

Article

Phases of Cultural Adjustment of East Asian Students

Intercultural Communication and Integration into American Culture

Anya HOMMADOVA

University of Tsukuba, Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Ph.D. Student

There is a growing population of international students in the U.S. and although previously only elite or scholastically advanced students were able to study abroad, this experience is now becoming more accessible to a more diverse population. As this new demographic grows, questions arise on how to make the experience for international students in the U.S. more positive and less stressful. Asian students make up the largest demographic of students studying in U.S., and though there is a plethora of literature on Asian students studying in major cities in U.S., researchers have somewhat neglected the experiences of students in rural areas. This study looks at the process of cultural adjustment through ethnographic inquiry, exploring the process of adaptation through five phases of adjustment. Utilizing an ethnographic approach, one year of fieldwork was undertaken at a small-sized university in the rural U.S. The researcher examined the lives of 38 students from East Asia through observations, interviews, open-ended surveys, and other means. The students' interactions with the local population are analyzed using the Interpersonal Adaptation Theory. Practical suggestions were made based on the students' experiences and reflections on possible ways for sojourners to not only adjust, but to integrate into the local culture.

Keywords: Cultural Adjustment, Adaptation to American Culture, East Asian Students, Interpersonal Adaptation Theory

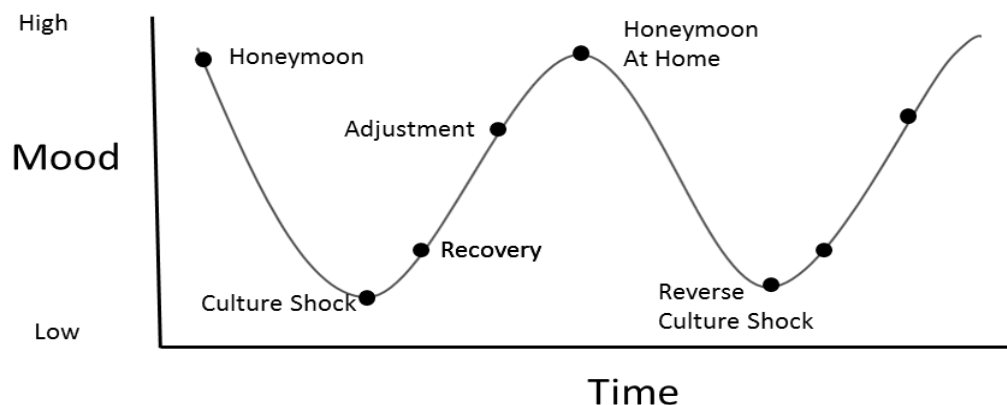
Introduction

The United States hosts the largest share of the world's international students, serving as a temporary home to 1.23 million international students (SEVIS, 2016). This figure represents over a million stories of students struggling to adapt to a new environment. This adaptation process is especially enthralling in its extremity when the host environment is tremendously different from the native environment. The more cultural differences there are between the home and host countries, the more difficult it becomes for international students to adjust (Lin & Yi, 1997; Mori, 2000). In the U.S., these students not only have to overcome the same challenges as American students, but are additionally faced with language barriers, culture shock, unfamiliar social norms, adjustment to the consumption of foreign food, different educational expectations, isolation, and inability to establish social networks (Church, 1982; Furnham & Trezise, 1983; Leong & Chou, 1996). Asian students make up the largest percentage of international students studying in the U.S., and the number of Asian students studying in the U.S. has continued to grow. Many studies focusing on student adjustments take a quantitative approach, and few studies look at the adaptation of students from urban areas to rural areas of the U.S. Furthermore, the international students' experiences rely heavily on their interactions and communication with other people. The United States is highly diverse and Americans in metropolitan cities are different from Americans in rural areas. This paper focuses on the interactions between East Asian students and the local populace in a rural U.S. city in the mid-west. The fundamental problem addressed by this article is examining the process of adaptation that East Asian students go through in a rural American environment.

Various scholars describe stages of adjustment in different ways. For example, Berry et. al. (1987) identified five distinct categories of acculturation as 1) physical changes (location), 2) biological changes (nutrition), 3) cultural changes, 4) social relationships (in-group/outgroup), and 5) psychological changes. Berry et al. (1987) focus on stress associated with learning a second culture firsthand; however, these categories do not fully capture the complexity of the process, and many of them can be grouped under the term ‘culture shock.’ Berry’s model was developed for immigrants, not sojourners, as the sojourners are in a foreign culture temporarily. Sojourners face additional challenges in negotiating their identity and are also faced with reverse culture shock once they return to their homeland. Another scholar, Chen (1992), identifies the phases as 1) culture shock, 2) psychological adaptation, and 3) interaction effectiveness. Chen focuses on psychological adaptation, overlooking other types of adaptation that the sojourners have to go through such as physical, social, and cultural adaptation needed to fully adapt to the host culture. However, the importance of interactional effectiveness cannot be ignored, as many scholars agree that interaction with the local population plays a major role in the integration of foreigners to their host environment.

A pioneering scholar in this phenomenon, Kalervo Oberg (1954), described cultural adjustment in four phases: 1) honeymoon, 2) culture shock, 3) gradual adjustment, humor, and perspective, and 4) “Feeling at Home”—adaptation and biculturalism. The previously mentioned issues in the differences between models for immigrants and sojourners were addressed by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) with the emergence of the W-Curve Model (Figure 1).

Figure 1. W-Curve Adaptation Model



Source: Based on the U-curve (Oberg 1960) and extended by (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963)

However, Oberg does not discuss what happens before the honeymoon phase. He does suggest that in the gradual adjustment phase, some of the key factors are the perspectives and sense of humor of the foreigners. Gebhard, a scholar in the field of education, describes the phases of the students’ adaptation consisting of the following: 1) getting ready to leave, 2) initial experiences, 3) increasing interaction 4) culture shock, and 5) adaptation (Gebhard, 2010). The students go through the phases in a non-linear way and often skip a phase or go back to a previous phase.

The East Asian students that were able to study in the U.S. twenty years ago are not from the same demographic as today. Currently, it is no longer elite nor exceptionally smart students who study abroad. Studying in the U.S. with in-state tuition prices and more easily available student visas are viable options for more people. Asian students are the largest group of students studying in U.S. (IIE, 2016), and are not often singled out in their adjustment; they are grouped together with all the other international students. The problem is the lack of studies on the process of cultural adjustment of East Asian students to the rural U.S. from the perspective of these students. The sense-making process and accounts of their experiences in their words are nowhere to be found. This study attempts to fill this gap by answering the following research questions:

RQ1. What is the process of adaptation that East Asian students go through when adapting to the rural U.S. in their perspective?

RQ2. In the interactions of East Asian students with the local populace, what helps students form intimate relationships?

1. Conceptualization of the Stages of Cultural Adaptation and Integration

In constructing a more comprehensive view of the cultural adjustment of East Asian students in the rural U.S., phases of adjustment need to be tailored to sojourners. As suggested by Gebhard (2010), a pre-arrival stage is important for students, as preparation for their studies affects their academic success. Kim (1988) also suggested that “adaptive predisposition,” which consists of pre-departure preparations, has an impact on the outcome of cross-cultural adaptation. However, it is not only the preparations but the expectations and perceptions of the place they are going to that also formulates in this stage, as is pointed out by Black et al. (1991). Black also suggests that previous experience plays a role in the expectations of sojourners. Therefore, based on the literature, the first stage should focus on what happens before the departure, which includes predispositions of the students towards the host country and people, previous experiences abroad and the preparations that were undertaken for their travel abroad.

The next phase is upon arrival, and looking at the literature, a commonly suggested accuracy upon arrival is the honeymoon stage. Although it is true that many of the students feel exhilarated about their first experiences upon arrival, they are not necessarily always positive experiences. Gerhard (2010) provided an example of a negative first experience when the students were deprived of their belongings on the train in New York. The phase upon arrival will be defined as the initial experience phase and consists of the first impressions of the rural area, university, and the experiences of East Asian students. The third stage is culture shock, when many sojourners for first time realize some of the negative points in living in the host culture compared to home country. The definition of culture shock used in this study is similar to Oberg’s (1960) and is described as the feeling of inadequacy, frustration, anxiety, and anger caused by the clash of host and home culture ideas. The fourth stage is the adjustment phase, where the students negotiate their identity and can adapt or integrate into the host culture. There is a clear difference between coping with the environment and becoming part of it. Adjusting to the environment means coping through various ways, such as withdrawing, communicating exclusively with co-ethnic nationals, and rejecting the host culture, but still being able to live in the host environment. Integrating into the host environment is becoming part of it, and requires interacting with it on a much deeper level.

Kim’s Intimacy Model of Cultural Adjustment (Kim, 1988) suggests that foreigners integrate into a host society by increasing the number of intimate relationships with the local populace compared to the number of intimate relationships with co-ethnic nationals. Therefore, an individual whose intimate relationships are only with co-ethnic nationals ends up being unable to integrate, though he or she might be well adapted to the environment by coping with it through the haven of the interactions with co-ethnic nationals. Conversely, individuals with an equal amount or more intimate relationships with locals integrate into the local society through these relationships. Berry et al. (1987) also suggested the in/out group relationships are paramount in the process of adjustment. The overall plethora of literature suggests that, in the process of adjustment, the interactions and social support the students receive is a major factor in how well they adjust to their new environment (Adelman, 1988; Chavajay, 2013; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004; Watters, 1999). The final stage is reverse culture shock and it is missing in the acculturation models and other adaptation models designed for immigrants. During this phase the students can find it difficult to re-adapt to their home culture after prolonged exposure to a foreign culture. Re-adapting to one’s own culture at times can be more difficult than the culture shock of adapting to a foreign culture, particularly for Asian students, as they face a process of reconstruction of their identities and roles. An example of this was provided by Gebhard (2010) in a story of how a Japanese female student, who had gotten used to independence and equal treatment, was asked to do menial tasks and serve tea when she returned to Japan and started working. However, on a more positive side, a Japanese scholar who explored the cultural adjustment of Japanese students in the U.S. (Nakagawa, 2013) discussed the effects of studying abroad on the identity of the

Japanese students upon their return. In her findings, she discovered that studying abroad resulted in an increase in self-esteem and confidence of students once they returned.

