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Experiences of Chinese Students in Higher Education in the Southeastern United States: A Narrative Study

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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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Date January 13, 2021

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School of Educational Leadership

Experiences of Chinese Students in Higher Education in the Southeastern United States:

A Narrative Study

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Darren Dean

February 2021

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is by His hand that this paper exists. To my wife, Holly, who "pulled the plow" with me through this process. I love you beyond words! To my children who were so patient and encouraging to their dad while I spent many hours in front of a computer. I love you!

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I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Dr. Simone Elias, who served as my chair. Your wisdom, unwavering support, and gentle (or not-so-gentle) prodding helped me create a dissertation that I could be proud of publishing. You are not just a mentor but a friend!

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Abstract

As higher education leaders, it is vital to understand who is attending our schools and know how to provide the support they need. The number of Chinese international students studying abroad has increased by 600% over the last two decades. Higher education institution leaders need to understand this growing segment of their student population and meet their unique needs. Unfortunately, regional data is lacking concerning antecedent factors of acculturative stress for Chinese international students. The purpose of this narrative study was to understand Chinese international students' perceptions of the factors, if any, that may lead to acculturative stress while attending a four-year public university in the southeastern United States. The research question was, How do Chinese international students understand their cultural and academic experiences at a public, four-year university in the southeastern United States? This study was based on an interpretive paradigm study. This narrative inquiry population included three Chinese international students enrolled full-time at a public, four-year university in the southeastern United States. The key conclusions were (a) university interactions in the southeastern United States are largely positive, with a few exceptions; (b) cultural differences have a powerful influence on Chinese international students' acculturative experiences in the southeastern United States; (c) current political and social conditions in the United States are causing heightened stress among Chinese international students; and (d) language challenges are the single greatest stressor for Chinese international students in the southeastern United States.

Keywords: international students, Chinese international students, acculturation, acculturative stress, higher education institutions, southeastern United States, culture shock

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Description of International Education

Higher education's geographic boundaries are permeable. Students seek out experiences in different countries, and higher education has had to adapt. Today, higher education and international learning seem inseparable, and student mobility is a focus of most universities and colleges (American Council on Education [ACE], 2017). The number of students globally studying abroad climbed from two million in 2000 to five million students in 2018 (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2019) and continues to climb. International education is now a worldwide phenomenon (de Wit, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to know what it is.

International education is a complex concept that includes a journey or transfer of people and ideas across social and political boundaries (Hansen, 2002). A mixture of cultural frontiers marks today's college campus. Hayden and Thompson (1995) described international education as the development of "worldmindedness" on the part of leaders, educators, and students. Heringer (2019) identified the internationalized campus as one that values, sustains, and promotes cultural diversity.

Definition of International Students

The globalization of modern higher education has left the leaders of many higher education institutions (HEIs) with the challenge of how to support such an increasingly diverse student body (Choudaha, 2017). A crucial step is to agree on a standard description. Definitions of international students vary according to the individual or institution. Still, most include an individual who travels to a different country to gain an education. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) Global Education Digest (2011), an internationally mobile student

has left their homeland and moved to another country or region for education. For this paper, I fuse these definitions into a straightforward statement; an international student is one who leaves their home to enroll in an HEI in another country or territory.

Trends in International Education

Historic Trends

Bevis and Lucas (2007) stated that students were learning internationally as early as the second century BCE. Though few records remain, evidence exists that individuals occasionally left one country to study with a specific teacher or mentor in another country. The first documented international student in a university was Emo of Friesland, who attended Oxford University in 1190 (Roberts, 2013). Over the years, wars and political climates affected the flow of students across borders (Vestal, 1994). By the 18th century, international education became a means to world peace and a greater understanding among cultures (Scanlon, 1960). It was not until the peace congresses of Vienna following the Napoleonic wars that international efforts began to mold a modern version of international education (Claude, 1956).

Unfortunately, little changed in the next century. Many countries focused inwardly during a time of extreme nationalism and sentimentality (Scanlon, 1960). Pioneers like Czech philosopher John Amos Comenius and French educator Marc-Antoine Jullien saw the benefit of international education (Scanlon, 1960; Vestal, 1994). However, their views were not the consensus of the time. It was not until after the First World War that the idea of organized international education took shape.

The concept of internationalization began in the United States with the establishment of the Institute of International Education in 1919 (ACE, 2017). International education remained an oddity among academia throughout the first half of the 20th century (Institute of International

Education [IIE], 2019a). From 1948 to 1974, the number of international students in the United States grew modestly from around 25,000 to just over 150,000 (IIE, 2019a). In comparison, the same amount of growth occurred in merely six years following 1974 (IIE, 2019a). The 1980s brought more expansion of internationalization. The Coalition to Advance Foreign Languages and International Studies (CAFLIS) in 1987 furthered the commitment to improve international education and expand international exchanges (Vestal, 1994).

Until the early 1990s, the growth of international education was slow, despite the efforts of those who saw the value in cross-cultural learning (ACE, 2017). International student enrollment gradually increased (IIE, 2019a). In 1990, approximately 380,000 international students were studying in the United States. By 2015, the number of international students in the United States reached 1,043,839 (IIE, 2018). However, since 2016, the trend of rising international enrollment has flattened domestically and internationally due to political and social issues such as xenophobia, discrimination, and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic (Bartram, 2018; IIE, 2018; Redden, 2020a; Yao et al., 2020).

Future Forecasts

It is impossible to predict with certainty how international education will change in the future. While most believe that it will continue to evolve as globalization shapes higher education, no one knows for sure what international education will look like in future years. Current trends, such as institutional drivers for recruiting and student demographics, are evolving at an extraordinary pace (Choudaha, 2017). Educators are no longer expected simply to respond to global changes. They must interact with it, training students around the globe to overcome the challenges of globalization (Jackson, 2016). However, experts in the higher education field can provide educated predictions based on previous and present data on international education. The

British Council released a report in 2017 that lists ten trends that will likely shape international education (British Council, 2017). Though higher education leaders in the United Kingdom wrote the report, the findings can be applied globally. Table 1 summarizes the results of the council's report.

Table 1

Ten Trends for the Future of International Education

Trend #	Predicted Trend
1	Shifting global demographics.
2	Expanding access to education for all.
3	Internationalization among national strategies globally.
4	National funding for higher education could decrease globally.
5	Hiring qualified graduates may get increasingly difficult, forcing multi-sector cooperation.
6	Advancing technology will likely affect online learning and traditional education.
7	Technology advances will force the need for workplace-specific skills.
8	International students will seek institutions based on quality and value, as well as ranking and reputation.
9	The continued prominence of English as lingua franca* is in question.
10	International students will likely seek out institutions based on quality experiences. *Refers to English as the chosen language of foreign communications. (Seidlhofer, 2005)

Note: Information from British Council (2017). *The shape of global higher education: International mobility of students, research, and education provision* (Vol. 2).

https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/f310_tne_international_higher_education_report_final_v2_web.pdf

The council stated that these trends rely on educated predictions for the future of international education (British Council, 2017). If the British Council is correct, HEIs will have to compete for international student business. These predictions also implied that HEIs might face tougher competition in the future among traditional institutions and nonconventional

methods of learning (British Council, 2017). The council also predicted that global outbound mobility would slow by 2027, and the number of countries competing for international students will continue to rise. If the British Council is correct, the top host countries may be affected.

Trends Among the Top Host Countries

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (2019) predicted that the next five years would reveal significant changes to the top hosting countries for international students. The United States and the United Kingdom are the top two destinations for international students studying abroad (UNESCO, 2019). However, organizations such as UNESCO (2019) and the British Council (2017) reported that other destination countries are currently gaining international students at a much higher rate than the United States or the United Kingdom.

In a 2018 survey, nearly 60% of U.S. HEIs stated that international students decided to enroll in another country's institution besides the United States (IIE, 2019c). This finding is the first time since the IIE survey began in 2005 that HEIs reported such a claim. These destinations face competition among countries like Canada and Australia. The United States and the United Kingdom have increased recruitment efforts and invested more funds in international student recruitment (British Council, 2017).

Other countries have improved their own higher education infrastructure to keep students from traveling elsewhere (IIE, 2019b). Germany, for example, has not only decreased the number of students leaving to go abroad but has increased the number of incoming college students (German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2020). Sevart and Dean (2019) cited free tuition and world-class professors as the two main reasons that students are choosing to study in Germany.

Many countries like Germany are enacting national strategies to develop their international education sector and are perceived by students as more welcoming than locations like the United States and the United Kingdom (Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018). Additionally, international students might choose another destination besides the United States or the United Kingdom due to the prohibitive cost to attend higher education in these countries. Figure 1 shows the comparison of top destinations for international students.

Figure 1

A Comparison of Top Destinations for International Students

	U.S.	CANADA	U.K.	AUSTRALIA	NEW ZEALAND	GERMANY
Cost	Highest	High	High	Moderate	Moderate	Low
National Marketing Strategy	No	Yes "International Education Strategy"	Yes "International Education: Global Growth Prosperity"	Yes "National Strategy for International Education 2025"	Yes "Draft International Education Strategy for New Zealand to 2025"	Yes "Strategy DAAD 2020"
Path to Immigration	No	Yes Extra points for immigration applicants with Canadian credential	No	Yes Extra points for immigration applicants with Australian credential	Yes Extra points for immigration applicants with New Zealand credential	No
Work Permits	• On-campus work for up to 20hrs/week; 12-month total curricular practical training (CPT) during study • Post-study: 12-month optional practical training (OPT); STEM majors can extend the period to 36 months	• Work permit not required during study for up to 20hrs/week • Post-study work permit for up to 3 years	• 20 hrs/week during study if you are in a degree program or above at a higher education institution • Post-study work permit cancelled in April, 2012 • Doctorate graduates get one year extension	• 20 hrs/week during study; unlimited hours during breaks • Graduates with a minimum of 2 years in Australia can get a post-study work visa for 2 years	• 20 hrs/week during study • Post-study: 12-months permit	• 90 days/year on student visa • 18-month visa extension post-study

Note. Information adapted from World Education News + Reviews (Gu, 2017). Copyright 2017 by World Education Services. Adapted with permission.

The United States and the United Kingdom are no longer the only destinations that international students consider. Sá and Sabzalieva (2018) stated that many students are choosing Canada over more traditional destinations because the cost of tuition is much lower than the

United States, and the Canadian dollar is weaker in comparison to places like the United States and the United Kingdom. The cost of tuition in Canada and the United Kingdom are similar. However, the cost of living in the United Kingdom is higher than in Canada (My Life Elsewhere, 2020). These indicators point toward a vastly different international education paradigm than a world dominated by the United States and the United Kingdom. Figure 1 shows how the United States and the United Kingdom compare to other destinations for international students.

Chinese International Students: Demographics

Outbound Students

China and India are the two predominant sending countries for international students (IIE, 2019c). China sent more than one million students to study at foreign universities in 2018, up almost 12% over the previous year (Textor, 2020). In comparison, 332,000 students from India enrolled in HEIs outside of India (Gu, 2011). The third-largest sender of international students was Germany, which sent 122,000 students abroad (UNESCO, 2019). These numbers indicate that China sends the most students abroad.

Inbound Students

The United States is the world leader in global higher education (IIE, 2019a). During the 2018–2019 school year, 1,095,299 students from China and other countries attended HEIs in the U.S. (IIE, 2019c). Australia had the second-highest number of inbound students with almost 700,000. Canada was the third most popular destination for international students, with just over 640,000 incoming students in 2019 (IIE, 2019a). The United Kingdom had slightly under 500,000 inbound international students in 2019 (IIE, 2019a). However, the annual percentage change for these countries tells a different story. While the United States had only a slight increase (0.05%) in inbound students, Canada and Australia increased their inbound numbers by

nearly 15% in one year. The United Kingdom had a decrease in international students by almost

2% from 2018 to 2019 (IIE, 2019c). Governmental and institutional efforts to recruit from other

countries attribute to Canada and Australia's high growth of inbound students (Sá & Sabzalieva,

2018).

Like global sending, China and India are the top countries of origin for universities and

colleges in the United States. Chinese international students comprise the largest group of

international students in the United States (IIE, 2019a). Last year, China sent 400,000 students to

the United States to study in HEIs (IIE, 2019a). India sent just over 200,000 in 2019, and South

Korea sent 52,000 students to the United States. (IIE, 2019a) to round out the top three countries

of origin. While China and India continue to increase the number of students attending school in

the United States, other countries like South Korea and Saudi Arabia are decreasing the number

of students coming to the United States (IIE, 2019a).

Trends

The total number of globally mobile international students has risen from 2.1 million in

2000 to 5.3 million in 2017 (UNESCO, 2019). China sends the most significant number of

international students abroad of any country in the world. Additionally, the number of

international students from China continues to increase each year in the United States (IIE,

2019c). In the last 10 years, international students from China attending HEIs in the United

States has increased by 270% (IIE, 2019c). However, enrollment for Chinese international

students might be on the verge of a national decline (Redden, 2020a). Domestic emigration

peaked in 2015. Since then, emigration numbers have slowed (Poyrazli & Isaiah, 2018; Thomas

& Inkpen, 2017; Yeo et al., 2019).

As of 2019, international and domestic political and social issues have led to a downward trend in international student enrollment in U.S. HEIs (IIE, 2019a). This trend should be a concern for HEI leaders in the United States. At a time when competition to increase enrollment is intense (Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018) and student population diversity is critical (Geddie, 2015; Hakkola, 2019), it is incumbent upon HEI leaders to attract and retain a diverse student body.

The main reason given for the flattening of the upward slope of incoming international students is the difficulty in attaining a visa. In the last two years, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has denied F-1 petitions at a historically high rate. An F-1 visa is the most commonly granted visa to international students coming to the United States to study academics (United States Department of State, n.d.). Visa issuance decreased from over 640,000 in 2015 to just over 360,000 in 2018 (United States Department of State, 2018). International students also list the inflating cost of attendance at schools in the United States as another reason for choosing other countries in which to study (Falcone, 2017). The average tuition at a public university for international students in the United States is approximately $29,000 compared to $15,000 in Canada (Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation [HSBC], 2019). The HSBC (2019) reports that tuition for international students in the United Kingdom is about $20,000.

Benefits for Students

International students benefit from their experience of studying abroad. A common benefit listed by international students is the cultural experiences gained by studying in a different culture (Jenny et al., 2019). Dima (2019) stated that international students also benefit academically, including a global education. Ahmad et al. (2016) claimed that students who gain a degree abroad have a competitive advantage over their counterparts who studied domestically.

Additionally, studying abroad allows international students to immerse themselves in a foreign language while living in a new culture (Dima, 2019).

International students are not the only students on campus who benefit from studying abroad. Domestic students can also benefit from the attendance of international students on campus (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013). A study at the University of Minnesota found that domestic students develop increased cognitive skills, enhanced intercultural communication skills, and improved cultural self-awareness when they regularly interact with international students (Yefanova et al., 2015).

Challenges

Chinese students often list financial struggles as a significant obstacle to attending college in the United States (Ching et al., 2017). The rising cost of tuition and living expenses is just one challenge that Chinese international students encounter while studying in the United States. Chinese international students report elevated stress levels while living and studying in a different culture (Zhou et al., 2018). Consequently, these students frequently find the challenge of attending school in a different culture overwhelming (Lopez & Bui, 2014). Additionally, studies suggest that students from China may experience more stress than other international students who are studying in the United States (Han et al., 2013; Qi et al., 2018). This variance is in part due to the effects of acculturation on students from differing cultures.

Acculturation

Definition of Acculturation

The challenges confronting international students may attribute to acculturation. Redfield et al. (1936) defined acculturation as "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the

original cultural patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield et al., 1936, p. 149). Although this definition has become the classical definition of acculturation, more recently, Berry and Sam (2006) simplified the definition to state "all the changes that arise following contact between individuals and groups of different cultural backgrounds" (p. 11).

The acculturation process varies by individuals or groups. It is usually associated with the adoption of values, practices, ideas, beliefs, languages, or customs of one culture by a member or members of another culture (Berry, 2005). Ward and Geeraert (2016) argued that acculturation is a process that occurs over time and is influenced by "ecological context" (p. 100).

