The Impact of Cultural Values on Chinese Students in American Higher Education:

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Abstract

Chinese students who pursue their higher education in America benefit from the high quality of education in this country, which includes a richness and diversity of subjects, facility of research resources, and high academic standards. At the same time, they are under pressure, which results from culture shock and includes fear of failing, the language barrier, lack of class participation, homesickness, and isolation from their host culture, resulting in mental problems such as depression, frustration, and students dropping out. This study reveals the negative influence of Chinese cultural values on these students in American higher education by making use of interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, which evidence Chinese students' dependence on their family, the Confucian middle way, the concept of "mianzi," and filial piety. These findings can help international administrators better understand how to assess and resolve the problems that Chinese students face, thereby minimizing cultural clash and the difficulties of acclimating to a new environment. By addressing these problems, American universities will be better able to accommodate the incoming multi-cultural students, the majority of whom are Chinese, and bridge the gap that separates them from their American counterparts in order to enhance the learning environment for all students.

Keywords

Higher Education, Chinese Students, Chinese Cultural Influences, Culture Shock, Case Study

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Chinese students who pursue their higher education in America benefit from the high quality of education in this country, which includes a richness and diversity of subjects, facility of research resources, and high academic standards. At the same time, they are under pressure, which results from culture shock and includes fear of failing, the language barrier, lack of class participation, homesickness, and isolation from their host culture, resulting in mental problems such as depression, frustration, and students dropping out. This study reveals the negative influence of Chinese cultural values on these students in American higher education by making use of interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, which evidence Chinese students' dependence on their family, the Confucian middle way, the concept of "mianzi," and filial piety. These findings can help international administrators better understand how to assess and resolve the problems that Chinese students face, thereby minimizing cultural clash and the difficulties of acclimating to a new environment. By addressing these problems, American universities will be better able to accommodate the incoming multi-cultural students, the majority of whom are Chinese, and bridge the gap that separates them from their American counterparts in order to enhance the learning environment for all students. Keywords: Higher Education, Chinese Students, Chinese Cultural Influences, Culture Shock, Case Study

The expanding enrollment of foreign students in American higher education has not only accelerated cultural fusion and promoted economic development, but also has benefitted international students who would not otherwise have access to a quality education. America, dominating the list of the top research universities in the world (Clotfelter, 2010) provides those students with a richness and diversity of subjects, facility of research resources, and high academic standards. As a result, the number of international students has dramatically increased in recent years, with Chinese students being the most plentiful (Bartlett & Fischer, 2011). This expansion has occurred for a number of reasons, including universities' need for cultural and ethnic diversity and their profit-driven orientation. China's growing economy, enormous population, and traditional concept that education is the key to a family's prosperity and happiness (Kwon, 2009), have all encouraged parents to send their children to study in America. However, the influx of students has challenged the faculty and administration of American universities due to a shortage of teaching staff, instructors' struggle to adapt their teaching models to meet the needs of different students, and increased demands for psychological counseling (Bartlett & Fischer, 2011; Chu, 2002; Furnham & Bochner, 1986). In addition, further psychological and physical problems result from the culture shock that plagues Chinese students and hampers their academic achievement.

It is the duty of international student officers to help them adapt to the unfamiliar environment (Arthur, 2004), but if the underlying causes for these problems are not discovered, there will be no lasting solution. As an individual's personality is heavily influenced by social and cultural factors (Hsu et al., 2012), such elements should be considered in any proposed solutions. This study attempts to investigate the factors underlying the difficulties that Chinese

students face in order to offer suggestions to leaders of higher education, especially international officers, to predict potential problems and resolve them effectively and efficiently.

Review of Relevant Literature

Culture shock, as coined by Oberg (1954), describes the trauma precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse (p. 142). Hall (1959), on the other hand, interprets culture shock as the replacement of familiar cues and symbols with the unfamiliar ones of a new environment. Adler (1975) defines it as "a set of emotional reactions" (p. 13), while Pedersen (1995) holds that it is "the process of initial adjustment to an unfamiliar environment" (p. 1). Regardless of the emphasis, all definitions of culture shock share the commonalities of cultural confusion and emotional discomfort.

Because of the sharp differences of the two cultures, Chinese students inevitably confront culture shock when pursuing higher education in America, which may produce psychological problems (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Ying, 2012). Many of the preceding studies about Chinese students studying abroad discuss the hardships that they face as a result of the new environment, including language barriers (Liu, 2002; Yan, 2009; Yuan, 2011), lack of effective communicative skills (Shi, 2011), negative stereotypes (Zhao, 2005), ethnic discrimination, and personality differences (Kwon, 2009). These challenges directly or indirectly bring about certain negative effects: hatred of exotic cultures, resistance to studying English, self-isolation, and poor academic performance (Chou et al., 2011). In addition, culture shock challenges the faculty and international student offices that interact with the Chinese students, because they must alter their pedagogies and practices (Bartlett & Fischer, 2011). Much of the previous research suggests that universities should take actions to help Chinese students deal with culture shock by improving counseling services (Arthur, 2004), enhancing social integration (Owens & Loomes, 2010), self-understanding, and self-control (Qin & Lykes, 2006). In addition, they are urged to make academic and sociocultural adjustments (Shi, 2011), including alterations in the learning environment by integrating Chinese and Western elements (Ying, 2012), and launching initiatives to improve the public image of international students (Sherry et al., 2009).

