In another study, married international students reported having less acculturative strain than single students, and Asian international students reported more stress compared to international students from European countries (Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006).

In contrast to equivocal findings reported for the variables mentioned in the previous paragraph, language proficiency has more consistently been found to correlate with both psychological distress (inverse relationship) and academic performance (positive relationship) over the course of acculturation. For example, Turkish international students reporting higher GPAs tended to also have better English language

reading and writing skills (Poyrazil, Arrona, Bullington & Pisecco, 2001). Yeh and Inose (2003) found that self-reported English language fluency was a significant predictor of acculturative distress. Specifically, higher frequency of use, fluency level and the degree to which participants felt comfortable speaking English, predicted lower levels of acculturative distress among international students. The authors speculated that international students' confidence in their language skills helped them interact more with people and the surrounding environment in their daily lives. They also hypothesized that a higher language level would help international students perform better in school because the students may feel more confident participating in discussions. Further evidence of an association between language proficiency and acculturative stress was the researchers' finding that international students from English-speaking countries were less likely to report experiencing acculturative stress compared to students from Asia, Africa, and Latin/Central America. Perhaps speaking the same language helps English-speaking international students fit in better on an American campus.

In summary, acculturative stress may be related to age, gender, relationship status, and language proficiency. The most consistently demonstrated relationship appears to be between English language skills and international students' level of acculturative stress. English language skills have also been shown to predict international students' academic performance, possibly allowing them to better comprehend academic materials, participate in classroom discussions, and have more confidence to interact with others, which allows them to build and expand their social network. One shared limitation of these cited studies is that participants took the surveys or measurement tools in English, instead of in their native language. Participants' understanding of and responses to the

surveys and measurement tools may be influenced by their language proficiency. Another limitation of these studies is the lack of homogeneity in some of the samples. Some samples have international students from various regions of the world and language systems, and the makeup of the samples does not necessarily resemble that of the international students in the U.S. This may make it hard to generalize the findings from these studies to greater international student population in the U.S.

Coping with Acculturative Stress

Another importance aspect of acculturative stress concerns the strategies international students use to cope with stress. Acculturative stress is closely associated with the transition to a new environment (Berry, 1997). The same stressor may be perceived differently by international students compared to their host country peers, since acculturation adds more layers of complexity to it (Poyrazil & Lopez, 2007).

Seeking social support comprises a commonly recommended coping strategy (cf. Yeh & Inose, 2003). Yeh and Inose (2003) studied a group of undergraduate and graduate international students from a large urban university from northeastern part of the U.S. and found that international students who are more satisfied with the quality of their social network reported less acculturative stress. Hwang and Wang (2011) hypothesized that social support and a supportive campus environment will significantly impact international students' adjustment and learning performance. Their sample consisted of international students in Taiwan. Using structural equation modeling (SEM), the researchers confirmed their hypothesis regarding the interrelationships of support, supportive campus environment, learning performance, and adjustment. International

students who experienced more support and perceived the campus environment as more supportive had better learning performance and less adjustment difficulties.

One strength of Hwang and Wang's (2011) study is that it considered different aspects of social support for international students, including support from social network, and also support from their university. This acknowledged the fact that international students' adjustment includes both personal and academic aspects. One limitation of the findings, however, is that Hwang and Wang (2011) did not report how they measured learning performance. Another limitation of the study is that it did not rule out other factors that may affect the relationship between support and learning performance. For example, one's language proficiency also influences academic performance to some extent.

On-line networking comprises another potential venue for international students to build social connectedness. Concepts related to on-line networking include online bridging, off-line bridging, online bonding, and off-line bonding. Bridging is thought to help people develop "loose relationships" and most of the time serves to connect individuals to a different network of people; bonding is thought to provide more emotional support through stronger, more personal relationships. Lin and colleagues (Lin, Kim, Kim & LaRose, 2011) studied international students from a large Midwestern university in the U.S., and found that international students who spent more time networking on line with students from their own country had more on-line bridging capital (defined as getting to know more people), better social adjustment, and college attachment, but they did not have better emotional adjustment. They speculated that the

level and the quality of the support received from the internet did not necessarily help them adjust emotionally.

Regarding increased social support, some research suggests having a religious affiliation helps international students manage acculturative stress. Research on religion/spirituality as a coping mechanism, however, is mixed. Hsu et al. (2009) found that international students at a university in New Zealand reported higher level of spirituality than domestic students and they also were also more likely to use spirituality as a coping mechanism. The international students also reported having a lower physical and environmental quality of life than domestic students, but there were no significant differences in psychological and social quality of life domains.

Chai, Krageloh, Shepherd, and Billington (2012) found no significant difference in self-rated spiritual, religious, and personal beliefs between international and domestic students. It was also found that religious beliefs serve as a contributor to international students' psychological and social quality of life only in Asian international students. In fact, Asian students' religious coping had a beneficial effect regardless of whether they experienced low or high levels of stress (Chai, Krageloh, Shepherd & Billington, 2012).

These studies shed light on how religious belief potentially buffers some acculturative stress. These studies have a few strengths. First, they compared domestic students and international students in regard to their religious beliefs a coping strategy to stress. The comparison allows the readers to consider and understand unique function of religious belief to international students' adjustment. Second, these studies emphasized role of religious belief not only as a moderator of acculturative stress, but also as a contributor to some international students overall psychological health. This means

international students who have a religious affiliation can be encouraged to incorporate religious practice throughout their stay in the host society. However, these studies have some limitations. First, they failed to consider within group differences of certain ethnic groups. For example, some Asian countries may be more religious than others, and students from different countries may have different perceptions of religion. Second, it is possible that in some Asian ethnic groups, the buffering effect of religion is larger than for other groups. When all ethnic groups are studied together, subtle differences may be lost.

Wang et al. (2012) found that students with a balanced mixture of support from friends of the same ethnic group and friends born in the U.S. adjusted more quickly and smoothly to the new culture. The study concluded that international students who had good support from students of the same country may expect to receive more understanding and validation of their struggles. At the same time, a solid group of students with the same cultural heritage may serve as a safe place for international students to venture out and explore the new culture. However, if only interacting with a same-home-country group, international students may be stuck in the *Separation* stage (Berry, 1997) where they hold on to the home culture and do not have much opportunity to know the new culture. Berry (1997) suggested that healthy acculturation involves *Integration*, meaning some degree of culture integrity maintained, while at the same time one seeks to participate as an integral part of the larger social network. Therefore, international students should be encouraged to get a balanced array of support, from people in the new culture and those identifying more with home culture.

Wang et al.'s (2012) study has a few strengths. First, the study used a longitudinal method, which allowed the study to paint a clearer picture of the adjustment trajectories of Chinese international students over a span of several semesters. Second, the participants of this study were recruited from multiple states across the U.S., including Missouri, New York, California and Pennsylvania. The large scale sampling may increase the generalizability of the findings. The study findings should be considered with the context of some limitations. First, the study used psychological distress as an indicator of the level of adjustment. This may run the risk of overlooking other important aspects of acculturative adjustment, such as social connectedness, or self-esteem in a new cultural environment. Second, around 20% of the participants in the study had previous experience studying in the U.S. It is likely that these participants have adjusted to living and studying in the U.S. to some extent. Therefore, their experience of coming to U.S. for college education may be different from those who come to the U.S. for the first time.

Summary

Existing research on acculturative stress of international students has revealed some common factors that may contribute to distress when international students transition and become adjusted to a new culture. These factors include personality traits, language proficiency, and perceived discrimination. Age, gender and marital status do not appear to be strong predictors of acculturative stress. In order to cope with acculturative stress, international students may need to build stronger social network. The social support can come from students of the same ethnic group, religion, and/or from on-line communities. Seeking balanced support from people in and out of international students' own ethnic group may be more beneficial to cultural adjustment. Although existing

literature provides insight in the acculturation experience of international students, the extent to which these findings apply to Chinese international students, especially Chinese undergraduate international students, remains unknown.

Subjective Well-Being: Focusing on the Positives

The link between acculturative stress and subjective well-being has not been firmly established based on exiting literature, but arguably, if someone is distressed and not able to manage the stress, life satisfaction will diminish. The literature reviewed in this section is based on the hypothesis that international students' acculturation challenges are related to their level of life satisfaction. Factors that may cause distress likely may also be ones that lower life satisfaction of Chinese international students.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, literature on the adjustment difficulties of Chinese international students, as well as international students in general, provides good guidance for university staff and helping professionals as they conceptualize potential challenges. The research, however, creates an impression that international students are a high-risk group for problems, difficulties and psychopathology. Missing are data concerning aspects of international students' lives that are more exciting, eye-opening, and satisfying.

Hiseh (2007) argued that Chinese international students' adaption experiences are not necessarily negative, and suggested more attention to their positive transformative processes. Wang et al. (2012) found that 65% of the Chinese undergraduate international students studying in the US who participated in his study belong to the "well-adjusted" group. These students had lower distress across all the data collection points; 14% actually reported feeling "relieved" after their arrival. The authors believed they might

have overestimated the challenges before they came to the U.S. Soon after their arrival, they felt the situation was more manageable than they anticipated. The findings of this study raise questions about the impact of cultural adjustment on Chinese international students' overall wellbeing, in particular, their overall life satisfaction. One question is whether their successful adjustment contributes to feelings of satisfaction despite the high likelihood that they have both satisfying and dissatisfying experiences while in the U.S.

Empirical attention to both positive and negative aspects of Chinese international students' lives fits well with research on subjective well-being. Subjective well-being (SWB) has been an extensively-studied topic since the 1960s, when researchers became interested in finding the "ingredients" to happiness. Wilson (1967) noted several key factors to "being a happy person," such as being healthy, well-paid, young, well-educated, and optimistic. These factors were based on values important to American society 50 years ago. Perhaps they are unchanged currently.

Researchers from the 1960s to 1980s viewed SWB as a reflection of virtues, holiness, and positive attitude over negative events (cf. Diener, 1984). Most of their findings generally indicated that subjective well-being is a broad category encompassing people's emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgment of life satisfaction (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Research on subjective well-being encourages a more comprehensive view of people's physical and psychological health. The concept of subjective well-being does not focus solely on a person's challenges, but it also examines what has been working well and how a person can continue to build on strengths. As some studies suggest many Chinese international students do not necessarily feel distressed about their experience in the U.S., more research should be

done to determine factors that help to enhance and maintain their subjective well-being as they transition to the U.S (Wang et al, 2012).

Life Satisfaction: One Important Construct Subjective Well-Being

Subjective well-being (SWB) and life satisfaction are two different concepts that are related, but not identical to each other. Diener (2015) defined subjective well-being as follows:

"Subjective well-being is the scientific name for how people evaluate their lives. People can evaluate their lives in terms of a global judgment (such as life satisfaction or feelings of fulfillment), in terms of evaluating the domains of their lives (such as marriage or work), or in terms of their ongoing emotional feelings about what is happening to them (feeling pleasant emotions, which arise from positive evaluations of one's experiences, and low levels of unpleasant feelings, which arise from negative evaluations of one's experiences)"(para.1).

Diener (2015) defined life satisfaction as follows:

"Life satisfaction refers to a cognitive evaluation or judgment of one's life. Is my life overall going well? Has the entirety of my life been close to my ideal? If I could live my life over, would I choose essentially the same life or would I change much of it? People use information to make conscious judgments when they report "satisfaction," whereas moods and emotions occur as ongoing reactions to current events."(para.26)

Based on Diener's (2015) definition, SWB involves individual's evaluation and perception on how their life is going in general or in specific domains. There is also an affective component to SWB that speaks to people's on-going emotional experience, especially pleasant emotional experience, with life. Life satisfaction focuses on

individual's judgment on their overall functioning but not necessarily in any specific areas of their life. Life satisfaction focuses more on individual's cognitive perception, instead of the affective side of their life experience. Life satisfaction may be considered a component of SWB that can be used and measured to indicate a person's SWB. This present study focuses on the cognitive judgment of how life is for Chinese undergraduate international students. Therefore, it is appropriate to focus this literature review on life satisfaction.

Life satisfaction usually involves a cognitive process that assesses the quality of one's life (Hamarta, 2009; Diener, 2015); it involves constant evaluation, both conscious and unconscious, of how various domains of life fit an individual's expectations of how life should be. Howell and Hill (2009) concluded that people have a basic need to feel satisfied with life, based on their findings of a strong positive link between income and life satisfaction in impoverished communities of Calcutta, India. The correlation remained significant even after satisfaction with self, family, and friends were controlled, and suggesting that for people with lower levels of income, getting basic needs met is of primary importance to their well-being.

Interpersonal relations have also been found to predict life satisfaction. Froh et al. (2007) found that people who have quality interpersonal relationships are more likely to feel satisfied with life. The researchers also found an inverse relationship between quality interpersonal interaction and "global irrationality," indicating that people who have better interpersonal interactions tend to have less irrational beliefs about themselves and others. The study recruited 28 patients from a non-profit outpatient training/treatment center, and sampled 207 undergraduate students attending three academic institutions in New York.

The participants reported an average age of 23.27 (SD=7.7). The study showed that people who are more socially connected are likely to have more psychological needs met, since they are more likely to receive support in difficult situations. The findings also suggested that people with more quality interpersonal interactions have more resources they can draw upon. If their friends and family cannot help with specific life tasks or situations, they are more likely to make connections with people that can help.

Personality and emotional intelligence are also factors contributing to life satisfaction. Koydemir and Schutz (2012) investigated how much variance emotional intelligence and personality accounted for in a model predicting life satisfaction for a sample of college students from Germany and Turkey. The German sample was selected from a large university in Eastern part of the Germany. The Turkey sample was selected from one of the most prestigious universities located in the capital of Turkey. All students in the study were native-born. SWLS (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) was used to measure life satisfaction; the Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988) was used to measure participants' emotional well-being; the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Scale (SSREI; Schutte et al, 1998) was used to measure emotional intelligence; the Big Five Inventory (BFI-44, John & Srivastava, 1999) was used to measure the Big Five personality traits. The authors argued that German students had higher general subjective well-being than those from Turkey on based on the level of reported life satisfaction. For the participants from both countries, life satisfaction was significantly and positively related to emotional intelligence, when personality traits were controlled. One strength of the study is the use of two samples from two culturally different countries. The findings suggest that

emotional intelligence is closely related to life satisfaction in both samples, despite the possible cultural differences between the two samples. This may bring more generalizability to the findings. Further research may continue to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction in other cultures, and explore the universality of that positive correlation. One limitation of the study is that the researchers do not reveal the path of how emotional intelligence affected life satisfaction. Perhaps participants with higher emotional intelligence were more reflective or more able to relate to others. In that sense, emotional intelligence may help improve social connectedness, or insight in life, which subsequently improve life satisfaction. Another limitation of the study is that the authors did not offer clear reasons for sampling participants from Germany and Turkey, instead of other countries or regions. With clearer rationale for sampling, the study may have stronger implication about how college student's life satisfaction may vary depending on country or origin, or cultures.

Other factors such as character strength and meaning in life have also been shown to correlated with life satisfaction. Peterson and Seligman (2004) developed a hierarchy of 24 personal strengths classified within 6 categories of universal virtues: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. A study in Switzerland sampled 334 adults and examined the correlation between strengths of character and reported life satisfaction. Some strength has been significantly correlated with self-reported satisfaction with life, specifically, the strengths of love, hope, zest, curiosity and gratitude (Buschor, Proyer, & Ruch, 2013).