As can be seen from the previous studies, successful integration and adaptation are dependent on interactions between international students and local students. Therefore, it is essential to look next at social interactions and consider a working model to explore the intercultural communication occurring in the phenomenon of cultural adjustment.

2. Role of Intercultural Communication in Integration and Interpersonal Adaptation Theory

Loneliness has been shown to be a negative predictor of sociocultural adaptation and psychological adaptation (Wang & Sun, 2009). Furthermore, recent research done in the area of social interactions demonstrates that interaction with more people helps students cope with their process of adjustment (Miyazaki, Bodenhorn, Zalaquett & Ng, 2008; Wei, Heppner, Mallen, Ku, Liao & Wu, 2007). This does not only include communication with family and friends back home, but also includes interactions with the local population, which is a major contributing factor to the students' adjustment to the host culture. Numerous studies show this to be true; the more frequently the international students interact with friends from their host country, the better they adjust (Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Perkins, 1977). For example, the classic study by Sellitz and Hook (1962) showed that international students felt a stronger connection to the United States if they had at least one close American friend. The results of a more recent study also suggest that social support available to international students, even today, plays a major role in making the adjustment to a new cultural context (Chavajay, 2013; Watters, 1999). A study done by Toyokawa et al. (2002) suggests that extracurricular activities are positively related to Japanese students' experiences in the U.S. by increasing life satisfaction, as well as better academic performance. One of the theories germane to the study of interpersonal communication is undoubtedly the Interpersonal Adaptation Theory, commonly known as the Interaction Adaptation Theory, and hereafter referred to as the IAT. The IAT attempts to explain dyadic interactions through a formula, where the combination of expectations, desire, and needs yield to the interaction position (IP). IP is "a net assessment of what is necessary, anticipated, and preferred as the dyadic interaction pattern in a situation" (Burgoon, Stern, & Dillman, 1995, pg. 266). Individuals in interactions try to minimize the gap between predicted behavior and actual behavior to stabilize the interaction. The theory predicts that if there is a gap between IP and actual behaviors, then one of the partners in the interaction will adjust their IP, which minimizes the gap and can signal to the other person to change their actual behavior. An obvious example of this is in the interactions surrounding the discussion of washing dishes between husband and wife. The wife needs the husband to help around the house. She desires him to do it without her saying anything, but expects that he will end up doing it once she explicitly tells him. However, if the husband comes home and goes to watch TV and the wife tells him to wash the dishes, but he says, "Do it yourself," this will create a gap between the predicted behavior and actual behavior. As a result, the wife will have to adjust her IP or the husband will have to do so, and as the interaction continues, the IP will adjust, and the actual behavior can change. This can also be applied to explore the interactions between East Asian students and local Americans.

The IAT theory derived from theories and models of four distinct approaches. First, the authors looked at biological approaches, looking at models such as interactional synchrony, mirroring, and mimicry. These biological models showed that individuals would share similar patterns that are universal and involuntary. Furthermore, these adaptation patterns have an innate basis of satisfying the needs of bonding, safety, and social organization. The second approach was arousal and affect, which analyzed the affiliative conflict theory (ACT), the arousal-labeling theory, Markus-Kaplan and Kaplan's bi-dimensional model (BM), the discrepancy-arousal theory (DAT), and the dialectical model. The commonality found among these is that internal emotional and arousal states are the driving forces in people's decisions to approach or avoid others. For example, ACT states that when the stability is disturbed in an interaction, there will be pressure to compensate by restoring it intra-personally or inter-personally. BM works similarly, but the approach and avoidance tendencies are attributed to individuals' personality traits and attempts to predict conjoint interaction patterns through individual predispositions. DAT predicts that moderate arousal is caused by discrepancies in expected behavior patterns and will produce reciprocity, while high arousal is negative and causes avoidance. Dialectic models focus on the changes in people's behavioral patterns and the cyclical pattern

poles of approach/openness and avoidance/closeness. The third approach consisted of the social norm approach, which is mainly looking at the norm of reciprocity, social exchange and resource exchange theory, couple interaction, and the "dyadic effect," as well as the communication accommodation theory. The standard of reciprocity states that people feel a social obligation to reciprocate what other people do to them. CAT states that convergence and divergence strategies depend on in-group and out-group status, motivation to identify with one another, and other factors. Finally, the last approach is the communication and cognitive approach, and the models that were used were Patterson's Sequential-Functional Model (SFM), the Expectancy Violations Theory, the Cognitive-Valence Theory, and the Motor Mimicry (MM) revisited. SFM looks at pre-interactional and interactional factors that regulate the stability and degree of accommodation in interactions. MM shows that matching is functional and may be deliberate. EVT and CVT are a combination of many similar elements from the previously described models, and for EVT, the behavior change needs to be identified as a positive or negative violation and predict a number of outcomes. Based on the above theories and models, Burgoon et al., identified nine principles that guide the IAT. The first four principles include innate pressure to adapt, biological inherent pressure, variance in approach and avoidance drives, as well as social pressure toward reciprocity and matching. Reciprocity and compensation can also transpire at a communication level, however despite people's predisposition to adapt there are various factors that can limit conscious adaptation. These limitations include: (a) individual consistency in behavioral style, (b) internal causes of adjustments, (c) poor monitoring of self or partner, (d) inability to adjust performance, and (e) cultural differences in communication practices and expectations. The combination of the various forces that are present set up boundaries that largely produce the behaviors of matching, synchrony, and reciprocity. The last two principles state that although many variables may be salient moderators of interaction adaptation, predictions about functional complexes of behaviors should be more useful and accurate than predictions about particular behaviors viewed in isolation of the function they serve (Burgoon, Stern, & Dillman, 2007).

This theory is becoming more popular among scholars, but still, very few studies have tried to test it empirically. The two studies published by empirically testing it were done by Floyed and Burgoon (1999), and another by Le Poire and Yoshimura (1999). Floyed and Burgoon did one of the most extensive studies by applying the IAT to an experiment to predict nonverbal expressions of liking ($n=96$). The results of the experiment show that when individuals desire being liked by their partners, they will enact liking behaviors. Conversely, consistent with the IAT, they will show less liking behavior if they do not desire the same from their partners. Interestingly, when a person has a desire to be liked, s(he) will act in an attractive way, regardless of expectations and received behavior. Somewhat counterintuitively, findings suggested that expressions of liking can be considered negative, rather than positive, events. The studies that tested this theory include Le Poire and Yoshimura (1999), with results suggesting that the strongest desire to continue communication was when the participant expected an unpleasant communication, but in fact received highly involved communication. Despite these studies, the biggest criticism this theory faces is a lack of empirical evidence.

One of the limitations of the IAT is the concept of IP, which might be unnecessarily more complicated than needed. IP is a combination of variables that show the position of expectancies. There is high variance among the three elements that make up the IP, making it hard to be sure of what it is in different interactions, which in turn makes it hard to predict the outcome. The fact that people constantly influence each other in communication and, with reactions, can change the behavior of the people they are interacting with, is not new. Although the IAT explains this process, it is not clear how well it can predict the outcome. For the theory to be empirically tested, expectations need to be operationalized, which is hard to do, as stated by Le Poire and Yoshimura (1999). Furthermore, the variance among individuals' expectations is also hard to measure. As the theory states, behavior can be involuntary and unconscious; people do not calculate their IP, and often struggle to identify personal desires, needs, and expectations. Therefore, it is also hard for scientists to manipulate these variables. Another limitation that was noted by Burgoon et al. (1999) is regarding the ability of the IAT to predict patterns of interaction, as little empirical data testing is available. The limitations of the EVT are covered by the IAT. However, the boundary conditions are not clear; situational factors, cultural factors, and variance among needs, desires, and expectations could all affect the likelihood of compensation and reciprocity. This theory is well suited to exploring phenomena in intercultural communication, as it can help explain the discrepancies and, in an exploratory manner, it has not been applied to

explain interactions. However, the IAT has not been used pragmatically and has only been experimentally tested in laboratory settings.