Unfortunately, these studies fail to uncover the social and cultural factors that lead to the devastating challenges that individual students face. In forming a successful strategy to aid Chinese students' acclimation, many cultural factors must be considered. Therefore, this study strives to discuss the relationship between an individual's adaption to the unfamiliar environment and traditional Chinese culture, in order to offer practical solutions for coping with the obstacles that Chinese students commonly encounter.

Methodology

Researcher's Identity, Investment, and Intention

Before moving on to methodology, I would like to inform the readers of my identity, investment in this inquiry, intentions to conduct this project, and so forth. I am a graduate research assistant and an emerging qualitative researcher, writing a dissertation on influences of multimodality on second language learners' identity development and literacy practices. Fascinated with cultural comparison and contrast, linguistic enrichment, and sociocultural assimilation and adaptation, I have developed a strong desire to capitalize on case study (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 2005; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009) to explore "the local particulars of some abstract social phenomenon and the messy complexity of human experience" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 3) to understand and interpret how individuals experience, make sense of,

and interact with their social world (Merriam, 2002) and to investigate the intricate relationship between participants' lives and/or their lived experiences and the social context in order to make the invisible visible and the unheard heard. Born with Chinese traditional culture and profoundly influenced by Confucianism, I had been wandering between the disintegration stage and reintegration stage of culture shock (see Pedersen, 1995) while pursuing my Ph.D. program in the United States, which piqued my interest in examining why culture shock happens, in order to find solutions to cope with it. To reach these goals, I had done a lot of research on culture shock. In addition to combing and reviewing related literature, I had formal and informal conversations with some newly arrived Chinese students who suffered culture shock in a Southeastern U.S. university. I also conducted informal participant-observations when I was invited to celebrate Chinese traditional festivals, visited coffer hours (for international students to make friends), and engaged in other community activities, through which I had built rapport with my potential participants, so that I had easy access to better understand their life and suffering from culture shock. Hopefully, I can provide my readers with an example to conduct a case study through this paper.

Why Do a Case Study?

The selection of case study as my research methodology depends on the characteristics of case study itself. Case study concentrates on analyzing complex and unique cases that happened in a certain place during a certain time (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2005; Yin, 2009). Stake (1995) contends that the case study aims to optimize understanding through answering targeted and selected questions, and focuses on using experiential knowledge to dig out the principles underlying the phenomena being studied within certain social and physical contexts. Central to the case study is a probing of particularities and complexities through in-depth description, interpretation, and explanation of data that provide researchers, participants, and readers with opportunities to learn about the world. Even though a case study focuses attention on tiny, singular, and unique events or instances, it opens a big window for us to think and rethink, and interpret and reinterpret human lives. Case studies makes it possible for qualitative researchers to immerse themselves in the participant or actor's life to build knowledge of reality through a series of social interactions between researchers and the researched. In this sense, case study is a process of knowledge co-construction in which researchers are a vehicle to help participants tell their stories. Thus, the case study researcher's interpretation of participants' life stories and lived experience is of significant importance, to the extent that researchers' ontological and epistemological assumptions count. In short, case study is a fusion of emic and etic perspectives (Candlin & Sarangi, 2003).

The use of case study to conduct my research also manifests my epistemological orientation as a novice researcher. More importantly, this study lends itself to a case study inquiry, because the case study allowed me to investigate complex units of analysis, offered me opportunities to garner rich and holistic information, and helped me gain insights into participants' lived experience, in order to illuminate meanings. Specifically, this study investigated three Chinese international students suffering from culture shock that resulted from Chinese cultural factors, which negatively impacted their daily life and academic performance. By exploiting thick description (Geertz, 1973) and thick explanation (Watson-Gegeo, 1992), this case study answered my research question: *How do Chinese traditional cultural factors cause Chinese international students' culture shock?*

Participants

This seven-month case study took place from May - November 2015 at a Southeastern US university (as a preliminary research site, other sites included churches, grocery stores, and participant homes), in which three international Chinese students, Amy, John, and Lisa (all names are pseudonyms) were studied. I targeted Chinese international students as my research samples mainly because a dramatically increased population of Chinese students have flooded American higher education (Bartlett & Fischer, 2011), most of whom have been suffering culture shock and learning shock (Chou et al., 2011; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Kwon, 2009; Liu, 2002; Shi, 2011; Yan, 2009; Ying, 2012; Yuan, 2011; Zhao, 2005). The selection of two female students and one male student as research subjects followed the notion of purposive sampling that "[selecting] a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2002, p. 12) and choosing information-rich cases (Patton, 1990) to look at the complexities and particularities (Candlin & Sarangi, 2003). To better answer my research question, these three participants served the following selection standards: prospective participants were (1) Chinese graduate students from mainland China (aged from 25-30); (2) were the only child in their families; (3) had been at this university less than a year; (4) had encountered devastating challenges resulting from culture shock and learning shock. Nominations of potential participants were obtained from the International Student Service, the Psychological Counseling Center, and my friends' recommendations at this university. Eventually, John, Lisa, and Amy voluntarily participated in my project, and they also signed consent forms attached to the end of this paper. The profile of my participants is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' Profile