Those who experience acculturation may suffer from what Qi et al. (2018) call tangible and intangible losses. Tangible loss refers to real or perceived loss, such as loss of a relationship, personal possessions, or a home (Berry, 2005; Casado et al., 2010). Intangible loss is more abstract and includes loss of status, self-efficacy, or identity (Berry, 2005; Casado et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2014). Both tangible and intangible losses are negative consequences of acculturation (Berry, 2005; Wang et al., 2014). These losses can have a detrimental effect on all international students and one group, specifically Chinese international students.

Causes of Acculturative Stress

Researchers identified possible factors that lead to acculturative stress, such as language barriers (Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017; Zhang & Jung, 2017), social challenges (Heng, 2018), homesickness (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Will, 2016), discrimination (Gebregergis, 2018; Karuppan & Barari, 2011), financial difficulties (Zhou et al., 2018), and academic distress (Poyrazli & Isaiah, 2018). Other factors that lead to acculturative stress comprise loss of social support systems and a sense of belonging (Qi et al., 2018). Chinese students may experience an

even greater sense of acculturative stress due to a more significant cultural gap (Liu, 2009; Rice et al., 2016) and differences in higher education systems (Yi, 2018).

Lack of Acculturative Stress Data Among Chinese Students

Research has shown the importance of retaining Chinese international students, and HEI leaders must provide appropriate support for students who may be experiencing acculturative stress (Qi et al., 2018; Yeo et al., 2019). Accomplishing this task would require a greater insight of the needs of Chinese international students (Qi et al., 2018).

Acculturative Stress Among Chinese International Students

While research exists on the causes of acculturative stress of international students (Fritz et al., 2008; Poyrazli & Isaiah, 2018; Wu et al., 2015), only a few empirical studies have addressed the antecedent factors of acculturative stress among Chinese international students (Park et al., 2014; Will, 2016; Zhou et al., 2018). An examination of experiences that trigger these antecedent factors among Chinese international students could increase understanding of the challenges of studying in the United States. Additionally, research may enhance higher education leadership practices in the southeastern United States (Zhou et al., 2018). Furthermore, regional studies of Chinese international student acculturation are almost nonexistent. No research exists on the acculturation of Chinese international students in the region chosen for this study, southeastern United States.

If enrollment of Chinese international students is sliding, competition among HEIs to recruit and retain these students will increase, which makes the importance of understanding the effect of acculturation on international students from China more critical (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Higher education institution leaders must understand the current and future trends of their students as increasingly more learners become international students (Choudaha, 2017).

Relationship of HEIs and International Students

Benefits of International Student Attendance

International students are beneficial to HEIs and the culture in which they live and study (Hegarty, 2014; Kralikova, 2013). For example, international students improve innovation within their field of study, as evidenced by the high number of patents that are awarded each year to these students (Chellaraj et al., 2008). International students also generate an estimated $42 billion that benefits the domestic economy (IIE, 2019c). North American respondents to a 2018 survey by the International Association of Universities (IAU) stated that "increased international awareness of [and] deeper engagement with global issues by students" was the most important benefit of international student attendance (Marinoni et al., 2019, p. 3). Respondents outside of North America agreed that the most critical benefit to international student attendance was "enhanced international cooperation and capacity building" (Marinoni et al., 2019, p. 2). Both responses indicate that international student attendance improves the quality of education and creates a positive contribution to society.

Domestic students benefit from interaction with international students, as well. Luo and Jamieson-Drake (2013) suggested that local students gain a new cultural perspective, which positively affects not only the student but also the attitude of the student's friends and family. Domestic students are more likely to develop greater empathy toward others with varying cultures than their own (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013). The third benefit for domestic students is an increase in competence with intercultural interactions (Geelhoed et al., 2003).

Challenges for HEI Leaders

While the benefits of international student attendance are many, challenges exist for HEI leaders. Fostering communication and positive relationships between local students and

international students is essential and beneficial for both groups, but it is difficult to cultivate on campus (Jenny et al., 2019). This is particularly true when the two cultures are very different from one another (Akanwa, 2015; Falcone, 2017). Higher education institution leaders can find it challenging to meet the needs of students with varying cultural backgrounds and preferences. It is crucial to train teachers to have a more profound understanding of the various cultures represented in their classrooms. Still, few schools have found a cohesive way to foster enthusiasm among their faculty for such training (Haigh, 2018).

HEIs in the Southeastern United States

In the southeastern United States, four-year universities are experiencing a steady growth of Chinese students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the percentage of HEI students who identify as Asian is steadily growing while other ethnic groups are either flat or declining since 2010 (NCES, 2018). Since 2013, the Chinese student population in four-year universities in the southeastern United States has grown from 2.88% to 4.21% (NCES, 2017). This growth indicates a continued interest in learning at HEIs in the southeastern United States among Chinese international students. However, little data exists to explain why students are choosing to study in the southeastern United States over other areas of the country.

The challenges of acculturation are tangible for Chinese international students in each region of the country (Young, 2017). However, there is insufficient information on the acculturation experiences of Chinese international students in the southeastern United States, which is due to a lack of studies specific to the region.

Statement of the Problem

Despite their growing number in the United States, Chinese international students are not thriving at HEIs (Poyrazli & Isaiah, 2018; Will, 2016; Young, 2017). Instead, these students

encounter considerable challenges due to the academic and cultural variances between China and the United States (Yeh & Inose, 2016; Yeo et al., 2019). In addition to adjustment difficulties, Chinese international students experience elevated levels of homesickness, which makes it difficult to thrive at HEIs (Zhang & Jung, 2017).

Chinese international students report adverse effects of acculturation (Zhou et al., 2018). Acculturation can cause increased levels of psychological suffering, which is often called acculturative stress (Fritz et al., 2008; Park et al., 2014). Berry (1970) first defined acculturative stress as negative social and psychological outcomes associated with moving and adapting to another culture.

Many Chinese international students admit to elevated stress levels when studying in a culture other than their own (Ge et al., 2019). However, cultural variations may prevent a clear picture of how many students are experiencing acculturative stress (Chu & Sue, 2011). Chu and Sue (2011) found that individuals from Asian cultures tend to give different answers about their mental health than do their counterparts from the United States. For example, Chinese participants tend to choose neutral or judicious responses instead of extreme options on questionnaires that ask about well-being (Chu & Sue, 2011; Masuda et al., 2009), possibly to protect one's perceived honor. If this is the case with other international students from China, the incidence of acculturative stress may be worse than what is currently reported. Therefore, the actual number of Chinese students suffering from acculturative stress and to what extent is not clear (Chu & Sue, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

  The purpose of this narrative study was to understand Chinese international students' perceptions of the factors, if any, that may lead to acculturative stress while attending a four-year public university in the southeastern United States.

Research Questions

  RQ1: How do Chinese international students understand their cultural and academic experiences at a public, four-year university in the southeastern United States?

  RQ2: How does living in the southeastern United States affect acculturative experiences?

Definition of Key Terms

  Academic performance. A measure of accomplishment in an academic setting as measured by overall grade point average (GPA; Alegria & Borges del Rosal, 2013).

  Acculturation. The psychological, behavioral, and cultural changes that arise when persons or groups from different cultural contexts participate in prolonged, direct contact (Berry, 1997).

  Acculturative stress. A stress reaction to the acculturative process in individuals or groups (adapted from Berry, 2005).

  Chinese international student. A full-time international undergraduate or graduate student from the People's Republic of China who is studying at a college or university within the United States. The student identifies Chinese as their primary language, having no extensive educational experience in the United States or another English-speaking country, and having attended both primary and secondary schools in China where Chinese was the primary language of instruction (Berry, 1997).

Culture. Shared roles, norms, beliefs, values, and meanings of a group of individuals who live in the same area in the same period (Schwartz et al., 2010; Triandis, 1995).

Culture shock. The psychological disorientation suffered by people who live and work in a profoundly dissimilar cultural environment than their own (Eschbach et al., 2001).

Emigration. The movement of individuals from one country to enter another country (Song, 2018).

Immigration. The transfer of individuals or groups into a country (Song, 2018).

Prejudice. A negative preconceived notion of a person or persons based on race, gender, religion, ethnicity, or another defining factor (Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010).

Chapter Summary and Preview of the Next Chapter

Chapter 1 introduced the concept of international education and provided a definition of international education, which applies to this study. Additionally, Chapter 1 discussed historical trends in international education and the current and future state of higher education as it pertains to international students. The significance of international students, and specifically Chinese international students, follows.

In Chapter 2, a summary of the problem and research question is reviewed, followed by a look at the topics of the study with background information. The remainder of Chapter 2 is a discussion of the research related to the dissertation topic. The chapter concludes with a synopsis and synthesis of the pertinent data as it relates to the topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

International students from China have a significant role in higher education (Will, 2016). Chinese students comprise the most significant percentage of international students (IIE, 2019a). Accordingly, higher education leaders must understand how acculturation affects them to ensure that HEI leaders provide the best care possible for the largest group of international students on their campuses (Fritz et al., 2008). Specifically, this research seeks to understand the acculturative experiences of those attending a four-year university in the southeastern United States. This chapter offers an overview of the existing literature on acculturation, acculturative stress, and the cultural differences that may affect acculturative stress. Hofstede's (2011) six cultural dimensions ground this study in a specific theoretical framework, though contemporary refutations for Hofstede's model are presented for balance.

Three search databases primarily provided research data. Abilene Christian University's Distance Learning Portal, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, and Google Scholar were accessed to gather relevant literature on the topic. Keywords for searches included *international students*, *Chinese international students*, *acculturation*, *acculturative stress*, *higher education institutions*, *southeastern United States*, and *culture shock*. The results were refined and narrowed, then were filtered according to publication date, publication source, peer-reviewed articles, and relevance.

Higher Education and International Students

Higher education in the United States attracts students from abroad (IIE, 2019c). The National Center for Education Statistics (2018) reported that the number of international students attending higher education in the United States for the 2018–2019 school year reached 1,095,299 (IIE, 2019a). However, international students have not always chosen colleges and universities in

the United States. International students choose how, when, and where to study abroad based on macro and micro influences.

Factors That Influence Study Abroad

Numerous factors inspire a student's choice to study abroad. Political factors play a dominant role in shaping the movement of students across borders in a push-pull relationship (Waters, 2018). Economic factors also influence the movement of degree-seeking students across borders (Austin & Shen, 2018). Some factors drive students toward certain countries and institutions, while other influences may cause students to leave a destination of learning. Other factors impact a student's decision to study abroad or quit and return home.

Political Factors

Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping and President Jimmy Carter signed the Understanding on Educational Exchanges in 1978. This political agreement between China and the United States provided for a study and research exchange of graduate, undergraduate, and visiting scholars between the two countries (Yan & Berliner, 2009). The Understanding of Educational Exchanges agreement and subsequent agreements between the two countries are at least partly responsible for the rapid rise in the number of international students from China since 1978 (Lampton et al., 1986).

Economic Factors

Political influences were not the only explanation for the drastic increase in international student immigration. The increased demand for skilled talent globally, especially in the technology sector, brought more international students (Choudaha, 2017). Economic factors also triggered an upsurge in international student enrollment. The global recession of 2008–2009 forced HEI leaders who previously relied on local revenue to actively recruit from sources

outside of the United States (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2010). Choudaha (2017) further explained that colleges and universities around the globe were forced to close or downsize during the economic downturn, leading students to consider elsewhere for higher education. Students turned to the United States for their learning when they lacked attractive educational opportunities in their home countries or abroad (OECD, 2010). Choudaha (2017) described how economic challenges in Japan led many students from China and South Korea to leave Japan and move to schools in the United States instead (Choudaha, 2017).

The Association of International Educators estimated that international students provided 458,290 jobs and contributed an estimated $41 billion to the U.S. economy (NAFSA: Association of International Educators [NAFSA], 2019). A large part of this growth is the result of the number of Chinese international students (IIE, 2019c). Chinese students make up 33.7% of the aggregate population of international students in the United States (IIE, 2019). Compared to the second leading place of origin (India) at 18.4% and the third (South Korea) at 4.8%, China's dominance in higher education in the United States is apparent. While the number of incoming international students from most other countries is currently flat or decreasing, China's number of incoming students is slowly growing (IIE, 2019c). The latest data from IIE's 2019 open doors snapshot showed a modest increase in enrollment of students from China of 1.7%, while the total number of enrolled international students decreased by 0.8% in 2018–2019.

Other Factors

Acculturation. While Chinese enrollment numbers grow, the number of students experiencing the challenges of acculturation also increases (Ching et al., 2017). John Wesley Powell first coined the term 'acculturation' in 1860 (Aton, 2010). The prevailing model that

emerged was Berry's (1980) model of acculturation. Berry (2005) defined acculturation as a two-fold process of cultural and psychological transformation that happens when two cultural parties come in contact. Typically, the minority culture adopts elements of the native majority culture when the two come in contact (van Oudenhoven & Benet-Martínez, 2015). However, Berry (2005) found that acculturation takes place in the majority group as well as the nondominant or minority group as contact between both parties leads to the sharing of cultures (Schwartz et al., 2010).

Change. Change occurs when individuals or groups from disparate cultures come in contact for sustained periods (Berry, 2005). Individuals or groups who are exposed to a different culture experience cultural and psychological changes due to acculturation (Berry, 2005). Culture is shared roles, norms, beliefs, values, and meanings of a group of individuals who live in the same area at the same time (Schwartz et al., 2010; Triandis, 1995). Acculturation involves one individual or group adopting the cultural aspects of another individual or group (Berry, 2005) and the changes that occur from cultural contact (Berry, 2005; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

The process of going through these changes can lead to stress in those who are experiencing acculturation (Fritz et al., 2008). International students and specifically Chinese international students face multiple stressors such as cultural, social, academic, and financial challenges (Akanwa, 2015; Berry, 2005; Ching et al., 2017; Wei et al., 2007). These four stressors and others not mentioned can be harmful to the well-being of Chinese international students who experience them (Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010; Ecochard, & Fotheringham, 2017; Perry et al., 2017).

Chinese Students in the United States

Historical Movement

The first Chinese students to arrive in the United States appeared between 1872 and 1875. During that time, 120 students from China studied in the United States with the mission to understand all the technological specialties of the West (Ch'en, 2019). These first students were to bring back this knowledge and share it with other Chinese academics. The Chinese government believed it could grow stronger by adopting American learning (Yan & Berliner, 2009).

China continued to send students abroad, and by 1951, approximately 36,000 students had spent at least some time studying in the United States (Ch'en, 2019). The Chinese government sent these students to learn scientific and technical skills that would benefit their country when they returned home (Wang, 1965). As time passed and different regimes took control, however, the reasons for coming to the United States evolved to personal interests (Ch'en, 2019). Over time, a diploma from an American university became a symbol of prestige that was highly prized but expensive for a Chinese student to attain. Ch'en (2019) stated that a degree from the United States was a guarantee of ascent in the Chinese social structure of the time.

Around 1949, China became a very restricted country, and foreign study was impeded entirely (Wang, 1965). The Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s changed this policy, and by 1978, the Chinese government was ready to adopt its old strategy of sending students to strengthen the country (Ch'en, 2019). The government of the People's Republic of China felt that the United States and other western countries had something to offer its people, though it approached the idea cautiously at first.

When President Carter and Vice-Premier Xiaoping signed the Understanding on Educational Exchanges, there were only about 200,000 international students in the United States

(Lampton et al., 1986, p. 62). After signing the agreement, the number of Chinese international students in the United States went from zero to 12 in December 1978 (Maeroff, 1978). The number of incoming students from China has grown exponentially since that time.

Current Trends

Higher education institutions in the United States attract students from many different countries. In 2019, 221 countries sent students to study at HEIs in the United States (IIE, 2019a). Ch'en (2019) stated that the most common reason students give for wanting to study in the United States is the prestige of graduating from an American university. China is the foremost source for international students in the United States.

Chao (2018) found that Chinese students seek an American educational experience because they want to gain a new perspective on their home country. Students from China also stated a desire to study in the United States because they believe their home country's educational system is inferior (Chao, 2018). The IIE (2019b) reported that 369,548 students from China attended HEIs during the 2018–2019 school year, which is more than the next six sending countries combined.