3. Methodology

This study implements an interpretive qualitative paradigm and adapts ethnography as a research strategy. The subject of inquiry is the adaptation process of East Asian students to a rural American culture from the point of view of the participants. With ethnography being, by definition, a systematic study of people and cultures, it was the most suitable approach. Ethnographic research is designed to view various cultural phenomena from the point of view of the participants, matching the objectives of this study. The data described in this study was gathered through numerous in-depth interviews, and the data was verified and enriched through triangulation by combining surveys, semi-formal interviews, and participatory observations. This study explored the following five phases of adjustment: 1) pre-arrival phase, 2) the initial exposure phase, 3) the culture-shock phase, 4) the adaptation phase and finally 5) reversed culture shock of the East Asian students. In this study, East Asian students are non-U.S. born students holding student F-1 visas who have come from East Asian countries and identify themselves as Chinese, Japanese, or Korean. The sample population was selected from a university in the mid-west United States, located in the rural city of M. with a population of fewer than 40,000 residents. The data gathering process started on May 2, 2015 and ended in August 2016. The summary of the data used is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Data Collection

Data Collection Table			
Data Collection Method	Quantity Collected	Time of Collection	Output Data
Semi-Formal Interviews	6 students	May 2015	Phases 2-4
Initial Asian Students Survey	23 surveys	September 2015, January 2016	Phases 1-3
In-Depth Interviews	Over 160 single space pages	August 2015 to May 2016	Phases 1-4
Focus Groups	2 (total of 13 students)	September and December	Phases 1-2
Observation Notes	Numerous	August 2015 to July 2016	Phases 1-5
Online Survey	17	June to August 2016	Phase 5

To be able to look at the students' experiences from fresh perspectives, without any restrictions, the patterns were allowed to emerge freely. The sensitivity and the nature of the topic as well as the desire to generate new knowledge, pointed to the implication of interviews as one of the main tools of gathering data. Two focus groups were conducted about the students' initial experiences in the U.S. The semi-formal interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes and the data collected was in the form of extensive notes. All of the in-depth-interviews, which were much longer, were recorded and transcribed. The scripts went through two cycles of coding. The first cycle includes descriptive, in vivo and causal codes. The descriptive and in vivo codes were chosen because they help understand the lives of the students using the participants' words. The causal coding was used to underline the possible causes of progress in adaptation or what caused the adaptation process to not go so well. The second cycle of coding was comparing the data and making more analytical codes to bump up the level of generalization. Mostly, the second cycle of coding used axial and longitudinal coding where it was relevant. The coding process analyses followed Saldana's (2009) coding manual.

The richest data was provided through in-depth interviews with 37 participants, and their demographic information is provided in Table 2. In reporting the results of the interviews, pseudonyms are used for the students to protect their identity, which also helps the reader to differentiate among the students' different personal experiences and opinions. The most commonly used strategy to improve validity is triangulation, which means using different sources of data to build a rational justification for the themes (Creswell, 2014). In this research, triangulation was used to improve the validity by looking at secondary sources that reported similar findings around the United States and by using the surveys and observations to ensure that the emergent data accurately captured the experiences of the students. Participant checking was used during all of the interviews and the data from the

surveys was also verified with the participants who volunteered for follow-up interviews. Reliability, or the consistency of researcher’s analysis, for this project was systematic and focused on specific codes. In this research project, the transcripts were double checked, and the coding was done in cycles. The transcripts were partially cross-checked with another coder.

Table 2: Demographic of In-Depth Interview Participants

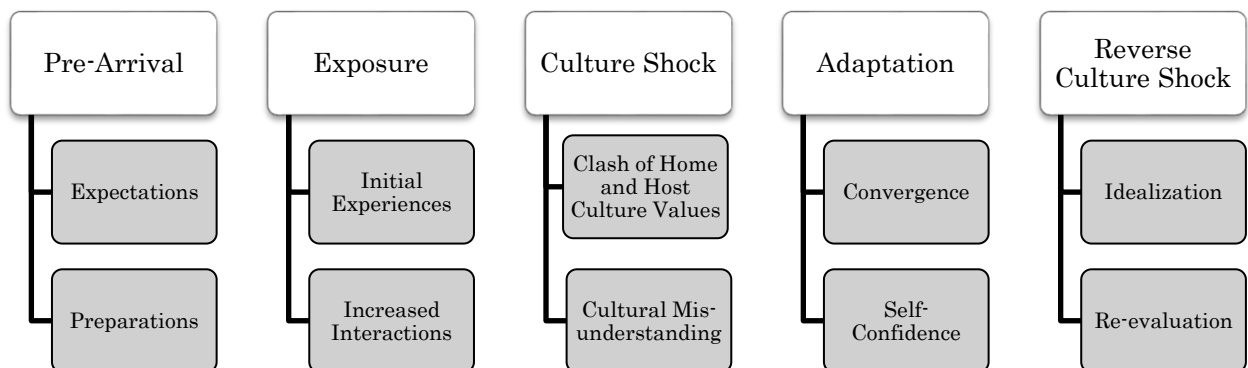
Ethnicity	Number of Students	Sex	Age	Major	Status	Duration of stay
Korean	6	2 male 4 female	22-34	English, Business, Computer Science	3 International 3 Exchange	5 months to 4 years
Japanese	15	5 male 10 female	20-23	Sociology(2), Physics, Comm, Business(3), Intl. Studies, Chemistry, English (3), Design, Psychology	5 International 10 Exchange	5 months to 3 years
Ethnically Chinese	16	10 male 5 female	20-28	Business (4), Computer Science (2), Economics (2), Engineering, Project Management, Marketing, East Asian Studies, Chemistry	13 International 3 Exchange	5 months to 6 years

Overall, qualitative research focuses on “discovery”, of new information, categories, and relationships, while canonical science makes prediction its ultimate goal. Although the sample might not be representative of a larger population, it is representative of East Asian student experiences in the rural U.S. The author would like to argue that it is not a stand-alone case, instead it looks at the general phenomenon of how perception, cultural background and experiences influence the cultural adaptation of East Asian students.

4. The Process of Adaptation to the Rural U.S.

The results are reported in this section through the conceptualized phases of adjustment, displaying the categories that emerged from the data analyses according to the stage the students were at during their study abroad. Each student moved through the stages at a different pace and few were able to achieve integration; while the majority were able to adapt, two international students quit their studies due to various circumstances. The overall process of adaptation is visually displayed below.

Figure 2. Phases of Adjustment



(1) Phase One: Pre-Arrival

Phase one is the phase that usually only lasts a few weeks for some students, while it could last for many years for others. In the pre-arrival phase, the motivation for coming, the expectations and their formation, as well as fear, anxiety, and preparations for study abroad that the East Asian students went through are examined. This phase is accompanied by many different feelings, and focuses on the personal circumstances of individuals and their personalities.

(1.1) Motivations for Studying Abroad

The reasons or motivation to study abroad for East Asian students varied greatly. The number-one reason was related to learning English, but other causes included wanting to experience a foreign culture, better college education, or failing the university exams at home. Four students (three from China, one from Korea) indicated that they had no choice; it was their parents' decision. Student status was a major factor that affected their choice for studying at M. University. Many of the international students that were enrolled in regular bachelor degree programs came to the U.S. because they failed their university entrance exams back home and were looking for an inexpensive university in the U.S. Exchange students chose M. University based on the results of their tests in English as a foreign language (hereafter referred to as TOEFL) score and major. For Chinese students, parents and relatives played a major role in the decision, while for Japanese students, there were instances where not all family members supported the decision for the student to go abroad.

Some students were inspired by people in their lives or by other aspects of American culture. One Japanese student came to the U.S. wanting an education in English to further her future career. In a survey she wrote, "In the future, I want to work at a research facility in physics, and I need good English and high skills in Physics, so I need this. I want to access the new information firsthand, not translated. All the information must be in English in conferences too. I want to go to graduate school." Another student said her English teacher told her a story about her experience of studying abroad, and it made her interested. Many students also mentioned that since childhood they wanted to go overseas. In this category, their study abroad was long awaited, well pre-planned, and highly anticipated by the participants. Students in this category had their pre-arrival phase begin years in advance, as they dreamed about their lives in the U.S. However, other students had little desire to go to the U.S. One extreme case is of a Taiwanese student who was not aware that his parents applied to M. University for admission on his behalf. Two weeks before his departure his parents informed him that he would be studying in the U.S. for the next four years. They simply handed him his acceptance letter and his airplane ticket. For this student, when asked about his expectations, he said he had no expectations or any preparation about his life in the U.S.; he was indifferent. This was not the only student for whom the parents made the decision that they should go to the U.S., and the parents chose M. University as the destination. Other students wanted to go to the U.K., Australia, or big cities in the U.S., but ended up studying at M. University because it was less expensive or because their TOEFL scores were not high enough to go to other universities. One Korean exchange student wrote, "I came because I wanted to learn English, and in Korea, English skill is important for our career. Because of my TOEFL score, there were few choices, so it was because of this score I had to go to M. University." M. University had a low minimum TOEFL score requirement, making this university one of the few places that would accept them. Some international students have studied at other American universities where they took English preparation courses and then transferred to M. University. This was not an option for the exchange students because of the short length of their program abroad.

Some students mentioned that the U.S. was not their first choice for learning English, while other students indicated that the U.S. was the best place to learn English. Factors such as enjoying studying English since middle school or a sound knowledge of English needed for the students' careers were the inspiration for this group. One exchange student majoring in English wrote, "I want to be an English teacher for the future, and I wanted to study at the country that English is spoken. In addition, English taught in Japan is American English, not British English, so I decided to go to the U.S. I chose M. because there is the subject in which I can join the fieldwork at elementary, middle or high school in the U.S. In addition, there are some classes that I'm interested in." Most of the students from Korea indicated that learning English was their main goal for studying abroad, and one student from Seoul, Korea, wrote, "I wanted to study in the U.S. because my major is English, and my family told me to go abroad."

The majority of Japanese and Chinese international students, unlike the exchange students, came to study in the U.S. because they were not able to obtain acceptance to the university of their choice in Japan or China, and decided to study abroad instead. None of the Korean students who were studying in the U.S. at the University of M. as international students mentioned not being able to gain acceptance into a Korean university. However, the Korean sample was the smallest and the majority of Korean students on campus were on short-term exchange programs. Not being able to gain access to a university education in their home country is a common reason why East Asian students come to American universities, however not all students admit this fact. Chao¹ wrote, “I failed in the university exam in China, so decided to go abroad. My family encouraged me to go abroad. Without their support, I could not come here, but I am always worried about money.” Student like Chao, who come from a less affluent economic background are faced with additional pressure to succeed as they depend on their families financial support.