Name	Age	gender	Education	Major	Stay in US	Contact with Family	Visit
John	26	Male	Graduate	Business	9 Months	Once a day	Never
Amy	28	Female	Graduate	Computer	9 Months	Twice a day	Once
Lisa	25	Female	Graduate	Education	9 Months	Once a day	Never

All the participants had stayed in the US for 9 months. All of them indicated that they came to this university for better educational opportunities and to improve their English proficiency. Both Amy and Lisa lived with their Chinese friends in apartments close to campus, so they could walk to class, but if they wanted to buy Chinese food, they had to carpool with others, because they did not have cars. Even though John lived in a dorm with an American roommate on campus, he seldom talked to him, because they did not get along very well. All the participants were assigned to host families by the International Student Office, but they did not contact their host families often. Most of time, they either stayed with Chinese students in class or sat by themselves, limiting their interactions with native speakers. Frequent contact with their home families made it more difficult for them to adjust to the host environment.

Data Collection

The major sources of data collection for this project included structured interviews (interview questions fully developed before the interview started) and conversational interviews (interview questions developed during the dialogue and interactions between the researcher and researched; Glesne, 2011), participant-observations and field notes, artifacts,

and my reflexive journal entries. I conducted one structured interview with each participant for about an hour respectively, so structured interviews totaled three hours. Conversational interviews were based on structured interviews, participant-observations, and field notes, which lasted for 40 minutes per interview. All the participants chose Mandarin Chinese as the interview language because they felt more comfortable sharing their lived experience in their first language. Six interviews, including structured and conversational ones, were recorded and transcribed in Mandarin Chinese verbatim. Transcript copies were emailed to each participant to clarify misunderstanding or asymmetrical information. Participant-observations were conducted for 3 home visits and 3 activities for each participant (e.g., celebrating Chinese New Year, attending coffee hours, hanging out with the participants and their host families, etc.), which lasted at least 24 hours in total. Another data source included artifacts such as diaries, emails, photographs, drawings, and souvenirs from China, and so on; each artifact told a story. My reflexive journal entries documented events that happened at the research settings, my interpretation of activities, reflection on field notes and interviews, insights and questions derived from research site activities, field notes, and observations. The journal entries, as an important data source and resource, helped me reflect on and interact with other data, which also helped me record the research proceedings, scrutinize, and be conscious of biases.

Data Analysis

Data analysis drew on In Vivo Coding that prioritizes participants' voice and axial coding that reassembles data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Saldaña, 2009) and case study analysis (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009;). The three cases were analyzed step by step. First of all, I read all the data line by line thoroughly from interview transcripts, field notes, artifacts analysis, and my reflective journal entries, noting words or phrases that seemed relevant to the purpose of the study. After carefully and repeatedly reading the data, I started In Vivo Coding to discover patterns in order to generate categories. Secondly, I wrote analytical memos based on analyzing all the data, and triangulated and crystalized the emerged themes and patterns by relying on multiple data sources. I constantly compared interview transcripts with field notes, artifact analysis, and my personal reflexive journals, to look for congruence and correspondence between the data, so that I could include them into categorized themes and concepts. The coding process was cyclical in which data was coded and recoded: data to code, code to category, category to code, code to category, and category to data (Saldaña, 2009). Finally, I invited all of my participants to verify and confirm my understanding of their life stories by reading the final analytical memos to ensure I interpreted their experience correctly and appropriately.

Researcher's Positioning

Since the qualitative researcher is the predominant instrument (Merriam, 2002) for data collection, generation, and analysis, I positioned myself as both an insider and outsider to the participants' lives to deepen my sociocultural understanding of this case study. As a doctoral Chinese student, I shared the same ethnicity, language, culture, and tradition as my participants, which naturally increased the relationship. In addition, I had experienced culture shock like my participants did, so I could empathize with their experiences, which bonded us together. In this sense, I was an insider, which helped me build rapport with my participants to elicit "the intimate details of their lives" (Best, 2003, p. 897) to enrich data for my project. In addition, as an insider, I had added extra dimensions to the role of professional stranger (Agar, 1980) and provided relevant knowledge to my participants and my research. Even though I was involved in my participants' lives and had a closer alignment with my research subjects (Candlin &

Sarangi, 2003), I was also an outsider in terms of my researcher role. The role of an outsider kept me aware of my verbal and nonverbal behavior (Glesne, 2011) when I was in the research settings. The role of an outsider allowed me to carefully listen to my participants' lived experience and life stories. Furthermore, my outsider's perspective led me to reflect on all proceedings and findings of my research.