Schools that have enjoyed the continual increase of incoming students from China became reliant on international student tuition to balance their budgets. Now, the global health crisis created by COVID-19 threatens international student attendance at hundreds of HEIs around the country. Colleges and universities around the United States are reporting that students are unable to return from China due to travel restrictions. United States government travel restrictions prevent the issuance of visas, and travel for school recruiters to China is suspended. The U.S. government is taking a very cautious approach toward any contact with China since evidence indicates that the COVID-19 virus originated in China (Contini et al., 2020). Since the

World Health Organization (WHO) began tracking the impact of this coronavirus, almost 100,000 people have died in the United States, and nearly 350,000 people have been killed worldwide (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). Higher education institution leaders do not know what the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will be since many factors are unknown.

Mirka Martel of IIE stated that it is already apparent that the outreach and recruitment of international students are suspended with no relief in the foreseeable future (Redden, 2020b). It is the loss of new international students that will negatively affect both students and institutions. Higher education institution leaders may have to look elsewhere besides China to increase incoming international student attendance (Redden, 2020b). Redden (2020b) argued that the current health crisis is the most significant disruption to international student emigration in history. Fanta Aw, former president of NAFSA: Association of International Educators, said that this is what a global world looks like; events in one area have a great impact on many other areas of life, including higher education (Redden, 2020a).

Fortunately, currently enrolled international students from China were already in the United States when the pandemic began. Currently, these students who make up most international students in the United States will not be restricted from attending classes when schools reopen. However, Chinese international students may face discrimination from other nationalities as backlash from the COVID-19 pandemic grows. The Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council (A3PCON) received over 1,100 instances of verbal harassment, banishment, and physical assault in the last two weeks of March alone (Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council [A3PCON], 2020). This trend could spill over to discrimination against international students. It is not clear how the largest group of international students in the United States will be

affected by this health crisis. Therefore, it is vital to comprehend the challenges that Chinese students experience while studying in the United States so that HEI leaders can help these students succeed.

Xenophobia and prejudice toward Chinese, in general, underscores life for many students who are studying in the United States (Bartram, 2018; Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010; Redden, 2020a; Yao et al., 2020). The U.S. government has canceled visas and forced Chinese students to return home after concerns about espionage. Senator Marco Rubio, chairman of the Intelligence Committee, said, "The Chinese government too often entraps its own people into service in exchange for an education in the United States," implying that students are forced to become spies for the Chinese government. Rubio stated that higher education institutions in America need to be fully aware of this counterintelligence threat (CampusReform, 2020). This real or imagined threat has led to feelings of ostracization and threats from those who see their presence on U.S. campuses as Chinese intelligence gathering.

Challenges for Chinese International Students

Cultural Challenges

Cultural differences are one of the most frequently listed problems that Chinese international students report while living in the United States (Will, 2016; Young, 2017). Differences in core belief systems and social structures influence how well an individual adjusts after moving from one culture to another (Ward et al., 2005). One obstacle that Chinese international students encounter is what many refer to as *culture shock* (Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017).

Culture shock is psychological reactions that occur in response to the transition from one cultural setting to another (Yang et al., 2018). Emotional behavior differences occur when there

are variances in cultural experiences (D'Souza et al., 2016). Che and Manizade (2009) described culture shock as a disequilibrium or dissonance that international students experience after immersion in a different culture. Zhou et al. (2018) found that Chinese international students suffer greater stress from cultural challenges due to the cultural distance of their homeland and differences between China and the United States. The effect of cultural differences on acculturation will be discussed more thoroughly later in this chapter.

Social Challenges

Besides difficulties with culture, social challenges are a potential stressor for international students who are living and studying in the United States. Chinese international students may experience feelings of isolation, language difficulties, homesickness, and differences in social expectations, which may increase anxiety (Ching et al., 2017). International students who develop relationships within the host country report increased satisfaction and fewer cases of homesickness (Hendrickson et al., 2011). However, students from Asia had higher levels of anxiety about making new friends than other groupings of international students (Fritz et al., 2008). The vast differences in the cultures of China and the United States mentioned earlier in this chapter could be the reason.

One of the most widespread social challenges reported by international students is language acquisition (Will, 2016; Zhang & Mi, 2010). Many students who can pass the English proficiency exam before entering a higher education institution in the United States are still unable to communicate adequately and understand spoken English in the classroom (Berry, 2005; Will, 2016). This lack of understanding leads to elevated stress levels in international students who are struggling with English as a second language (Oramas et al., 2018). The stress of language barriers increases in students from China due to the differences between Mandarin

and English (Ching et al., 2017). Students experience language barriers that inhibit Chinese

international students from interacting with domestic students (Will, 2016). This reaction only

exacerbates the social struggles that these students experience. Liu et al. (2016) pointed out that

students studying in a different culture have a more exceptional ability to overcome acculturative

stress when they can build relationships with individuals from the host country. However, if

language barriers prevent relationship building, then acculturative stress increases (Oramas et al.,

2018).

Homesickness is another factor linked to acculturative stress in Chinese international

students (Hendrickson et al., 2010). Homesickness is suffering or impairment triggered by an

actual or expected separation from home (Thurber & Walton, 2012). Poyrazli and Lopez (2007)

found that international students experience higher degrees of homesickness than do their

American counterparts. Chinese students tend to experience greater homesickness than do other

international students due to considerable differences in home and host cultures (Yu et al., 2014).

Wang (2012) stated that stress increases with distance from home. Additionally, the lack of

contact with home families can contribute to more significant stress (Wang, 2012). Nevertheless,

Chinese students experience acculturative stress related to social challenges like language

barriers, cultural differences, and homesickness.

Academic Challenges

International students from China commonly report academic challenges as a critical

stressor during their schooling in the United States (Oramas et al., 2018). Yan and Berliner

(2009) found that Chinese students experience three significant academic difficulties: language,

achievement, and faculty interaction (Yan & Berliner, 2009). Academic difficulties related to

poor language acquisition are most considerable with listening comprehension and writing (Zhang & Mi, 2010).

Students report challenges with even simple activities due to a lack of English understanding (Liu et al., 2016). Oramas et al. (2018) reported that students who transition to a different learning environment experience heightened levels of stress. Besides increased stress levels, Chinese international students also experience poor scores, perceived discrimination in the classroom, and difficulty interacting with teachers and peers (Yan & Berliner, 2009).

Financial Challenges

Financial challenges are often reported by Chinese international students who attend higher education in the United States as a significant contributor to stress among all college students (Yan & Berliner, 2009). These students typically pay full tuition plus fees, receive no financial support from the government, and are usually overlooked for institutional scholarships. Also, international students from China rely heavily on support from Chinese family members who expect the student to perform well while in school in the United States, which only adds to student stress levels (Fritz et al., 2008). Previous studies found that financial hardship can increase the possibility of mental health struggles and may lead to dropout (Liu, 2009; Thurber & Walton, 2012).

As noted earlier, when Chinese international students suffer elevated stress levels related to acculturation, there is an increased probability of mental health disorders such as depression (Shadowen et al., 2019). Factors such as homesickness or language struggles further exacerbate these feelings. Studies have linked acculturative stress to depression among international students (Fritz et al., 2008; Huang & Mussap, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

Hofstede's Six Cultural Dimensions

The differences between Western culture and Confucian-influenced cultures are well-documented. For example, in Confucian culture, it is considered rude to show feelings in public. However, in the United States, it is perfectly acceptable to express one's emotions in front of others (Will, 2016; Young, 2017). These differences impact acculturative adjustments for Chinese international students (Perry, 2016; Young, 2017). Hofstede's (2011) six dimensions of national culture highlight the variances between China and the United States and provide insight into understanding why so many students from China struggle with acculturation.

Of Hofstede's six dimensions, China and the United States varied widely in four categories (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). The five dimensions pertinent to this study are power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, long-term orientation vs. short-term normative orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint (Hofstede Insights, n.d., p. 1).

Figure 2 illustrates the considerable variances in the four dimensions, which are pertinent to the study. These four dimensions displayed significant differences when a comparison was made between the United States and China. Hofstede Insights' (n.d.) scale illustrates these four dimensions, which also includes masculinity and uncertainty avoidance. Hofstede Insights (n.d.) believed these differences explain why people from varying cultures with relatively broader gaps had more considerable differences in culture.

Figure 2

Hofstede's Six Dimensions: China vs. the United States

	Power Distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty Avoidance	Long Term Orientation	Indulgence
China	80	20	66	30	87	24
U.S.A.	40	91	62	46	26	68

Hofstede's Six Dimensions: China vs. USA

China ——— U.S.A.

Note: A comparison of China and the United States using Hofstede's six dimensions. Adapted from Hofstede's Insights. https://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/. Adapted with permission.

Hofstede's model has been used to explain how varying cultures view core beliefs and interpersonal interaction. While many cultures have similar scores within Hofstede's dimensions, the differences in most of the categories between the United States and China are vast. A brief look at each of these dimensions will help to clarify why many students from China experience acculturative stress while living in the United States.

Power Distance

Power distance (PDI) relates to the degree to which the less powerful people within a culture accept the inequitable dispersal of power (Hofstede, 2011). For example, the hierarchy of an employee accepting the power of her manager represents a power distribution. Hofstede Insights (n.d.) stated that cultures with high power distance readily accept the unbalanced dissemination of power hierarchies, whereas a low power distance represents a culture where people strive to bring power distribution into balance among its members (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). Figure 2 shows that China has a relatively high PDI, and the United States has a comparatively low PDI. This discrepancy demonstrates how these two cultures relate to authority differently (Manikuty et al., 2007).

Individualism vs. Collectivism

Individualism vs. collectivism (IDV) is a consideration of whether people prefer being alone to take care of themselves or choose to remain in a tightly knitted network in exchange for unwavering loyalty (Hofstede, 2011). Hofstede (n.d.) described IDV as "whether people's self-image is defined in terms of I or we" (p. 1). China's score is very low on Hofstede's scale (20), and the United States scores high (91) due to its individualistic culture. These differences in how one perceives "I" and "we" create a chasm of perception and interaction among different cultures (Wang, 2012). This fact is evident in the classroom, where Chinese international students tend to remain quiet and accept what is presented without confrontation. At the same time, the American instructor expects open discussion, questions, and debates to promote learning (Triandis, 2002).

Long-Term Orientation vs. Short-Term Normative Orientation

The third dimension that is vastly different for China and the United States is the "Long-Term Orientation vs. Short-Term Normative Orientation dimension" (Hofstede Insights, n.d., p. 1). Hofstede (2011) believed that this dimension measures how a group of people use traditions

and norms to deal with challenges. Societies that prefer to maintain long-standing traditions while viewing societal change with suspicion tend to score lower on Hofstede's scale (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). Skepticism, regard for social responsibility, and temporary interests characterize the short-term-oriented culture of the United States (Hofstede, 2011). On the other hand, people from cultures who score higher on this dimension tend to believe that a practical approach is necessary for dealing with challenges (Hofstede, 2011). For example, the Chinese culture, a Confucian-based society (Young, 2017), highlights values such as self-determination and diligence in a long-term-oriented culture (Wang, 2012).

Indulgence vs. Restraint

Indulgence vs. restraint (IND) is the fourth element presented by Hofstede (n.d.), which showed a wide gap between the Chinese and American cultures. Indulgence represents a society that allows the indulgence of basic human drives associated with personal enjoyment (Hofstede, n.d.). Conversely, restraint refers to a culture that suppresses self-gratification in preference of following strict social norms (Maclachlan, 2013). A high indulgence culture like the United States is in direct contrast to the high restraint culture of China and creates a culture gap that causes one group to struggle to relate to the other (Maclachlan, 2013).

A Similar Model to Hofstede's Dimensions

Triandis (1990) developed a model that was similar to Hofstede's dimensions. In his model, Triandis (1990) found three cultural factors that are parallel to Hofstede's cultural dimensions: "cultural complexity, tight versus loose cultures, and individualism vs. collectivism" (p. 60). Triandis referred to these factors as 'syndromes' and described them as patterns that could be used to contrast groups of cultures. Triandis (1990) stated that cultural complexity is related to a culture's use of technology, time, and the specificity of roles within a society. Tight

and loose cultures refer to the amount of freedom that the individuals within a culture enjoy (Triandis, 1990). The individuals within a tight culture have more restrictions placed on them by governing bodies than do those in a loose culture. Triandis (1990) defined the grouping of individualism vs. collectivism in the same manner as Hofstede and cited examples of how cultures that differ in this way might struggle to relate to one another. Triandis (1990) agreed with Hofstede that differences in culture create difficulties in intercultural interactions.

An Alternative Perspective to Hofstede's Model

As popular as Hofstede's model is in academia, some argue that there are several problems with using this model to study culture. Signorini et al. (2009) contended that culture is too complex and varied even within a nation to be reduced to "immutable concepts" (p. 262). Signorini et al. (2009) argued that culture should be viewed as flexible and dynamic and not collective programming that characterizes whole people groups. The authors argued that Hofstede fails to understand the complexity of culture when someone simplifies it to a set of coats worn in layers (Signorini et al., 2009).

Alternatively, Signorini et al. (2009) proposed that culture is more a coat knitted with numerous varying types of threads. Differences in cultures are too complex to be reduced to a short list of items on a scale. Others argue against Hofstede's model by saying that a culture like the Chinese culture is too heterogeneous to be grouped into a single category, such as Hofstede's power distance (PDI) dimension (Gu, 2011). These alternative perspectives bring doubt into the confidence that many afford to Hofstede's model. However, even though the model may have inherent flaws, numerous researchers use Hofstede's model to explain general understandings about varied cultures, and that is how it is used in this study.

Chapter Summary and Preview of the Next Chapter

Chinese international students experience an array of challenges that may cause varying levels of acculturative stress. Financial stress and academic challenges can cause the student to struggle with stress about doing well in school. Social challenges can cause Chinese students to feel disconnected and overwhelmed while adjusting to life in the United States. Cultural challenges magnify the dissimilarities between the student's home and the host culture in which they now find themselves. Hofstede Insights' (n.d.) model of six cultural dimensions provides a theoretical lens from which to consider how the differences between two cultures impact the acculturation process. The differences between the cultures of China and the United States are vast (Young, 2017). These variances broaden the distance for students to traverse in their attempt to acculturate while completing their education in a foreign land.

Additionally, while little is known about the acculturative process for Chinese international students who are attending college in the United States, less is known about how Chinese international students fare in different regions of the country. For example, there are no studies that address the acculturative process of Chinese international students attending school in the southeastern United States. The goal of this study was to provide needed information to HEI leaders who may be able to improve the acculturation process and educational experience for Chinese international students who study in the United States, and specifically, in the Southeast.

Chapter 3 describes the methods of research for this study. In Chapter 3, I list, define, and explain the research methodology. I provide ways that the participants were protected during the interview process. Additionally, Chapter 3 clarifies how the data was collected, coded, and

analyzed. The role of the researcher is discussed, as well. Finally, Chapter 3 explains how the data was protected throughout the study and beyond.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this narrative study was to understand Chinese international students' perceptions of the factors, if any, that may lead to acculturative stress while attending a four-year public university in the southeastern United States. This study should provide rich data that goes beyond survey findings to explore the experiences of international students from China who may have different experiences from similar students in other regions of the country. This information may inform HEI leaders who seek to understand better the international students who attend their school. This study investigated academic and cultural factors that lead Chinese international students to encounter acculturative stress.

These experiences are varied and complex, like the individuals who live them. The environment in which they occur further complicates understanding the acculturative process. By design, the research question that drives this study is open-ended and inductive to allow for the research process to evolve as the study progresses (Glesne, 2015). The research question was as follows: How do Chinese international students understand their cultural and academic experiences at a public, four-year university in the southeastern United States? The subquestion was, How does living in the southeastern United States affect acculturative experiences?

Moen (2006) stated that narrative research is the study of how individuals experience life and how they assign meaning to their experiences, which happens through the stories they tell. Chinese international students experience stress related to living in a state of instability while immersed in a different culture (Ching et al., 2017). Sandelowski (1991) explained that narratives present the experiences of "persons-in-flux in a personally and culturally coherent, plausible manner" (p. 162). This study's goal was to present the stories of students who have

experienced acculturation so the reader can gain understanding into the way the participants cognize their perspective (Sandelowski, 1991).