In addition, having meaning in life may help people feel satisfied. Research has repeatedly shown that meaning in life plays a positive role in enhancing subjective well-

being. Steger, Oishi, and Kesebir (2011) found meaning in life is a key factor in maintaining people's motivations. People were very satisfied with their lives if they were actively searching for meaning and had already found personal meaning. Those who were actively searching but had not found meaning in life reported much lower levels of life satisfaction. Of note, people who were not actively searching for meaning seemed more satisfied than those who wanted to find meaning but could not.

In summary, life satisfaction, as an indicator of subjective well-being, has been well-researched. The level of life satisfaction varies among individuals. Life satisfaction has been found to relate to income level in low-income communities, indicating that people whose basic needs are met are more likely to feel satisfied. Personality, personal strength, and emotional intelligence are qualities that appear to contribute to life satisfaction in varying degrees. People who are willing to interact socially with others tend to feel connected, supported and satisfied. Character strengths also seem to influence how a person responds to daily tasks, other people, and life circumstance. A person who is willing to look for meaning in life, and is able to find meaning, is more likely to feel motivated, which helps improve life satisfaction. A more detailed literature review on the life satisfaction of Chinese international students and college students in general will be included in the following sections.

Life Satisfaction of Chinese International Students

As extant research indicates life satisfaction is important to people's subjective well-being, this construct should be studied in Chinese international students for the following reasons. First, feeling satisfied implies a level of comfort with college life in the U.S. college life comprises a large part of their overall experience in the U.S. (Eland,

2001), and thus identifying ingredients of life satisfaction may help Chinese undergraduate international students feel more comfortable and content. Second, life satisfaction may foster motivation and hope for the future. Chinese undergraduate international students need to work hard to adjust and to succeed academically, and the effort may seem more manageable if life generally looks more hopeful. Third, life satisfaction is a strength-oriented construct. Diener (2006) believes that studying life satisfaction may bring a "recipe of a few ingredients" that may promote individual's life satisfaction. As mentioned earlier in this paper, most international student are not necessarily distressed (Hiseh, 2007; Wang et al., 2012) as assumed by some authors (e.g.,Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Han et al., 2013; Lee, Park, & Kim, 2009; Tochkov, Levine & Sanaka, 2010). Therefore, exploring the strengths, traits, or other factors related to life satisfaction may provide a more comprehensive view on Chinese undergraduate international students' experiences. To date, however, only two studies could be found specifically addressing Chinese international students' life satisfaction, after the primary investigator did an extensive search on some major journals. The primary researcher searched all the issues of the Journal of College Counseling, the Journal of Counseling Psychology, The Counseling Psychologist, Journal of Higher Education, back to January, 2005, using the key words "Chinese international student" and "life satisfaction". The search did not yield any article on Chinese international students' life satisfaction. The primary investigator then searched on the same key words in "Google Scholars", and found two articles related to this topic. They are described in detail next.

Pan et al. (2008) found meaning of life had protective effects on life satisfaction among samples of Chinese international students in Australia and Hong Kong. They

developed the Acculturative Stressor Scale for Chinese Students (ASSCS) to measure the

acculturative stressors Chinese students experience in their host country or region. They

validated the initial 18-item scale in a sample of 400 mainland Chinese students in 6

universities in Hong Kong (Cronbach alpha coefficient = .89). The stressors measured

were language proficiency, cultural difference, academic work and social interaction. The

authors added 9 items to represent two additional stressors common for Chinese

international students in Western countries: discrimination and financial problems.

Validation of the 27-item ASSCS in a sample of Chinese students in Australia yielded a

Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.91. The questionnaire used in the study consisted of the

ASSCS (18 items for Hong Kong sample; 27 items for Australian sample); a 55-item

Chinese Personal Meaning Profile (Cronbach alpha coefficient = 0.96; Baessler & Oerter,

2003); and a 5-item Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener,Robert, Emmons &

Griffin, 1985) (Cronbach alpha coefficient = 0.87). A total of 606 participants completed

the questionnaire. Four hundred were Chinese students studying in 6 Hong Kong

universities (200 males, 200 females), and 206 were mainland Chinese students studying

at the University of Melbourne (68 males, 138 females).

The results indicate that Chinese students in Hong Kong had a mean rating of

20.16 for life satisfaction (SD = 6.28); Chinese students in Australia had a mean rating of

20.99 for life satisfaction (SD = 6.35). Diener (2006) identified scores between 20 and 24

on SWLS as average scores in terms of level of life satisfaction. Multivariate analysis of

covariance (covariates being sex, duration of stay in the host society, level of education,

age, marital status, and religiosity) indicated the Hong Kong sample reported

significantly lower acculturative stress than the Australian sample. Although Chinese

international students in Australia experience a higher level of acculturation stress than the Hong Kong sample, the two groups did not differ in their level of life satisfaction. The authors reported that meaning in life was a mediator between acculturation stressors and life satisfaction ($p < 0.001$). Several sources of life meaning were assessed, and results served as an indicator of how much meaning of life the participants held. These sources included self-development, achievement, acceptance and contentment, Western religion, relationships, pursuit of purpose, family, being close to nature and being authentic, fair treatment, and intimate relationships. The authors found the following: students with more meaning in life tended to feel more satisfied; students experiencing more acculturative stress reported less meaning in life; students who reported less acculturative stress felt more satisfied with life. More specifically, in all the areas of acculturative stress, social interaction and academic work were significantly and positively correlated with life satisfaction. Among the ten domains of life meaning, factors such as personal achievement, acceptance and contentment, relationship, family, fair treatment and intimate relationships were significantly and positively correlated with life satisfaction.

Pan et al.'s (2008) findings suggest that life satisfaction is important to international students' psychological well-being. In addition, the study revealed factors contributing to Chinese international student's life satisfaction, for example, quality of social support, academic performance, acculturation difficulties, and perceived discrimination. Acculturative stressors such as the quality of interaction and perceived discrimination tend to make students less satisfied with their life in the U.S. There are a few limitations to this study. First limitation of the study concerns their use of The

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) which

was designed to measure global life satisfaction. Since the authors were trying to examine

the life satisfaction of international students, more specific questions should be asked in

regard to how satisfied international students feel about their life in a different culture.

Future research could involve scales tailored to measuring international students' life

satisfaction, or include open-ended questions to capture potential factors unique to

international students' life. Second, the study did not elaborate on what lowered or

buffered the acculturative stress in the Hong Kong international students' sample. The

fact that participants in the Hong Kong sample still reported acculturative stress indicates

that there are factors that are causing the acculturative stress. However, what had made

that stress significantly less compared to Australian sample may need further explanation.

Third, close to 40% of the Hong Kong sample's duration of stay in the host society was

less than half a year, while only 18.4% of the Australian sample has been to the host

society for half year or less. It is likely that the participants in Hong Kong sample were

at a "honeymoon" phase of their adjustment to the host society, and therefore did not

report as much acculturative stress as those in Australia sample.

Personality has also been found to be a predictor of Chinese international students'

life satisfaction. Zhang, Mandl and Wang (2010) sampled 139 Chinese international

students in Germany (66 men, 73 women) and measured their level of life satisfaction

and personality traits. Their average age was 25.3 (SD= 2.9); and 64(45.3%) participants

were single, 17 (12.9%) were married, and 58 (41.7%) were in a serious relationship.

Their average duration of stay in Germany was 32 months (SD=29). The authors

measured the participants' personality traits using the Big Five Inventory of Personality

(Benet-Martinez & John, 1998; John & Srivastava, 1999); they measured their acculturation level using the Vancouver Index of Acculturation (Ryder et al., 2000) and Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (Ward & Kennedy, 1999); they measured life satisfaction using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985).

One-way ANOVA analyses showed that women (M = 4.56, SD = 1.43) reported higher life satisfaction than men (M = 4.04, SD = 1.53; F1,137 = 4.40, $p < .05$). Marital status also influenced participants' reported life satisfaction (F2,136 = 4.63, $p < .05$). Post hoc analysis showed that married people (M = 5.24, SD = 1.46) were more satisfied than people who were either single (M = 4.03, SD = 1.46; F = 9.19, $p < .01$) or in a relationship (M = 4.34, SD = 1.46; F = 4.79, $p < .05$). The latter two groups did not differ significantly from each other. Five hierarchical regression analyses were performed separately, with general adjustment and life satisfaction as dependent variables. In the first step of each analysis, language confidence, residence time, sex, and marital status were entered as control variables. In the second step, the five personality trait scores were entered. The results revealed that the personality traits of Extroversion and Conscientiousness were significantly related to life satisfaction. Life satisfaction was also predicted by less Neuroticism.

Similar to Pan et al. (2008), Zhang et al. (2010) used the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985) to measure life satisfaction, but the scale was normed around domestic college students in the U.S., instead of international students, and has not been validated using an international student sample. Another limitation is the wide variance in the sample's duration of stay in Germany (M= 32 months, SD=29 months). The participants may have been in Germany somewhere between 3 months to over 5

years. Those who had only been in Germany for a few months may likely have been experiencing more distress due to the transition to the new environment. Their reported level of life satisfaction may have been influenced by the distress. Therefore, their level of satisfaction may skew the overall rated level of life satisfaction in the whole sample. In addition, the researchers did not consider participants' level of satisfaction prior to their arrival in Germany. Thus it is difficult to discern how much of the participants' satisfaction or dissatisfaction was due to their status as international students.

These studies illustrate the importance of studying Chinese international students' life satisfaction, and open the conversation on what contributes to their life satisfaction. They are limited, however, in the domains of life satisfaction investigated. Future studies are needed to explore domains of Chinese such as the academic, vocational, and personal life satisfaction of Chinese international students.

In order to contribute to an understanding of factors that may contribute to life satisfaction of Chinese international students, this investigator expanded the literature search to the life satisfaction of college students studying in their own countries. As mentioned earlier in this paper, developmentally Chinese international students need to fulfill similar tasks as domestic students (e.g., declaring a major, exploring career paths, developing friendships and intimate relationship, etc.). Identification of variables that contribute to college students' satisfaction with various aspects of college life may help to inform the present study.

Life Satisfaction of College Students

Life satisfaction has been shown to bring positive momentum to college students as they explore the path of personal growth in college. Stevic and Ward (2008) noted that

positive recognition may increase life satisfaction of college students, and increased life satisfaction encourages students' personal growth. In their study, only a few participants reported receiving positive cognition from family or faculty. Those, who reported receiving positive recognition, also experienced more positive emotions, felt more motivated and confident to explore college life and become more knowledgeable and creative.

Mahmound and colleagues (Mahmound, Staten, Hall & Lennie, 2012) surveyed 508 undergraduate students at the University of Kentucky and found that maladaptive coping styles may lead to higher chances of depression and lower life satisfaction. Moreover, mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety also tend to lower college students' level of satisfaction. Positive problem solving was positively correlated, such that students who had more skills to solve problems and felt more confident in their ability to solve problems were more likely to feel satisfied with college life. This finding is supported by a study in Turkey (Harmata, 2009) which found that positive problem orientation and rational problem solving were positively related to life satisfaction, while negative problem orientation, impulsivity and avoidance problem solving styles were negatively related to life satisfaction of Turkish students? . Rational problem solving, avoidance styles and positive problem orientation also significantly predicted life satisfaction.

Zullig, Huebner and Pun (2009) studied domain-specific life satisfaction for a sample of college students in the U.S., and found that Caucasian students seemed to be more satisfied with their life than minority students in both "school" and "self" domains, meaning the Caucasian students felt more satisfied with their learning experience in

college, sense of belonging on campus, and self-esteem. Students of minority groups (not international students) tended to feel more isolated and that they had not reached their potential academically. This study illustrates the potential influence of ethnicity on students' levels of life satisfaction. The study, however, lacks data regarding what it is about ethnicity that influences life satisfaction. If minority students feel isolated, is it due to perceived discrimination, lack of support from their community, or other factors? More research is needed to answer these questions.

Two selected studies on college students' life satisfaction. The two studies in this section were selected for a more detailed review. Diener (2006) stated that social relationships, and state of work or school are important factors to life satisfaction. These two studies were selected because they discussed the importance of social support and career development to college students' life satisfaction.

Yacin (2011) studied 133 Turkish college students (54 female, 79 male) and found perceived social support from family and faculty, as well as optimism, predicted their level of life satisfaction. Students who were in the Faculty of Educational Sciences class at Ankara University completed three questionnaires: 1) the Turkish version of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985), used to measure global life satisfaction of the participants (Cronbach alpha coefficient = 0.74); the Perceived Social Support Scale-Revised (Yildirim, 2004), used to assess students' perceived social support from family, friends and teachers (Cronbach alpha coefficient = 0.93); and the Life Orientation Test (Scheier & Carver, 1985), used to measure students' optimism level (Cronbach alpha coefficient = 0.63).

There was a significant difference in the level of life satisfaction between males and females ($p < 0.01$). Multiple regression analysis revealed that one third of the variance in the participants' life satisfaction was jointly accounted for by family support, faculty support and optimism (adjusted $R^2 = 0.34$). The results confirmed that having a strong social support network was related to students feeling "happy" and satisfied with where their high-school-to-college transition. Yacin (2011) also encouraged future research to look into different types of social support, and the support from different providers, in order to get a broader perspective on the relationship between social support and life satisfaction.

Yacin's (2011) findings should be considered in the context of a study limitation. First, the sampling method may affect generalizability of the findings. Participants were recruited through a single class; the researcher did not explain the rationale for choosing this specific class as the potential pool of participants. Although not indicated in the article, the students were likely in the same or similar disciplines/majors, suggesting they may be a more cohesive group. Furthermore, their reported level of faculty support may only reflect the quality of faculty support in those disciplines or majors. In addition, the authors did not report the time of the year when the study took place. College students' stress level may vary depending on external factors such as being in the week of finals. With more information about the time and context where the study took place, readers may have a more comprehensive understanding of the findings.

Career development has been found to be related to life satisfaction. College students inherently move through different stages of career development, including declaring a major, building experiences around their interest areas, and post-graduation

planning (finding a job or seeking further education). Hirschi and Herrman (2012) noted

that vocational identify achievement acted as a partial mediator of the relationship

between vocational calling and life satisfaction. At the first measurement point, they

sampled 589 German undergraduate students (in Germany) from diverse majors, ranging

from social work to engineering. Sixty-eight percent of the participants were female and

their mean age was 23.5 (SD = 3.38). At the second measurement point, 269 of the 589

participants completed a survey. This sample was 69.5% female and their mean age was

23.3 (SD=3.49). The authors stated that there was no difference regarding the distribution

of gender, age or semester between the participants at the two measurement points. The

construct of *Calling* was assessed with the Brief Calling Scale (Dik, Eldridge, Steger, &

Duffy, 2012). *Calling* in this study was conceptualized as a way to approach life in a way

that is consistent with one's sense of purpose and meaningfulness, one's values and goals

(Dik & Duffy, 2009). Students were asked to rate the "trueness" of each item on a 1-5

scale (1 = not at all true of me; 5 = totally true of me). One sample item was "I have a

calling to a particular kind of work."

The researchers found that calling did not predict life satisfaction. Students with

stronger vocational calling, however, reported more vocational decisiveness. In addition,

calling was also a predictor of greater vocational identity achievement. Although

vocational calling was not directly correlated with life satisfaction in the study, it did

have some relationship to career development. One major limitation of the study is that it

was based on the assumption that "calling" means the same thing to all participants.