Data Rigor and Trustworthiness

A case study is only a choice that is studied, so the case itself has accidental, specific, bounded, and contextual features. Therefore, it is extremely important for case study researchers to ensure trustworthiness and validity by continuously engaging and persistently observing in the field to build trust with participants, learn the culture, and check for misconception (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). In my research, I established a friendship with my informants as an insider to increase validation and vitality of data. Also, I made use of multiple sources and methods to triangulate my data in order to shed light on perspectives (Patton, 1990). In addition, I emailed my participants the copies of interview transcripts, my final codes, and analytical memos to ask them to reflect on the accuracy of my description and written analysis, as well as whether there was misunderstanding or something missing, because case study is the interpretation of interpretation. The three participants played the critical role of directing and acting in my case study research, so it is essential to elicit their observations and/or interpretations (Stake, 1995). Further, my own reflexive journal helped me to mitigate the influence of my subjectivity in research. I critically reflected on and recorded how I, as a qualitative researcher, my participants, the research setting, and research proceedings interacted with each other -–from embarking on the inquiry to presenting the findings (Glesne, 2011) and making the project more legitimate and valid. In the process of writing reflective journals, I tracked, questioned, and shared experience in which I shaped and was shaped by the whole inquiry process. I wholeheartedly agree with Reason (1994) on reflexivity: "Critical subjectivity involves a self-reflexive attention to the ground on which one is standing" (p. 327).

Ethical Consideration

As a researcher I not only abided by ethical codes, but also followed certain social norms and rules when conducting this inquiry, including respecting my participants and protecting their rights. After my research protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board, I sent my potential participants research consent forms, which articulated the research objectives, data collection devices, settings, timelines, and activities. Also, my participants were informed of checking verbatim transcriptions and written memos and reports, which was not only to consider their rights, interests, and wishes, but to ensure the accuracy and appropriateness of my description. In short, I tried my best to fulfill the obligation to respect the rights, values, and needs of my participants.

Findings from the Data Analysis

Amy's story

Amy was born in a southern city of China where she attained a Master's degree in Computer Science. She taught science in a middle school in her home city during which she stayed with her family (parents and grandparents from her mother side). She was enrolled at this university last year, which was the first year of her Ph. D. program in Computer Science.

She stated that limited English proficiency was the main reason for her inability to adjust to the new environment; even though she started learning English as a foreign language since third grade, her English was still limited, which discouraged her from participating in class activities.

> From my elementary school to my high school, my English teachers emphasized reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary memorization, but ignored speaking and listening. I did not have chance to speak English in class, let alone out of class, so I learned dumb and deaf English. When I went to college, my English class was optional, so I did not spend much time on it. That is why my English is bad. I do not understand what is going on in class if my professors talk fast. I have difficulties to understand English slangs and idioms as well. Sometimes my classmates laugh loudly when my professors make jokes or say something funny, but I have no idea what they laugh at. I feel like an outsider, totally isolated from my class. I am so afraid of group discussion or presentations, because I do not know how to talk in English. One day in my research class, my professor asked us to discuss a topic in a group of six people. My classmates were very excited to take turns to share their ideas. When it was my turn, I did not know how to say it in English. I wish I could have disappeared from that class. After a short period of silence, one of my classmates asked me, "Are you going to talk?" I shook my head and shrugged my shoulders to him. I could tell a little bit anger from his tone and facial expression. I could also feel disappointment from others' reactions. I felt stupid and useless. I do not want to go back to that class anymore. (Interview with Amy, May 2015)

Limited English proficiency not only hindered Amy's involvement in class participation, but also damaged her self-esteem and self-worth. She felt a sense of disconnectedness and identity disorder. She did not think she belonged to that group, because she felt like an outsider. Her classmates were active in class activities, but she was not; she excluded herself from opportunities to engage in classroom activities. Failing to contribute to group discussion made her feel stupid and useless, which might have resulted in schooling anxiety and frustration, because she wanted to escape or disappear from that class, as she noted in the interview. Amy's experience of the English language barrier was parallel to the research of Yan (2009), Yuan (2011), and Liu (2002), which was one of the reasons for cultural resistance and disintegration.

Low self-esteem and a sense of worthlessness not only isolated her from the mainstream culture, but also threatened her membership in the community of Chinese students. She felt inferior to native speakers and her compatriots who had a good command of English. Her roommate was a Chinese student at the advanced English level, but she never talked to her in English, because she was afraid that her roommate would point out her bad English skills. She did not tell her roommate about her frustration and depression in that research class, because she was worried that her roommate would look down on her. She had some Chinese friends at this university, but she did not feel comfortable sharing her learning experience with them, because she did not want her friends to see her as a failure. She did not tell her parents about her academic difficulties either, as she did not want to worry them. She resorted to a diary as an outlet to relieve her stress and dejection.

> Sometimes I just want to escape from this university and go back home. But, I cannot do that. My parents have high expectations for me. I cannot disappoint them. I love them. I am their only hope. If I gave up, I would shame my parents and grandparents in the eyes of my neighborhood, which they would lose face

or mianzi. Mianzi is a big issue in China. We can lose money, but we cannot lose mianzi. I came here to study not just for myself, but for my family as well. I am under pressure all the time, because I really do not know how to finish my degree. I am so worried about my studies. Sometimes I really doubt myself if I am a material of success. Is there anybody who can tell me what to do? I do not know! I do not know! I do not know! I am so lonely…If I was in China, my life would be much better. I miss my mom, my friends! I miss my home! What am I going to do? Escape or stay? … (Excerpt from Amy's diary, June 2015)

Amy was struggling with her academic performance. She had a strong desire to change the circumstances, but she had not found a solution yet. She wished she could have dropped out, but escapism was not an option, because she would not only disappoint her family, but also make herself lose face; none of these were acceptable for her family. The only choice was to stay and face the challenge, but she had no idea how to rise above the circumstances. She doubted herself and doubted if she could handle the situation. She was afraid and worried. She got homesick. She called her family twice a day (once in the morning, once in the evening). Sometimes she talked to her parents, sometimes her grandparents, but she never mentioned her frustration and depression from her studies, as she thought that she might worry them.