Methodology

Qualitative Methodology

Sandelowski (1991) described how a qualitative approach makes something scientific out of the biographical, which, by nature, is ambiguous. The goal of qualitative inquiry is to understand the meaning of experiences by explaining their inherent characteristics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Human experience and the retelling of it is often fluid and relative to the teller (Jackson et al., 2007). Qualitative methodology is an exploratory research design characterized by observing and interpreting data from a relatively small group of participants (Creswell, 2013). Researchers use qualitative methodology to gather data when little is known or a present understanding is inadequate (Creswell, 2009; Mertler, 2016). Qualitative methodology is the appropriate approach when the material studied is more subjective (Sandelowski, 1991). Creswell et al. (2007) gave five subcategories of methods within qualitative research. These five qualitative approaches are case study research, phenomenology, grounded theory, participatory action research, and narrative research (Creswell et al., 2007).

This study used a narrative research tradition to understand the complex nature of one's lived experiences because it is necessary to hear from the participants themselves. This qualitative research tradition allows the researcher to explore how the participant's experiences have shaped their reality (Clandinin, 2016). This tradition would allow the data to speak from the participants' perspective (Creswell et al., 2007; Riessman, 2008). Therefore, a qualitative approach was most appropriate to gather rich data from the participants about their lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008).

Paradigm

The constructivist paradigm lens guided this study. This lens focuses on the meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences, which are founded on one's ideals, values, feelings, and assumptions (Creswell, 2013). This approach rests on the idea that people create their realities based on their belief systems, as well as how they interpret and view the world (Packer, 2018). The constructivist approach aligns with the qualitative methodology of this study.

The belief that individuals socially construct meaning concerning the world around them drives this study (Moen, 2006). Experiences shape reality through "continuous interaction with our personal, social, and material environment" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 14). These experiences create meaning for the individual that can best be understood through the telling and receiving of stories (Andrews et al., 2014; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) called this exchange narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry analyzes how people understand their unique perspectives. Andrews (2004) stated that there is a close relationship between the stories people share and their perceived identity.

Narrative Inquiry

The need to comprehend the experiences of Chinese international students through the retelling of their stories makes narrative research the best approach for this study. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) defined narrative inquiry as a method for understanding experience through the collaboration of the participant sharing their story and the researcher receiving it.

In narrative inquiry, the researcher allows individuals to construct stories based on the meanings each participant assigns to them. Humans make meaning of their experiences through storytelling, and the researcher collects and retells these stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In

a narrative inquiry, the researcher adopts an active role in the gathering of data (Jackson et al., 2007). Lincoln and Guba (1985) coined this personal involvement as the human-as-an-instrument approach. The narrative researcher seeks to go beyond finite questions that elicit only shallow data to gather more descriptive information from the participant (Jackson et al., 2007). To do so requires the researcher to assume a more active role and requires their willingness to change the course of the interview questions if the need arises.

Population, Setting, and Sample

Selection Criteria

Participants were chosen based on a set of preselected characteristics. First, the participants were Chinese-born students who are currently enrolled at a four-year university. Second, I chose participants who have lived in the United States for at least one year but no more than four years. This allows students who have had time to experience life in the United States and culture shock through the first year of school. By setting a limit of four years, student participants have a better recollection of the events prior to arriving in the United States and post-arrival. Third, students were required to be at least 18 years of age to qualify as participants for this study. This ensured acceptance by the institutional review board (IRB) since all participants are consenting adults. I chose participants and interview sites based on the selection criteria availability and preferences, data collection feasibility, and the relationship between the investigator and the participants (Maxwell, 2013).

Participants are the keystone of a narrative inquiry, so it is crucial to maximize their comfort level. Creswell (2009) stated that narrative participants must be accessible and willing to provide information to the researcher. A participant-centered study is particularly important when the data is coming from a small pool of sources. Participants who are comfortable with the

researcher and the surroundings are more likely to share a greater depth of data (Wu et al., 2015).

Clandinin (2016) stated that the inquirer must build a trusting and open relationship with each

participant, as this contributes to the quality and quantity of the stories gathered.

Sample Size

Participant selections in a narrative study are critical. Typically, fewer participants are

appropriate in a narrative study due to the nature of the approach (Creswell, 2009). Narrative

analysis tends to produce more raw data than other forms of analysis, so limiting the number of

participants causes the amount of information to be more manageable (Vasileiou et al., 2018).

Additionally, a small sample size enables the collection and analysis of data within the timeline

of this doctoral project. When gathering data from participants about their experiences, it is more

important to use a small sample size and collect rich data in multiple interviews than to sample a

broad group with less-meaningful data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Sandelowski, 1996).

Creswell (2009) posited that a small sample size allows for a better understanding of topics that

might otherwise go unexplored.

Sandelowski (1995) proposed qualitative sample sizes be sufficient to allow the

development of a "new and richly-textured understanding" but small enough so that the "deep,

case-oriented analysis" of qualitative data is not prohibited (p. 183). Morse (2000) also believed

that the sample size is dependent on the particular needs of the study. Crouch and McKenzie

(2006) argued that the exploratory nature of narrative studies not only allows for a relatively

small number of respondents but that fewer participants may even be advantageous. Fewer

participants allow the researcher to obtain in-depth information (Smith, 2004). A small sample

size enables a close relationship with the participants and enhances the validity of free-flowing,

comprehensive inquiry in natural settings (Sandelowski, 1995). For these reasons, a small sample

size within a narrative research method is the standard among qualitative researchers (Creswell et al., 2007; Riessman, 2008).

Therefore, a purposeful approach with a small sample size was utilized in this study to provide in-depth, rich information from three participants. Three participants allowed for a greater experiential analysis of Chinese international students' narratives and allowed a deeper understanding of individual perspectives (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

Strategy

The participants for this inquiry were three Chinese international students who have been living and studying at a four-year university in the southeastern United States for a minimum of one year. Restricting participants to these criteria ensures that students have had time to experience life in the United States for at least two academic terms and experience acculturation to some degree. I identified potential participants using a purposeful sampling method (Patton, 2002) through a network of Chinese international students who are enrolled at four-year universities in the Southeast. Purposeful sampling is a practice used in qualitative research that includes identifying and selecting individuals who are exceptionally knowledgeable and experienced with the phenomenon investigated (Palinkas et al., 2016). Researchers also seek individuals who are both willing to participate and available for multiple interviews (Russell, 2018). Those who consented to participate in the study also needed to be at least 18 years old to avoid the necessity of parental consent. Participants also had to be English speakers since the interviews were in English only.

Institutional Review Board

Upon approval of Abilene Christian University's (ACU) Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix A), I referenced a network of Chinese international students and requested

volunteers to participate in the study. Potential volunteers received a full explanation of the research and candidate requirements, including the length of interviews and the number of meetings.

Seidman (2013) recommended that the researcher interview participants in three separate sittings. Therefore, the interview process consisted of three sessions, with the first meeting lasting 45 minutes. The second meeting was slightly longer at 90 minutes, and then a shorter, 45-minute follow-up session was utilized to clarify themes after analysis.

Participants were guaranteed their confidentiality and received a request to be digitally recorded during the interviews. Participants received instructions that they were free to opt-out of the interview process at any time and for any reason without any repercussions. This understanding is vital to establish trust with the participants and protect the integrity of the research process. Interview scheduling allowed time for interview preparation, postinterview reflection, and initial analysis of data. The appendix provides sample documents for the interview process according to IRB guidelines (see Appendix B). The next section gives detail on the interviewing process and what follows.

Interview Location

The location for the interviews was based on the availability and comfort of the participant. An interview site that is convenient for the participant is essential. Additionally, it was important to choose a setting that was quiet and private while allowing the participant to feel safe during their time with the researcher (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Given that governmental authorities currently recommend social distancing of at least six feet, interviews occurred online. However, a quiet and private location for virtual meetings was important. It was essential to keep distractions to a minimum to allow unhindered communication between the participants and

myself. A suitable location enabled the participants to experience a higher comfort level and provided me a better opportunity to enter into the respondent's perspective (Patton, 2002). Dilley (2000) stated that listening skills are the most important factor when collecting qualitative data, and the second is understanding the participant's body language. Therefore, the choice of location can significantly impact the quality of data gathered and should be considered carefully (Patton, 2002).

Narrative Interviewing

Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2015) identified four sections of the narrative interview. First, there is an introduction section where the researcher explains the study and gathers preliminary information about the participant. Next is the narrative section, where the participant shares his or her story with the researcher. The interviewer should do little of the talking during this time so that the participant can share their experiences unhindered. Third, the questioning phase involves the researcher filling in any gaps and following up on any area of interest from the narrative (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2015). Finally, during the conclusion section, the researcher concludes the conversation and explains what will happen next with the data gathered. Any questions that the participant has are answered during the conclusion phase. Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2015) explained that the four sections could vary by length of time and information discussed, depending on the participant.

Semistructured interviews are the most customary technique in qualitative inquiries (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Semistructured interviews typically begin with a set of predetermined questions. However, the researcher has the liberty to seek clarification from respondents, change the items, or remove or add new items to follow up on a narrative (Creswell et al., 2007). The interview protocols are included in Appendix B.

Introductory Phase

The first interview helps to build a rapport with the participant and increase trust between the participant and the investigator (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Thus, the first meeting established rapport with the participant and gathered background and biographical information. Given the current health crisis with COVID-19, all meetings occurred via the online, secure platform known as Zoom. Before I gathered any data, I explained in detail the objective of the study and the process used to collect data. Additionally, I answered any questions that the participants had before proceeding.

Participants signed the consent form (see Appendix C) and returned it via secure email before the interviews began. The participant received a copy of the consent form, and I retained a copy for the record. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. Pseudonyms protect each participant's identity (Allen & Wiles, 2015).

The first interview's questions are closed-ended and designed to gather background information about the respondent (Dilley, 2000). During this interview, I asked questions one through six on the interview protocol sheet (see Appendix B). Questions were excluded or adjusted if I needed the participant to expound on a topic (Seidman, 2013).

Narrative Phase

The next phase of the narrative interview is the narrative section (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2015). During this phase, the participant was encouraged to tell their story. Participants were urged to share their experiences before relocating to the United States and their experiences since arriving in the United States. As the interviewer, I interjected as little as possible so that the participant can freely share their story (Seale et al., 2004). The interviewer

used nonverbal cues to encourage the participant to give as much detail as possible (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2015).

It is imperative to note that the researcher is an active member in the interview, aptly engaged, authentically present, and trustworthy (Beuthin, 2014). However, the interviewer should not approach this time as an opportunity to persuade or guide the participant in any direction. The researcher should listen to what the participant wants to share, what they do not want to share, and what they cannot share without help (Brinkmann, 2013). During the online interview, I asked only questions that were necessary to keep the dialogue moving.

This was a time of sharing and collecting. I collected the data as the participant shared lived experiences that have meaning and importance to them (Beuthin, 2014). Gubrium et al. (2012) described this phase as a dynamic interactional communicative opportunity. The participant must be comfortable with sharing personal stories for the narrative interview to be effective (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). During this interview, I asked questions seven through 12 on the interview protocol sheet (see Appendix B). Questions were omitted or altered if I needed the participant to expound on a topic (Seidman, 2013).

Questioning Phase

The third part of the narrative interview is the questioning phase. This phase focused on gathering data about the acculturation experiences of the participants in the study. The questions for these interviews were more open-ended to permit the participant to speak freely and the researcher to adjust the direction of the interview (Dilley, 2000). This phase allowed an opportunity to ensure the timeline of events was clear to both the participant and the interviewer. Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2015) suggested using the participant's own words to fill in any gaps

that exist after the narrative. It is appropriate to ask for more detail about any part of the narrative that is unclear or unexplained (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2015).

This phase can be challenging for the interviewer if the participant is shy or uncomfortable about sharing their thoughts and feelings. When this happened, I used open-ended questions to draw more information from the participant (Soderberg, 2006). During this interview, I asked questions 13 through 16 on the interview protocol sheet (see Appendix B). These questions are designed to fill in any missing gaps in the narrative and to draw more detail from the participant. Items were removed or modified if I needed the participant to expound on a topic (Seidman, 2013).

Conclusion Phase

The concluding phase of the narrative interview is a time to end the interviewing process and explain the next steps for the participant if there are any. If the participant concluded the first or second interview session, I scheduled a future time to meet with the participant to continue the narrative interview. If the meeting was the last interview, I thanked the interviewee and explained what steps were next. The researcher must allow the participant to ask any questions they have. Soderberg (2006) stated that it is good practice to provide a copy of the transcribed narratives to the participant upon completion. I also asked the participant to check the transcript for errors. Once this process was complete, I asked the participant to sign off on the authenticated transcript.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for this narrative study consisted of three one-on-one interviews with each participant. I recorded each conversation for transcription during the online talks. Zoom and other virtual meeting applications offer the capability to safely record and save videos with

sound to a cloud storage file. I recorded each interview using Zoom's recording feature. The primary form of data for this study were transcripts of recorded interviews. I used contemplative field notes as part of the data compilation process. These notes were used to add to the narrative of each participant.

Once the interviews concluded, I used recordings of the talks to transcribe all data verbatim. No details of the interview must be lost, so careful transcriptions were vital. An online service called TranscribeMe! served to transcribe all recordings, which ensured the highest quality transcription possible. This platform allows the recorded files to be uploaded and the data to be transcribed by professional transcriptionists to provide the highest accuracy. TranscribeMe! fully conforms with the requirements of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), with numerous defenses designed to protect the privacy of confidential information. Security measures for customer data protection cover multiple levels of protection (TranscribeMe, 2020). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that the researcher listen to the audio while reading the transcripts and verify that the transcriptions are accurate. I followed this strategy.

Finally, listening to the audio multiple times ensured greater accuracy of the vast amounts of data that were collected during this narrative inquiry (Seidman, 2006). Listening to the recordings also allowed me to understand the linguistic nuances of each participant.

Coding

The next step in the process of analysis was coding and analyzing the data from the transcriptions. Coding is collecting data to be compiled, classified, and thematically organized to create meaning (Williams & Moser, 2019). Saldaña (2016) defined a code as a word or phrase used to capture the essence of a portion of language-based data. In coding the data, rigorous

coding procedures must be followed to adhere to validity and reliability standards. Williams and Moser (2019) stated that it is vital to the coding process to ensure that coding procedures are defined, meticulous, and consistently employed to follow validity and reliability standards of qualitative research. The online service Dedoose® helped to code and analyze the data using the audio recordings obtained during interviews. Dedoose® is a web-based application that allows the organization and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data ("Dedoose," n.d.). This service was helpful for the coding process, but I performed most of the coding and analysis to gain a better understanding of the participants' stories.

First-Cycle Coding

The purpose of coding is to analyze information gathered during the interviewing process to detect patterns, categorize information, form propositions, and build theories (Saldaña, 2016). The first step in coding is to read the transcript to gain familiarity with its overview. Then the researcher divides the text into usable groups of information. Once the text is broken into more manageable chunks, the next step involves the initial coding phase. In this step, the researcher applies the appropriate first-cycle coding method (Saldaña, 2016). There are many first-cycle coding methods, but for this study, narrative coding is most appropriate. In narrative coding, the researcher develops codes from the participant's narrative using a literary perspective (Saldaña, 2016). It incorporates terms as codes to uncover the structural properties of the participant's story. Saldaña (2016) stated that this method is most suitable for exploring the participants' experiences to understand their story. After I completed this step, the information segments were labeled with the generated codes to aid in the organization of the data.

After First-Cycle Coding

After the first cycle of coding was complete, then I categorized the codes and generated themes based on relationships between the codes and code frequencies (Saldaña, 2016). I looked for any underlying meanings across the codes. This process moves the researcher from coding and sorting toward the process of synthesizing the data, and finally, theorizing. Saldaña (2016) recommended writing analytic memos at this stage to help the researcher begin to integrate hypotheses with clusters of other classifications. I wrote shorthand notes on the transcript that aided in organizing clusters of data within the transcripts. Analytic memos helped in the next phase (second-cycle coding) to see patterns, frequent themes, or significant concepts in the data (Saldaña, 2016).

Second-Cycle Coding

Saldaña (2016) stated that once the data is categorized, then the researcher codes the information through a second cycle. The goal of second-cycle coding is to build key themes from the data. The second cycle can use one or more methods: pattern coding, axial coding, theoretical coding, elaborative coding, focused coding, and longitudinal coding (Saldaña, 2016). Pattern coding develops the grouping summaries into smaller numbers of sets or themes. Focused coding allows the researcher to find the most frequent or significant codes in the data. Axial coding explains a category's properties and explores how they relate to each other. Theoretical coding seeks a central group that drives the data. Elaborative coding builds on the previous coding. Longitudinal coding looks at data collected across time (Saldaña, 2016). I utilized pattern coding and focused coding in the second cycle of this study since these two methods fit this narrative research.