Although all the participants were German-born undergraduate students, it is risky to

conclude that the concept of "calling" resonated with them in the same way. Moreover, the findings may not be generalizable to cultures in which "calling" is a foreign concept.

In summary of this section on college students' life satisfaction shows that life satisfaction is related to academic performance, career development, social support, problem solving skills, and ethnicity. Further study is needed to examine if whether these factors are associated with the life satisfaction of Chinese international students. Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, and Kommers (2012) argued that academic adjustment comprises one important dimension of overall adjustment to a new culture. Academic success brings a sense of achievement and helps promote international students' social integration (Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet & Kommers, 2012). With a higher level of social integration comes more social connectedness. More social connection may also bring more satisfaction (Diener, 2006). There is limited research on how academic success, problem solving skills and ethnicity affect Chinese international students' life satisfaction. These topics should be explored further in future research.

Accordingly, the present study was a qualitative investigation of contributors to Chinese undergraduate international students' academic success in the U.S. The study also explored the factors that help an academically successful group of Chinese undergraduate international students achieve and maintain high life satisfaction in the U.S.. In the study, participants provided suggestions for other Chinese undergraduate international students on how to improve academic performance and life satisfaction. Another goal of the study was to investigate how this group of Chinese undergraduate international students manages cultural and academic adjustment in the U.S.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Sample

The population of interest is Chinese undergraduate international students who were pursuing college education in the U.S at the time of the study. This investigator used a criterion-based sampling method to obtain a homogeneous sample (Hill, 2012). Selection criteria for the survey included: (1) Chinese undergraduate international student, and (2) enrolled as a full-time student at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities campus. *International students* are defined as students who were holding F-1 Student Visa at the time of the study; *full-time students* are defined as registered for at least 12 credits at the time of the study. Selection criteria for the interviews included: (1) students who scored at 25 or above on the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, 1985), (2) students who reported a GPA at or above 3.5 at the time of the survey, and (3) students who were of sophomore year or above, as at time of the study.

Recruitment began upon receipt of approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Minnesota. This investigator contacted the Office of Measurement Services (OMS) at the University of Minnesota; the OMS which has authorization to reach out to Chinese international students via email without disclosing their email addresses to the researcher(s). The OMS sent out an invitation to participate in the study (See Appendix A) to all Chinese undergraduate students who met selection criteria ($N = 1189$). The invitation informed potential survey respondents they would be entered into a drawing to win one of two $30 University of Minnesota Dining Cards, and it also contained a link to an online survey.

The OMS sent returned surveys ($N = 180$; a conservative estimated response of 15.1%). Forty of the surveys were not complete and they were excluded from further analysis. This investigator next screened out respondents who did not meet the selection criteria for participation in the interview ($n = 92$). These 92 participants were screened out because they scored below 25 on the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmos, Larsen & Griffin, 1985) and/or reported a GPA lower than 3.5 at the time of the survey; or because they reported being freshmen in the survey. Of the remaining 48 respondents, 20 indicated a willingness to be contacted to participate in the interview portion of the study. Demographics for the survey respondents are reported in Table 1 and summarized in Chapter 4. Figure 1 contains a flow chart illustrating participant recruitment and sample sizes.

Email to all full-time, Chinese undergraduate students ($N = 1189$)

Online survey (returned $n = 180$; completed $n = 140$)

48 of the 140 met criteria; 20 of the 48 indicated willingness to participant in the interview

Interview invitation sent out ($n = 20$)

3 of the 18 participants were not interviewed because it was found out prior to the interview that they did not meet full selection criteria

Participants agreed to be interviewed ($n = 18$)

Interviews completed ($n = 15$)
Interview transcripts kept ($n = 13$)

2 completed interviews were discarded because the participants disclosed that they went to high school in the U.S. during the interviews

Data analysis (140 completed surveys and 13 interview transcripts)

Fig.1 Flow chart illustrating participant recruitment and sample sizes

An email invitation to participate in the interview portion of the study (See Appendix B) was sent to all 20 individuals who agreed to participate. The invitation informed potential interviewees they would receive $10 upon completion of the interview. Eighteen students responded and expressed interest in participating in the interview; of these, 15 completed the interview portion of the study. Data for two of these individuals were excluded from analysis, however, as they disclosed during the interview that they had attended high school in the U.S. The three students who were not interviewed were excluded because they disclosed the following in response to the interview invitation: one was an exchange student and only studying at the University of Minnesota for one semester; one was a sophomore by credit, but had only been at the University of Minnesota for one month; one completed high school in the U.S. before coming to the University of Minnesota. Thus, the final interview sample was 13. Demographic characteristics for the interviewees are reported in Table 2 and summarized in Chapter 4.

Instrumentation

Study Survey. The study survey is a tool that was used to recruit interview participants that meet the study selection criteria (See Appendix C). The survey consisted of 6 items eliciting demographic information (GPA, sex, age, year in college, and in which college they are enrolled), and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmos, Larsen & Griffin, 1985). The SWLS is a 5-item measure of global life satisfaction (Diener, Emmos, Larsen & Griffin, 1985; Pavot, Diener, Colvin & Sandvik, 1991). Respondents rate each item on a 7 point rating scale (1= Totally Disagree to 7= Totally Agree). The total score ranges from 5-35, with higher scores indicating higher life satisfaction. According to Diener (2006) a score of 25 or above on the SWLS is a high

score or very high score and is related to agreement that one's life is enjoyable, and the major domains of life are going well (those domains being work or school, family, friends, leisure, and personal development).

The SWLS was initially constructed using a sample of 176 college students. The two-month test-retest correlation coefficient was .82 and the coefficient alpha was .87 (Diener, Emmos, Larsen & Griffin, 1985). A later study (Pavot, Diener, Colvin & Sandvik., 1991) revalidated the SWLS and reported test-retest reliability for 2-week and for 1 month intervals averaged .84. The average coefficient alpha was .85. Pavot, Diener, Colvin & Sandvik (1991) also found that life satisfaction is a consistent and stable phenomenon that is not constructed at the moment by a respondent based on short-term factors. The SWLS has not been validated using a Chinese international student sample. However, the SWLS has been used to measure life satisfaction of Chinese international students in multiple studies (Pan, Wong, Joubert, & Chan, 2008; Zhang, Mandl & Wang, 2010). A final survey item asked respondents to indicate their willingness to participate in a confidential, in-person interview portion.

Interview guide. A 14-item interview guide (See Appendix D) was developed by this investigator. The questions are designed primarily as semi-structured and open-ended. The use of open-ended questions is an important design element in Consensual Qualitative Research method (CQR; Hill, 2012). Open-ended questions provide a framework in which interviewees can say whatever comes to mind about the topic without imposing predetermined ideas onto their experiences (Hill, 2012).

The questions were constructed based on the major research questions of this study, this investigator's knowledge of the literature on international students' transition

and adjustment to a new culture, academic success, and life satisfaction, and consultation with her committee members. The interview questions addressed the following topics: Chinese undergraduate international students' experience with their transition to the U.S.; how the transition has affected their overall life satisfaction; what has helped them maintain their satisfaction with life; suggestions about how to maintain life satisfaction as an international student in the U.S; experience studying in the United States; what has helped them attain a high GPA, and suggestions about maintaining a high GPA; how has the transition to the U.S. has affected their academic performance; and their perceptions of the relationship between their life satisfaction and academic performance.

This investigator piloted the interview guide with two undergraduate Chinese international students who scored high (≥ 25) on the SWLS (Diener, Emmos, Larsen & Griffin, 1985) and reported having a GPA > 3.5. Based on their feedback, minor revisions were made to the interview guide to clarify some wording, and the investigator made a decision, based on pilot participant recommendations, to paraphrase interview questions if participants did not understand what they were being asked.

Procedures

Survey. They survey was built using Qualtrics, a survey tool commonly used at the University of Minnesota. The survey was set up in a way that each respondent could only take the survey one time. Potential respondents were asked to complete and return the survey regardless of their eligibility for, or interest in, participating in an interview. The reasons for this approach are two-fold: first, respondents did not have to take the time and responsibility to assess their eligibility for the study; second, it allowed this investigator to compare the demographic characteristics of interviewees to non-

interviewees. The survey was open for responses for 23 days (January 29, 2015-Feburary 20, 2015). There were 180 participants who responded to the survey, among which 140 participants completed the survey. The other 40 participants did not complete the survey.

Interviews. Interview participants and this investigator worked together to determine when and where to meet for the interviews. All interviews took place in private, quiet places, such as a private office, and they were completed within a four-week period (January 31, 2015 to March 1 2015). All interviews were conducted in English. Before starting each interview this investigator explained the nature and goal of the study and discussed informed consent, including that the interview would be audio-recorded. Every participant signed an informed consent statement prior to being interviewed (Appendix E). All participants were asked to respond to interview questions in English.

This investigator conducted every interview, using the interview guide. Consistent with a semi-structured approach, each participant was asked questions in approximately the same order, with occasional prompts for clarification/elaboration. Examples of prompts include: "Could you say that again?" and "What do you mean by that?" Audio files for all interview data were saved in an encrypted folder on a password protected computer. This investigator transcribed the audio files verbatim and checked the transcripts for accuracy against the audio files.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were calculated for responses to the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and for interviewees' demographic survey.

Interview data were analyzed using CQR methodology (Hill, 2012). This research method was chosen because CQR relies heavily on words, narratives, and stories rather

than numbers, and it is a method designed for inductive and cross-case analysis of interview data. The CQR researcher allows participants to talk about what they were thinking in an open-ended manner, and asks for a full description of experiences related to the topic rather than trying to capture their experience merely through numbers (Hill, 2012).

The primary research team for this study included three data analysts, the primary investigator and two second-year master's level counseling students; the primary investigator's academic adviser served as data auditor. The primary investigator is a doctoral candidate in counseling psychology and has had experience teaching, counseling and supervising Chinese international students in college settings. She is an international student from China and has been studying in the U.S. for 7 years. The primary investigator has had experience in collecting and analyzing qualitative data in multiple studies. The two master's level counseling students are female, Chinese international students. They had been studying in the U.S. for 1.5 years at the time of the data analysis. These two master's level counseling students had no previous experience with qualitative data analysis. The data auditor is a professor in counseling psychology with extensive experience with qualitative research, and counseling, teaching and supervising students from various cultural backgrounds.

During the first meeting with the two master's level coders, the primary investigator described the nature and goals of the study and explained CQR and the steps for analyzing interview data. She also explained how to code data into domains (rationally-derived topics), core ideas (summaries of interviewees' words), and categories (more specific topics within domains) based on CQR methodology. Then the coders used

the following steps to analyze data: 1) they independently coded data from transcripts into a list of domains; 2) they constructed core ideas within each domain; 3) they aggregated the core ideas within domains to form categories. After each step, the three coders met and discussed their domain list, core ideas and categories until consensus was achieved. The principal investigator conducted a cross case analysis, tallying the number of cases (interviews) in which each domain and category were present. The auditor reviewed the domain list, core ideas, and categories, and any disagreements were discussed to reach consensus.

The coding team started with 8 transcripts from which to form a domain list. Upon reaching consensus for these eight transcripts, the two master-level coders and the primary investigator read the remaining five transcripts to assess whether the domains reflected the data contained therein. Then the two master-level coders were given 4 transcripts each, and constructed core ideas based on the 4 cases assigned to each one of them. The primary investigator coded all 13 cases for domains, core ideas, and categories. During the discussion, the three coders reviewed and reached consensus on core ideas for each case. The same process was used to form categories across all cases. Figure 2 contains a flow chart illustrating the data analysis process (Figure 2).

```
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │  8 initial transcripts │
                    └─────────────────────┘
          ┌──────────────────────┐
    a     │  PI*, Coder 1, Coder 2 │
          └──────────────────────┘
                         │
                         ▼
                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │  5 additional   │
                    │   transcripts   │
                    └─────────────────┘
          ┌─────────────────────┐
    b     │  PI, Coder 1, Coder 2 │
          └─────────────────────┘
```
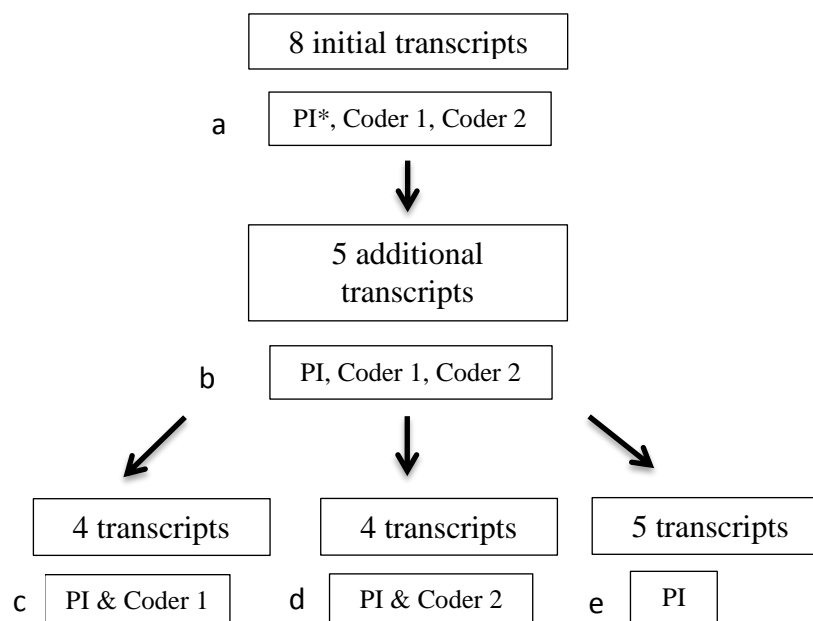
Fig.2 Data analysis process using Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) methodology. Consensus regarding domains and categories was reached through discussions between primary investigator and the two master-level coders.
*PI = Primary Investigator

Investigator Biases and Expectations

Biases in CQR are defined as personal issues that may interfere with the researchers' ability to remain objective about the data (Hill, 2012). *Expectations* differ from biases, as they refer to researchers' anticipations of participants' possible responses to interview questions (Hill et al., 1997). Hill (2012) provides this example of expectations: when studying international students, researchers may anticipate, based on personal experiences and knowledge of the literature, that most international students experience language difficulties and loneliness. The researchers may have a tendency to report language difficulties and loneliness even though participants indicated these are no longer an issue for them. Prior to data analysis, the primary research team discussed potential biases and expectations that might influence the data analysis process.

All three coders are graduate-level international students from Mainland China. They completed their undergraduate degrees in China and came to the U.S. for graduate study. All three shared that they experienced some level of difficulties with their transition to the U.S. The two master-level coders voiced a belief that Chinese international students are very likely to experience distress when they first came to the U.S. One coder had significant financial distress during her study in the U.S., and she suspected that finances may be a common stressor among Chinese international students. Another coder shared that people often assume that she did not have many challenges adjusting to the U.S. because she was fluent in English and seemed to "just fit in well." These assumptions caused her to become more aware of the "invisible" distress Chinese international students may face, such as lack of a sense of belonging. Coder's life experiences may drive them to emphasize the interview responses that resonate with their personal experiences in the coding process, which may result in important information being overlooked in data analysis. In order to mitigate the impact of potential coders' biases in data analysis, the three coders followed the recommended steps in CQR (Hill, 2012) . The three coders allowed enough time to fully discuss and reach consent about the analysis results after each step. The primary investigator consulted the auditor along the process to ensure that the data analysis results represent the interview responses sufficiently.