After a long time of struggle, she decided to ask the Psychological Counseling Center for help. She felt uncomfortable when she saw the people at the center. She was the only Chinese student there, which made her very nervous. She practiced so many times about how to greet the counselor and how to tell her problems before she went to the center. But while the counselor asked her what her difficulties were, she could not remember a single word, and started stuttering. The counseling lasted less than an hour, but Amy felt that period of time was as long as a century. She left the center and decided not to go back again. Being frustrated at the counseling center was one thing; even worse would be her visit to the center being found out by her Chinese classmates-- her countrymen would stay away from her immediately if they knew she had psychological problems. In that case, she would face losing her membership in the Chinese community. The unpleasant counseling experience worsened her situation; she was depressed again.

As the only child in her big family, she was treated as a princess, constantly showered with attention, care, and love. Back home, she had never cooked, done laundry, or house chores, because her parents or grandparents had done these things for her. Doing laundry, cooking food, and buying groceries by herself were a big challenge. She wished her parents could have come here to stay with her to help. Relying extremely on her family made her homesick all the time.

Amy had a host family (host mother, father, and two little brothers) and was invited to have dinner with the family members in a restaurant when she arrived at this university. At the dinner table, her host mother asked her to go to church with them on a Sunday. She was very excited because she had never been to a church when she was in China. She went to church with her host family in which she enjoyed the friendly atmosphere. The pastor's passion about discussing the Bible impressed her tremendously. Unfortunately, she hardly understood what he said, even though her host mother kept telling her the page numbers of the Bible in a very low voice. She felt bad because she was not able to understand the church service. After the church, her host mother suggested she attend Sunday school. She went to Sunday school and sat there fidgeting, because she felt that she did not belong to this group either. She left the church and never went back. She cut off and was cut off from her host family. Unable to participate in class, uncomfortable to talk with a counselor, and incapable of understanding the church service, Amy felt hopelessness and helplessness. She viewed herself as a directionless kite floating in the sky as shown below.

Figure 1. Amy's Perception of Herself
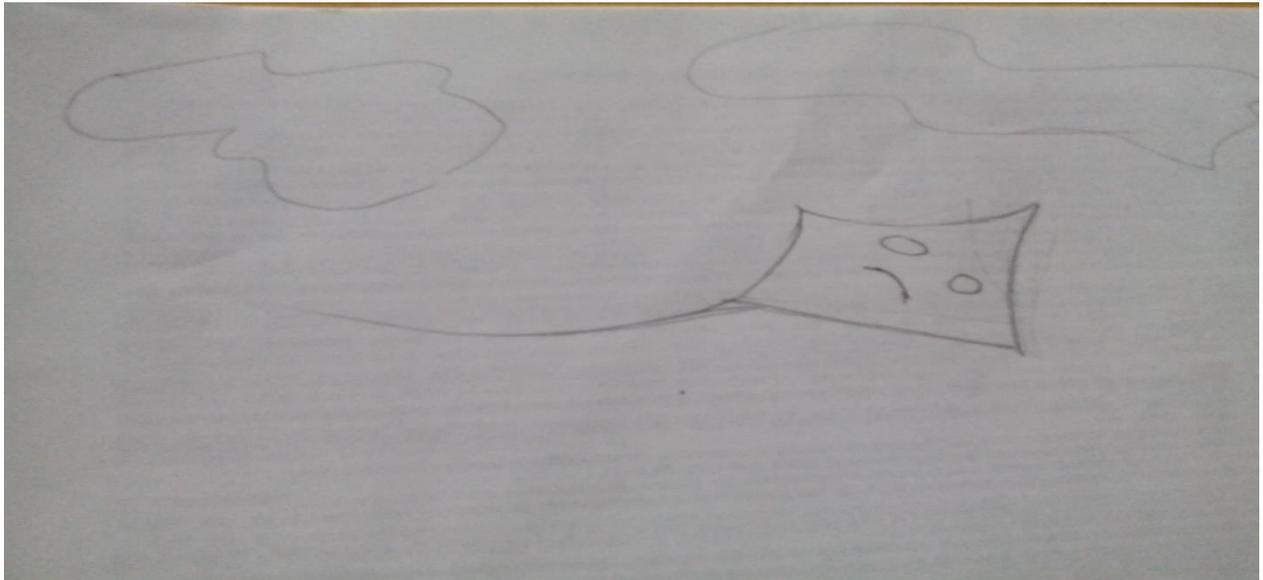
My observations and interviews reveal that Amy's low English proficiency was one of the reasons for her culture shock. If she had mastered English, she would not have encountered so much cultural clash. For Lisa, the English language was not a problem, but she also experienced culture shock.