Analysis

After the data coding, the information was parsed and categorized to reveal embedded

themes (Williams & Moser, 2019). Appendix D illustrates the coding-to-theme process. Braun

and Clarke (2006) proposed a thematic analysis of the data to search for themes or patterns that

emerged from the participants' stories. I followed this strategy.

This study follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedure for thematic analysis. The goal

in this process is to gain meaning from the narratives, which is presented in Chapter 4 of this

study. Thematic analysis follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps. I followed these steps

throughout this study's analysis stage.

Table 2

Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Process Description
1. Gaining familiarity with the data	• Transcribing information • Continually reading data • Noting preliminary ideas
2. Generating preliminary codes	• Coding noteworthy elements of the data across the complete data set • Collating data pertinent to each code
3. Probing for themes	• Organizing codes into prospective themes • Gathering data related to each possible theme
4. Review themes	• Checking the themes related to the coded extracts and entire data set • Creating a thematic map of the analysis
5. Defining and naming themes	• Continual analysis to refine specifics of each theme • Generating clear definitions and names for each theme • The last chance for analysis
6. Generating the report	• Choosing vivid, compelling excerpt examples • Final analysis of designated excerpts • Produce a scholarly report

Note. This table explains the six phases of thematic analysis. By V. Braun, & V. Clarke. (2006).

Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101.

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The process took several passes, starting with a broad overview of the data and proceeding in a spiraling manner until distinguishable themes emerge from statements that are seemingly unconnected accounts (Sandelowski, 1996). Thematic analysis was used to identify and interpret patterns that developed throughout this stage of data analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as a method for discovering, evaluating, and reporting relationships within data to "interpret various aspects of the research topic" (p. 79).

After I identified themes from the data, the process of reviewing and refining those themes began. The goal of refining was to improve the validity and accuracy of the themes that emerged through the identification process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic mapping was utilized to visualize how ideas relate to each other and to categorize different levels of themes.

Watson (2018) refers to mapping as a "thematic network," which comprises themes and subthemes, which are continually revised and refined until the researcher believes the network to be comprehensive of the data (p. 259). Each part of the network or map was charted on a matrix. Finally, the themes were defined using the key characteristics of each (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each topic was titled according to its components, and each title clearly and concisely identified the theme for which it coincided (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Watson, 2018).

Establishing Trustworthiness

Two overarching groups of criteria have emerged in the literature to ascertain the qualitative research quality. The first group is trustworthiness, and the second is authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). These two groups were discussed considering the necessity to ensure that this research is of the utmost quality.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is paramount in any qualitative study, as it is in this narrative analysis. Trustworthiness, which is also recognized as rigor, refers to the level of confidence in the data, analysis, and methods used to improve a study's quality (Connelly, 2016). Guba and Lincoln (1994) give five criteria that increase trustworthiness. These five include the original four criteria of trustworthiness that Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited initially.

The first of these criteria is credibility. Credibility is confidence in the validity of research and, according to Connelly (2016), is the most important of the measures. Transferability is the degree to which data have applicability in other contexts (Shenton, 2004). Watson (2018) identified transferability to the extent that research findings can be generalized to different settings. Dependability refers to the stability of the data over time and is comparable to reliability in quantitative research (Connelly, 2016). Confirmability is the degree to which the findings apply to the participants and not the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Watson (2018) stated that confirmability refers to how well others can independently confirm findings. Confirmability parallels objectivity in other types of research (Watson, 2018). Shenton (2004) stated that researchers must make it clear that the results come from the data and not their bias.

Authenticity

The second criterion group is authenticity. Guba and Lincoln (1994) identified this group as an addition to the original trustworthiness group, which parallels positivist criteria (objectivity, external validity, internal validity, and reliability). Guba and Lincoln (1994) felt that because the criteria under trustworthiness parallel the positivist standards, that they should not be trusted alone to answer the question of quality in qualitative research. These authors felt that the criteria of authenticity would more closely reach that goal. Authenticity criteria include fairness,

ontological authentication, educative authentication, catalytic authentication, and tactical authenticity (Schwandt et al., 2007).

Authenticity Criteria. Fairness is a balance of stakeholder views, concerns, and voices within the text (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Ontological authentication is the improvement of an individual's conscious experience of the world as they interact with it and improve (Schwandt et al., 2007). Educative authentication leads to enhanced insight of the constructions of others (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In other words, it helps one to understand a situation from someone else's perspective. Catalytic authentication should lead to action (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It is the process of theory becoming change (Schwandt et al., 2007), and ideally, change for the better. Finally, tactical authenticity empowers action (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and addresses the matter of whether the research findings enable or impoverish (Schwandt et al., 2007).

Implementation of Trustworthiness and Authenticity

In seeking to ensure the trustworthiness of this study, it is essential to ask if the interpretation is credible and truthful (Schwandt et al., 2007). The criteria outlined above serve to assist in maximizing the integrity and quality of this study. All findings were held to these standards to ensure that trustworthiness and authenticity are paramount.

One way I increased the trustworthiness of the study was to have the participants read a copy of the transcript and give feedback about its accuracy (Cope, 2014). Verifying the validity of the data with the participants ensured that nothing was miscommunicated, misunderstood, or modified in any way (Schwandt et al., 2007). Cope (2014) stated that credibility is enhanced by the researcher describing their experiences in the research process with the participants. Doing so provides the reader descriptions with which they can relate and share (Sandelowski, 1996). This technique is often referred to as member checking. To increase this study's credibility, I

demonstrated engagement of the data with the participants, explained methods of observation, and explained each stage of the research process in the study (Cope, 2014).

The findings should be more credible if the participants are made aware that their involvement is voluntary and are free to quit at any time (Shenton, 2004). Another way to improve trustworthiness is to build a rapport with the participants to increase the likelihood that they are more honest and forthcoming with their acculturative experiences.

Positionality

An essential part of ensuring credibility with the research is to acknowledge the positionality of the researcher. Positionality is the influence that experience, social identity, age, gender, and ethnicity have on the interpretations of the researcher (Copestake et al., 2020). Positionality concerns not only the researcher's own identity and their subjectivity with interpreting complicated datasets but also their connection with other stakeholders (Copestake et al., 2020). The researcher must also consider the influence of other people and documents in the construction of knowledge. Reflexivity is an attitude of focusing systematically on the context of knowledge building, particularly to the influence on the researcher, at every phase of the research process (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Malterud (2001) stated, "A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most acceptable for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions" (pp. 483–484). As the researcher in this study, I acknowledge that my ethnicity, experiences, and background are different from the participants with whom I am interviewing. As a White, middle-aged man from the United States, I cannot completely understand the struggles that international students from China experience. However, as a person who has lived

in three countries on three different continents, I can understand the challenges that come with living in a culture different from my own.

My experiences and relationship with God have given me a compassion for people who are struggling with acculturation, which was the main reason for the choice to pursue this study. Additionally, my relationships with students from China and other countries in Asia created a desire to understand the difficulties associated with acculturation. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that, as the researcher, who I am and what I have experienced influences how I see the world, my decisions, actions, and interpretations of the data. I must continuously engage in the practice of reflecting throughout the research process. Also, it is crucial to the research process to acknowledge that the variances in language and culture of the participants and the researcher are vast. I ensured that every precaution was taken to prevent misunderstandings during interviewing and coding.

Ethical Considerations

Human subjects are of utmost importance in this qualitative research. Before data collection, the study received approval from ACU's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once data were collected, I stored it in a secure location that requires a password to access. Additionally, participants were given a pseudonym to safeguard their identities.

Digital files were encrypted with passwords. Hard copies of all research materials were stored in a secure site until after the study was completed. After three years, I will destroy all data to protect the personal information of all participants and incidentals. To do so, I will use a professional service provider. These professionals will have expertise in digital shredding, will follow HIPAA and National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) standards, and provide the appropriate disposition certificates upon completion.

Assumptions

Assumptions are statements that are presumed to be accurate or the conditions under which research techniques produce valid or trustworthy results. The following statements are assumed to be true of those involved in the narrative analysis. I assumed that all participants answered the interview questions truthfully and to the best of their capability. I also expected that the data collected accurately portrayed the experiences of Chinese international students who participated in the study.

Limitations

As with all qualitative research, there are limitations. For example, this study's findings cannot be generalized to the entire Chinese international student population who are studying in the United States. However, the findings in this study do not represent all Chinese international students. The data may not apply to other ethnic groups in the same situation or other four-year universities in the United States. The findings may have been inadvertently affected by researcher error, participant misinformation, researcher bias, or poor communication. Finally, errors may exist from the differences in languages that were spoken by those involved in the study since English was not the first language of the participants.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries that naturally exist and help to give focus to an otherwise overwhelming amount of data. The participants of this study were Chinese international students who are living in the southeastern United States and attending a four-year university. To participate, participants had to be students at a four-year university for at least one academic year. Participants were required to be English speakers, as well. Geographically, this study was

limited to the southeastern part of the United States. I limited the study's focus to the acculturative experiences of Chinese international students.

Chapter Summary and Preview of the Next Chapter

Narrative research tradition served as the best qualitative approach to successfully answer the research questions and attain this study's purpose. Conducting open-ended, semistructured interviews allowed me to gain direct data regarding Chinese international students' perceptions of the factors, if any, that may lead to acculturative stress while attending a four-year public university in the southeastern United States. By transcribing and contemplating on interviews, I ensured that the data collected was credible and trustworthy, allowing for future researchers to grasp how the findings contributed to the understanding of acculturation among Chinese international students in the southeastern United States.

Chapter 4 imparts the findings of the research founded on the information that was collected. Excerpts and themes based on responses obtained in the interviews illuminate the data that was collected during the interviewing process.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents data collected through in-depth narrative interviews. The purpose of these narratives was to examine how three Chinese international students understood their experiences while living and studying in the southeastern United States. The following research question guided the study: How do Chinese international students understand their cultural and academic experiences at a public, four-year university in the southeastern United States?

Semistructured interviews with three Chinese international students who have studied in the southeastern United States for at least one year guided the narrative inquiry. Bochner (2012) recommended presenting the findings through first-person storytelling to understand the lived experiences of participants. I used this approach to present the participants' stories in this chapter.

Subsequent sections of this chapter contain the study's context, methodological organization of the findings, a portrait of each participant, and their stories. Descriptive accounts of the participants and the interpretive analysis based on the themes that emerged from the narratives follow. The chapter's final section includes the chapter summary and an introduction to Chapter 5.

Context

It is necessary to provide the context in which the participants were located during the interviews. This section summarizes many of the events that occurred leading up to and during the time of this study. The current circumstances in which Chinese international students find themselves can only be described as tumultuous. The COVID-19 pandemic, strained relations between the United States and China, and animosity toward Chinese students have created a

hostile environment (Feng, 2020; Rauhala, 2020; Redden, 2018; Ruwitch, 2020; WHO, 2020).

These factors are described in this section.

Introduction

In a mere eight months, the world became a very different place because of a mysterious

virus with a confusing name. SARS-CoV-2, the viral culprit behind the now-infamous COVID-

19 disease, began with one person in a Chinese city called Wuhan in December 2019 (WHO,

2020; see Appendix E). The virus that causes COVID-19 is similar to the SARS-CoV virus that

first hit China in 2002, although the new version seems to be more contagious (Yuen et al.,

2020). The COVID-19 virus is a respiratory illness that spreads primarily through droplets of

saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes (Yuen et al., 2020).

Wuhan was likely a city most people in the United States would never have known if it

were not for the genesis of a virus that transformed the world in a matter of months. What began

with one person in Wuhan has brought whole countries to a standstill, pushed healthcare systems

to the brink of collapse, and dragged the global economy into what may be the worst recession in

80 years (World Bank Group, 2020). COVID-19 became a household name and dreaded killer

across the globe in a very short time.

On December 8, 2019, a patient in the city of Wuhan sought medical assistance for what

was described as pneumonia-like symptoms. At the time, no one could identify what was causing

the symptoms experienced by "patient zero," but it would not take long for more people to begin

showing up at hospitals across Hubei Province with the same symptoms (Wang et al., 2020). By

January 3, 2020, the WHO was alerted to a string of cases that were related but unidentifiable.

As the viral outbreak grew in China, Thailand reported its first case on January 13. This was the

first known case reported outside of China. Because the virus spread so quickly, it is difficult to

determine how the virus spread outside of China in the following weeks (Wang et al., 2020). However, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and other Asian countries reported outbreaks during this time, as well (WHO, 2020).

On January 20, the United States confirmed its first case of COVID-19 in Washington State, a man who had visited Wuhan (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2020). A second case was reported three days later in Chicago, a woman in her 60s who had also traveled to Wuhan in January (CDC, 2020). On January 23, China made an unprecedented move to close off Wuhan's 11 million inhabitants completely (Goh, 2020). Within a month, 27 countries had confirmed cases totaling over 75,000 people (WHO, 2020). On February 29, the United States reported the first death on American soil (CDC, 2020). The number of confirmed COVID-19 cases continued to spike until finally, on March 11, the WHO declared it a pandemic, and President Trump banned all travel from 26 European countries (Proclamation 9993). Two days later, President Trump declared the virus a national emergency (Proclamation 9994).

Despite efforts to encourage mask-wearing and social distancing, two techniques proven to help slow the spread of COVID-19, the virus continued to spread throughout the United States at greater rates than the global average. By May 28, more than 100,000 people were dead, and nearly two million people had contracted the virus (WHO, 2020). While many other countries took drastic measures to slow the spread of the virus, people in the United States debated the dangers of COVID-19, and the virus continued to spread.

By November 1, 2020, nine million Americans had been infected by the virus, and the United States death toll passed 230,000 people (CDC, 2020). Contrast these numbers with China, who reported only 86,000 total cases with 4,600 deaths nationwide (WHO, 2020). Many would say that the United States has not been as effective at controlling the COVID-19 spread.

However, the virus proved to be very adept at dispersing. The worldwide number of cases at the time of this writing has passed 49 million, with no sign of relief in sight (WHO, 2020). Appendix F shows the contrast between China and the United States for daily confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Strained United States and China Relations

Adding to the fear and worry that COVID-19 created was the strained relations between China and the United States during this time (Ruwitch, 2020). In 2014, the United States indicted five Chinese hackers with ties to the Chinese government on charges of stealing trade technology from U.S. entities. Since then, the United States has accused China of using hackers to steal information from the government and private companies (Satter & Bing, 2020).

In July of 2018, the Trump administration announced a 25% tariff on goods from China (Section 301, 82 FR 40213, 2018). China immediately retaliated with a tax on many American goods coming into China. This retaliation escalated into a trade war between the two countries that began during President Obama's administration and continues to cause tension between the two governments at the time of this study (United States Trade Representative [USTR], 2015). In August of the same year, President Trump was at a dinner party when he commented that almost every student who comes over from China is a spy (Redden, 2018). Although the remarks may be inaccurate, the rhetoric still affected Chinese students' anxiety.

On May 29, 2020, President Trump signed Proclamation 10043 which restricted the entry of certain Chinese students and researchers to the United States. He stated that Chinese students were being used by their government to acquire confidential technology and intellectual property from the United States. Lee (2020) identified the latest attacks against Chinese students as neo-racism that has recently elevated to "hate-fueled violence" against anyone who might be from

China (Lee, 2020, p. i). The author goes on to accuse educational and governmental leaders, including the president, of inciting neo-racism. Lee (2020) gives the example of the COVID-19 virus being called the "China Virus" or "Wuhan Virus" by prominent Americans as proof that China is the target of aggression during a time when relations are already strained between the two countries.

On July 23, 2020, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) charged four Chinese students with visa fraud connected with a plot to lie about their relationship to the People's Liberation Army. In September 2020, the DHS released a report stating that Chinese government-backed hackers had infiltrated U.S. government data systems and stolen data (Department of Homeland Security [DHS], 2020). China denied allegations of hacking and argued that these and other allegations were unfounded propaganda (Snyder, 2020). Consequently, relations between the two countries grew colder.