Chapter 4

Results

Participants

The initial survey was sent out to all 1189 Chinese undergraduate international students at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities campus. These 1189 students were enrolled as full-time students at the time of the study. A total of 140 Chinese undergraduate international students completed the initial survey. The response rate was 11.8% (140/1189). Of the 140 participants who completed the initial survey (with Satisfaction with Life Scale and demographic questions), 34.3% (n=48) met the full selection criteria for the follow-up interview. Of these 48 participants, 41.7% (n=20) consented to participate in the follow-up interview. Demographic characteristics of the participants who completed the initial on-line survey, along with those who were chosen for the interviews and those not chosen for the interviews, are presented in Tables 1.

The total sample (n= 140) reported an average GPA of 3.52 (SD=0.49). Their average age was 20.6 years (SD=1.37). The total sample consisted of 67.1% females (n=94) and 31.4% males (n=44). Across the total sample, 35.7% (n=50) were in their junior year of college; 25.7% (n=36) were senior; 20.7% (n=29) were sophomore; and 17.9% (n=25) were freshman. Most participants were studying in the College of Liberal Arts (57.9%), 13.6% (n=19) were in the College of Science and Engineering, 6.4% (n=9) were enrolled in the Carlson School of Management, 5.7% (n=8) were in from College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Science, and the rest 5% were from either the College of Biological Science, College of Design, or College of Education and Human Development.

Demographics for the 13 interviewees whose interviews were included in the data analysis are presented in Table 2. The mean of these interviewees' GPA was 3.78 (SD=0.16); the mean of these interviewees' age was 20.2 (SD=1.57). Most of the participants who were included in the interview data analysis identified as female (9/13). Seven were in their sophomore year of college, 3 were juniors, and 3 were seniors at the time of the interview. The majority were studying either in the College of Liberal Arts (6/13) or the College of Science and Engineering (4/13).

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Interviewees (n=15), Non-Interviewees (n=125) and Total Sample (n=140)

Variable	Interviewees		Non-Interviewees		Total Sample	
	n = 15	%	*n* = 125	%	*N* = 140	%
Sex						
Female	10	66.7	84	67.2	94	67.1
Male	5	33.3	39	31.2	44	31.4
Not to Respond	0	0.0	2	1.6	2	1.4
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Year in School						
Freshman	0	0.0	21	16.8	25	17.9
Sophomore	8	53.3	25	20.0	29	20.7
Junior	4	26.7	45	36.0	50	35.7
Senior	3	20.0	34	27.2	36	25.7
College*						
College of Liberal arts	7	46.7	74	59.2	81	57.9
College of Science & Engineering	4	26.7	15	12.0	19	13.6
Carlson School or Management	1	6.7	8	6.4	9	6.4
College of Food, Agricultural & Natural Resource Sciences	1	6.7	7	5.6	8	5.7
College of Biological Sciences	1	6.7	3	2.4	4	2.9
College of Design	1	6.7	1	0.8	2	1.4
College of Education & Human Development	0	0.0	1	0.8	1	0.7
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
GPA	3.76	0.15	3.50	0.51	3.52	0.49
Age	20.3	1.49	20.7	1.36	20.6	1.37

* Excluded 16 participants who either did not answer the question or did not answer correctly (e.g., "UMN")

The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) scores of the total sample (*N*=140),

the non-interviewees (*n*=125), the interviewees (*n*=15) and those who were eventually

included in data analysis (*n*=13), are presented in Table 3 and Table 4. The total sample

(*N*=140) reported an average SWLS score of 23.1 (SD=6.28). The average SWLS score

of the interviewees (*n*=15) is 28.5 (SD=2.67). The average SWLS score of the

interviewees who were included in data analysis (*n*=13) is 29 (SD=2.45).

Table 2
Demographics of Interviewees Included in Data Analysis (n = 13)

Variable	Data Analyzed	
	n	*%*
Sex		
Female	9	69.2
Male	4	30.8
Not to Respond	0	0.0
Other	0	0.0
Year in School		
Freshman	0	0.0
Sophomore	7	53.8
Junior	3	23.1
Senior	3	23.1
College*		
College of Liberal arts	6	46.2
College of Science & Engineering	4	30.7
Carlson School or Management	1	7.7
College of Biological Sciences	1	7.7
College of Design	1	7.7
	Mean	SD
GPA	3.78	0.16
Age	20.2	1.57

Table 3
SWLS scores of Interviewees (n=15), Non-Interviewees (n=125) and Total Sample (n=140)

Variable	Interviewees		Non-Interviewees		Total Sample	
	n = 15		*n* = 125		*N* = 140	
Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Scores	28.5	2.67	22.4	6.28	23.1	6.28

Table 4
SWLS scores of Interviewees Included in Data Analysis
(n=13)

Variable		
	Mean	SD
Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) Scores	29	2.45

Interview Characteristics and Clinical Impressions of Interviewees

The interviews ranged in length from 25 to 55 minutes (median = 36.1 minutes). Every participant responded to every interview question. It was this investigator's impression that everyone approached the interview in an open and self-reflective manner. Several participants expressed interest in the topic of the study because they believed the study was relevant to their experiences as Chinese international students. Some interviewees expressed that they made a contribution to the Chinese international students' community by sharing their "words of wisdom" about studying and living in the U.S. Two participants expressed willingness to help recruit more participants if needed.

On occasion, participants looked confused by some interview questions. In that case, those questions were paraphrased, or rephrased to help them understand what the questions were asking. Some participants asked the primary investigator to explain some of the interview questions in Chinese, so they could be sure they understood the questions. In those cases, the primary investigator tried explaining in English first, and then switched to Chinese when the participants seemed to continue having difficulty understanding the questions. Many participants expressed confusion about question 14: "If you have to describe one event that is important to you related to your experience at the University of Minnesota, what would that be?" Most participants thought the question

was too broad and stated that it was hard to think of just one event that was important. All participants answered this question after receiving clarification, but most commented that they had experienced more of a series of events that collectively comprised an important experience for them.

Most participants were fluent in English and were able to elaborate on their thoughts without prompting, while a few participants were more succinct in their answers. With more succinct participants, the primary investigator asked follow-up questions to elicit more information (e.g. "Could you say more about that?"; "What do you mean by that?"). There were two individuals whose English skills were not as good as other interviewees, which resulted in their answers being difficult to understand at times. In those situations, the primary investigator asked clarifying questions to ensure an accurate understanding of the participants (e.g. "I am not sure I understood that, do you mind saying it again"?).

Although most participants responded to the interview questions from an intellectual framework, a few shared some difficult emotional experience with transitioning, studying and living in the U.S. At times, the primary investigator provided empathy and validation, but overall, was able to balance the role of an impartial researcher and a therapist. For participants who may benefit from additional emotional support, the primary investigator mentioned the University Counseling and Consulting Services at the University of Minnesota as a campus resource for their consideration.

Results of CQR Analysis of Interviewee Responses

The interview results are organized into four thematic areas. These thematic areas correspond to specific interview questions. Interview questions that yielded similar

responses were grouped and coded together. The four thematic areas are: (1) Contributors to academic success (Question 6-11); (2) Contributors to life satisfaction (Question 3-5); (3) Transition to the United States (Questions 1, 2, 14); and (4) Positive interaction between academic success and life satisfaction (Question 12, 13).

Corresponding domains and categories for these four thematic areas are presented in Table 3. Domains and categories are presented in a descending order of prevalence. Select quotations are provided verbatim (with only occasional slight grammatical corrections) to illustrate domains and categories. Some participants' responses were coded into more than one domain/category because of the complex and nuanced nature of the data. Responses that could not otherwise be classified within categories were labeled "miscellaneous," and they are described at the end of this chapter. Throughout the interview, participants vacillated between describing their personal experiences and perceptions and speaking about Chinese international students in general.

Table 3

Theme, Domain and Category Labels for Responses to Interview Questions 1-14 (n = 13)

Domain/*Category*	n^a	Domain/*Category*	n^a
Theme 1 : Contributors to Academic Success		**Theme 3: Transition to the United States**	
Seek help	13	Coping with challenges	13
Professors and teaching assistants	10	*Making friends*	8
Campus resources	9	*Seeking help*	4
Peers	6	*Using campus programs*	2
Work hard	12	*Improving English*	2
Being self-responsible	9	Challenges with the transition	10
Devoting time to study	6	*Language barrier*	7
Being motivated by high education expense	4	*Cultural difference*	6
Studying efficiently	2	*Lack of social network*	5
Understand and adjust to education in the U.S.	9	*Miscellaneous*	1
Different teaching & learning styles	8	Easy Transition	5
Process-oriented vs. score-oriented	4	**Theme 4: Interaction between Academic Success and Life Satisfaction**	
Balancing course load	3	Academic success contributes to life satisfaction	10
Have good knowledge base from high school	5	Life satisfaction helps academic performance	8
Pursue one's interests	4	Life satisfaction not as important	2
Stay confident	4		
Stay healthy	3		
Be in a competitive environment	3		
Have clear future goals	3		
Theme 2: Contributors to Life Satisfaction			
Have social support and network	10		
Friends	8		
Family	2		
Stay academically successful	8		
Be independent	8		
Be grateful	6		
Grow as a person	4		
Cultivate good health	3		
Miscellaneous	2		

Note. $^a n$ refers to number of comments.

Theme 1: Contributors to Academic Success

Responses to 6 interview questions (Q 6- 11, see appendix) were coded within

nine domains: 1. Seek help, 2. Work hard, 3. Understand and adjust to education in U.S.,

4. Have good knowledge base from high school, 5. Pursue one's interests, 6. Stay

confident, 7. Stay healthy, 8. Be in a competitive environment, 9. Have clear future goals.

Domain 1: Seek Help (*n* =13)

In this domain, participants emphasized the importance of reaching out for

help as they strive for academic success. They also identified sources of support that they

consider most important. There are three categories.

Category 1: Professors and teaching assistants (n =10). The majority of

participants identified professors and teachings assistants as great sources of help with

respect to their academic performance.

> *One of my psychology classes, there are like 1000 students in the lecture. It*
>
> *feels like the professor will never get to know you, so [*I was*] kind of*
>
> *frightened by this big classroom size, but [*you should*] never be afraid to*
>
> *reach out, professors are always there to help you; their job is always to*
>
> *encourage students, and just help you out, that is their job. So reach out to*
>
> *professors, and ask for advice, and ask for ways that you can be successful*
>
> *academically. (Senior; Female)*
>
>
> *You have to go to the lecture, and go to their office hour if you have questions,*
>
> *as soon as possible. Talk with [the] TA and ask them certain [about]*
>
> *problems, you know, physics, chemistry, you can ask them. (Sophomore;*

Female)

I would recommend talking to professors. I am a person that likes to talk with professors and TAs. Every semester, I have been trying to meet with the professors I have that semester, and talk about class, and me, and they are interested in learning about me. Even if that is a director, I still want them to know me. So when I have a problem or something, I can just ask them. For physics, the TA manages a small group of students, for homework, tests, lab reports, I go talk to my TA or after the lecture. (Sophomore; Female)

Category 2: Campus resources (n = 9). Most participants shared their experience using various campus resources (e.g., tutors, libraries, writing centers). Participants also commented on their belief that some university programs make academic support more accessible to students.

*Tutors are helpful…from the library, or in my dining hall, there are tutors on every Friday, they help with chemistry or physics. They are also students, so they know what kind of difficulties you have because they have [*the] *same level of study. We have similar perspective, [*the] *student perspective that is different from [*the] *professor perspective. (Sophomore; Female)*

Well, they have a writing center in Appleby; I use that to revise my papers. If you want to do research, they have research program in Wilson library. I think also they have tutoring hours for math and chemistry. That is very good. (Sophomore; Female)

Category 3: Peers (n=6). Some participants expressed that Chinese international students need to make more use of peer support. Making friends in class and studying together is a good way to help each other understand class materials. In addition, studying with American students can help Chinese students understand the "American" way of learning.

> *I think students need advice from older-year students, from students who are maybe in the graduate student level, maybe meet every week. They can give tips about how to study, how you deal with difficult situations in different scenarios. Senior or graduate students, senior students are pretty busy; I don't want to burden them. Maybe the high level students can help lower level students. I think first year graduate students, they are not that busy, and they still remember how to study in college. They can also give tips about how to take the GRE, and etc. Their tips for academic work. (Junior, Male)*

> *I think……also about classmates; a lot of time you take classes together…me and my friends we made study guides together. We can share our study strategies with each other, so we can like…show each other and discuss, so [*the*] next exam, we get better grades. (Senior; Female)*

> *The way American students learn mathematics is very talented. I think some Chinese students need to learn…I don't know…to make friends with them maybe, to do homework together, then learn the way they learn mathematics. (Sophomore; Female)*

Domain 2: Work Hard (*n=*12)

The majority of students stated that working hard is the key to academic success in a college in the U.S. Some interviewees defined "working hard" as spending more time on school work; some commented that one needs to have a strong sense of responsibility when it comes to academic work; some stated that using one's time efficiently is important, especially when taking difficult classes. There are four categories.

Category 1: Being self-responsible (n =9). Most participants mentioned the importance of having a sense of responsibility for their own academic performance.

The third advice I will give is you have to work hard. Although…cuz we are free from parents, but actually we have to be independent and work hard to get good grades, so just try your best, work hard…. (Senior; Female)

*Like here, nobody pushes you to do anything. I think like back home, you have [*the*] class teacher, you have this person looking at you, that person looking and making sure you do everything. Here nobody cares if you miss a class. So you take your own classes. I have also learned that you have to be responsible for your choices. And I think that kind of mindset took me a while to change, to really help me go through [*the*] academic process. (Senior;Female)*

Category 2: Devoting time to study (n = 6). Several participants expressed that spending time is important because in order to do well in classes, students need to put in enough effort to understand class materials. Some mentioned that Chinese

undergraduate international students may need to be prepared/willing to spend extra time due to potential language barriers.

> *Sometimes I do have English problem[s]. I don't get what [the] professor is saying. Without powerpoint, I lose them, I lose track of what is going on. So that can be hard, I don't know what is going on. I need to put in extra effort, to studying, taking notes, or reading the materials. (Junior; Female)*

> *um….work harder than your classmates. Yeah…um…because I have no idea about American students and [the] American grade system. I just try my best to get better grades than my classmates. So working hard, I have to say, in America, different school has different grade system. (Sophomore; Female)*

Category 3: Being motivated by high education expenses (n=4). Four individuals identified high educational expenses in the U.S. as a motivator for them to study in order to excel.

> *Numerically, I think academic performance should count for 70% towards how satisfied I feel about life. Because I pay a lot of tuition here, it is a waste of money if I don't care. (Junior; Male)*

> *Your parents are paying a lot of money. When you graduate and look back, you are not gonna be like "Oh my god, what did I do in those four years? Nothing!" I am so afraid that if I look back at my college life, and see "Oh my god, I did nothing!"(Sophomore; Female)*

The first thing is GPA. My parents paid me to go to America to study.

Studying is [the] most important thing. (Sophomore; Female)

Category 4: Studying efficiently (n=2). Two participants noted that finding an efficient way of studying can "double the results with only half the effort."