Lisa's story

Lisa was born into an intellectual family in which both of her parents were teachers. Her father taught physics in a college and her mother taught English in a high school, which helped her become a high achiever with a good command of English. My research began during the first year of her Ph.D. program in education. Before she came to the United States, she took GRE and TOEFL tests. She got 1580 out of 1800 in GRE and 104 out of 120 in TOEFL. However, her professors' different teaching approaches from her formal schooling shocked her.

> One day, one of my professors apologized to us, which surprised me. He said, "Today I talked too much, I apologize. Next class, I will make time for you to discuss". Most of my classes are seminars in which we are supposed to actively participate in group discussions or presentations. In China, however, the method of spoon-feeding predominated classes. We did not have to discuss in class; we just needed to listen to our teachers or professors, which we are like containers receiving what had been taught. If someone had different ideas and spoke out in class, others would attack her/him whom would be considered as showing off. Even if we had different opinions, we would agree to disagree, because it was not polite if we disputed against our teachers who were authorities of knowledge. Also, Confucianism tells us that showing off might result in trouble. Some old sayings warn that "the less said the better", such as "shut the mouth and open the eyes" and "careless talk leads to trouble." So, I did not and do not talk in class, even though I am able to, but I am not used to it, because I do not want my Chinese classmates to criticize me for showing off. I have another

concern: I have a strong accent. I do not want others to laugh at me. One day, one of my Chinese classmates was called on to answer a question, when she just said a few words, some of my American classmates laughed at her because of her strange accent, which was very embarrassing. I know I have to talk in class, but I do not feel comfortable. I am worried that I might make mistakes, but if I sit there like a wooden person, I feel terrible. I am so ambivalent. I do not know what to do. (Interview with Lisa, September 2015)

The interview indicates that Chinese traditional culture and teaching models could be responsible for Lisa's non-participation in class interactions. She felt uncomfortable and embarrassed sitting silently in class, but she did not have the courage to break the silence. In her philosophy of education class, she always sat in the last row of the classroom, because she could avoid being called upon by her professor. She never asked questions even though she really needed her professor's clarification. She said that her classmates might be bothered if she asked questions in class. Being afraid of making mistakes held her back from answering questions and engaging in discussions as well. Most of the time, she just sat there taking notes or nodding her head. Non-participation in class activities made her feel isolated and excluded, because she acknowledged that her classmates did not want to be in the same group <u>as</u> her. They might think she was not willing to contribute to discussions or she was not smart enough, either of which hurt her. She was ambitious to be an excellent student like her parents expected, so she wanted to interact with her professors and classmates; but her worries reduced her desire for class involvement.

Although Lisa's English was advanced, she still felt overwhelmed by her studies. She took four classes per semester in order to finish her degree as soon as possible and then go back home. She had to read tons of articles, books, and book chapters, and wrote papers for all of the classes— no weekends, no holidays, no entertainment. She showed me her calendar, which was a gift from her parents when she went back home for Christmas last year. The calendar expressed her parents' hope: "Be productive! Cherish every moment!" Every time she saw the calendar, she thought about her family and her parents' expectations for her, which not only made her feel a sense of warmth, but also a sense of responsibility. She had to work harder to fulfill her mission and realize her parents' ideal. Accordingly, the calendar was a symbol of motivation and hope, but also responsibility and pressure.

Lisa's aspiration to good grades and achievement motivated her to study hard, which became a heavy burden, like she described in her email:

I am very busy and tired. I need time to relax. I am like a machine running and running every day. Someday the machine will be broken. I always have a headache. I really need to take a break, but I cannot. I need time to study. I do not want to fail. I want my parents to be proud of me. (Excerpted from Lisa's email, September 2015)

In addition to study pressure, relying on her parents' financial support was also a burden for Amy. The tuition fees and living expenses were exorbitant, but she had not been granted any scholarships or assistantships due to limited funding in her department. This not only lowered her living standard, but also made her feel inferior to her Chinese classmates who were research or teaching assistants. That was one of the reasons why she did not want to make friends with them. She consumed herself with reading books and writing papers.

Unlike Amy, Lisa liked to go to church with her host family. She thought going to church was an important way to know American culture, but her family in China did not agree with her because her parents were atheists. Every time when she was in the church, she felt a

sense of betrayal to her biological family. Eventually, she quit going to church, because she felt like an imposter. Her connection to her host family was broken. Reticence in class, busy academic life, and financial problems restricted her ability to learn the host culture and integrate into the local society.

Figure 2. Lisa's calendar

John's Story

John was from an eastern city in China. His father worked in a transnational company and his mother worked in a local government agency. His parents wanted him to run a big company after graduation, so they sent him to the US to study business, believing America offered the best in the world. John was pursuing his Master's at this university during my inquiry, which was also the first year of his program. Unlike Lisa and Amy, John tried very hard to assimilate and absorb the local culture by making friends with Americans, even though his English was not as good as Lisa's. He lived in a dorm on campus with an American student. He was very excited, because he had the chance to not only practice English, but also learn about American culture. Unfortunately, the situation was much different than he had expected. John did not have much chance to see his roommate, because they had different schedules and habits. His roommate was an outdoors person, but he was not. Even though his roommate spent some time in the dorm when he was there, he did not seem to be interested in talking with John, which made John a little bit upset. When John caught a cold and had high fever, he thought his roommate would take care of him, but he did not. His roommate did not even ask him if he was feeling well. His roommate' indifference and coldness made John very sad and homesick. He wished his roommate was Chinese.