Chinese Students and Higher Education Institutions

The uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, increased discussions about race and prejudice, and political pressure in a presidential election cycle has created an era of uncertainty. Doubts surround the future of American higher education and the value of U.S. institutions to international students (Feng, 2020). Questions about the United States' connection with China abound as ties between the two superpowers hit new lows. Higher education institution leaders are uncertain about the future enrollment of students from China, and the students are apprehensive about their future.

Chinese international students find themselves in a very different world from that of a year ago. What had become a growth explosion in higher education in the United States is now a tenuous situation. For Chinese students headed for the United States, fall 2020 looks very

different from what they expected, partly because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some students

who were supposed to return to China were stranded in the United States (NAFSA, 2019).

Incoming Chinese students could not leave their country (DHS, 2020). Chinese students already

on campus worried they would be forced to leave. Higher education institutions planned for

online, on-ground, and hybrid models. Higher education institution leaders were concerned that

enrollment numbers would drop (Quinton, 2020).

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, there were signs that enrollment was flattening

(IIE, 2019a). Many HEI leaders could have expected the growth to eventually slow, but few

anticipated the impact of the Trump administration's tough talk and visa threats in Proclamation

10014 (Bartram, 2018). Harsh political discourse has added to the pandemic's negative effects

on higher education in a relatively short time. On July 6, 2020, the Department of Homeland

Security (DHS) announced that international students taking only online classes would be forced

to leave the country or transfer to a school that offered on-ground courses (DHS, 2020).

After backlash, the DHS rescinded the decision on July 14 but clarified that new

international students could not come to the United States to take a course of study that is

entirely online (Redden, 2020a). Many international students are forced to stay in their home

countries or enroll in programs that offer on-ground classes until this rule changes (Rauhala,

2020). The DHS attributed the tighter restrictions on concerns about safety due to COVID-19.

However, Brad Farnsworth believes that the government made the change to force HEIs to

conduct on-ground classes (Redden, 2020a).

At the time of this study, a mask ordinance was in place in the two states that comprise

the participants' campuses. Additionally, statewide ordinances were in place to prevent certain

public gatherings. People were strongly encouraged to avoid traveling outside of the home and

keep a safe distance from others. These ordinances were put in place to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus. State and local governments urged students to follow these same guidelines on campus by avoiding public gatherings, wearing a mask when in public, and using virtual meetings where possible. This unprecedented crisis has created stress and worry for domestic and international students alike.

Methodological Organization of the Findings

Chapter 3 recounts the methodological approach. Interviews with participants were recorded and transcribed. After a member checking process to ensure the transcripts' accuracy, a careful chronological organization of the stories followed. The next step involved the analysis and coding process. Appendix G provides a sample of the coding process I followed.

Using pattern analysis and focused coding (Saldaña, 2016), I identified themes and organized the data by these themes. Additionally, I developed and retold the participants' stories using a third-person portrayal. The individual narratives are presented in the first-person tense to introduce the participants' backgrounds, and then evidence was extracted to illustrate the emergent themes.

A Narrative Approach

Experiences are not conveyed as individual entities but are composed as we negotiate across recurrently shifting meanings. Narrative researchers are mainly interested in these meanings depicted in stories (Brown, 2019). The storyteller constructs the accounts to communicate a specific perspective of an event. Meaning and not necessarily truth is expressed in the form of stories. The purpose of narrative inquiry is to reveal the meanings or intentions of the individuals' experiences instead of objective facts (Bailey & Tilley, 2002).

It is imperative to emphasize the methodological approach and organization of the findings before presenting the data analysis results. A story in narrative research is a first-person retelling of events correlated to a participant's experiences (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Riessman (2008) stressed the importance of keeping the participants' voices intact when presenting them as stories. Accordingly, the participant's voices, translated from their verbatim accounts, are the focus of this chapter.

Narrative scholars recommend retelling narratives in the first-person (Bruner, 2011; Riessman, 2008). Riessman (2008) emphasized the importance of keeping each participant's voice intact when delivering their stories. Accordingly, I present participants' accounts in their words with minimum elucidation. This approach allows the reader to understand the researcher's findings and develop their own interpretations of the narratives (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). I present the participant portraits in the third person to situate the reader and introduce the stories. The following section explains the organization of the participants' narratives.

Data Analysis

Narrative researchers assemble the narrative to present a coherent account of the participant's experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Reese et al. (2011) described the narrative process as a complex composition of events, emotions, and environment, which may be subjective to the teller. Narrative inquiry desires to understand the human world instead of insisting on a single kind of truth (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2012). In seeking to understand the world of Chinese international students, I adapted this work in reaction to the participants and their stories. Braun and Clarke (2006) advocate using an organic approach to analysis, informed by the researcher's unique standpoint, and that is fluid, flexible, and responsive to the researcher's

evolving engagement with the data. This approach describes the evolution of my analysis of the findings presented in this chapter.

It is important to note that when a participant did not expand on a topic or give further details about a question, I did not press the issue if they gave cues of discomfort. Solinger (2006) states that Chinese participants' well-being should be of utmost concern for the researcher asking for personal information from individuals who live in a communist country. I followed Solinger's (2006) reasoning to ensure the participant would feel comfortable sharing their stories without feeling threatened. The participants in this study may have felt in danger of sharing more details about their experiences or having more information about their lives in publication. Safety concerns may have prevented them from sharing more information about their lives, particularly their time in China. For that reason, I allowed the participants to share organically, and I did not continue to press for details if they were not comfortable giving more information.

Besides safety concerns, there are unique cultural perspectives of the Chinese culture that affect verbal responses. In interviewing Chinese subjects, it is essential to be aware of two cultural factors: saving face and uncertainty avoidance (Ye & Pang, 2011).

Cultural Perspectives and Narrative Analysis Reflection

Saving Face

Although the cultural phenomenon is somewhat universal, saving face is a particularly important and unique part of Chinese culture (Monfret, 2011). Ye and Pang (2011) describe a common Chinese maxim that roughly translates to "the ugly things in our family should never go public" (p. 260). To understand this concept, one must first understand what face is. Ho (1976) explains the complexity of the Chinese concept of face:

The respectability and/or deference that a person can claim for him/herself from others, by virtue of the relative position he occupies in the social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in the position as well as acceptably in his social conduct. (Ho, 1976, p. 883)

The concept of face can be understood as a mixture of social standing, reputation, dignity, and honor (Monfret, 2011). Saving face means to uphold one's honor, whether it is yours or someone else's honor. It applies as much to the community as it does to individuals. Furthermore, the Chinese perceive individualism as inappropriate or even immoral in Confucianism thought (Young, 2017).

Saving face permeates the Chinese culture and is central to every interaction, including interviews. Monfret (2011) warns that a nervous giggle or laugh may suggest the participant is becoming uncomfortable. He advised changing course or desisting in a line of questioning to save face for the participant. Other social cues may indicate that the participant feels their face is threatened, and the interviewer must be aware of indicators that signal social anxiety (Yu & Wen, 2003). As I interviewed the three participants in this study, I sought to be sensitive to the cultural influence of saving face. If a dilemma arose over pressing a participant for more information or saving face, I chose to alter the line of questioning or allow the participant to change the subject.

Uncertainty Avoidance

The second concept that influences how Chinese participants respond to questioning is uncertainty avoidance (Solinger, 2006). A detailed definition of this dimension is offered in Chapter 2. Yu and Wen (2003) describe the role that uncertainty avoidance plays in Chinese interactions:

Chinese tend to keep their mouths shut as they believe that trouble is born out of the words you speak, and if to speak would be an unwise commitment of one's judgment, a risk ought not be taken. Thus, in sensitive situations, Chinese tend to decline to communicate or to divert attention away from themselves. (Yu & Wen, 2003, p. 54)

Qiu and Cameron (2020) state that uncertainty avoidance is a stronger culture underpinning than telling the truth. They give an example of how government officials chose not to reveal the number of people infected by SARS so that others would not look down on the Chinese (Qiu & Cameron, 2020). This example illustrates that principles have a low priority in the Chinese culture. Protecting the common honor is far more important, which might explain why participants are slow to share information that might be considered dishonoring to those with whom they want to protect (Ye & Pang, 2011).

Saving face and uncertainty avoidance influenced how the participants responded to the questions and what they chose to share about their personal lives, especially their experiences in China. Although the participants felt comfortable with me and shared their stories of acculturation, there were gaps in the data that were unavoidable because of these cultural perspectives. At times, it seemed that a participant would draw back from a story if he felt it was becoming too much about him. This practice was particularly evident when I asked about their family, upbringing, and childhood. Nevertheless, the participants' narratives were rich and provided valuable insight into their experiences of acculturation. I present these narratives in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Revisiting Positionality

In narrative inquiry, the researcher poses questions to interpret and experience the participant's world rather than attempt to predict it (Clandinin, 2016). Narrative researchers trust

that the participant will provide compelling insights into their world. The researcher's task is to

interpret those experiences through analysis without tainting them. In qualitative research, the

researcher's positionality provides a glimpse into why the research is presented as it is. As

researchers, we affect and are affected by the stories our research participants tell. During the

research process, it is vital to acknowledge that this sway of influence is happening. Then it is

critical to incorporate strategies for proactively managing how we affect the data.

As stated in Chapter 3, ensuring research credibility requires acknowledging the

researcher's positionality (Schwandt et al., 2007). My background, experiences, and subjectivity

influence the interpretation of the data. The fact that my cultural background is different from the

participants affects how I interpret the data. Additionally, the differences in our native languages

influenced my perception of the participants' responses. The subsequent findings are presented

with minimal interpretation to keep the participants' perspectives and experiences organic and

rich. More information about these participants follows before their portraits.

Participant Demographics

Participants were recruited through the process detailed in Chapter 3 from a Chinese

student organization database. Selection criteria included Chinese students from around the

southeastern United States enrolled in a four-year university. The prospective participants

received a recruitment letter email with the consent form (see Appendix C). Instructions for

consent and participation were included. I asked the participants to choose a pseudonym to

maintain confidentiality (Butin, 2010). They chose the following pseudonyms: *October, Wen*,

and *Chen*. Additionally, all identifying information was removed from the transcripts. Table 3

presents demographic data for the participants.

Table 3

Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Major	Year of Arrival	Level of Completion	University Pseudonym
October	Male	24	Graphic Design	2017	Graduate	School A
Chen	Male	23	Accounting	2018	Undergraduate	School B
Wen	Male	25	Materials Engineering	2019	Graduate	School C

Portraits of Participants

The portraits that follow present a third-person introduction to each of the participants. Following each overview, the participant's verbatim words are presented chronologically to depict their story. What follows is each participant's narrative of their background and how they came to study in the United States. Their voices tell the stories of who they were in China and who they are today as they adjust to a very different life in the United States. We begin with the first participant, October.

Portrait I: October

October was born in Shanghai, China, in 1996. He spent his entire childhood in Shanghai until he went to college in another province. October believed that his childhood was typical for Chinese children. October's father worked and traveled extensively with his job. His father felt that it would be better for October to attend school full-time since his father was always out of town. Believing that it would make life easier for his mother and grandparents who lived with them, October's father enrolled him in a private boarding school starting in fifth grade. October attended the boarding school for five years. He rarely saw his parents during this time but remembered it fondly because of the friends he made and the teachers that became like parents to

him. He remembers being afraid the first year or two he was there, but the delicious food and constant activity took his mind off of his fears.

October returned home for high school at the age of 16 and studied at a more traditional school close to his home in Shanghai. He remembers this time as a period of intense study and preparation for college. Because he attended a prestigious school for primary and secondary learning, October found himself surrounded by students who came from wealthy families. Although his family was not poor, they were not as rich as the wealthy elite who typically sent their children to these schools.

October's interest in studying abroad began during high school when he saw many wealthy classmates leaving China to study overseas. He began pursuing the idea of studying abroad after he started college and realized that he was not happy. Although his family could not afford to send October abroad for secondary schooling, his father did agree to help send him overseas for his master's degree. October believed, as many Chinese do, that a degree from the United States would be highly valued and ensure an excellent future for him and his family. October heard other students talk about using an agent to find the right university in the United States, so he did the same. His family's desire for October to attend a university in a safe location led him to School A, where he has been for the past three years.

October's Story

Life in China

> I was born in 1996 in the city of Shanghai, China. I spent my whole childhood–middle school, primary school, and high school in Shanghai. We lived there with so many other people. Shanghai is a big city, but I lived in a suburb. It's like a satellite town outside of

the center of Shanghai. I lived a little bit north where there is a river going through, and it's the biggest river in China. Life there is pretty fast. There is much competition.

October's Family

My father works for a national company. It is a big company called Jinshu. It's a steel manufacturing company of iron and steel. It is a vast corporation, and he works as a general manager at one of the branches. They sell the products for the company. I don't really know what they do other than that. I do know they have manufacturing work and selling, and my dad is the head of that building.

My mom keeps changing jobs. She is not as consistent as my dad. She went to college for computer science back in the 80s, but she did not stay on that path. She followed what her family wanted her to do and joined the same company as my grandma. I think she worked for the union, and later on, she went to another company. They produce automobile transmission parts and those kinds of things. I know that their biggest market is GM, General Motors. In 2008, GM closed, and they closed, too. So, they sold all of the factory and stuff there. Then, my mom worked for the same company as my dad. But it is a huge corporation. So, they worked in separate departments but under the same company.

Education in China

I did my primary schoolwork at a school pretty close to my home, and I took a bus to the school every day. My childhood was normal, I think. My dad was working abroad, so they decided to send me to a boarding school. I went there from grade five to grade 10. Then for high school, I moved back home. My parents sent me to a high school that was relatively close to my house. I rode a bike to school every day.

In China, we choose our college before we take the exam, the GaoKao. We write down on a list which schools we want to go to. You make a first choice, a second choice, and so on. Based on your score, they will place you in a different order depending on if that school wants you. Once it is all over, they will give you an offer. So, it's not like a bunch of schools give you an offer and then you choose. It's more like you provide your wish list, and then, based on your score, the school will decide if they want you.

So, I went to a school that was at the bottom of my list. That school was not in Shanghai, but I was glad that I went there because you are limited if you always stick to the same places in life. So, I went to a different province that was about 200 miles away. In that province, people were different, and that gave me a change of perspective. I was just stunned there because I didn't expect people to be different from me. I decided never to think the way I used to think anymore and judge others because different environments can raise different feelings, personalities, and habits.

Plans to Study Abroad

My mom actually did not want me to study abroad. My dad said, "Whatever school he goes to in the United States will be better than the school he is at now." My mom finally agreed with my dad. So, I started thinking about how to study in the United States. When I was little, it never occurred to me that I would have the opportunity to study abroad. My family is not extremely poor, but we are also not extremely rich. We are okay. We are like in the middle. My parents sent me to a boarding school when I was younger, which is like a private school. The people that went there were kind of wealthy, and after they graduated, a lot of them chose to study abroad. My parent's friends all sent their children overseas for college. The United States is always the first option for

Chinese students studying abroad because it is the strongest country. Also, the school rankings there are excellent.

Challenges and Opportunities

Once you entered college, it wasn't very good for learning unless you went to a really good school. I went to an okay college. The learning environment was not very good, and things suddenly got loose. They let students play games all the time. They were partying and that sort of thing. The students weren't studying as much as we used to in high school. So, I felt like I was not learning anything. That is when I started thinking about doing something else. I remembered hearing other students in high school talking about going overseas to attend a university. I started having those thoughts more and more in college because I was not happy there. I wanted to study abroad so that I get a good education.

We had enough money for me to go abroad because my family had made some investments at the beginning of the 21st century, and most of them were housing investments. My parents sold our house, and that money together was enough to pay for me to study abroad. That's how I ended up coming to school here.

When I finally came to School A, I started as a business student. To be more specific, I began in business administration. Later, I changed my major to industrial design because my mentor, who is also Chinese, convinced me it would be a good fit. I am glad I did because I really liked it. I feel like it was challenging enough, and my professors taught me a lot.

I graduated last year with my bachelor's degree. It felt really good to be able to tell my

family I graduated. I am also pursuing my master's degree at School A. I want to get a

job here if I can, but I don't know if I will be able to stay in the United States. I hope so.