Students mentioned being influenced by American pop culture, which made them interested in studying in the U.S. This appeared to have influenced their expectations of the U.S. Overall, all students received support and encouragement from their family. Only one student mentioned that his family was against it in the beginning. Many exchange students chose this particular university because it had an established exchange program with their Japanese university, and also had classes in which they were interested. For privately supported students, low tuition fees became the reason they chose M. University. One Korean student said, “I Googled ‘Cheapest University.’ Well, at first, I got into the university in Minneapolis, but their tuition was \$40,000 to \$50,000. I couldn’t burden my family [that much]. My dad was [like], ‘It is too much for two years.’ It could be even through three years. I tried to research again, and I found two universities, and one was in Cleveland and one was here. I asked my friend at the time, [he said], ‘Cleveland is more countryside and M. University is [good for the] field of education and safe and with wealthy people.’ That is what he said, anyway; [it had] better circumstances to study. I decide to come here, and he was from here too.” When asked why they chose this particular university, many students wrote the same thing: “I chose M. University because it was cheap.” One Chinese-Malay student wrote, “I chose the U.S. because it was the land of opportunity to explore more things, and also the American culture intrigues me, and I would like to know more about it. M. University was an easy choice for me due to the low tuition cost, and also the opportunity to know more about the American culture by beginning in a small city.” Another underlying reason for the exchange students was the university being located in the countryside. One of the Japanese students wrote, “One of the reasons I choose M. was that it is in the countryside. There are two reasons I prefer countryside. First is safety. The countryside is safer than the city. Second reason is that I wanted to study in quiet place. I believed it made me concentrate on studying because there are not so many places to have fun. Another reason that I chose M. is that I thought there were few Japanese people compared with another university.”

(1.2) Expectations of the U.S. and Americans

When asked how he imagined Americans, one Korean student wrote only three words: “Blonde and pretty.” He added that he expected more racist people. A majority of the East Asian students said they expected Americans to be friendly, positive, fun, interested in other cultures, talkative, kind, good at making friends, open-minded, skinny, tall, and fashionable. Students expected their life in the U.S. to be of fun, partying, hanging out with many friends, and stated that the Americans they imagined were eagerly waiting to talk to foreigners. One Korean student wrote, “[I expected] if I go to America I get freedom. I imagined I can do whatever I want to, and I can get a lot of chance[s] to meet many foreign friends and improve my English skill and go to many places and want to experience party in U.S., but I haven’t. I think Americans will have an open mind to international people so I can make many friends, but most important are experience with another culture. In reality it is pretty hard for me, and many international students have [the] same problems.” Another Japanese student wrote, “I expected that American people are more fashionable because my favorite cloth[ing] companies are from America and there are American celebrities fashion

¹ Pseudonyms are used to protect the identities of the students who were observed during the fieldwork and participated in interviews. The surveys were anonymous and only basic demographic information could be reported, however, for the group of students that were observed and interviewed in depth, background information and their experiences are reported in a more personal and individualized manner.

magazines in Japan.”

The image of an easy-going and friendly American was the same among Chinese, Japanese, and Korean students. Most students said this picture came from the television dramas and movies they watched. A few students stated that they had met Americans back home and those Americans (who were in Korea and Japan) were very friendly and interested in the country. There was one student from Korea who did not have an image of a friendly and outgoing American. Instead, he wrote, “I watched many American TV shows, so I thought it would be very busy, much drinking and drugs and scary people. Americans always look serious and don’t smile. Because of the TV shows. I watched *Prison Break* and *Gossip Girl* and some Hollywood movies. And *CSI* too.”

The image of the U.S. as a country was most commonly described by the word “freedom” and “big”. The U.S. is a place where many people from various countries come together, and many students wanted to experience communicating with foreigners from many countries, which is an opportunity they did not have back home. Overall, the students had high expectations for their lives in the U.S. With the exception of a few students who were completely indifferent following their parents’ instructions, most of the students were excited. However, the students from Japan especially expected America to be dangerous, leading to the next section of worries and fear prior to arrival in the U.S.

(1.3) Fears, Worries, and Anxiety

Everyone was worried about something, and out of over 40 students who participated in interviews or did the survey, not a single student said that (s)he had no worries at all or that (s)he was confident in general or with his/her English ability. The main anxiety was unsurprisingly caused by language ability, as more than half of the students indicated English as their main concern. A Korean student wrote, “Language is the biggest concern and lifestyle is a little concern. Most scary is the language.” Besides the language barrier, other worries included economic issues, weather (among the ones who researched the area), safety, integration, making friends, academic ability, being able to get along with their roommate(s), ability to communicate, gaining weight, being homesick, and facing discrimination. One female student from Tokyo wrote, “I am a chicken, so I was really afraid. I thought people said no [she was worried about the embarrassment of having a request denied]. What if I can’t understand what they say? In Japan, foreigners are still rare, so we do not talk a lot with them. Americans are not worried about details and are powerful. And discrimination by white people is common. I was worried about many things, like academic performance, my English ability, safety, and discrimination. I was worried and anxious.”

The image of America as a place of drugs, crime, sex, and violence were vivid in the minds of many Japanese students. During a focus group, one student described her surprise that her dictionary was not stolen when she left it in the classroom. Other students seemed concerned about Americans carrying guns and shootings. In reality, the crime rate of this particular city is very low. Safety was the main concern for Japanese students. One student in the survey wrote, “Mostly my concern was safety, since shooting incidents were often on the news.” Another student was concerned with public safety in relation to American law enforcement officers, she clarified that the image of American police officers she has seen on TV was different from the Japanese police boxes “Koban”. Other concerns included discrimination. Somewhat contradicting to the images the students had of friendly, outgoing, and blonde Americans, they encountered Americans who they perceived as racists. A Chinese student wrote, “Prior to my arrival in the States, my concerns were that the hostile reception I might get because I am a foreigner that is living in their country. I was also concerned for my safety as I am aware that Americans love their right to bear arms and due to the many reported shootings in the States, I had [sic] concerned that I would be caught in an unfortunate situation.”

The few students who did research the area well were not concerned about the crime rates, but instead were worried about the lack of transportation. One student from China who did extensive research on the city where M. University was located found out ahead of time about how uneventful the city was and that there was no public transportation on Sundays, which made her somewhat concerned. This brings us to the actual behavior of preparing during the pre-arrival phase.

(1.4) Preparations

Over 90% of the students said that they prepared either by studying English or by not doing anything in

particular. All of the students took either the TOEFL or International English Language Testing System (IELTS), as part of a requirement to study at all American universities unless applying for an ESL program. Some students studied English by watching American television dramas, while other students tried to read books to improve their English. Some students also took English classes through Skype or talked to Americans online. Very few students did any research on the location of the university. Most students did research the university itself, looked at the beautiful website and numerous appealing undergraduate programs. One student from Korea did say she Googled the state where M. University was located, and the first thing she saw was the skyscrapers and modern images of the U.S. However, the images she saw were of the largest city in the state, which is located over 500 kilometers from M. University. Overall, the students did not have any clear ideas of how they could prepare in order to increase their chances of academic success in the American education system.

Out of the four students who did do research on the university and the area, one student decided to transfer after two years and go to a larger research-based university. She set a goal to get high marks and to transfer. This helped her have a clear goal, and she knew from the beginning that a rural area was not for her and that she was there temporarily. Students who did some research moved into the second and third phase of adjustment with fewer difficulties, most likely because they had more realistic expectations compared to other students.

(2) Phase Two: Exposure and Initial Experience

Phase Two is accompanied by an array of emotion, which is referred to as the honeymoon stage in the literature or, as Gerhard (2010) calls it, the initial experience stage. It is usually filled with elation, gratitude, fear, anger, frustration, and confusion, as well as happiness. In this phase, the students have changed their physical location, started consuming the local food, and are now experiencing numerous “firsts”: first time to ride on a subway, going to class, listening to a lecture, or going to a party. In this phase, the students went through physical adjustment, which is quick and is often accompanied by excitement, as everything is new. There was a shock about the “rural-ness” and “nothingness” of the area, but the week-long orientation, beautiful campus, and moving into the dorms while waiting for arrival of roommates overshadowed the absence of the expected skyscrapers, malls, etc.

Upon arrival, the students attended a special orientation at M. University. This orientation was for international students only. This, caused some confusion among the newly arrived students, giving the impression that the only Americans in the whole school are the staff and the few students acting as guides. One student from Japan described how surprised she was that there were so many international students at the orientation, and she got the impression that the university was made up of mostly international students. However, when classes started, she was constantly the only foreigner in her class and only later realized that the international and regular students had different orientations. The fact that the regular students arrived and moved into the dorms a week after the international students did not help. During the orientation, international students learned how to pay their tuition online, how to do volunteer work so their tuition stays low, reviewed the laws and regulations prohibiting students from working off campus, as well as filled out documents and got vaccinations if needed. This kept the jet-lagged students busy for the first week. The following week was marked by class registration, the arrival of American students and, just as the East Asian students got used to the idea of rural America being made up of “nothing,” the next shock came in the form of rural Americans, who were not what was expected.

The local American students were not all skinny and blonde, and many of them wore yoga pants, sweatshirts, and sandals. Most surprising to the East Asian students, they were not all friendly, outgoing, and eager to learn about Japan, China or Korea.