John also had an American host family and he kept a good connection with them in the beginning. The family invited John to their farm to hunt and have dinner. John cooked authentic Chinese food for them. But one day when they hung out together….

My friend's wife told us a joke while we were hanging out. All of a sudden, they laughed to tears, but I got confused, I did not understand why they laughed. I pretended I understood and laughed as well, but I felt terrible. I wanted to ask them why it was so funny, but I did not. I was afraid that they thought I was ignorant or my English was bad. Since then, I did not feel comfortable to be with them. Gradually, we did not contact each other anymore. (Interview with John, August 2015)

Failing to build a friendship with his roommate and having difficulty understanding a joke seemed to make John lose confidence in his ability to make friends with Americans, but he did not give up easily. He made an American friend who was his classmate. They spent a lot of time together.

One day, while we were studying in a library, I was very sleepy, so I told him I wanted to take a nap at a computer station. He was surprised. He said, "We came here for studying not for sleeping." But I told him that most of Chinese students take naps when they are tired. He seemed not to accept it. I am under pressure when we are together. He is a big football fan. One day he asked me to go to the stadium to watch a football game with him. I do not like sports and I do not understand the game rules at all, but out of courtesy I went to the stadium with him on a Saturday. That was a torture for me. People sang and danced. My friend was very excited, but I got bored very soon. I wanted to leave, but I did not. I sat there until the game was over. Fortunately, he did not realize that I was unhappy. When I was walking home from the stadium, I saw people laughing and dancing, but I was so lonely. If my parents were here, my situation would be different. After got home, I called my parents immediately. I really miss them. (Interview with John, September 2015).

Making American friends was not as easy as John expected, so he decided to hang out only with Chinese students. He did not have to speak English with his compatriots. No worries for making mistakes when he spoke Chinese, but the problem was when he spoke English in class Chinese words came out unconsciously. His countryman classmates mocked him all the time because he said "我 (I in English) think" as he was answering his professor's question. Since then, he had had a nickname "我 think". He felt embarrassed, so he was not as active as before. He hated both Chinese and English. He felt guilty when he remained silent in class. He considered himself neither a good student nor a good son because he did not practice English as much as he could, which was against his intention to come to America to study.

Discussion

The purpose of this case study aims to understand how Chinese cultural influences hinder these three Chinese students' acculturation and integration into the host culture. Main findings of this study include interdependence and secondary control, different teaching approaches, mianzi (or "face"), and filial piety (family obligation), which might have resulted in these three Chinese students' culture shock. I will discuss these factors in turn in the following section from the sociocultural and psychological perspectives.

Interdependence, Secondary Control and Culture Shock

China is an interdependent society in which each member must conform to the expectations of the community. Because individuals are tightly connected with others, they must consider others' desires, and adjust themselves to the whole community, which, in turn, reinforces social connectedness. Connectedness and conformity are rooted in Chinese culture, due to traditional social structures and systems.

> China was an agrarian society with strong obligations and strong role relations specifying how to deal with family, clan, and village, and with tight vertical control of social relations. Action was carried out in the context of many role relations. Harmony with one's fellows was believed to be a primary end of the society. (as cited in Kitayama & Cohen, 2007, p. 586)

Accordingly, it is reasonable and natural for these three Chinese students to stick with their countrymen. They had a desire to gain membership of the community of the host culture. Unfortunately, none of them were members of this new community because they isolated themselves or were isolated from the mainstream culture for numerous reasons. The exclusion from the English language community had them recoil from this unfamiliar environment.

In addition, traditional Chinese culture values secondary control (Kitayama et al., 2007) which emphasizes interpersonal responsiveness to the expectations and concerns of others; individuals are more concerned about communal interest, social acceptance, and the self's reputation when attaining an achievement. The expectations, standards, and assessments of the community drive the self to attain self-improvement by adjusting to the expectations of others to pursue interpersonal connectedness. When these three Chinese students were exposed to western culture, they instinctively came into conflict, which manifested itself as anxiety, hopelessness, depression, or loneliness (Marsella & Yamada, 2007). As the Chinese students perceived and interpreted the world differently, the ways in which they interacted with their physical and social contexts were distinct. From a cultural and psychological perspective, their cognition and motivation were represented by their cultural characteristics. Cultures not only play a big role in the cognition and motivation of individuals, but also regulate one's emotions, because "emotions [are] social, relational phenomena, rooted in collective meanings" (Mesquita & Leu, 2007, p. 734).

In this sense, when these three Chinese students were uprooted and immersed in the American culture, their thinking, motivations, and behaviors were challenged by the new sociocultural environment that is characterized as primary control (Kitayama et al., 2007), emphasizing self-esteem, self-efficacy, and beliefs in self-reliance. Accordingly, these three Chinese students from the interdependent society sensed a loss of identity and belonging when they encountered the individual-centered society.