Portrait II: Chen

Chen was born in Shanxi Province, China, in 1997. As is the case with the majority of his

generation in China, he is an only child. Chen grew up in a suburb of a large city in China. Most

of his education was at a school with an excellent reputation and exceedingly high tuition. Chen

described the academic rigor of his school as very challenging.

His father is an entrepreneur, and Chen believes that he has done very well with his

business. He is not entirely sure because he and his father do not talk very much. Nevertheless,

he describes his relationship with his father as very good. Chen's mother is a homemaker. Many

generations live together in one house in China, so Chen's mother remains busy tending to their

extended family. His parents and grandparents anxiously await his return after he completes his

education in the United States.

Chen is now less than a year away from graduating with a bachelor's degree in

accounting from School B and plans to move to another university in the United States to earn

his master's degree–possibly Boston or Chicago. He desires to move to a bigger city to

experience life in a big city in the United States before returning to China.

Chen's Story

Life in China

I was born in a big city. It was a lot like other big cities in China. There were many

people everywhere you went. I remember the markets were so crowded with people when

we went to buy food. It did not bother me, however. I liked going to the market with my

mother. I liked seeing all the different kinds of meats and vegetables. There were so many! Sometimes I would get to pick something to eat that I had never tried before. Usually, it tasted good, but sometimes, I would choose something that tasted terrible. My mom would just laugh at me. The pollution was awful in my city, but it was home, and I liked it. I have good memories there.

Chen's Family

I would describe my family as a typical middle-class family in China. My father has a very decent income. He was an engineer, and then he took the risk of opening his own company. He is the sole owner of that company. Therefore, I think he can afford to pay for all of my school expenditures. My father spends much time on his business, but he spends less time on me. We don't speak a lot, and I think that is pretty normal for Chinese. Even though we do not talk much, I think we have a very good relationship. My mother used to work with my father, but now she is a housewife. She walks the dog and takes care of our family.

Education in China

My grade school and high school were good. It was a private school and had an excellent reputation in my hometown. The tuition was very high. The other high school in the area was a public school, and it was not as good as the private school. I do not know about the United States, but public versus private education can make a big difference in China. When I started high school, it was very hard, but I tried my best to study. As expected, our studies were very difficult in China. The teacher discouraged us from doing anything outside of studying. The course load was very heavy, and we had so much work to do. It was all we did, and that was miserable. One day, my friend told me that some American

high schools have many days off each year, and their schools get over very early by three

p.m. each day. In China, school does not often finish until nine o'clock at night.

Eventually, I came home for a break and did not go back because I was so tired. I did not

want to go to college there either. I knew I wanted to go somewhere different.

Taking the GaoKao

I finished high school in the public school in my hometown, and it was okay. However, I

knew that the college examination was going to be very hard. I studied a lot for it. In

China, if you want to go to college, you have to do a lot of work. You have to work hard

to get ready for the GaoKao because it is critical to your future as a Chinese student. I did

my examination just right, I think. My score was not good, but it was not bad. It was just

right. I knew I wanted to go to an American school anyway.

Going to an American School

I knew that my father could pay for all of my expenditures if I came to school in the

United States, so I talked to an agent that helped me come to School B. He said School B

is a good place for Chinese students to go because the people are friendly, and the work is

not too hard. When I came to School B, I was not sure what to do for my major. I knew

that I was not a science guy, and I do not particularly like mathematics. I would not say I

like chemistry or physics, either. Therefore, accounting was the major that I chose. I

thought that I could understand this very easily. Many Chinese students choose to study

in business school, so I chose accounting. Also, I can get some help from my Chinese

student friends. I soon discovered that school here is hard, too. It is just hard for different

reasons. It is not necessarily the schoolwork, but other things like the language and the

people. They are so different from what I was used to in China. Even so, School B is a nice place, so that makes it easier.

Plans for the Future

When I finish my bachelor's degree, I want to get a master's degree in an American school, but not School B. I would like to go to an American school in a bigger city so that I can still experience the American Dream.

After I finish my education, I hope to work in America for maybe one or two years to get some good experience. I do not want to make long-term plans, though. I think it is better to plan for about two years at a time right now. However, I believe that I will go back to China in the long run because my father and my family do not want me to live in America. They have said, "That's enough! What do you want to do? You should come back, and you should help your family because your family is in China." Family is very important for Chinese people, and they do not want me to be far away from them. So, I think I will go back home someday.

Eventually, I want to be an accountant in China or perhaps start a business. Maybe I will run a company in China. The most likely option is probably to be an accountant in China, though.

Portrait III: Wen

Wen is a 25-year-old Chinese international student who was born in Shanghai in 1995. He grew up in Yangzhou, China, where he went to school until college. Wen stated that he grew up in the city and had a normal upbringing for a middle-income family in China. For the most part, his childhood was uneventful. As he described, academics is the center of life for a boy in China. However, schooling was not his favorite thing to do. Wen preferred to play with friends

and family, but he had to practice the piano for one to two hours after school every day. Eventually, he convinced his parents to let him quit learning to play the piano. They agreed that it would not benefit the family since he was not very good at it. They decided that he should focus his efforts elsewhere.

After he finished high school, Wen went to a college near Shanghai, where he majored in engineering. He came to the United States in 2019 when his university in China offered to let him work on his graduate research at a "sister-university" (School C) in the southeastern United States. Wen is a materials engineer student who hopes to work for an American company in China after graduation.

Wen's Story

Life in China

I was born in Shanghai, China, and lived there until I was in grade four. I came from a middle-class family. My mom and dad are not rich, but we do okay. After grade four, we moved closer to some of my other family in Yangzhou, China. Yangzhou is a three-hour drive from Shanghai, so it's not that far. After we moved, I went to school in Yangzhou, and I made many friends there. I like Yangzhou, and it is very nice, but the water there is very dirty. There is a big lake north of Yangzhou, and it used to be very pretty, but now the pollution there is so bad. The water is dirty, and you cannot do anything there. It is sad. Much of China is like that because there are so many people there. Pollution is a real problem in big cities, especially.

School Years

When I was a young boy, school was just okay. It was much learning and studying. We learned English in school. English was a class we had to take in school. It is taught by

Chinese people, and their English is not very good, either. So, the English we learned was not too good.

School in China is very challenging. You spend many hours each day learning many things. We took the usual subjects like math, reading, and writing. I remember having to memorize a lot of writings and then reciting them. We had lots of homework that we had to do around lessons after school. I liked math and science the most. I wasn't a very good writer, but I tried my best. I enjoyed physical education (PE) and the time we would have on breaks to be with our friends. Most of the teachers back then were really nice, too.

I did okay in school. I made good grades, and when I took the GaoKao, I did pretty well. As a result of those good grades, I got my second choice for college, and it was outside of Shanghai. My grandma did not want me to go too far away to college, so I was happy to get a good school that was not too far from home. I was able to go home to see my family.

College and Plans to Leave

My time in college was good. I graduated and then immediately started on my master's degree. Not long after I started, my professor said that I should go to the States, so I applied. In January 2019, I got the news that I would study at School C in the United States. At first, I was kind of hesitant about leaving. Eventually, I thought that maybe it would be good to go somewhere else, and I had gotten tired of China's education. I had been studying on school campuses in China for 16 or 17 years. I felt like if I came to the States, although I would continue to learn, it would be a totally new environment.

Doubts and Fears

I was still not very sure that I wanted to come to School C, however. I had some financial

problems. Like I said, my parents are not rich. However, I told them about my struggles,

and they both wanted to support me financially. I was still unsure that I wanted to spend

all of that money studying in another country. Especially after I talked with my grandma,

who is not very well-educated. Grandma feels like America is very dangerous. Whenever

we spoke of America or Japan, my grandma would say they were bad places and not safe

for people from China. Her mind goes back to World War II, and she is reminded of

nuclear weapons. She told me it is not safe to go abroad, especially to go to the United

States.

Eventually, I did choose to come to School C, and my grandma still cannot understand.

She's always pushing me to go back as soon as possible. After one year, my grandma

wants me to come home. So, when I finish my work here, I will go back to make my

family happy. My family's happiness is important, as it is to most Chinese people.

Enlightenment in the United States

In China, I did get some inspirations and enlightenment. Still, I thought if there is even

more for me outside China, I should push myself to pursue this in another cultural

environment. I thought that maybe I could get some enlightenment by experiences with

things in the States. I think I have changed a great amount since coming to the States, and

it is good. I feel like I have gained so much enlightenment here about myself and other

people.

Apprehension to Return to China

I worry about going back to China, though, since I do not have much time left here. I am

not sure I will be able to go back to my old ways of thinking and living. In China, you

have to sacrifice part of yourself to meet other's expectations or requirements. It is very

different from life in the States. I worry that I might not be able to sacrifice as I did

before. I don't mean my family. Of course, I will take care of my family, but the way you

have to give up yourself for others like your community, I don't know if I will do that

like before.

Since I came to School C, people are so different here, and the lifestyle is so slow, and I

have had time to sit down and try to figure out our differences. So, I will go back to

China, a different person.

Plans for the Future

When I get back to China, I want to work for an American company in Shanghai. I

especially like Tesla or GE. I like American technological companies, including Apple.

Steve Jobs is like my idol! I think I want to be like him and do great things in the future

with my engineering.

I think I have a good chance of working for one of these companies in China since I have

overseas experience. Also, my English has improved since I came to the States to study. I

really want to use my skills in my country. I want to go back and help my family and my

country, and that is good. Chinese people make helping family and improving the country

a priority so that life gets better for everyone, and that is what I want to do when I

graduate. I will miss my time here, though. I may want to come back some day if the

government will let me. Who knows what will happen?

Emergent Themes

The purpose of this narrative study is to understand Chinese international students'

perceptions of the factors, if any, that may lead to acculturative stress while attending a four-year

public university in the southeastern United States. In the analysis process, I identified four themes and thirteen subthemes from the participants' narratives that addressed this study's purpose. The four major themes are (1) university experiences, (2) cultural differences, (3) conditions in the United States, and (4) language issues. The thirteen subthemes are (1a) treatment of Chinese students, (1b) recruitment, (1c) relationships with faculty, (2a) cultural hierarchy, (2b) exposure to American culture, (2c) difficulties connecting, (3a) COVID-19, (3b) drugs and crime, (3c) racism, (3d) governmental policies, (4a) language fears and Chinese honor, (4b) differences in syntax, and (4c) American reactions. These themes are listed in Figure 3.

The subsequent sections present each of the major themes, which I derived from the thematic analysis of the participants' narratives in relationship to the research question. These themes originated from the thematic analysis and coding procedures of the life story narratives. These themes are not listed in order of value or magnitude. Rather, they are intertwined closely to one another among the participants' experiences of acculturation.

Figure 3

Emergent Themes From Participants' Perceptions

Theme #1 **University Experiences**	(1a) Treatment of Chinese Students (1b) Recruitment (1c) Relationships with Faculty
Theme #2 **Cultural Differences**	(2a) Cultural Hierarchy (2b) Exposure to American Culture (2c) Difficulties Connecting
Theme #3 **Conditions in the United States**	(3a) Divergent Reactions to the Pandemic (3b) Drugs and Crime (3c) Racism (3d) Governmental Policies
Theme #4 **Language Challenges**	(4a) Language Fears and Chinese Honor (4b) Differences in Syntax (4c) American Reactions

Note. Themes that were factors which cause acculturative stress among the participants.

Theme 1: University Experiences

Theme #1 relates to university experiences. This theme is loosely defined as the participants' experiences on campus and within the university setting within the southeastern United States. The university experiences theme includes three subthemes: (1a) treatment of Chinese students, (1b) recruitment, and (1c) relationships with faculty. Figure 4 illustrates this them and its subthemes.

Figure 4

Theme #1: University Experiences

Given the study's scope, it is appropriate that the participants discussed their on-campus experiences the most. Attending academic programs is their reason for being in the United States. Chinese international students are most affected by their campus experiences, given the amount of time spent there. The three universities that the participants attended varied in size, yet each participant described their school as a small university in a small college town. For example, Wen stated:

> I received offers from schools in five different states, but I went with School C because it
>
> is located in what I would call a small town. My father told me that if you live in a big
>
> city like New York or Chicago, you have to take care of yourself. He said those places in
>
> the United States are more dangerous than living in a small town. So, I just want to live in
>
> a small town where it is safer for Chinese students. Also, I feel like I can get to know
>
> people in a small town.

October described his school as "very small" compared to the university in Shanghai that he initially attended, even though the size difference is less than 2,000 students. In a follow-up interview, October explained that School A felt smaller because it is in a smaller city, and the pace of life is much slower.

When asked about their overall experiences in the southeastern United States, all three participants felt that the region provided a more enjoyable experience than other areas of the

country. Wen stated, "School C offers a lot of hospitality. More than other schools in the States. I have friends who go to other places in the States, and they didn't have a good experience like I did. I'm glad I came here." October echoed this perspective, "Well, I haven't gone to school at other places, but people I know say that my experience is better than their experience in places like California where they go."

Subtheme 1A: Treatment of Chinese Students

Participants' perceptions of how domestic students and faculty treat Chinese students emerged as a subtheme within the university experience. All three participants were positive in their overall assessment of Chinese students' general treatment at their campus.

It is noteworthy that each participant felt their time in the southeastern United States helped with acculturation because of the overwhelming hospitality experienced while living there. For example, Wen stated, "Everyone here is so nice and polite. People are friendlier here than in China. It has made it easier to get to know people. I can try to talk to people here, and everyone is friendly." When asked if he remembered any negative experiences he had with domestic students or others in the community since arriving in the southeastern United States, October stated that he could not remember any prejudice or bad feelings from anyone at school or elsewhere. He said of living in the southeastern United States:

> At other schools, they have a lot of unfriendly stuff happen to them. I would say that most people here are very friendly. The people at School A are nice, so I didn't experience any racism or prejudice here. Only on the internet, but people on the internet can be mean. It's usually someone mocking my poor English on the internet. But here at School A, the people have been so nice and friendly to me. I guess there are people who don't speak to me but not really any prejudice or people being hateful to me. I have heard

people in the stores not be very polite, like the workers in the stores can be rude, but it's

not really directed at me. Most people are nice, though.

The participants' generally positive experiences may have been tied to the regional

culture of the southeastern United States. However, a deeper discussion revealed that this was

not always the case.

October cited several instances in which he experienced what can only be expressed as

prejudice toward him and other Chinese students in his industrial design department. October

described a final exam in a class. The class size was "small, about 20 or 25 students," but six

faculty members walked around the room. October questioned why there were so many teachers

in the room and was told, "It's just to make sure no one cheats." October said the reason this

bothered him was that the class was almost entirely Chinese students. He did not think so many

teachers would have been there if the students were not mostly Chinese. "That made me feel

targeted. It made me feel uncomfortable." October reported additional incidents of targeting

Chinese students. He cited an email as an example: "Sending emails specifically to students

telling you not to cheat kind of feels offensive to me, the way School A did that. They sent it to

all the Chinese students in my department."

The participants in this study felt the broad accusation that Chinese students tend to cheat

was offensive and inaccurate. October stated:

There's a lot of people saying Chinese or Asian students really like cheating. They don't

understand what plagiarism is. But to be honest, I know many students that are studying

very hard. They won't do such things because cheating is not going to benefit anyone. So,

they don't do it, but we just have to take those prejudices from other students. They won't

say it, but sometimes they would look at you like you obviously cheated if you got a good grade.

Participants described how people make assumptions about Chinese students in other areas. Wen described an incident in which a toilet was soiled in the building where he attended most of his classes. The head of the department called a meeting to address the problem. Wen described what happened next:

Clark, the department head, is there, and he's talking about these things. I don't think he did it on purpose, but he mentioned, "Could it be a Chinese student doing that 'cause Chinese students poop differently?" Those were his words.

Wen said the incident made him feel embarrassed and angry, but he did not talk to anyone about it. He said he was afraid to complain because it might make the head of the department angry. Reflecting on the incident, he said he wishes he had said something so that other Chinese students would not have to experience something like that again.

A similar incident happened to Chen, who received an email from the housing department explaining how to use a shower curtain correctly. The housing authority found the floor wet in several dorm bathrooms. Chen explained that the email was directed only to Chinese students:

According to School B, they sometimes find when they check the floor that it's wet and get a complaint about it. And they make assumptions, like a Chinese student doesn't know how to use a shower curtain. Well, it's not a high-tech thing! Chinese people know. We also have shower curtains back home. You should think about why they do that. It's not because they don't know how. It is more like they don't care or like they're just

trying to do a bad thing. Why are you trying to apply that to all the Chinese students by

sending that email to everyone? I feel like that's not acceptable. That's not respectful.