The local students came from areas that are much more rural, and it was not uncommon to meet an American student whose hometown only a few hours away or had a population of fewer than 1,000 people. Many of these students have never met foreigners. American students, just like the East Asian students, had expectations of foreigners not being able to speak English, and with no previous experiences in dealing with foreigners, local American students did not rush to welcome the Asian students, and were perceived by East Asian students as cold and distant. Some of the East Asian students directly stated that they had expected Americans to be different from what they had experienced during the first two weeks. One student wrote, “I imagined Americans interested in other

countries, but actually not so many [are],” while another Japanese stated, “I thought everyone would be more friendly.” Other differences in expectations were about physical appearances, as one student said he did not expect to see so many overweight Americans.

Students also felt a lot of stress and insecurity about their academic performance. They were not sure if they were studying the right material, how to study, how to behave in the classroom, and had trouble understanding the lectures. During the first week of classes students said they do not understand much at all, but just after a few weeks, students were able to be more precise and point out that they did not understand the professor's humor or the professor's accent. As they had more interactions and after a few weeks of classes, the insecurity diminishes, but the stress and anxiety levels of students should not be underestimated during their first two weeks of classes in the U.S.

(3) Phase Three: Culture Shock

The third phase is culture shock, and though it can occur at any time, it is often caused by an increased amount of interactions during the third phase. Culture shock is commonly accompanied by feelings of uncertainty regarding social norms, loneliness, anger, and isolation, and is experienced in the U.S. from noticing the differences and confronting expectations. Culture shock is the stressful feelings that inevitably occur and is caused by social difficulties experienced by international students in the host culture. Often, the students anticipated some difficulty in their adaptation to the new environment, but not the extent. For example, students were aware of the colder weather, language difficulties, and food differences, however, it might be colder than they predicted, harder to understand the professor than they thought, and the flavor of the food stronger than expected. Furthermore, there are challenges in micro-behaviors described by Hall (1998) in nonverbal cues and personal distance, which often act as a guide to human behavior, varying across different cultures. Symptoms of culture shock include anxiety, homesickness, helplessness, boredom, depression, fatigue, confusion, self-doubt, paranoia, and physical ailments (Gebhard, 2010). Furthermore, according to the results of previous studies, there is a positive relationship among communication adaptability, interaction involvement, and the ability to cope with social difficulties (Chen, 1992). This might help explain why Chinese students, who are more direct in their style of communication, avoid some of the challenges that are faced by some Japanese students. It is impossible to draw clear lines between the phases of adjustment other than for phase one and phase five, where it is clear that the pre-arrival phase ends once students arrive, and reverse culture shock only begins once the sojourner has returned to the native culture. Furthermore, not all sojourners go through all phases, and with that said, the difference between the initial experiences of the second stage and the culture shock phase is due to the outlook and attitude of the East Asian students. The awareness of cultural differences starts upon arrival to the country, but culture shock influenced the students in a more long-term way. This varies considerably from student to student. For example, a majority of Japanese students quickly accepted the fact that some Americans are overweight and unfashionable and, by the second and third interview, focused entirely on the differences in communication and interactions between Americans and Japanese. However, for one student, it was not just an initial experience. The topic of Americans being overweight, especially girls, was a continuous discourse after seven months in the U.S. For him, in the interview, he kept asking, “Why can't American girls be skinny like in Japan?” It is stated that in culture shock, some foreigners will genuinely look for an explanation of a phenomenon, trying to gain an understanding of why certain things are done a certain way, accepting it, and adapting to the host culture, while others will reject the host culture, expecting it to change and adjust to the “correct” or “best” way, which is like their native country (Gebhard, 2010, pp. 108-115).

Many East Asian students were shocked at the American students' attitude towards time in school settings. Once the class is over, everyone leaves right away, students do not sleep during class, and during group work, the activity of the group is task based but time oriented. If the students agreed to meet from 5 PM to 7 PM, the students would all leave at 7 PM, despite the progress, or if the task was or was not completed. Rini was shocked at this behavior of not finishing the assignment of the group work because the time of the meeting was finished, and despite not finishing, everyone dispersed at 7 PM. Other students noted that it is hard to approach American students because they leave so quickly. However, in the U.S., most students schedule one class after another, and many local students have part-time jobs. The American educational system is set up in a way that there are high chances you will never have a class together again in the future unless you are in the same major.

When asked about culture shock, the most important points were the unfriendliness of Americans, as well as Americans not being impartial toward foreigners. This was not only during the initial experiences but throughout the length of their stay. As can be expected, examining the interviews of students who were in the U.S. for over ten months, the overall attitudes toward the U.S. and Americans were much more critical. The students who were in the U.S. for longer had more stories about negative interactions of being ignored or discriminated against, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Some interviewees felt comfortable enough to discuss their romantic relationships, and two girls said that they found courtship etiquette prior to dating in the U.S. very different and that American males were more aggressive in their advances. This was a common opinion among the Japanese female students, but not among the Chinese and Korean students who thought that although American males might be direct, they did not find them aggressive or overly invasive. One of the Japanese girls had a relationship with an American and said that she thinks that Americans are too different in the way they think, and she would prefer not to date an American again. A majority of the Japanese females reported unwanted persistent attention from the local opposite sex. In the online survey, one Japanese female student reported her worst experience in the U.S. as being raped. A Taiwanese female student complained about not knowing the difference between dating and being a girlfriend. She described her previous relationship with an American young man, and she was under the impression that they had been dating for six months when suddenly he asked her to be his girlfriend. She said, "If you want me to be your girlfriend now, what was I for the last six months?" He explained that they were kind of dating, but the boundaries were not set for it to be exclusive. If she were to become his girlfriend, this would mean that they are not allowed to date other people. She was extremely frustrated with the situation. Interestingly, one of the male students who had a girlfriend in Japan was frustrated with other Japanese students commenting about his relationship, saying, "They have Americanized, and not in a good way" (Interview #Sh13). Two other students, Sa and K, were not in a relationship but were attracted to and starting to go on dates with international students from other Asian countries.

Another surprise to the students was that some of the university events lasted late into the night, finishing at 11PM or midnight. The students agreed that there is a lot more discussion in the American classrooms than in their native countries. T. commented, "Students raise their hands and participate in answering questions, but some students talk without even raising their hand." Manners were another point of heated discussion. Students said that their classes started punctually, while one student complained that his professors were always 5 to 10 minutes late. The students went back and forth, discussing that American professors are punctual, while one music-major student insisted they are always late and stated that people were even late to the international student orientation. There was a consensus, however, that all of the classes ended on time, and students started packing up their things regardless of what the professor was doing one minute before class ended. One minute after the class ended, the classroom was empty. It was noted that, in Japan, students slowly pack up and hang around and chat after class, while in the U.S., the students rush out of the classroom. Most of the students had not yet had any personal interactions with their classmates. However, they noted the difference in manners, such as taking up too much space. The students who had roommates said that it was not easy to get along at times. K.S. said, "My roommate is always hot. He opens the windows and turns on the fan even when it is cold." Another student from China complained that his roommate would have parties and smoke marijuana inside the dorm room, which frustrated him, but he still continued to live with him because, "He was not a bad guy, just had bad habits."

Other interactions with people included an account of an unpleasant incident where three Japanese students became scared of a local citizen. They recall the incident: "So, we were just walking around on the sidewalk in downtown when this black man started yelling at us. He got out of the car and came very close to us just swearing for no reason." When asked what exactly the man was yelling, the students felt very uncomfortable and just said it was "racial insults." Despite some negative experiences some of the students had, overall, all of the students said that their time in the U.S. thus far was positive.

(4) Phase Four: Adjustment and Integration vs. Adaptation

The fourth phase consists of adaptation, integration, and negotiation. Students can conform to the expectations of host cultures, resulting in feelings of confidence, self-assurance, and an increase in self-esteem.

However, not all of the students reach the stage of integration, and although some students might be able to adapt well to local culture, not many are able to integrate.

The most difficult question is how to measure adaptation in terms of what is or is not a successful adaptation. Adaptation is coping with the environment, but the ultimate goal is integration. All of the students adapted, as no one left in the middle of the year during which the fieldwork for this project was conducted, but very few became integrated into the local culture. The air of segregation was there between each of the groups observed, however, within the groups, there is a degree to which some students were able to negotiate their cultural identity and approach a healthy middle ground of having an equal number of close American and co-national friends. A majority of the students became used to living in the rural U.S. Students in this study were able to adapt to the harsh weather, and no one returned home due to the weather, however the level of cultural adaptation and integration is harder to determine. Some might argue that there is no clear distinction, and the experiences of a majority of participants in this study could be plotted on a broad spectrum from full assimilation or complete seclusion.