Your time scheduling should be efficient…should be the most efficient one for you. For example, I study well in the morning, so I get up and study in early morning. I think that is helpful. (Junior; Male)

Domain 3: Understand and Adjust to Education in the U.S. (*n* = 9)

Most participants discussed their perceptions of the differences between education in China and the U.S. They described a process of personal adjustment to the teaching and learning styles in an American university, which they regarded as one of the major reasons they have been academically successful. Some students also experienced a shift in how they view the purpose of education. This domain has three categories.

Category 1: Different teaching and learning style (n=8). A number of interviewees described what they had observed as the "American" way of teaching and learning in a college, which is different from how they were taught and learned in China. Examples of differences include the ways in which materials are taught, and the variety of forms of assignments. These students discussed how they had adapted to the differences.

It is definitely different from China. Cuz in high school, the teacher does the "cooking," the teacher also prepared the food, and cooked the food, so the only… [thing I needed] to do as a student in China was to eat the food. But here, you have to chop the food, [the] teacher buys the ingredients, you have

to chop and then cook the food and eat by yourself. In other words, here you have to take the initiative to digest all the materials. For example, I am studying biopsychology this semester. It is a lot of information, so much information; it is like the teacher buys so much ingredients, and you don't really know what to do. So we kind of separate things into different categories, different chapters, then I drew my own diagram, like graphs, to help myself to understand it. (Senior; Female)

I believe most Chinese students have the ability to do well. They studied in middle school and high school, they have [a] lot of study experience. We have to know that there is [a] difference between studying in China and in US. You have to be active. You have to do work yourself. There is no one who will push you to do something, it is all your choice. You have to be aware to do it yourself. Read a lot. Reading is very important. (Sophomore; Female)

I think for psychology classes, they are easy, compared to China where they had all those homeworks for you. You had to study all the time. Here I think yeah….for academics, most classes, for example, Psy001, participation is like 30% of the grade. So it is pretty easy to get participation, you just being there, like into group discussion.(Sophomore; Female)

Category 2: Process-oriented vs. score-oriented (n=4). Four participants experienced a shift in how they think about the purpose of education. They found themselves enjoying more of the process of learning, instead of focusing on grades. Some

of them also found ways to engage in extra-curricular activities as a way to deepen their understanding of the knowledge learned in the classrooms.

> *When I first came here freshman year, sophomore year, because my cousin went to another school here, they say that "I got a 4.0," I just felt like competitive with my cousin. I think now going through the learning process, I realized what is important is what I learned in class, instead of the grade. Now I just completely give up the grade….Once you like what you are learning, once you enjoy your class, the interaction with your professor and other classmates, good grades will come. So I think we just need to change how we look at that. I am in a communication class with non-native English speakers, and the majority of us either come from China or Korea. You can see that everybody wants to get an A. That mindset is very common among Asian students…even though I say that I don't care about grades at all, that would not be true, but you just need to put it on the secondary order. (Senior; Female)*

> *I think I always have complaints about Chinese education stuff like all the time. It's just like you are learning all the stuff in the books, and the textbook. You don't know what it is really like in life…. So for example, psychology study, like if you study counseling psychology, you can go volunteer in some organization, there are so many organizations you can choose from….So you see that….also there is psychology research. You can go into the lab, you can*

see if you want to be a professor in the future, all the things you need to know.

(Sophomore; Female)

Category 3: Balancing course load (n=3). Three participants emphasized the importance of having a reasonable course load when registering for classes. They also encouraged other Chinese undergraduate international students to get help from academic advisors when it comes to registration.

I think it was easy for me cuz I did not take many hard classes first

year…There was this girl who is stressed, she is from the same floor of my

dorm, super stressful because she took something form literature first

semester…She loves Chinese literature and stuff, but that was in English. She

was really struggling. I would say make wise decisions on your class choice.

Don't put too much stress on yourself. (Senior; Female)

When you register for classes, you should choose the right ones. Don't

overestimate yourself. Sometimes, they choose graduate level courses, they

don't do well because it is really hard. In those classes, most students are

*graduate students…They [*academic advisors*] can tell you how to register for*

classes, how to balance your course-load, But it is your own business. You

have to take the responsibility to go and talk to them. (Junior; Male)

Domain 4: Have Good Knowledge Base from High School (*n=5*)

Five interviewees said classes were not too hard for them because they had learned some of the subjects in high school. They believed their transition to academic

life in the U.S. was made easier because they were well-prepared academically in high school. This domain has no separate categories.

> *When I came here, I felt it was easy. I took some AP classes in China, like physics, chemistry, calculus, art appreciation, economics. The math courses I have here, they are not that hard. Those AP classes were really helpful, made things easier here. (Sophomore; Female)*

> *I think…you know in Chinese high school, I took mathematics and physics, sometimes [the courses were] pretty hard. So after I came here, those classes are pretty easy for me, because I have already learned them in China [in] high school. (Sophomore; Female)*

> *….no matter what university you stay in the United States, you need [a] good foundation in high school, it helps you go through the transition when you arrive in [the] US….. If you learn really well in high school, what you need to do here is to get familiar with the vocabulary, that is really the thing you need to do during transition time. But if you did not learn well in high school, what you need to do during the transition time is not only vocabulary but knowledge, so your work is doubled as a student. (Senior; Male)*

Domain 5: Pursue One's Interests (*n*=4)

Four participants emphasized the importance of following studying what they enjoyed. One individual encouraged Chinese international students to take time to reflect

upon how to align their college education with future career goals. There are no separate

categories.

> *um....academic.....I like what I study. I study art. It is really amazing, like the*
>
> *instructors, they are very inspiring. They are very encouraging. I did not have*
>
> *a lot of practice of painting or drawing before I came to the United States, but*
>
> *during those classes and practice, I have learned a lot. I really love art. I like*
>
> *my major, so I guess that is really why I am happy with what I study. (Junior;*
>
> *Female)*

> *I think I can't stress enough about the importance of thinking about what you*
>
> *are studying. I know a student in Physics...Just because she thinks that is*
>
> *what her parents do, that is what she should do as well. I think that is true for*
>
> *a lot of Chinese students. They don't think about "Oh, this is what I am going*
>
> *to do for the rest of my life"...I think that you are responsible for yourself,*
>
> *because that is your life; you are only living it once. If you are not doing it*
>
> *right, once you regret, you will resent your parents, you are gonna resent*
>
> *yourself for wasting all that time. (Sophomore; Female)*

Domain 6: Stay Confident (*n*=4)

Four students spoke to the importance of trusting their own abilities to

succeed academically in the U.S. Some described how they built up their confidence.

They believed that those with more confidence will engage more in classroom activities,

and are more likely to share their unique perspectives. There are no separate categories.

> *I believe confidence is important. I believe I can do better in my junior and*

senior year, even if my time is longer than others. I can take summer courses

to improve, I can improve previous grades that way. And the reasons for

being confident, well, I am still doing better than my peers. They have big

problems. And more team work will make you more confident. You feel like

you are linked to others, you are not alone. (Junior; Male)

I would say that, "Be confident in yourself." One of the reasons that I did not

speak up in class was because I was not confident with myself. I was afraid of

making mistakes. So once I got over that, now I am more active in class.

(Senior; Female)

One interviewee gave the following example to illustrate how she became

confident about the value of her perspectives:

There was one time that I said something, sophomore or junior year…..and

after class, they guy sitting next to me and was commenting on that "Wow,

that was really fresh. I haven't heard about that before." Then I realized that

it is because of my different experiences, I have some perspectives that other

people may not have. (Senior; Female)

Domain 7: Stay Healthy (*n*=3)

Three students spoke to how good health plays a crucial role in their academic

performance. They gave examples of how they practiced good self-care. Two participants

commented on how their academic performance was negatively impacted when they did

not take care of their health. There are no separate categories in this domain.

Before I was working hard, but I was not exercising. So I kind of had some

body pain, like you study too much, and your shoulder and your neck will kind

of have pain. One [piece of] advice is to try to take PE class every semester.

(Senior; Female)

My health was not very good. I was ill for two months/ It was in November

and October, yeah, those two months. Those were critical two months, but my

health was not good. That was the reason that [my] grades were not so good.

I think keeping healthy is important to myself. (Junior; Male)

Domain 8: Be in a Competitive Environment (*n*=3)

Three participants described their current cohort as competitive. One

individual said that being in a good academic program had exposed him to outstanding

students, which had motivated him to study harder. There are no separate categories.

I transferred from another university here. I would say that students here,

especially in my major, they are very competitive, compared to other

universities…I think University of Minnesota is a really good school, with

very good students…that is very helpful…so for example, if a professor gives

an exam, average is 60 and you get 80, you will be the best three of your

class. You will always find someone that gets a full score, and the average is

60. (Senior; Male)

Domain 9: Have Clear Future Goals (*n*=3)

Three participants clearly stated their career goals in the interviewees. The

participants believed that in order to achieve their goals, they needed to have good GPA

in college. They also elaborated on why a good GPA would increase their chance of achieving career goals in the future. There is no separate category in this domain.

My GPA is actually not that good, because as a Chemical Engineering major, I am about 3.5…not high enough for graduate school. But I have another major in Math. My GPA for math is pretty good, it is about 3.95. My main purpose here is to study. (Junior; Male)

There is usually two reasons for people to pursue a higher GPA, so first is if you want to stay in US after you graduate, you want to find a position, then you need to have a higher GPA than other American students. It requires higher GPA than others. If you want to apply for graduate school, if you want to go to Ivy League, you have to have higher GPA….both of the reasons I mentioned are my motivation. (Senior; Male)

The important thing about having a good job is you perform good academically, so for me academic success is very important for me to have a good job, and to have a good life in the future. (Senior; Female)

Summary of Contributors to Academic Success

Interview question 6 to 11 asked participants to reflect on their experiences of studying in a college in U.S, especially the key contributing factors to their academic success. Everyone stated that seeking help was critical to being academically successful. The most commonly identified sources of support include professors and teaching assistants, tutors, and peers. Participants also emphasized that Chinese undergraduate

international students should take the initiative to use campus resources more (e.g., a writing center, library, and ESL programs). Some described their experience of seeking help as "not easy," because it usually takes time to navigator campus resources. Some stated that they learned where to go for help by observing their American peers.

Most of the interviewees expressed a belief that academic success always requires hard work. Some shared that they had pictured studying in the U.S. as being "very relaxed" before their arrival, but soon realized that in order to do well, they would have to invest time and effort. Some students said they actually spent more time than American peers because they were adjusting to the education system. Most stressed the importance of taking personal responsibility for their academic performance, because there is little "push" from professors or academic advisers to achieve a certain level of performance.

Some participants shared experiences with understanding and adjusting to the expectations of college education in the U.S. They described their perceptions of differences in the education values between China and U.S., which had shifted how they approach studying. For example, education in China emphasizes learning facts, while in the U.S., students are encouraged to enjoy the process; in China students heavily rely on teachers to acquire knowledge, while in the U.S. students need to rely more on themselves to solve problems and find answers. Some of the interviewees encouraged Chinese undergraduate international students to reflect on their interests and study what they enjoy. Some believed people are most likely to be successful academically if they are empowered to choose what they want to study. Finally, a few individuals suggested a solid knowledge foundation from high school may ease the stress of academic

adjustment, and therefore, Chinese undergraduate international students should work hard in high school as part of the preparation for their study in the U.S.

Theme 2: Contributors to Life Satisfaction

This section includes domains, categories, and examples of participant responses to interview questions 3, 4 and 5. There are eight domains: 1. Have social support, 2. Stay academically successful, 3. Be independent, 4. Have gratitude, 5. Grow as a person, 6. Improve English, 7. Have good health, and 8. Miscellaneous.

Domain 1: Have Social Support (*n*=10)

Most participants expressed a belief that having strong and consistent social support contributes to high life satisfaction. Two categories reflect the sources of social support that they consider important.

Category 1: Friends (n=8). The majority of students considered friends to be the most important sources of social support, and a contributing factor to life satisfaction.

> *I have good friends here, who I can always find supports from. When I have a problem, I have someone I can easily talk to. My friends, we lived in the dorm, we lived [*there*] for three years to this point, so good social support. (Junior; Female)*

One participant considered her roommate to be a friend and described the support she received as follows:

> *My roommate and I don't talk deeply about ourselves, even though we both know that we are very different, but at least I have someone to speak with. The most important thing is we can speak Chinese to each other. It is our language. (Sophomore; Female)*

Category 2: Family (n=2). Some participants considered their family back in China as strong support, expressing that family can provide a sense of safety as they go through challenging situations.

> *…[*I*] talk with my parents, via Skype or something. I mean, not that you can't talk to your peers. You can talk to your peers. But when you talk to your peers, you are at the same stage. Probably they can't give you as good advice as your parents. That is why I more recommend to talk to your parents. (Senior; Male)*

> *Also, family support is always great. My mother loves me, understands me, allows me to do anything I want. So I am really grateful for that, compared to my peers' parents who are really strict, tiger mothers, and things. My family is not like that, so I love it. (Junior; Female)*

> *I have a wonderful family, which supports me a lot. My parents tell me that "You have to save your money," and "You can not spend a lot," but if there is anything required, they just tell me "It is ok, go ahead, don't worry about it". (Sophomore; Female)*

Domain 2: Stay Academically Successful (*n*=8)

The majority of participants noted that good academic performance generally makes them satisfied. Some responses in this domain overlap with the domains in the first thematic area *Contributors to academic success*. Participants elaborated on why academic success contributes to their life satisfaction. There are no separate categories.

> *The first thing is GPA. My parents paid me to go to America to study,*
>
> *studying is [*the*]most important thing. (Sophomore; Female)*

> *Grades make me happy….my grades were not very good in China, but [*here*]*
>
> *they are] pretty good. My parents are also very happy about my grades.*
>
> *(Sophomore; Female)*

> *I have pretty good grades. That makes me feel ok. To me friends are not that*
>
> *important, because my main purpose here is to study. That is more important*
>
> *to me than campus life. (Junior; Male)*

Domain 3: Be Independent (*n*=8)

Most participants stated that a major source of life satisfaction comes from having freedom to pursue what they are interested in (e.g., taking classes of interest, and participating in extra-curricular activities), as well as a variety of options from which to choose. Some also described a sense of independence because they have been able to decide how to use their time in the way they desire. A few students said they felt satisfied because they had the power to choose their career path. There are no separate categories in this domain.

> *I found, you know, University of Minnesota is a large school…so many*
>
> *people, so there are so many activities you can get involved in. And it is, I*
>
> *don't know, I really like the classes I am in, I like all my professors, I made*
>
> *some friends. Maybe that makes me satisfied? (Sophomore; Female)*

I think I finally get what I want. Back in China, I told you, there is only math and physics, the university wants [students] to study more [of those subjects]. They [teachers] are all engineers. That is all they think about: you need high GPAs, you need to show the company that you have good attitudes towards your future. But here you actually can do student groups, internship, or research if you want to. So I think that diversity of what I am doing everyday just makes me happy. (Sophomore; Female)

..... being able to have a schedule for myself. When I was in China, not like here, here I can take summer courses and I do research here. (Junior; Male)

I did everything I like, I came here, and I am grateful for what I have got. I also went studying abroad in Japan, which is something I liked to do, I wanted to do. I just feel really satisfied. (Junior; Female)

I am really happy here because I can go to different cities, different countries, like Mexico, Canada, and many other places. So travel, I like travel, that makes me happy. (Sophomore; Female)

Domain 4: Be Grateful (*n*=6)

Some interviewees stated that life satisfaction comes from feeling "content" and "grateful about" what they have. They raised an important distinction between feeling "satisfied" and feeling "worry-free." Some shared that they were struggling with personal and family issues at the time of the interview. They still felt generally satisfied

with life, however, because they chose to focus on what they had in their lives. There are no separate categories.