In addition, the one-child policy had reinforced the tradition of interdependence and the ideology of secondary control, which had made the current generation lack a firm sense of determination. All the three participants were the only children in their families, and had been given complete attention and love from their parents, so it was much more likely for them to rely on their family or others around them (Sue & Sue, 1990). Once they left their parents, they had a strong sense of loss, because they were not used to the environment that values self-reliance and independence. As Amy described, she was overwhelmed when she arrived, because she suddenly had to do everything by herself. She did not have family here. She had to stand on her own two feet. Without the help of her parents and friends, Amy felt like a directionless kite floating in the sky.

Spoon-Feeding Model, Language Barrier, and Learning Shock

American education is characterized by student-centered teaching models and positive participation in classroom activities, which emphasizes critical thinking through inquiry and questioning (Brush & Saye, 2000; Garrett, 2008; Sandholtz, 1997). Classes are like simulated debates, and students are encouraged to express their opinions. In China, however, teacher-centered teaching and spoon-feeding models dominate the classroom (Guan & Meng, 2007; Song et al., 2005; Su, 1989) in which students are supposed to listen to their teachers attentively and carefully, take notes, and think quietly and calmly. Students are not encouraged to question or discuss in class. It is neither polite nor acceptable to challenge a teachers' authority, so students generally agree to disagree all the time. Raised and educated in this culture, these three Chinese students were inescapably confronted with *learning shock* (Griffiths et al., 2005), a sensation of "acute frustration, confusion and anxiety experienced by some students [who] find themselves exposed to unfamiliar learning and teaching methods, bombarded by unexpected and disorienting cues, and subject to ambiguous and conflicting expectations" (pp. 2-3). Both Lisa and Amy felt like outsiders in American classes, because they were not accustomed to engaging in interactions with classmates and professors. Even though sometimes they needed their professors' clarification, they were afraid of bothering their classmates. The language barrier was another obstacle to their class participation, because both Lisa and John's listening and speaking abilities were not advanced enough to communicate with others. The traditional model of teaching English in China, which focuses on reading and writing, while ignoring listening and speaking, was partly to blame. A lack of English proficiency excluded them from classroom activities. Remaining silent in class not only caused their failure to adapt to the new teaching model, but also their inability to improve English. In addition, the great amount of reading and writing required by their classes overwhelmed them. Non-participation in class activities resulted from the unfamiliarity with the teaching model, and the language barrier not only severely damaged their self-confidence, but also slowed their academic progress.

"Mianzi," Class Participation, and Consulting Counseling Center

Chinese society places a high value on *mianzi,* the so-called face, which denotes an individual's social position, as well as the roles that are expected of him or her by others. The concept of *face work* is the projection of a self-image and impression management; its goal is to shape and instill in others a particular favorable image (Tedeschi & Riess, 1981). Remaining reticence in class was partly attributed to face saving. They were afraid of being mocked if they had strong accents or made mistakes in speech. John's experience held him back from interaction with his peers and professors. All three participants tried very hard to save "mianzi" at the expense of academic performance.

The Counseling Center that helps students deal with culture shock and other psychological problems was out of the question**.** These three participants believed that if they received counseling, they would be humiliated, so neither John nor Lisa went to the counseling center for help. Amy went once, but she did not go back. In their perception, losing face is tantamount to losing power, so these participants would rather struggle with psychological difficulties alone than consult the Counseling Center.

Filial Piety, Motivation and Pressure

A traditional sense of family obligation, called *filial piety* (Ang & Liamputtong, 2008), also put pressure on these Chinese students. Filial piety "has been long believed to be the essential element holding together the Chinese families' system of care, and is a Confucian

concept that encompasses a broad range of behaviors, including children's respect, obedience, loyalty, material provision, and physical care to parents" (Zhan & Montgomery, 2003, p. 210) that passes from generation to generation. Filial piety is a core ideology and guiding principal for Chinese people, because it creates the responsibility for Chinese children to return their parents' care and love. The fulfillment of the familial responsibility required these Chinese students to be diligent and ambitious. However, the sense of a familial duty was a double-edged sword, because it motivated them to keep going, but also exerted great pressure on them. Amy described herself as *a machine running on and on, every day* that would *erupt someday like a volcano.* Tensions from poor studies, a failure to make friends, and tiresome house chores were exacerbated by the financial burden that these students felt. They were trapped in a desperate situation, but unable to escape, because they did not want to shame their families.

Conclusion

These findings reveal cultural influences that hindered the social and academic lives of Chinese students who were studying in America. Among these are: dependence on family, the Confucian middle way, the concept of *mianzi,* and traditional filial piety. Being aware of Chinese cultural factors might help international administrators better assess and resolve the problems that Chinese students face, thereby minimizing cultural clash and the difficulties of acclimating to a new environment. By addressing these problems, American universities will be better able to accommodate the incoming multi-cultural students, the majority of whom are Chinese, and bridge the gap that separates them from their American counterparts. However, the findings of this study might be limited by the homogeneity of the participants with regard to ethnicity and culture, which may not be appropriate to generalize to other international students from different cultures.

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