A student named Ho, who seemed to integrate well into the local American culture, was born in a big city but grew up in a rural area in Korea. Her parents owned a Korean restaurant and were very busy, so she spent a lot of time with her elder brother who took care of her. When the restaurant was not busy after lunch but before dinner time, her father often spoiled her by bringing delicious food home. Like many other children, Ho studied piano and played saxophone in elementary school. She had many happy memories with the school band members. In middle school, she was elected as a student council president. Ho graduated from a language-oriented high school majoring in English with a Japanese minor. Although Ho liked Japanese dramas and culture, she found it difficult to study the language, so she decided to focus on English. Her high school had many foreign teachers. They made her interested in going abroad and seeing the world. In 2013, accompanied by her parents, she arrived at the city where M. University is located. She was expecting America to be like New York and with a lot of racism, but instead she met nice people in the countryside. Ho said, "What was difficult was the language and [being] homesick. When I first came here, I couldn't speak any English. I just, like, shut my mouth and then sit, and then just listen when the friends talk to each other. I just listen, listen, listen, listen. Then after, like, three months, actually like for one month, I didn't say anything. After one month, I started talking, and then start to hang out. English was hard to me. Right now, it's okay" (Interview H2-16, Lines 132-136). Currently at M. University, she has an equal number of American and international friends, and is the leader of one of the school organizations that has more than 20 members. Although her best friend is Korean, she does not spend too much time with the Korean group. Her boyfriend, who is not Korean, and her best friend live together in an apartment nearby. She drives a car, just like a majority of American students, and goes to bars and on outings with her boyfriend, her best friend, and a few close American friends. What makes this case a success story is that Ho is happy with her life in the U.S. and that she took up certain behaviors of Americans but did not abandon her native culture. She is able to keep a healthy balance between Korean friends and American friends; she goes to bars and American restaurants and cooks Korean food, along with food from her boyfriend's home country. She can see the good points of both Korean and American culture, and she said, "I came to experience individual life. Americans don't care about other people's life. Koreans want to know everything." Ho mentioned that she met many Americans interested in Korea, and her American friends were from the Korea Club. Looking at the example of Japanese students, none had friends from Japan Club and none joined the club either.

One Japanese student who recently came to the U.S. adapted quickly to her new life. She is from a single-parent family and had spent a year earning enough money and applying for scholarships to come study in the U.S. Her dream is of academia and research in the field of physics. She had avoided all contact with Japanese students, explained that she missed home a lot, and was afraid that if she started hanging out with the Japanese students, she would not learn English at all. Instead, she surrounded herself with American and international students so that when she felt lonely, she could talk to them. Her American roommate helped her integrate, and after only two months of staying in the U.S., she had more American and international friends than many students who had stayed for many months or years.

Ima, a female student from Kanagawa Prefecture in Japan, had less luck in making close friends. She was positive, interacted with many Americans, and she successfully adapted to cooking food for herself, even though she lived in the dorm. Academically, her grades were also very high, however, she had very few interactions with

Americans or other international students outside of school. She said she had made friends in class, however, they never met outside of the classroom, and that Americans see classmates as fleeting encounters a majority of the time. Ima also identified her Resident Assistant or RA as a close person to her; they have cooked food in their dorm together on two occasions. Other than that, Ima hangs out with the RA during the desk hours. Ima said that after spending nine months in the U.S., she feels she learned a lot and has had a positive experience.

Conversely, some students see their time in the U.S. as a time that they must serve to get their degree and nothing else. Students like Shane, who has spent more than three years in the U.S., have not made a single American friend, and socialize only with other Chinese students and some Asian students. As Shane is majoring in Japanese and has a Japanese girlfriend, he is interested in Japan but has little interest in the U.S. He describes local people as, “The people here, they are a little bit, not racist, but I think they are cold. They do not want to talk to you unless you talk to them. I'm the kind of person who doesn't just talk to other people by myself, so for people like me, I don't have many American friends” (SH1-17, Lines 74-77). Jack is another case of someone who has little to no interaction with Americans. Interestingly, he calls himself a “playboy,” as he often switches girlfriends, all of whom are Chinese. During his friend’s birthday, he was devastated because his girlfriend broke up with him. According to him, “She said I was immature and too childish.” He was upset and ended up drinking a lot. The party ended with all the Chinese students very drunk, singing Jay Chou’s songs, and Jack got a different girlfriend two days later. He majors in computer science and lives with Shane. Jack commented on Americans, saying, “The people are not that open-minded, not as I was thinking. There are still many people who are conservative; it depends because each country has different people. Some people are open-minded, some are not” (J1-18, Lines 63-65). Jack, during his initial phase, did experience a few American parties with his American roommate, who was not a good roommate, and drank and used controlled substances. However, in the one year of observing Shane and Jack, they had no interactions with Americans. Shane and Jack both had an image of California when they arrived at M. University, and although it was not explicitly said so, it seems they both were disappointed with the reality of what the rural U.S. was like. They both play an online computer game called *League of Legends*, and a majority of the interactions they have with Americans is online.

Bob, from China, has little desire to interact with Americans and tends to avoid such interactions. He describes them as too different and hard to understand, even though he does think they are polite. Though his family in China seems well off financially and he goes home every year, including last year when he visited his parents and also went traveling around China, he did at one point have a part-time job. A few days a week he worked illegally delivering Chinese food. Bob’s boss paid below minimum wage and did not reimburse him fully for the gas fuel that was used to make the deliveries. Bob described one experience on the job: “I do not have American friends. When I deliver the food, some people are pretty terrible. One guy gave me the money not enough for the food. He said I delivered very late, so I throw the food away in front of him, He wanted to punch me and I told him I have a knife in the car. He went back then. He said some swear words. You see many terrible people when you deliver the food. They are silly because they don’t even remember their address. It was hard for me to find their address. Some people live in the poor place can be polite, some live in a rich place but can be really rude. I worked three times around 15 hours. I quit the job then; I worked over half a year. I quit it because the boss is terrible. The boss’s son is terrible, but not as bad as the boss. They don’t give me enough gas fee. The food is better, but compared with the food in China, that restaurant’s food is just so-so” (RB3-5, Lines 88-98). Bob seemed to have many friends in China, but in the U.S., he has just a few Chinese friends and no American friends. He worked with Chinese people and had limited interactions with his classmates. He wanted to go back home to China. For the 2016 fall semester, he planned to live in an apartment with another Chinese student, and each summer he traveled back to China. In September 2016, it was observed that he was suspended from school, and over the summer holidays he had no access to his school email from China. Upon return, he was confronted with the harsh reality of not being able to register for classes and his visa being revoked. After over three years of struggle in the U.S., Bob boarded a plane back home. The only person to send him off was his roommate, who was complaining about not knowing what to do with the apartment and all of Bob’s stuff. There was no farewell party, or a group of students sending him off; it was a silent event that very few people knew about. After this study was completed, Bob indicated that he was not planning to return and wanted to use his money to buy a fake certificate. He was done with the U.S.

(5) Phase Five: Reverse Culture Shock

Upon returning to their home countries students face various re-adjustment difficulties. Ima was the first student to return back home, but she was in the U.S. on a short-term exchange and was away from Japan for only five months. For her, what stood out the most was that all the people around her were Japanese, meaning unlike in the U.S. there were few foreigners in Japan. The second reverse culture shock was the Japanese politeness, which included the “*irashyaimase*” and other pleasantries and greetings. Another Japanese student described a bad experience in the supermarket in Japan. She gained some weight during her one year in the U.S. and felt that the people around her were judging her appearance. She broke down in tears at the market. She said this was most likely caused by many of her Japanese college classmates telling her she gained weighed every time they saw her.

Students from China sometimes have difficulty readjusting to the pollution and the car traffic back home. There are many cars and E-Bikes on the streets in China that do not follow the traffic rules and rather communicate through honking their horns. Another reverse culture shock is the uncleanliness, where people spit on the streets and also sometimes on the bus. One student reported after spending one week back in China he started having stomach problems. Sam from China reported that after being in the U.S. for three years, he felt disgusted at everyone at restaurants using their own chopsticks to take the food from the shared plates in the middle of the table. Prior to living in the U.S., it was normal and there were no second thoughts about it. But now, just imagining the saliva from the mouths of other people touching the food everyone shares is very repulsing.

One student who returned to Korea and was in the army complained that the seniors around him were absurd. The hierarchical organizational structure at universities and in the workplace made him uncomfortable. He wished to return back to the U.S. He wrote, “I really didn’t like the part that I had hated when I was young. I am serving a mandatory service back in Korea right now. If I have a chance to get out of here, I will not live in this country ever. I will come back to see my family and friends, but the culture up here is quite messed up.” This problem also confronted students in daily life upon their return to Korea. Another student wrote, “The age is very important in Korea. For instance, I cannot eat until the oldest person starts to eat. I get yelled at eating first... It just I forgot a lot of things about Korean culture, but there is no tolerance about that.” It is common for sojourners to get no sympathy from people back home while readjusting to home culture. It is expected that once you return home you will naturally fit in, but it is not always possible for students who have spent a long time abroad. Furthermore, the process of readjustment is not instant; it takes time.

(6) Students Perceptions of Rural versus Urban Areas

It is difficult to make a direct comparison between the experiences of Asian students in rural versus urban areas since the data of this study was mainly obtained from field work in a rural area. However, some comparison is possible based on the findings from two sources. First, the perceptions of the students in this study often reflected a belief that the major factor of the dissatisfaction of their experiences in the U.S. stemmed from studying in such a remote area. Secondly, some of the students have spent time in metropolitan areas of the U.S. and were able to compare their experiences between the rural and urban U.S.

(6.1) “My image of America was California.”

In many adaptation and culture shock models, the process starts with the honeymoon period; however, this experience is somewhat different for Asian students in the rural area. The first thing upon arrival that they were confronted with is the countryside they did not expect. Most of the students had a mental image of America equating to the “Big City” or the sunny state of California. One student from Japan said her first impression was, “Nothing, like, it is so, so countryside that like, wow. My imagination is [that] it [is] like New York. I have been there, or Los Angeles, but I have never been here in America and I was so surprised. I thought there would be more stores, more... more... [pause] but this city has nothing.” (Interview #SA11-11 Lines 9-14). Another student from China said, [My first impression] like in my mind were those movies and cities should be a metro area, but M city is a very, very rural area so it’s like, [pause] how can I say. I felt kind of sad. Like, I thought it should be much better than Hangzhou but that’s just my feeling at the beginning. After I lived there for 2 years, I felt it was a great place to live. The environment is much better because Hangzhou has very severe air pollution, and it’s quiet here and

[there are] many activities like fishing and hiking.” (Interview #Yu12-15, Lines 67-73).