> *And I am just grateful for….I have never thought I could study abroad. It just hit me one day, I just did it. I did everything I like. I came here, and I am grateful for what I have got. (Junior; Female)*

> *I just feel like I am pretty happy. I don't have anything to complain about. Of course there are small things that happen every day that just bug me out, but um….I think overall I am happy, I have to say. I think the only way you can stay satisfied comes from your inside. It is nothing exterior, not those outside factors. Not the grades…of course I will be happy if I get good grades, but good grades, good work, good food, those are things external. I think what keeps a person satisfied is how he and she look at the things, so if the food is bad, it is fine, I will find somewhere else to eat tomorrow. (Senior; Female)*

> *As an international student, I am grateful to have financial stability…..That part, I feel satisfied that my mom and dad do that, because even though many parents do that for their children, children should not feel like "Oh, that is their job"….I should be grateful if someone supports me like that. I think if you want to be satisfied with life, you should be grateful of everything you are granted. So it is not their duty, or whoever that provides money, not their responsibility to do that. (Sophomore; Female)*

Domain 5: Grow as A Person (*n*=4)

Four students expressed satisfaction regarding their personal growth after coming to the U.S. They believed living and studying in a foreign country requires a great deal of skills and strength. These skills range from basic life skills (e.g., cooking, banking), to independently resolving difficult situations that arise in life.

> *The most important thing I would say is personal growth. Yeah like before I came here, I would say grades, now I would say personal growth. When I was in China, I lived with my family, my parents, I don't do anything. (Sophomore; Female)*

> *Because here in the United States, my parents are not here, they can not speak English at all, so it has trained me to be more independent. So actually I compare myself to my classmates who stay in China, and they are still dependent on their parents. Whenever they have [a] question, they will go to their parents. I feel like for me, I am more independent, I will search for the solution just by myself, just ask more people and do more networking as well. (Senior; Female)*

Domain 6: Cultivate Good Health (*n*=3)

Three participants emphasized the importance of living a healthy life style as a contributor to life satisfaction. This domain is similar to a domain from the previous theme *Contributors to academic success*. Some participants gave suggestions about how to stay healthy.

> *Another thing….I lost 40 pounds over two years. That really affects my life satisfaction. For people, another suggestion is not to eat the fast foods….that*

fat makes you uncomfortable, makes your body uncomfortable. I eat

breakfast, I eat lunch, I don't eat dinner. I eat only fruits and yogurt for

dinner. I go to gym one hour and a half almost every day….So don't eat fast

food. (Sophomore; Female)

Domain 7: Miscellaneous (*n*=2)

Two participants provided responses about things that helped them stay

satisfied with life. These responses could not otherwise be classified.

So, I have been here since Oct, 2010, it is more than four years. I am more

used to life here, than my hometown, because I have already left my

hometown for four years. So I have to get used to life here. The other reason

is in reality, the air condition here, everything, even the transportation,

driving, I feel more comfortable than that in China. I also work here for more

than half a year, like a co-op. I also worked in China before. For living

environment, work environment, study environment, very good here. (Senior;

Male)

I would say learn English. It is really important. And come to the

environment, the English environment, and your English is going to get

improved. Actually you need to study hard for that. It is really going to help

you. It is a key problem. (Sophomore; Male)

Summary of Contributors to Life Satisfaction

The vast majority of the sample emphasized the role of social support in

maintaining high life satisfaction. The most commonly identified sources of social

support were friends and family. A few individuals noted relying rely on both friends and family for suggestions and encouragement in difficult situations. Knowing they have access to that level of support provides a sense of safety and also satisfaction. Most participants also drew a connection between academic success and life satisfaction. Some participants viewed studying as the primary goal of their stay in the U.S., and thus being successfully academically contributes a great deal to their overall life satisfaction. In addition, about half of the students spoke about the importance of gratitude. Some reported high life satisfaction despite the struggles they were having at the time of the interview. They believed life satisfaction comes from a positive outlook on life, or as one participant put it, "it is an attitude." They encouraged other Chinese undergraduate international students to reflect on what they have received in their life and learn to appreciate the positives in life. Some other participants expressed satisfaction with their personal growth that has occurred after they came to the U.S. One student said she had learned to take care of daily chores, which were taken care of by her parents when she was in China. Another student described a sense of independence that comes from having to make life decisions on her own.

Theme 3: Transition to the United States

Responses to the three interview questions yielded two domains: Overall Experience with the Transition, and Actively Coping with Challenges.

Domain 1: Coping with Challenges (*n*=13)

Everyone identified experiencing some level of challenges as they transitioned to living and studying in the U.S. Some described specific areas of struggles and the coping strategies they used to ease the distress associated with the transition.

Even participants who did not experience their transition as "stressful" spoke to the adjustment they went through when they first came to the U.S. This domain consists of four categories.

Category 1: Making friends (n=8). The majority of the sample identified making friends as an important way to cope with the distress related to their transition to the U.S. Most spoke to the benefits of getting to know people from diverse cultural backgrounds, while one participant emphasized the importance of having a close group of Chinese friends.

> *Those are American friends I am living with right now. They are important for sure. Sometimes I get frustrated with them though, like chores, who is doing the chores, but other than that, I feel great support from them. I can talk to them about all my issues. I can get positive feedbacks from them whenever I need [*it*]. (Junior; Female)*

> *I mean if I can suggest something to future students, don't stay in your small circle. Go out and meet people from different cultures, it will really give you different perspectives. You get to know something you may have never thought about. Yeah, make friends with people from different cultural backgrounds. (Sophomore; Female)*

> *Most students on my floor were students in [*name of college*], so that makes me….have common things to talk about with people who live in the same floor with me. I think that is a good idea for new starters in America, you live there,*

you have a lot of time to meet, and talk about things with them. (Sophomore;

Female)

Campus life, I speak with my Chinese friends a lot. It is not that if do not like

to hang out with American students; it is just I don't want to speak English

when I want it to be entertaining. I just want to speak Chinese, that is all it

matters. (Sophomore; Female)

Category 2: Seeking help (n=4). Four participants stated that taking the

initiative to ask for help had made the transition easier for them.

My opinion and my suggestion is, try to find someone that can help you, like a

professor, or an adviser, or find a host family, or an organization. I know

someone, she arrived early, like three months earlier than me, so she found a

host family and lived with them for three months. So that family helped her

and introduced her to American culture, and I totally can tell her oral English

was so much improved. (Sophomore; Female)

One participant gave an example to illustrate the importance of reaching out

for help when navigating life on campus:

I remember when I first came to the campus, I had the orientation, then I was

*about to go back to our dorm, but I [*didn't*] know where it is. It was a small*

campus, but because it was my first time, so that seemed so big, so I went to

another direction, and on the way, I felt it does not really look familiar, it did

not look like the way I went this morning. So I saw another person, who is a

*professor in [*name of department*]. Then I asked him, and he gave me a ride to the dorm. (Senior; Female)*

Category 3: Using campus programs (n=4). Four participants identified a few programs on campus that helped them transition more smoothly.

*I have to say that I try to keep an open mind to everything. I wouldn't say no to [*anything*] at first place, and [*I became*] bonded with friends. I think what makes my transition easier was I was in "Students cross borders" living and learning community in [name of residence hall]. It is like half international students, half domestic students. I think living in a dorm, or a community like that actually helped me to make new friends and get adapted. That was very important as well. (Senior; Female)*

I would say the social network…the UMN, the CLA has a lot of social networking events, alumni will come to those events and talk to you about their life outside school. I feel like through that type of event, it gives me a picture of getting a job, not just the life in school, but what will happen out of school. (Senior; Female)

Category 4: Improving English (n=2). Two participants shared that by improving their English, they found themselves more capable of understanding professors in class, and communicating with people around them.

It was just because the language…..it is hard to communicate. That is my key problem. I just need to learn language better. So I listened to a lot of radio and watched a lot of videos, TV. I listened a lot. There are some basic daily

conversations, listen to that and understand that. And some good websites, I use that. It helped me a lot. (Sophomore; Male)

Domain 2: Challenges with the Transition (*n=10*)

The majority of the participants characterized their transition to the United States as "stressful." Four categories reflect the types of challenges they described.

Category 1: Language barrier (n=7). Over half of the sample mentioned difficulties they experienced due to a language barrier.

I felt it was very difficult….the language….after like around a month, I kind of started to get better, kind of understand what the professor was talking about in class. So during the first month…I mean the first week, when professor is talking…I could not catch anything. I am always the person that works really hard and achieves the goal, so I really don't want it to be like that. (Senior; Female)

So the first time I came here, I went to Wendy's. I did not even know how to order food from the menu. Also, the speaking of Americans is much quicker. So that was very hard. (Senior; Male)

*I found that [*the transition*] was very stressful, because sometimes there was miscommunication. Everything is in English. Because if your English is not good, you can't understand anything. (Sophomore; Male)*

*I was concerned a little bit about it [*the transition*], because of language. Because we have to do all the classes in English. Maybe for me, I am concerned about taking notes in lecture, get[*ting*] used to professors' teaching styles. (Sophomore; Female)*

Category 2: Cultural difference (n=6). Several participants noted that cultural differences comprise a major hindrance to their communication with others. Some of these students also stated the lack of "cultural understanding" made it hard to connect with students around them.

For me, the culture shock was mainly about we don't share background. We don't share the same shows as American friends. I don't care about European or American singers, so when they talk about it, I don't know anyone of them, so that makes a huge problem for me to start a conversation with them. (Sophomore; Female)

*First year I was in [*name of residence hall*]…there were a lot of Minnesota people. I guess I was so excited. I had no idea who they are, I had no idea what to expect from them. So I tried to talk to them. I tried to fit in. So I guess there was stress sometimes. Like I made some silly jokes….sometimes. There are some stereotypes that Chinese people can be really blunt, not really nice, especially in Minnesota, sometimes hurt people's feelings, and sometimes people don't get my jokes. So that can be stressful. (Sophomore; Female)*

For example, like my American friends have religion; I have my own

opinions…When they talk to me about that, I think that is no fun to talk

about….Me and American friends argue about that. None of my Chinese

friends argue with me about that. That is why it is easier to talk to Chinese

friends. Arguments like that, with American friends, it causes a gap between

us. I am just like, eating and having fun with them, but things like religion, or

family issues, I avoid them, because they have totally different opinions with

me. (Sophomore; Female)

   Category 3: Lack of social network (n=5). Five interviewees spoke of

difficulties they experienced due to a lack of a social network in the U.S.

Well, when I first came to the U.S., I felt like that is a white paper, and you

*have to, it is like a brand new paper, and you have to do that [*form a social

network*] little by little. In China, you have the family social net, and you*

have so many friends, classmates, teachers; that is like a paper with a lot of

*pictures, a lot of drawings. But when you first came [*to the U.S.*], it is brand*

new. You have to draw day by day and little by little, make your own

connections, so that is stressful for you. (Senior; Female)

One participant spoke to the pressure involved in making friends:

For me, first of all, making friends. In China, I can make friends if I like to

talk with you, but here I feel making friends is like an assignment. I have to

do it, because my mom and father pay a lot for me. I should know the

American culture from them. I think the most stressful thing is how you can

make friends with them. (Sophomore; Female)

 Category 4: Miscellaneous(n=1). One individual mentioned that not having the food she liked was one of the biggest challenges to her transition to the U.S.

 The adjustment….I don't know, the biggest thing for me is that I come from a city with very spicy food. American food does not match my appetite. After I moved to my apartment I can make my own food. (Sophomore; Female)

Domain 3: Easy Transitions (*n*=5)

 Five participants stated that their transition to the U.S. was "smooth" or "not too stressful," despite the fact that they also identified some difficulties they experienced when they first arrived. Some described how they overcome the early difficulties, and some identified resources that helped them make a smooth transition (e.g., being fluent in English, having a host family). There are no separate categories in this domain.

 When I got here, I was pretty excited, but I was also confused. But I actually did not find it like…too much of [a] problem adjusting, or cultural shock or living. It was a pretty easy process for me.   (Senior; Female)

 I had a pretty smooth transition. When I first came to the U.S., I had a host family. I think I lived a little over one week with them. We went to church together, and had camping and other activity. That was awesome. (Junior; Male)

Summary of Transition to the United States

 Participants shared their experiences about the transition to the U.S. Most participants stated that they experienced challenges with the transition to some extent.

Everyone talked about how they coped with the distress related to the transition. Most of the students stressed the importance of having a support network (friends, family, campus community). They encouraged other Chinese undergraduate international students to take the initiative to seek help because there are many useful resources on campus to help incoming students. Commonly identified challenges include a language barrier, lack of cultural understanding between them and local students, and difficulties in forming a social network. A few participants stated that their transition was not particularly stressful because they were fluent in English, or they had immediate support (host family) after their arrival. Of note, the participants who did not report the transition as being stressful did identify experiencing difficulties associated with their transition.

Theme 4: Interaction between Academic Success and Life Satisfaction

Two interview questions yielded three domains under this theme: Academic success as a contributor to life satisfaction, Life satisfaction as a contributor to academic success, Life satisfaction not as important.

Domain 1: Academic Success as a Contributor to Life Satisfaction (n=10)

A vast majority of participants emphasized the importance of academic success to their overall life satisfaction. Most stated that studying is the primary purpose of their stay in the U.S, and thus guides where they spend time and energy.

> *I think I will be not satisfied with life, or definitely [*be*] blaming myself*
>
> *because I am not doing right for my parents if I am not getting a good GPA.*
>
> *(Sophomore; Female)*

I am a student, school is a big part of my life. Doing well in school definitely eases my stress a lot, allowing me more time to interact with other people, to build relationships with other people. So I would say academics is really important, especially for us. I don't see anyone would be happy if school is really bad. I think academics is definitely important, especially for us. (Senior; Female)

*I feel like my academic performance is a base, basic level for me. It is something you need to be good and laid there for me [*that is, forms the basis*] to succeed gradually in other areas. So it is like a backbone. I am a student here. I am supposed to study well. That is kind of important, if I don't have a 4.0….I will punish myself, I will blame myself. So that would be essential to me. (Junior; Female)*

Domain 2: Life Satisfaction as a Contributor to Academic Performance (*n*=8)

Many participants emphasized that students' overall happiness may contribute to academic performance. Some asserted that people tend to concentrate better when studying if they are satisfied with life.

If you are happier, if you are less stressful, first of all, you have more time for school. Those two definitely correlate to each other, either way. (Senior; Female)

*Sometimes, I think if you feel comfortable with life, you can concentrate more in study[*ing*]. If you [*feel*] stressful, or lonely or something, you may not be*

that focused on study; you may be distracted. If you have good life

satisfaction, you may find studying is easier. (Sophomore; Male)

One participant talked about needing to make extra effort to achieve

academically when life satisfaction is low:

Sometimes, actually right now, I am struggling with…eating behaviors. I am

*kind of not in a very good mentality right now. So I am probably not very *

satisfied with life at this point, only because I am kind of sick. So that disturbs

me. So if I am not happy, it will be hard. But I will still get A's. (Junior;

Female)

Domain 3: Life Satisfaction not as important (*n*=2)

Three participants noted that life satisfaction does not have a strong impact on

their academic success. One participant believed that as long as he is doing well in

school, life satisfaction does not feel as important.

For me, it does not really affect, cuz I really don't have time to…honestly, we

have

*homework due, project due all the time; I have no time to [*feel*] depress[*ed*]*

for something that happens in your life. I have to say that if you have

something that happens in your life, it may distract when you study, but you

can't waste too much time on this kind of things, cuz you will miss the due

*[*date*]. (Senior; Male)*

I am not very satisfied with life, but it is ok. If my academics is good, that is

ok. It will be ok. (Junior; Male)

Summary of Interaction between Academic Success and Life Satisfaction

Most participants considered academic success as a strong contributor to their overall life satisfaction. Some participants considered being a student as a major part of their identity. They emphasized the importance of fulfilling all the tasks a student is "supposed to do." Some participants also mentioned that their academic success brings happiness to their parents, which in turn, makes them feel more satisfied with life. Over half of the sample expressed a belief that a healthy and satisfied life will help them remain academically successful. Some participants gave examples of how they were "distracted" by distress in life and thus had to expend additional effort to concentrate on their studies. Two students stated that life satisfaction was not as important, compared to academic success. They seemed to believe that as long as someone is doing well in school, life satisfaction may not matter as much.

Summary of the Results

Participants' interview responses were analyzed and categorized in four thematic areas: 1) Contributors to Academic Success; 2) Contributors to Life Satisfaction; 3) Transition to the United States; 4) Interaction between Academic Success and Life Satisfaction.

Some major contributors to academic success was identified as seek help, work hard, as well as understand and adjust to education in the U.S. Some participants emphasized the importance of having good knowledge foundation from high school. Some participants believed that they were motivated to study because they chose the subjects they are interested in. In addition, some participants encouraged other Chinese undergraduate international students to stay confident and trust that they are capable of

doing well in school. A few participants stated that staying healthy, being in a competitive academic environment, and having clear goals for the future are among the contributors to their academic success.

In regard to life satisfaction, most participants identified having social support as a strong contributor to their life satisfaction. The primary source of support comes from friends and family. Most participants stressed the importance of being academically successful, and believed that academic success contributes to their overall life satisfaction. Other contributors to life satisfaction identified by the participants included having independence and freedom, being grateful about what they have, being able to grow as a person, and having good health.

Most participants reported experiencing a certain level of distress associated with their transition to the United States. Common challenges related to their transition are language barriers, lack of social support and network, and navigating cultural differences. All of the participants described how they coped with the stressors related to their transition to the U.S. Some of the major coping strategies include making friends, making good use of campus resources, taking the initiative and reaching out for help, and improving English skills.

When asked about how they perceive as the relationship between life satisfaction and academic success, most participants considered academic success a strong contributor to life satisfaction. Some participants acknowledged that life satisfaction helps them do better in school. Two participants believed that as long as they are academically successful, life satisfaction is not that important to them.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The present study was a qualitative investigation of factors contributing to

Chinese undergraduate international students' academic success and life satisfaction.

Thirteen undergraduate students from a major Midwestern university responded to

interview questions investigating four major research questions: 1) What are these

Chinese undergraduate international students' perceptions of the factors that contribute to

their academic success? 2) How do these academically successful Chinese undergraduate

international students maintain a high level of life satisfaction while studying in the U.S.?

3) How do these Chinese undergraduate international students manage cultural

adjustments and academic requirement transitions? and 4) What are these Chinese

undergraduate international students' suggestions for other students in their situation that

might improve their academic performance and life satisfaction? The following sections

contain a discussion of major findings, organized according to the major research

questions for the first three questions (results pertaining to question four are included in

practice implications), study strengths and limitations, practice implications, and research

recommendations.

Contributors to Academic Success

Participants were asked to describe their perceptions of the major factors that

helped them achieve and maintain academic success. Everyone stressed the importance of

seeking help. Identified sources of help included professors, teaching assistants, peers,

and other campus resources (e.g., library, writing center). These results are consistent

with those of Hwang and Wang (2011) who found that social support and a supportive

campus environment significantly impact international students' adjustment and learning performance.

Most of the present participants believed Chinese undergraduate international students should take the initiative to talk with professors and teaching assistants, because many undergraduate classes have large enrollments, making it difficult for professors to give each student individual attention. These findings support prior research indicating that college students who actively participate in academic activities and use campus resources are more likely to benefit from college (Astin, 1977; Webber, Krylow & Zhang, 2013). Some interviewees stated that it may not be easy for Chinese undergraduate international students to navigate campus resources in order to find the best help. They stressed, however, that it is critical for students to keep trying. As one participant said "Go talk to people; if they cannot help, they will help you find someone that can."

All but one participant identified working hard as an important contributor to academic success. There is scant research regarding hard work as a contributor to international students' academic success. Geramian, Mashayekhi, and Ninggal (2012) found that international students who possess personality traits of Openness, Conscientiousness, and Agreeableness are more willing to put forth efforts needed in school and are more likely to have a higher GPA. For Chinese undergraduate international students, hard work may be especially valued because of cultural messages they have received concerning academic success. For example, the *Three Character Classics (*Wang & Gary, 2012*)*, one of the traditional six Confucius classics, tell numerous stories of people who exerted tremendous effort and made personal sacrifices

in order to achieve academic goals. Although no longer a part of the mandatory school curriculum in China, these stories are often cited by parents and teachers to illustrate the importance of persistence and tolerance of distress in academic pursuits.

When asked about their overall studying experience in the U.S., most participants recalled feeling surprised when they first began, because they had previously pictured college study in the U.S. as "relaxing." They discovered, however, that they needed to expend much more effort to study than they had expected in order to succeed. Most of the interviewees also believed students need to have a strong sense of personal responsibility and strong self-discipline in order to be successful in college. In Chinese high schools, students usually have teachers, advisers and parents who hold them accountable if they do not achieve academic goals. As some participants mentioned, that level of "check-in" and support does not exist in the university they are attending. Students must personally choose whether they want to attend classes, finish assignments, and find extra-curriculum activities to enrich their college experience.

One motivating factor for students to study hard, rarely mentioned in prior studies, is the high cost of education. Several participants expressed a strong desire to obtain good grades, because their parents have paid a great deal of money for them to study in the U.S. A recent estimate of the cost of studying in the U.S. (public, four-year, out-of-state university or college) for academic year 2014-2015 is $32,762 (College Board, 2015). International students typically pay additional requisite service fees due to their immigration status. A 2012 China's Income Distribution Report indicated the average annual personal income of a city resident was RMB 22,196 (~$3,167) (Luo, 2012). Most Chinese undergraduate international students are not eligible for any U.S.

federal or state loans because they are not U.S. citizens, or because they do not have a co-signer who is a U.S. citizen to support them taking on a loan. Due to the limited number of assistantships available to undergraduate students, most Chinese international students' families pay out of pocket to sponsor their study in the U.S. Clearly, studying in the U.S. requires a substantial financial commitment and investment for a Chinese family. Therefore, it is not surprising financial expense is a motivator for Chinese undergraduate international students to do well in school.

Another factor identified by the present sample is the importance of understanding the differences between American and Chinese learning and teaching styles, and to adjust one's approaches accordingly. This factor is congruent with previous findings that international students' transition from Chinese to American education requires flexibility to navigate the differences between the two educational cultures (Yan & Berliner, 2010). In the present study, a major difference identified by participants was that learning in the U.S. seems to be more student-driven than teacher-driven. One individual used an analogy of cooking to illustrate that difference. In China, teachers would "cook the meal" and "feed it to us"; while in the U.S., professor would "buy ingredients, but we have to chop it up, cook it ourselves and then eat it." The shift from being a more passive "eater" to an active "cook" calls for Chinese undergraduate international students to develop new study attitudes, habits and skills.

Some participants expressed a sense of relief during the interviews because studying in the U.S. is more process-oriented, rather than test score-oriented. As important as grades are, they noticed grades are not the only thing valued at their university. College students are encouraged to pay more attention to what they can

actually learn from projects, assignments, and discussion. Several students recalled themselves learning much more from their courses when they started to "put grades on second order" of priority.

Finally, this sample of Chinese undergraduate international students indicated feeling more motivated to study if they find a major in which they are interested. As mentioned by a few participants, many Chinese parents and students view college education as a means to ensure a prosperous career; so personal interest may easily become secondary when students consider what major(s) they might pursue. Career development theory and research support a positive association between pursuing one's interests and academic performance (Lent, Brown & Hacket, 1994). These participants asserted that pursuing a major they are truly interested in serves as a natural motivator for academic success, because they feel more connected to what they study and more empowered from making the decision for themselves.

Contributors to Life Satisfaction

Interviewees in this study scored higher (mean =29; SD=2.45) on SWLS, compared to the average SWLS score of the total sample (mean=23.1; SD=6.28). Pan et al. (2008) found that the quality of social support serves as a major contributor to Chinese international students' life satisfaction. In this study, most participants similarly identified having a strong social support network contributed significantly to their overall life satisfaction. Friend and families comprised the primary sources of support. A social support network may contribute to life satisfaction of Chinese undergraduate international students in the following ways: First, it seems to provide a sense of safety and stability. As mentioned by most participants, knowing that "there is someone to talk

to" is comforting, no matter how difficult a situation might be. The simple thought of having someone to process their experiences, or just to listen, may decrease feelings of loneliness. Second, friends and family may offer concrete suggestions of how to handle certain situations. Some participants said that they did not always take on the suggestions; but at least they received some ideas that may have helped them formulate their own action plan.

Academic success constituted another important contributor to life satisfaction in the present study. Participants seemed to consider academic success as an indicator of their overall success in the U.S. Sam (2001) similarly found that academic performance is positively correlated with the life satisfaction of international students. Other researchers have noted that Chinese international students' emphasis on academic success may be influenced by the education culture in China. For instance, Yan and Berliner (2010) described education as much more test-oriented in China. Grades are often the sole determinant of a student's future academic and career path.

In the present study, students identified gratitude as another contributor to life satisfaction. This construct that has not been discussed in similar studies. Most participants described some level of difficulties with studying and living in the U.S., even at the time of their interview, yet their distress did not seem to affect their overall life satisfaction very much. When asked why, they provided various narratives that share a common theme of appreciation and gratitude for what they have in life. One student described this phenomenon as an "internal attitude" of life, and "peaceful" place to go back to when she is distressed. Another student gave examples of the types of support she received from parents and stated that she never took their support for granted. Although

gratitude derived from different sources for participants, it appears that being in touch with that gratitude served as a buffer to the psychological distress they face.

As noted by Stevic and Ward (2008), life satisfaction and personal growth are closely associated. Specifically, an increased sense of life satisfaction may encourage college students' personal growth. In the current study, personal growth appeared to be related to life satisfaction for the Chinese undergraduate international students. By living independently in the U.S., students may develop many life skills ranging from cooking, cleaning, banking, and so forth. A few participants stated that they had become more independent people and closer to their ideal selves.

Transition to the United States

Most participants described their transition to the U.S. as "stressful" in some ways. Commonly identified stressors were language barriers, lack of familiarity with American culture, and lack of social support upon arrival to the U.S. These sorts of stressors have been reported in previous studies with samples of both international students in general, and Chinese undergraduate international students in particular (Berry, 1997; Poyrazil et al., 2001; Wang et.al, 2012; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Every participant described how they coped with the challenges associated with their transition to the U.S. Making friends and establishing a strong social network appeared to be the most important coping strategy for these individuals. Most participants noted that cultivating a "balanced" group of friends is ideal, compared to only having friends from China, or only having friends from other countries and cultures. Wang et al. (2012) found that students with a balanced mixture of support from friends of the same ethnic group and friends born in the U.S. adjusted more quickly and smoothly to the new

culture. Arguably, students may experience greater comfort by surrounding themselves with individuals from the same culture, because they do not need to constantly navigate the language barrier and cultural difference. On the other hand, this approach to developing a social network may not help them improve English, learn about other cultures, and develop an openness to a diverse campus environment. Therefore, the present findings suggest Chinese undergraduate international students may benefit most if they have a combination of friends from both China and other countries. Future investigations with larger samples should test this hypothesis.

Some of the study participants noted their transition was quite "smooth," a finding that is consistent with existing reports that the transition of Chinese international student is necessarily stressful (Wang et al, 2012). The variability in the degree of "smoothness" reported, even in this small sample of Chinese undergraduate international students, suggests transitional experiences are not universal. Additional quantitative research is needed to determine factors that influence transition (e.g., personality characteristics, language proficiency, environmental characteristics of the university, etc.).

Relationship between Academic Success and Life Satisfaction

The findings regarding this major research question overlap to some extent with findings for the other research questions. All participant scored high on the SWLS, and most participants stressed that their academic success contributed to their overall life satisfaction. Fewer participants expressed a belief that their life satisfaction has had a similar contributory effect on their academic success; they did however acknowledge that a student with higher life satisfaction may study more efficiently and would be more likely to obtain good grades. These comments may indicate the interviewees had a

relatively balanced perception of their need for both academic success and life satisfaction. Perhaps students who recognize the value of life satisfaction are more likely to find ways to improve their satisfaction, which yield additional benefits such as greater physical and psychological health. These benefits may in turn, promote their academic performance. These speculations could be investigated with larger samples involving multiple variable analyses.

Study Strengths and Limitations

     Strengths. This study possesses several strengths. This study may be the first to examine Chinese undergraduate international students who are both academically successful and satisfied with life (measured by SWLS). The qualitative nature of the study yielded in-depth and nuanced data that speak to the actual studying and living experience of the sampled Chinese undergraduate international students. The use of a rigorous and widely used data analysis method, Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR; Hill, 2012), increases confidence in the credibility of the findings. The sample was comprised of students from various colleges and included sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Although their academic experiences may vary (with respect to type and amount) a number of common themes were extracted from their responses. Finally, the qualitative data include valuable examples of participants' perceptions of how they achieved academic success while simultaneously maintaining a high level of global life satisfaction. These examples may give prospective and current Chinese undergraduate international students, their parents, and professional who work closely with this population, some ideas to improve academic performance and life satisfaction.

Limitations. The findings of this study should be considered in the context of a few limitations. First, the findings from qualitative studies are not intended to be generalized to the population of interest. Therefore, the results should be replicated in studies with larger samples and including quantitative research methods. The sample contained a few students who transferred to the University of Minnesota from another university or community college; some of them initially studied in smaller institutions. Although no apparent thematic differences were discerned for students who began their academic work elsewhere, the small sample size precludes any conclusions in this regard. Another limitation concerns a possible ascertainment bias. Students who completed the survey and agreed to be interviewed may differ in unknown and salient ways from those students who did not participate. Another possible limitation is that the data analysts are Chinese graduate international students. Although potential coder bias and expectations were identified and discussed prior to the data analysis, it is possible their understanding of the interview data may be reflect personal experience and bias.

All of the interviews were conducted in English. A number of interviewees had difficulty understanding certain interview questions and they varied in their English proficiency, which may have limited some students' responses. Perhaps interviews conducted in their first language would have yielded different results. A few participants reported that they did not feel satisfied with life at the time of the interview, and/or they did not consider themselves to be academically successful. Regarding the measure of life satisfaction, it may lack validity for some students. Some participants' responses indicated a level of disparity between measured and perceived life satisfaction. Further effort may be needed to explore what that disparity means to the studies that use the same

measures of life satisfaction in the future. For studies that use the SWLS as a measure of life satisfaction, researchers may need to consider using another measurement as a supplement to SWLS to get more accurate assessment of participants' life satisfaction.