A female student from Korea also described the initial surprise: “Actually, before I came here, I watched *Gossip Girl*, the drama. I kind of imagined it like that. Luxury life. New York. Handsome, that kind of stuff.” While she likes her life at M. University, she did feel a little disappointed when she first arrived. “Actually, I didn't know this M. [city] is a rural area. I just said, “Okay, X state? Okay, fine.” I came here and then as soon as I arrive at the airport... Yeah, this is rural.” (Interview #H2-16 Lines 40-59). Another Korean student said, “People in Korea think America is the top one. When I was young, I was learned that American is big cities, everything is big, bigger than us, then when I growing up, I know America has famous schools.” (Interview # OJ22 Lines 21-22). However, when he arrived, he felt, “There were just fields and fields, it was not what I imagined.” (Interview # OJ2-22 Lines 40-46). One of the Chinese-Malay students described her feelings when she arrived in the rural city as, “Dead. It is so quiet. I came here in early August; I knew no one here. I felt a little bit sad. I miss home, food, and my parents. I think people at M. City is the same as the people from other cities.” (Interview #HW3-15, Lines 76-79). One of the few students who did expect the area to be rural said, “I heard it is countryside, but I never thought it is so inconvenient like this, because America is still broad and strong. First, we need a car to do everything.”

There were a few students who were happy about the small town, but even they were initially surprised by the American countryside. The positive sides of living in a rural area for the East Asian students were different for each group; for the Chinese students, it was the quietness and the lack of pollution, for the Japanese students, it was the safety and lack of crime, one Korean student thought that local Americans were nicer than those in bigger cities. There was one student from Japan who had a choice to go to a metropolitan area, but instead chose M. University because of the countryside. She was on a short-term exchange, lasting only one semester, and explained her decision: “Because if I go to [the big] city, maybe I cannot study a lot. Because it has many fun places there, so... And I just want to go [to a place] where there is not many Japanese students. I don't wanna be with Japanese students, but many American people, and I wanna concentrate on studying. And people in the countryside might be very kind, and it's cheaper than city. I've been to New York for four days before I came there thought everything is big” (Interview #KEI11-25 Lines 22-30). However, at M. University, she spent the majority of her time with other Asian students, and her closest friend was from Taiwan. She actively sought interactions with local students and had some American friends, but no deep, meaningful relationships were formed with the local American students, while the relationship with her Taiwanese friend continued even after going back to Japan.

(6.2) Students' Perceived Experiences in Urban versus Rural Areas

Some of the students visited or spent time studying in metropolitan areas. These students perceived life in a big city as much better than in the countryside. One student from Taiwan noticed a difference between Americans in California and the local Americans: “I think they [local Americans] don't look at things the same way; they have different perspectives, I guess, and it's because they have different life experiences. For example, they're not too familiar with foreign cultures, or they're just not interested here, [but] in California it's different. Even though you're not interested, there [are] many immigrants and you can see people from all over the world walking next to you... [there are] so many international students. However, here, some local students have never met Chinese student in their whole life. It's like one in 20 people, maybe an occasion person who met one here, but in California, there is many Asians and Little Tokyo, and there's, like, so many Asians there, and they have to just know them.” (Interview # LI2-12 Lines 34-41). Another student from Japan who studied in California prior to transferring to M. University described how California was different: “So different. Way better. People are different, and way more open. They are more racist in California, when I was walking once, someone just started screaming, [racial derogatory term, profanity]. Here [M. City] they pretend to be nice, fake nice. And [in California] when I wear a nice T-shirt, they talked to me a lot and would say, “Nice T-shirt,” but here, no one talks to me. In California, people are more friendly and active... more interesting.” (Interview #YA9-19 Lines 176-182).

There is a tone of reminiscence and some regret when the students talk about their time in the major cities. Many students thought that their interactions with Americans would be much better if they were in California. One student from Taiwan who spent time in California described his experience and stated that due to being in a rural area, he played many video games: “I think American students here are not like the students in California; I do not

think they like international students, some part. Because I have been to California several times, [I] expected people to be like the people there, which is friendlier, but not really here. For example, in California when I go to the festival in the summer, [some] people ask me, “Do you want to join?” They respect you, you know like I said before... You know I wear eyeglasses and when I play basketball here [at the gym at M. University] people call me “glasses,” something like that. I don't care; maybe I don't care right now but I can [care] later. Because, I'm from the city so I didn't expect such a rural area, not that rural, but I think around here, and there is nowhere to go. Maybe that's why I play a lot of video games, and mostly I'm friends with Chinese.” (Interview #SH1-17 Lines 73-87). Another student from mainland China expressed a similar sentiment: “I would say so the people in that [rural] city are more conservative. Probably because they are in the middle of the country, there are not many foreigners there compared to other major cities. So, people were not that open-minded.” (Interview #J1-18 Lines 63-64). Few of the Korean students mentioned big cities or had the experience of studying in other parts of the U.S. Two of the students mentioned traveling on vacation to major cities, but they did not have much interaction with the local Americans there, so they could not comment. One student said she thought there were no differences, and in her opinion all Americans are equally pleasant and friendly.

5. Interpersonal Adaptation Theory and its Role in Integration

The IAT looks into the needs, desires, and expectations of two people in their interactions. Therefore, based on the gathered data, the needs, desires, and expectations of East Asian students and the local Americans, along with the nature of interactions, is explored in this section. Firstly, majority of the American students attending M. University are from the same or neighboring state, and from rural towns. The population in these areas range from 500 to 5,000 people. Many students are from families that come from an agricultural background, and when they arrive to M. University, it is very urban for them. These students have had little to no interaction with any foreigners and are often unsure of how to communicate with them. When observing the interactions of local American students, they keep a greater physical distance between each other, compared to the Asian students who come from highly populated areas. The local students and local population have a strong sense of sports culture. Particular attention is paid to American football, baseball, and to some degree basketball. When going to a grocery store, the cashier often will ask the customer, “You going to the football game this weekend?” Answers such as, “I don't follow sports,” are always met with a frown. Supporting the local teams, watching the games, and cheering for the local stars was cultural norm and resembled a second religion in the area. Many Japanese and Korean students were unaware of the rules of American football, and many mainland Chinese students did not understand the point and rules of baseball. The American students, therefore, mostly interacted with East Asian students on a need-to-need basis. Also, as was demonstrated, they often only engaged in interactions in the classroom based on the teachers' instructions to do so. Therefore, a majority of the students did not have a true desire to communicate with East Asian students due to them expecting the East Asian students to be unable to communicate in English. According to the IAT, the formula would look like this: the expectation that this person does not speak English + desire to avoid awkward situation + need, which there no need to interact (unless it is forced upon by the instructor), leading to a somewhat negative interactional position. When that need arises, then the expectation changes after the East Asian student can demonstrate a certain level of competency in the English language. However, for the desire to interact to rise, other means are necessary for the East Asian students to overcome this initial negative predisposition or this shyness of American students from rural areas. There are certainly rural American students who are curious and are genuinely interested in other countries. However, those interested in East Asian countries are, by far, a small minority. Many East Asian students did not know the rules of American football and knew nothing about the local teams or games. Conversely, in the semi-formal interviews, American students showed low competence in telling Japan, China, and Korea apart. Furthermore, students from Taiwan reported that some local students did not know where it was, similarly to Chinese-Malay students, who were often asked where Malaysia was located.

Looking at intercultural interactions from the perspective of East Asian students, the initial interaction position was positive, as they had much desire to interact with American students. They expected the American students to be friendly, outgoing, and interested in their respective cultures. To integrate into American culture, they needed to form friendships or intimate relationships with Americans to receive the social support that is necessary

to cope with a foreign environment. Upon the discovery of discrepancies between expectations and reality, many students described Americans as unfriendly and cold. The need for social support remained, but with East Asian students no longer expecting American students to be able to fill that need, many students turned to a more familiar co-ethnic group. When the interactional position became negative, many students like Bob avoided contact with American students. However, students with a positive attitude like Ho found Americans that were friendly, interested in Korean culture, and wanted to form intimate relationships by joining Korea Club. This led to the formation of intimate relationships between this Korean student and local students. Another anomaly other than Ho was a Japanese student, Hiro. He found Americans very friendly and formed intimate relationships with his American roommate and his roommate's friends, which was based on a mutual interest in film studies and American comic books. Hiro loves American movies and Marvel comic books, and this interest gave way for a lot of interaction with American students who also had the same hobby. Hiro took classes in film studies, where he met more Americans with the same interests. Although he faced some difficulty in group work, he concluded that some people make better friends than work partners. Interestingly, once the local Americans became more intimate and interested in Hiro, they developed an interest in Japan, often searching YouTube videos about Japan. Hiro recalled an incident when his American friend ran to Hiro's room excitedly and asked whether or not it was true that Japanese people eat Kentucky Fried Chicken for Christmas.

6. Conclusion

There is a mutual exchange between the attitudes of the host nationals and ethnic groups, and this is often moderated by the popular opinion (Berry & Kalin, 1979). This suggests that the attitudes held by the local population toward the Asian sojourners can act as a mirror and reflect back the way East Asian students view their classmates, professors, and other local populations. Developing intimate relationships and increasing the interaction between sojourners and local students is imperative to the process of adjustment to a foreign culture. Loneliness has adverse effects on the sojourners (Wang & Sun, 2009) and social support is necessary for the students to cope with their process of adjustment (Miyazaki, Bodenhorn, Zalaquett & Ng, 2008; Wei, Heppner, Mallen, Ku, Liao & Wu, 2007). Interactions with the local population is a major contributing factor to the students' adjustment to the rural U.S. Numerous studies suggest the more frequently the international students interact with friends from the host country, the better they adjust (Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Perkins, 1977). Sellitz and Hook (1962) showed that international students felt a stronger connection to the United States if they had at least one close American friend; however, a majority of the students in this study had very few close American friends.

The results of this study demonstrated a large gap in the expectations and a lack of preparation of the East Asian students to their lives in the rural U.S. One of the major discoveries in this study is the initial disappointment of the students in the rural area and the increase of culture shock because of the gap between the expectations and reality. Another major finding is that some of the students who were not able to integrate well into their new environment indicated that the cause of their loneliness was the rural area and the local Americans. The students believed if they were in California they would integrate better. The international student orientation at the host university failed to give any hints regarding cultural differences or provide information on the values upheld by the local populace. The local students were seen as lacking an international perspective by the majority of East Asian students, and were described as cold, unfriendly, and somewhat ignorant of matters outside of the U.S. A majority of East Asian students adapted, but failed to integrate into the local culture, and chose to interact with co-ethnic or other international students. The students that were able to integrate more into the American culture did so by forming intimate relationships with local students through common interests or school organizations. This finding is consistent with the conclusions from the study done by Toyokawa et. al. (2002), which also suggested that extracurricular activities are positively related to Japanese students' experiences in the U.S. through increasing life satisfaction, as well as resulting in better academic performance.

Based on these findings, a few suggestions can be made to institutions and students. There seems to be a lack of cultural empathy on both sides. American students do not empathize or try to understand the situation from the perspective of international students. On the other hand, East Asian students also did not understand that

Americans from rural areas might be unaccustomed to communicating with foreigners. It is strongly suggested that students take the time to think about the situation from the perspective of the other side to improve the intercultural communication. Furthermore, home institutions that send students abroad need to educate the students about the differences in the education system, as well as encourage the students to learn about the local culture that is specific to the town where they will be going. Preparations also need to be done by the students. One student found it beneficial to take free online classes from American universities prior to departure. It can also help to learn about cultural norms. For example, when Americans ask, "How are you?" they are not actually asking about your current status in life, but it is a common synonym to "Hello," serving the purpose of a greeting. The host institutions are suggested to give more support to East Asian students in the form of explaining cultural differences, and institutions must realize that the support systems available to American students, such as counseling and other support groups, are unlikely to be visited by East Asian students, as it has negative connotations. Another viable option that was shown to be effective is a peer-support system (Westwood & Barker, 1990), a system where the international students are introduced to a local student who provides support in the process of academic and social adaptation. As the Japanese female students were often made uncomfortable by the sexual advances of male students, training on sexual harassment is necessary to protect the minority group that is not familiar with the cultural norms of the U.S. A system where the differences are pointed out and local students are educated on intercultural competency and the international students on campus would also be beneficial.

The suggestions for East Asian students are to be more persistent in pursuing friendships with the local students. None of the students in this study attempted to learn about American football, even though the students who went to the basketball and baseball games did so with other international students, and reported it being highly satisfying. Initiating conversation instead of waiting for the Americans to do so would also benefit the international students, as well as understanding that students from rural areas are not accustomed to communicating with foreigners, and might be under the incorrect assumption that international students cannot speak English. Increasing the interactions between students will be beneficial for both local and foreign students.

References

- Barratt, M. F., & Huba, M. E. (1996). Factors related to international undergraduate student adjustment in an American community. *College Student Journal*.
- Berry, J. W., & Kalin, R. (1979). Reciprocity of inter-ethnic attitudes in a multicultural society. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 3(1), 99-111.
- Berry, J. W., Kim, U., Minde, T., & Mok, D. (1987). Comparative studies of acculturative stress. *International Migration Review*, 491-511.
- Black, J. A., Mendenhall, A., & Oddou, G. (1991). Black, J. S., Mendenhall, M., & Oddou, G. (1991). Toward a comprehensive model of international adjustment: An integration of multiple theoretical perspectives. *Academy of Management Review*, 16(2), 291-317.
- Burgoon, J. K., Stern, L. A., & Dillman, L. (2007). *Interpersonal adaptation: Dyadic interaction patterns*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chen, G. (1992). Communication adaptability and interaction involvement as predictors of cross-cultural adjustment. *Communication Research Report*, 33-41.
- Cheng, D., Leong, F., & Geist, R. (1993). Cultural differences in psychological distress between Asian and Caucasian American college students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 21(3), 182-190.
- Church, A. T. (1982). Sojourner Adjustment. *Psychological bulletin*, 91(3), 540.
- Floyd, K., & Burgoon, J. K. (1999). Reacting to nonverbal expressions of liking: A test of interaction adaptation theory. *Communications Monographs*, 66(3), 219-239.
- Furnham, A., & Alibhai, N. (1985). Value differences in foreign students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 9(4), 365-375.
- Furnham, A., & Bochner, S. (1986). *Culture shock: Psychological reactions to unfamiliar environments*. London: Methuen and Co.
- Furnham, A., & Trezise, L. (1982). Social difficulty in a foreign culture: An EMpirical analysis of culture shock.

- Furnham, A., & Trezise, L. (1983). The mental health of foreign students. *Social Science & Medicine*, 17(6), 365-370.
- Gebhard, J. G. (2010). *What do international students think and feel? Adapting to college life and culture in the United States*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Gebhard, J. G. (2012). International students adjustment problems and behaviors. *Journal of International Students*, 2(2), 184-193.
- Gullahorn, J. T., & Gullahorn, J. E. (1963). An extension of the u-curve hypothesis I. *Journal of social issues*, 19(3), 33-47. *Journal of Social Issues*, 19(3), 33-47.
- Han, E. (2007). Academic discussion tasks: A study of EFL students' perspectives. *Asian EFL Journal*, 9(1), 8-21.
- IIE. (2016, November 28). "Top 25 Places of Origin of International Students, 2014/15-2015/16." *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*. Retrieved from Institute of International Education: <http://www.iie.org/opendoors>
- Kawaguchi, K. (2006). Daigakusei no i bunka tekiō to shinri-teki fuan no henka ni kansuru kenkyū. [Study on the cross-cultural adaptation and change in the psychological anxiety of college students]. *Aomori University of Health and Welfare Journal*, 7 (1), 37-43.
- Kim, Y. (1988). *Communication and cross-cultural adaptation: An integrative theory*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Le Poire, B. A., & Yoshimura, S. M. (1999). The effects of expectancies and actual communication on nonverbal adaptation and communication outcomes: A test of interaction adaptation theory. *Communications Monographs*, 66(1), 1-30.
- Leong, F. T., & Chou, E. L. (1996). *Counseling international students*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Lin, G., & Yi, J. (1997). Asian international students Adjustment: Issues and program suggestions. *College Students Journal*, 473-479.
- Mori, S. (2000). Addressing the mental health concerns of international students. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 137-144.
- Nakagawa, N. (2013). Nihonjin ryūgakusei no i bunka sesshoku to aidentiti [Intercultural Contact and Identity of a Japanese College Student : Image Analysis of Pre-departure, On-site and Post-study Abroad]. *Kobe: University of Marketing and Distribution Sciences, Faculty of Human, Social and Natural Science*, 25(2), 53-75. Retrieved from <http://www.umds.ac.jp/profile/pages/documents/053-075nakagawanorikosensei.pdf>
- Poyrazli, S., Kavanaugh, P. R., Baker, A., & Al-Timimi, N. (2004). Poyrazli, S., Kavanaugh, P. R., Baker, A., & Al-Timimi, N. (2004). Social support and demographic correlates of acculturative stress in international students. *Journal of College Counseling*, 7(1), 73-83.
- Redmond, M. V., & Bunyi, J. M. (1993). The relationship of Intercultural Communication Competence with Stress and the Handling of Stress as Reported by International Students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 235-254.
- Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE Publishing.
- SEVIS. (2016, December 30). *Mapping SEVIS by the Numbers; Mapping SEVIS by Number reports*. Retrieved from Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Service: <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/byTheNumbersDec2016.pdf>
- Tanaka, K., & Takahama, A. (2013). Cross-cultural Adaptation and Use of Social Skills by Japanese Students Studying Abroad. *Longitudinal Study of Students Who Participated in Pre-departure Social Skills Learning Session*, 65-80.
- Toyokawa, T., & Toyokawa, N. (2002). Extracurricular activities and the adjustment of Asian international students: A study of Japanese students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 26(4), 363-379.
- Wakefield, C. (2014). *Aommunicating with Americans: Chinese Internationa Students' Experiences and Perceptions*. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
- Wang, K. T., Heppner, P. P., Fu, C. C., Zhao, R., Li, F., & Chuang, C. C. (2012). Profiles of acculturative adjustment patterns among Chinese international students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 59(3), 424-435.

- Wang, Y., & Sun, S. (2009). Examining Chinese students' Internet use and cross-cultural adaptation: Does loneliness speak much? *Asian Journal of Communication*, 19(1), 80-96.
- Westwood, M., & Barker, M. (1990). Academic achievement and social adaptation among international students; A comparison groups o. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 251-263.