With respect to academic success, these findings suggest a possible subgroup of Chinese international students who have perfectionistic standards, which has been studied as a common characteristic among Chinese students (Wang, Slaney & Rice, 2007). These participants may have a different perception on what it means to be academically successful. What is normally considered as academic success may not bring a strong sense of achievement to these participants with a perfectionistic standard. This may indicate that GPA may not be a sufficient measure of academic success to this group of Chinese undergraduate international students.

Practice and Clinical Implications

The present findings highlight factors that may help to maximize Chinese international undergraduate students' academic success and life satisfaction while studying in the U.S. The participants' recommendations have implications for student services personnel and college mental health providers. First, students may benefit from being oriented to academic life in the U.S. prior to their arrival. Smithee, Greenblatt and Eland (2004) described various differences between the education systems in U.S. and other countries. For example, the U.S. education system, instructors are facilitators of the learning process, while in non-U.S. education system, instructors may lead and direct the learning process; in the U.S. education system, learning emphasizes the application of concepts, while in non-U.S. education systems, learning may be focused on memorizing texts and facts. Many participants in this study noted their surprise when they discovered

what studying at a U.S. college study actually is like. They also described undergoing a process of comprehending and adjusting to American learning and teaching styles. It may be helpful if Universities that recruit students from China could provide more specific information about the work-load of an average college student (e.g., hours expected to be spent studying every week). This way, perspective Chinese students can get a more realistic sense of the effort they will need to devote to studying. A search on the Big Ten Universities websites showed that nearly all the major campuses of the Big Ten universities offer pre-arrival information to incoming international students. However, most handouts and materials seem to focus more on the logistics side of the transition, such as visa application, housing, health insurance, etc., rather than an in-depth introduction about the academic aspect of international students' life.

So far, many U.S. universities pre-arrival orientation involves in-person conversations or panels. For example, the Master of Engineering Management program at the Duke University has been sending program faculty and staff to mainland China every year in May since 2012. This pre-arrival programming provides an opportunity for admitted students to talk one on one with faculty and staff and to get their questions answered about living and studying in the United States. Programs like this are very helpful because Chinese undergraduate international students can start build connection with their program even before they arrive (Carrera, 2015). However, the one-on-one pre-arrival orientation can only reach out to limited amount of students. Universities may consider hosting Chinese international students panels over Skype, or Chinese social media platforms such as We Chat, so more prospective students can hear the real personal stories of those who have studied in a college in the U.S. Potential topics

include: where to look for academic support and why that support is important; what a typical class session may look like; the sorts of assignments and classroom activities students may encounter; difference between Chinese and American education, and so forth. Current Chinese international students may highlight the factors that contribute to their academic success, and encourage prospective students to consider using similar strategies. During these panels, current Chinese international students should also speak openly about challenging aspects of academic life in the U.S. Talking through the challenges may help prospective students make informed decisions about studying in the U.S. In addition, seeing that one's peers overcame difficulties and are academically successful in the U.S. may foster confidence and hope. For example, among the Big Ten Universities, University of Minnesota- Twin Cities campus and the Ohio State University have been offering "Pre-departure" orientations in China that can host many students at one time. Chinese undergraduate students can hear the experience of Chinese undergraduate international students who are already studying in the U.S. These are good examples of mentally preparing Chinese undergraduate international students for academic adjustment prior to their arrival in the U.S.

University staff may continue to explore ways to help Chinese international students build social support network on campus, since good social support was the most commonly identified contributor to students' overall life satisfaction. Some participants mentioned that having a "living and learning community" in the dorm (where students of the same major live together) was beneficial. For example, the University of Minnesota- Twin Cities has a "Student Crossing Boarders" program where "international and domestic students live together into a single living community that gives residents a

global experience through interactive cross-cultural learning" (International Student and Scholar Services-University of Minnesota, 2015). University of Wisconsin-Madison has an International Learning Community where students who are interested in learning other cultures can live and study with peers from various cultural backgrounds. The community helped them make friends with local students because it was easier to discuss school work than trying to talk about other topics (e.g., TV shows or sports) with which international students are not necessarily familiar. Greater implementation of this model within residence halls may promote students' connection to each other. In addition, universities might emphasize the benefits of participating in this type of housing arrangement for Chinese undergraduate international students (e.g., fostering of a support network, enhancement of academic performance).

More effort may be needed to bring down the barriers for international students to seek help from psychological services providers on university campuses. The University Counseling and Consulting Services (UCCS) at the University of Minnesota co-hosted a "Small World Coffee Hour" event with the International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) in Spring 2015 to raise the awareness of mental health care in the international students' community. Similar programs like this may, overtime, help reduce the stigma around seeking help from psychological service providers.

Psychological services providers could be encouraged to take a more strength-based perspective when working with undergraduate students from China. In this study, the Chinese students demonstrated significant personal strength and resilience in the face of challenges associated with studying and living in the U.S. Gratitude in particular, emerged as a major strength for a number of participants. Peterson and Seligman (2004)

developed a hierarchy of 24 personal strengths classified within 6 categories of universal

virtues: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and

transcendence. Some of these strengths have been significantly correlated with self-

reported satisfaction with life, specifically, the strengths of love, hope, zest, curiosity, and

gratitude (Buschor, Proyer, & Ruch, 2013). The present findings and those of prior

research provide good empirical support for a strength-based approach. Focusing on

personal resources and strengths may boost students' confidence and empower them to

draw upon personal strengths to improve their life satisfaction. For example, providers

might pose a series of questions to help students reflect on what they have accomplished

so far, what they have in life that is personally meaningful, who they love and appreciate,

and what they like about life at the moment. Reflection on these topics may bring

students' focus from distress or struggles, to a more comprehensive and balanced view of

their life. A balanced view on life may bring more hope, strength and sense of agency in

making changes and resolving difficult situations.

Finally, the present findings suggest that having a clear academic or career goal is

a motivator for Chinese undergraduate international students to improve academic

performance. Singley, Lent and Sheu (2010) suggested that counselors who work with

students with lower academic or work satisfaction encourage them to set clear academic

or career goals; those researchers found that students who had clearer goals, better

support around their goals, and consistent progress towards their goals, reported higher

level of satisfaction. Of note, college is also a time for students to explore and experiment

regarding possible career paths (Singley, Lent & Sheu, 2010). Counselors and other

helping professionals, in addition to encouraging goal-setting, may also want to validate

that goal-setting involves ambiguity. Students who do not have an established academic or career goal might still feel satisfied with college life if their uncertainty is characterized as a normal part of the process.

Some participants of this research encouraged Chinese undergraduate international students to be mindful of their semester course load and to avoid registering several hard classes at one time. They suggested that Chinese international students work closely with an academic adviser to balance their work-load each semester. Academic advising is not necessarily common in international students' countries of origins, and thus may be a foreign concept for international students (Eland, 2001). In mainland China, there is no formal academic advising in universities or colleges. Therefore, Chinese international students need to get familiar with the concept of academic advising and how to use it to assist their study in the U.S. Some participants noted obtaining good grades in general education classes because they had learned a lot of the material in high school. One participant, in particular, strongly encouraged Chinese undergraduate international students to treat high school classes as an important preparation step for studying in the U.S., noting it may ease the distress from the transition if they already are familiar with some of the course contents.

Research Recommendations

Additional research is needed to further explore and understand the experience of academically successful Chinese undergraduate international students who have high life satisfaction as measured by the SWLS. The present sample was recruited on the campus of a public research university. Some participants mentioned their academic experiences changed after transferring from a private or community college to a big, public

university. Future studies might include samples drawn from multiple public and private universities, and large and small campuses, in order to determine whether there are thematic differences due to academic environments. The inclusion of larger samples and quantitative data analysis methods would help to validate the present findings and increase their generalizability. Studies of this type may also provide valuable information to prospective Chinese international students as they decide whether to attend a public or private college in the U.S. In order to recruit students for research projects like this, future researchers may connect with the international student services and Chinese students' associations on targeted campuses, and explore the possibility of using the existing list-serve to reach out to potential participants.

This study focused exclusively on the experiences of Chinese undergraduate students. It is unknown how their experiences may differ from Chinese international graduate students. Research is warranted that investigates the studying and living experience of Chinese graduate students in the U.S. and explores the contributors to their life satisfaction.

Further researchers should more closely examine the academic adjustment of Chinese undergraduate students. Most participants in this study described a process of adapting to the "American way" of education in college, and their SWLS was high. Pre-post Studies could be conducted to identify different aspects of that adaption, such as changes in one's learning style, attitudes, and values about education in the U.S. Studies of this sort will help to deepen understanding of the nature of Chinese undergraduate students' academic adaption, and the role their adaption plays in their academic success.

In addition, future research may conceptualize Chinese undergraduate international students' life satisfaction and academic success from a broader theoretical perspective. The design of the study relies heavily on the literature within U.S. counseling psychology, college education and student development, and cultural adjustment theories. Chinese undergraduate international students' perception of life satisfaction and academic success may be influenced by the culture, ideology and history of their country. Future research may consider understanding the Sociological, Anthropological and historical aspects of Chinese undergraduate international students' experiences in the U.S.

Finally, this study did not find any apparent thematic differences due to gender, age, or academic discipline. Given the small sample, these variables should be studied further to determine whether significant differences exist for Chinese undergraduate international students.

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Appendix A: Participant Email Invitation for Online Survey

Subject: Share your story as a Chinese student for your chance to win a $30 Dining Card

Greetings!

My name is Kangting Heins. I am a doctoral student in Counseling and Student Personnel Psychology at the University of Minnesota. I am writing to invite you to participate in my dissertation study: "Key Experiences in the Adjustment of Academically Successful Chinese Undergraduate International Students at the University of Minnesota: A Qualitative Study".

The purpose of the study is to hear about the experience of Chinese undergraduate international students, especially their experience with adjusting to studying and living in the United States.

Those who participate in the survey will have the chance to win one of two **$30** University Dining Service gift cards.

To participate in the survey, please click here:
Take the Survey

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:
https://umn.qualtrics.com/WRQualtricsSurveyEngine/?Q_SS=1ZmnA6GLxzEquMt_8oie zcYvZrYcPYN&_=1

Participation is totally voluntary and confidential. If you have any questions, you may contact me at jixxx062@umn.edu.

Thanks!

Kangting Heins
Doctoral Candidate
Counseling and Student Personnel Psychology
University of Minnesota

Appendix B: Participant Email Invitation for the Interview

Greetings!

My name is Kangting Heins, and I would like to thank you for taking the survey for the study "Key Experiences in the Adjustment of Academically Successful Chinese Undergraduate International Students at the University of Minnesota"!

I am writing because you indicated an interested in doing a follow-up interview for the study. The interview will take about **45 minutes**, and as mentioned in the study invitation, you will get **$10 in cash** as my appreciation for your time. The time for the interview can be flexible, depending on your schedule.

Now I am open:

Any time after 4:30pm on Mondays, Tuesdays , Thursdays and Fridays. I will be open to weekends if that works better for your schedule

Please let me know if any time there may work for you. If you have any questions, please feel free to let me know.

Looking forward to hearing from you!

Warmly,

Kangting Heins
Doctoral Candidate
Counseling and Student Personnel Psychology
University of Minnesota

Appendix C: Online Survey

The title of the study is "Key Experiences in the Adjustment of Academically Successful Chinese Undergraduate International Students at the University of Minnesota: A Qualitative Study". The study is conducted by Kangting Heins, a doctoral student from the Department of Educational Psychology.

The study has two parts. This survey is part one. Part two of the study is an interview. Taking the survey does not mean that you have to participate in the interview. You will have chance to choose whether you want to participate or not towards the end of the survey.

Participants in the survey will have the chance to enter a prize drawing and win one of the two $30 University Dining gift cards. Each Participant in the interview will get $10 in cash as a compensation for their time.

The survey will take 5 minutes to finish. You will be asked to provide an effective email address if you want to participate in the prize drawing.

Please note that your responses will be completely anonymous and confidential. By clicking "Next" button, you give your consent to participate in the study as described on this page.

If you don't feel comfortable with what has been described about the study, please don't feel pressured to continue. You can leave the study by closing this window.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation!

Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6 - Agree
- 5 - Slightly agree
- 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 - Slightly disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 1 - Strongly disagree

_____ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

_____ The conditions of my life are excellent.

_____ I am satisfied with my life.

_____ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.

_____ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Demographics:
What is your GPA?
What is your sex? (Choose from "Male", "Female", "Other", "Not to Respond")
What is your age?
What year are you in college? (Choose from "Freshman", "Sophomore","Junior", "Senior")
Which college are you from?

Are you willing to participate in the prize drawing for one of the two $30 gift cards? If yes, please provide an effective email address below:_____

You may be asked to participate in a follow-up interview for this study. The interview will take about one hour, and you will get $10 in cash for your time. If you would like to participate, please check yes and provide an email address that I can reach you:_____

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. Thinking of the time when you first came to the United States, what was that like for you?

2. Sometimes, international students find their transition to the United States stressful, sometimes they don't. How about you?
   Possible follow-up questions:
   * What makes the transition not so stressful for you (if they mentioned that the transition was not so stressful to them)?
   * What are the things that stressed you out?
   * What did you do about those things?

3. You have been chosen for the study because you scored high on the life satisfaction scale in the survey, what do you feel satisfied about? What makes those things satisfying to you?
   * You mentioned before that you were stressed about how did that affect your life satisfaction? What did you do about it?

4. What would you say are the most important factors that help you stay satisfied with life in general? What are the factors that help you stay satisfied with your academic performance?

5. If you are going to give advice to Chinese undergraduate international students about staying satisfied with life, what would you say?

6. What has been your experience about studying in the United States in general?

7. Sometimes students from other cultures find university education in U.S. different from their home country, sometimes they do not. What has been your experience?

7. You indicated that you had a good GPA here at the University of Minnesota. What helped you maintain such a good GPA?

9. What are the things that the University did that was helpful to you?

10. What has been the hardest thing for you to maintain a good GPA? What did you do about that?
    * How did the transition from your country to here affects your academic performance (if they mention it was a stressful experience)?

11. If you are going to give advice to Chinese undergraduate international students about being academically successful, what would you say?

12.   How does your performance in school affect your life satisfaction here?

13.   How does your life satisfaction affect your academic performance?

14.   If you have to describe one event that is important to you related to your experience at the University of Minnesota, what would that be?

Appendix E: Interview Consent

The title of the study is "Key Experiences in the Adjustment of Academically Successful Chinese Undergraduate International Students at the University of Minnesota: A Qualitative Study". The study is conducted by Kangting Heins, a doctoral student from the Department of Educational Psychology.

You were chosen to do the interview because you reported doing well in school and feeling satisfied with life in the United States. Please note that our conversation will be audio-recorded. Everything you share in the interview will be confidential. No names or other identifying information will be attached to the audio clips. Information collected through this interview will be combined with all other interviews, and analyzed and reported as a group.

The interview will take about one hour. You have the option of passing if some questions are not comfortable for you to answer. You can stop the interview at any point of the conversation.

$10 cash compensation will be given to all those who finished the interview.

If you give consent to the interview, please put initial and date on this page

Thank you again for willing to participate in the study.

_____ Please put your initial here if you consent to participate in the interview.

_____ Please put your initial here after you have received the $10 cash compensation.