It is important to note that the participants considered these situations as isolated

incidents, and no one felt that their university had a problem with prejudice toward Chinese

students. October drew the distinction between prejudice and a lack of understanding of Chinese

culture or students. He also felt the reciprocal could be true: that Chinese students are also guilty

of not understanding domestic students.

Subtheme 1B: Recruitment

October's School A adopted a program to increase international students' recruitment and

help them acclimate to their new surroundings using an outside organization. This organization

referred to in this study as Global A is not part of the university but works for the university to

recruit international students, oversee the transfer process, and then guide students through their

first year of school. International students are assigned an advisor that works for the outside

organization. This person regularly meets the students to help them settle in housing, discuss

their classes, and schedule mandatory language classes. October stated that he appreciated the

efforts of the advisor and the purpose behind the program. However, he had concerns and said:

I think the structure is good, but the problem with the program is that they tried to recruit

more and more students later on. The majority of them are Chinese, and the problem is

that they come here, but they are not enrolled in School A. They are enrolled in this

outside program, and they have to pass those classes in order to get into School A. At

first, they are not associated with School A. Then, they recruit more and more Chinese

students who are not ready with their English or cannot do the schoolwork. So, I think

they should do a better job of recruiting. They should be the filter for Chinese students and not allow everyone in just for money.

October explained that once the students improved their English and entered School A, the experience is usually positive. He felt that many of the Chinese students that Global A recruited did not work as diligently as they should because they have wealthy parents. The students think they can pay their way to a degree. October felt that it shows in the classroom because they do not pay attention or attempt to cheat and that this could lead to negative perceptions about all Chinese students. The consequence of students cheating was October's greatest worry, along with his concern for fellow Chinese students' welfare and success. It is important to note that there was only a limited discussion of these organizations' services and programs to support Chinese students.

Subtheme 1C: Relationships With Faculty

The participants' opinions of the faculty on their campuses and their experiences within the classroom and interactions with faculty were generally positive. While the participants remembered at least a few negative experiences with professors, each one stated that the negative experiences were minuscule in comparison.

Chen described his experiences with professors at School B as beneficial and amiable. He contrasts his experiences with faculty in the United States and China.

> My professors really helped me a lot. And every time I had a problem, I emailed them for help. They replied to me very quickly, and they just helped me a lot. All of them have been friendly. I can see my professors. In China, my professors didn't help you off-campus. Like, in America, if I had a question, even though it's not a class day and I email my professor, they replied to me very quickly. Professors are not so helpful in China.

Asked about any negative experiences with his professors, Chen recalled one class in which the professor did not teach effectively, and Chen got an "easy A" for his grade. He considered this a negative experience as the professor "just showed up and just lectured and went away. He didn't teach anything." Chen felt that the professor did not care about teaching any of the students in the class. He compared this professor to many of the professors in China.

Wen's experiences were similar to Chen's. He stated that most of his professors in the engineering department were from China and that other faculty and students in his engineering program are from Asian countries. Accordingly, they mirrored Chinese teaching traditions. Wen indicated that his first professor was more concerned about his research than helping him:

He spent a lot of time working on his own research, so I had to learn by watching YouTube videos and using the internet to help me. But he was busy taking part in conferences with other guys from their industry to make his research more accurate instead of mine, but he was the head of the department.

However, Wen praised his other professors and stated that they were consistently available whenever he needed help:

My professors are always available every time I have a problem. I can set up a meeting one day ahead and meet with them. My current professor is even available every day except Sunday morning worship time. I can email him a question about my work, and he will respond right away. It doesn't seem to bother him, and he always tells me it's no problem. That makes me feel like he cares about Chinese students, too.

Surprisingly, the participants only briefly mentioned their experiences with full-time academic advisors. When asked about their educational experiences, they tended to gravitate toward their interactions with professors. Chen noted that he needed to meet with his advisor to

discuss his plan for graduating, but he did not describe the relationship as one that helped him with his acculturative process. The other participants had nothing to share about the relationship they had with their academic advisors. They described them as merely people who helped them register for classes. Table 4 illustrates a sampling of participant quotes on the topic of university experiences.

Table 4

Illustrative Quotes: University Experiences

Participant	Illustrative Quote
October	I actually think the university is doing pretty well. We have an international program that matches international students with domestic students and wants them to be friends. They go out like twice a week, and if you like each other, you maintain your friendship, and if not, no pressure. Also, the campus needs to hold international stuff on campus like on the lawn area. Overall, my experience here has been good. But I always think there is more room for improvement.
Chen	American college is really difficult. You have to study really hard. This is kind of different than China. I'm not saying Chinese colleges are no good. But on average, American diplomas are more challenging to obtain. I have to work a lot more here than in China.
Wen	The reason why I chose engineering is because I want to work hard to benefit my country. In the States, I don't think the students here feel like they need to sacrifice to help their country. Here, it's an individual-centered society, and people just choose a major for their self-interest. My roommates often change their majors because they don't like it. Why? They don't want to work for it. Engineering is too hard, and they don't want to work for it. They want to do what they enjoy. They don't want to sacrifice themselves for others.

Theme 2: Cultural Differences

Theme #2 is related to cultural differences between the participants' home country of China and the United States. I extracted three subthemes under the cultural differences theme: (2a) cultural hierarchy, (2b) exposure to American culture, and (2c) difficulties connecting.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the differences between these two countries are profound. Theme 2 discusses the participants' perceptions and experiences of these cultural differences. Figure 5 illustrates the three subthemes of Theme 2.

Figure 5

Theme #2: Cultural Differences

Theme #2
Cultural Differences

(2A) Cultural Hierarchy
(2B) Exposure to American Culture
(2C) Difficulties Connecting
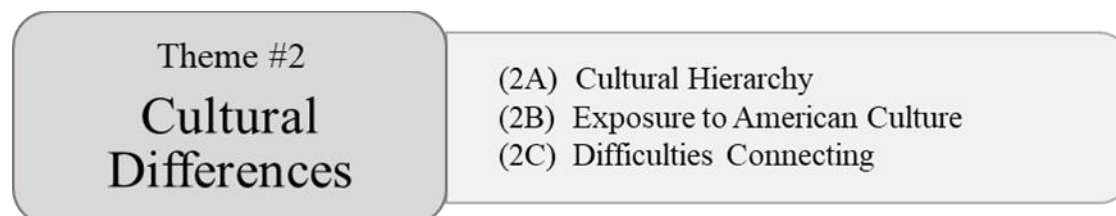
October, Chen, and Wen discussed differences in the cultures of China and the United States, which have influenced their experiences. The three participants frequently mentioned dissimilarities between the two countries as a possible stressor during their acculturation. Wen mentioned the stress he felt from these differences when talking about transportation.

> Things like traveling are a challenge in a different culture. It was hard to go anywhere because it could take up to 20 minutes from across the campus. Also, Uber is expensive, but we didn't have Uber back then. We only had a taxi service, which had an exciting number. It had many fours in it, which in Chinese culture, the number 4 means death. So, a taxi company makes their phone number with so many deaths. That's not a good thing for the Chinese! It made it easy to remember but not good for business. It isn't like a big city here. You have to make an appointment to use a taxi. And that requires a lot of preparation time. So, if you want to go somewhere, you need to plan ahead.

Even with additional tools for transportation, a lack of a larger social network and understanding of the area can be a challenge to navigate simple tasks.

So, I was happy when I got a bike, but that could be a challenge, too. If I wanted to go to the grocery store, I only had one backpack. So, I would get a small jug of milk and a little bit of frozen food, and then my pack was full already. Then I had to ride back. And in the summer, it is really, really hot here. And that is just going to the store. I didn't know anyone I could ask to take me to the market, and I didn't want to bother anybody anyway. So, even little things like going somewhere are hard when you don't know people in an unfamiliar place.

October acknowledged the gap between cultures when speaking about his perceptions of Americans:

So, we [Chinese people] actually know the United States pretty well. We learn about the U.S. structure: the governmental system, the democracy, the senators, all those kinds of things in textbooks. We also watch American TV shows. We watch online. There are some on the TV, but usually, on the TV it's not in English – it's translated. But we get involved in American culture, in American influence back in China. So, for me, I personally really admired the United States before I came. But once I got here, the differences were easy to see. Little things that you don't think about are even a challenge. Like the light switches here are totally different than the ones we had in China. Little things like that are different.

October said that he was not entirely surprised by the differences, but it was explicit, nevertheless. Hofstede (2011) addressed these cultural differences between China and the United States. These differences are discussed in Chapter 3 and will be addressed in the next chapter, as well. However, among the greatest differences were power distance, individualism, uncertainty

avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence (Hofstede, 2011). This knowledge informs the discussion of cultural differences.

It is prudent to note that the participants frequently indicated an appreciation for the differences between the two cultures and did not see the dissimilarities as altogether unfavorable. Examples of these differences were recorded across participant interviews and are presented in Appendix H.

Subtheme 2A: Cultural Hierarchy

The first subtheme that I identified under the cultural differences theme was the concept of cultural hierarchy. As Chen explained, Confucian tradition drives a hierarchy that exists in Chinese culture:

> In some Asian countries and especially China, there's a hierarchy, like a ladder. If you are on a lower level, you have to be submissive to a higher level. This culture in China is different from other cultures. Your parents and your relatives want you to get married early and do your duty. They really want you to get married and to have children.

Chen identifies the source of this pressure to get married and have children:

> The Chinese culture expects you to be submissive about that. I don't follow that rule right now because I am here, so they worry if I will marry. But people here don't have to do that. They party and hang out with friends. But in China, your family urges you to get married early and to have children. You have this kind of pressure in China. If you are older than 25 or 26, you have to get married, or your family is disgraced. They are anxious and always wonder what is wrong with you. My mom says I want my grandchildren! So, I have this pressure to give my parents grandchildren soon.

Chen went on to describe his family dynamic. He stated:

> In China, your family can all be in the same house. Your parents live with you and your grandparents. That's three generations that live together. If you get married, you Americans always leave your family to live with your wife and start your small family. But in China, three generations live together in one house, that's a big family.

The familial bonds reflect ideals about individualism. October shared:

> Americans are proud to be individuals and stand out. We don't think it's so important to be unique. That is just one way we are different from Americans who try to be individuals. Talking about people, it took a while to get used to the difference. I still struggle with thinking that people do and say things here because they were taught to think of themselves as independent. They were raised in a culture where people are told to be different from everybody else.

Wen also noted the dimension of individualism versus collectivism in his description of the factors behind Chinese and American students' career choices. He stated:

> I think America is the richest of the top global countries, economically. People here, they don't see the importance of making the country better with science and engineering. It is different in China. Many people choose engineering and other sciences because they think it helps the country in the long run. It's different in China than in the States. Take me, for example. I chose an engineering major. It is why I came to school here. I came to the university for that reason. I want to help my country. I sacrificed myself for the benefit of my country, China. Our countries are different that way. Here you do something because it sounds good to you or maybe it makes you happy. I want to be an engineer because it will help my country and other generations.

Wen continued the description of the conflict between individual and community in this way:

> In China, when you say something controversial, you have to consider other people's feelings first. I mean, you have to care about other people's feelings first. China is like a collective country. Society is not about individuals. We believe you have to give up your personal or individual benefits to meet the group's requirements. And sometimes you just forget who you are and what you really want. You are sacrificing yourself to meet the other guy's needs. Not like in the States where everybody is an individual.

Wen contrasted the Chinese culture of community with the individualistic culture of the United States:

> Everything is about the individual, and then maybe you think of other people afterward. And I feel like that's a very natural way to consider yourself as first, and then if we can care about other people, we do it. That's how people here in the States are, and it makes sense to me.

> But in China, you have to sacrifice part of yourself to meet other's expectations or requirements. I don't think that it is wrong for people in China to behave this way. I will make this sacrifice for my family and my country when I go home. I just think that for me, I have changed, and now I see things differently. I see them more like people here in the States.

The anxiety that Wen expressed about his exposure to American culture and individualism reflects his perception of how he has changed since coming to the United States. He believed that learning western ways of thinking has made him more enlightened. However, this perceived growth also causes him stress as he thinks about returning to China.

Subtheme 2B: Exposure to American Culture

Exposure to American culture was a subtheme I developed from the participants' narratives that addresses the effect of their exposure to the culture in the United States. Wen described concern about going back to China and his old ways after becoming "enlightened" in the United States. This internal analysis of American culture's impact represents the second subtheme within the cultural differences theme, exposure to American culture. Wen explained:

I'm going to worry about going back to China. I feel like, even though I'm just realizing what kind of stuff I want to do right now, society in China is the relationship between the individual and the group, and it is hard. You can realize who you are in the United States because people just care about the individual and respect those who have their own opinions. But I feel like the longer I stay there in China, the longer I will kind of lose my mind. Even right now, I worry that I am self-aware. I'm not sure if in two years, what idea or what my thoughts will be at that time after I go back. Will I still fit in there?

Wen shared a story of friends who experienced similar feelings and how it affected him:

Yesterday, I talked to my friend, one of my Chinese friends. He's in China right now. I told him about my worries about going back to China. He has other friends who went to other countries to study and come back to China as different people. He said they are fine now, but I wonder if I will be the same. I worry I won't be able to do my part to help. But my family worries, too. So, it is time for me to sacrifice for my family and head back to China. I will make my parents happy by going back and helping support the family. I really like it here, but I will go home soon to help my family not worry and comfort them.

Wen appreciates the differences he has experienced in the two cultures. However, he acknowledged that these differences cause him stress because of the heightened cultural expectations placed on him.

Chen articulated the differences between different international students and this level of internal conflict based on the country of origin:

I think England is closer to America. I think culture and race are closer between England and America than the culture of China. China is closer to Japan or South Korea. It is tough for a student from China if you are in America, but if you are from England, you don't have any problems in American culture. It is harder for people from China.

The participants seem to value the opportunity to experience American culture, but there appear to be equal stressors reflecting their eventual return to China after these experiences.

Subtheme 2C: Difficulties Connecting

The third subtheme of the major theme culture differences is difficulties connecting. October mentioned that he had a difficult time connecting with domestic students because of cultural differences. He stated that it has been difficult to relate to American students because of dissimilarities in backgrounds. October stated:

It is hard to break barriers that are there between Chinese and Americans. It is hard because of the differences in things like what we like and do not like. It is easier to just hang out with people who understand you, but that does not mean that it is the best way. Sometimes it is good to talk with people who are not like you, but that scares people. For Chinese people, talking to someone from another culture who may think you are strange can be really scary. So, it is just easier to stay with your own kind.

October also stated that it was hard to make friends with such a busy academic schedule. Specifically, he said:

Monday through Thursday, I would just go to the library and do my reading and review everything I learned today, and Friday was volleyball. Saturday and Sunday, I could play video games. And then I would start over again on Monday. So, it was a very full schedule. That doesn't leave much time to meet people.

When October found time to meet with other students, their interests were different from his own. He found the pastimes of typical American college students either confusing or counter to his beliefs. He said:

Also, I'm not really a bar person. I don't go to the bars to make friends. Most Americans go to bars to meet people and have fun. But I don't drink, and I don't like the noise or that kind of situation. Also, I don't really have any outdoor interests. The thing that we usually go out to do in China, we don't have it here until recently. We found a karaoke. My Asian friends and I go there and sing a lot. But I never see many white American friends there. They all go to bars.

It is important to note that October differentiated between his Asian friends and white American friends. The barriers to inclusion in the American friend group may not be as transparent to his domestic peers. He continued:

At the beginning of the summer semester, we had a GroupMe of all the students, and we also have a GroupMe of some relatively close American friends. Sometimes they invited us to go to the bar, and I remember one time I really wanted to go. I wanted the experience. The people who invited me mentioned the name of the bar, but I couldn't find it on Google Maps. So, I asked if anyone could give me a specific location. I guess

they were in the bar and having fun, and they missed that. I kept waiting for the address

so I would know where to go. Also, I didn't have a vehicle back then. So, it was hard for

me to go anywhere except on campus. So, I just stayed home.

October was not the only participant to address this subtheme. Wen felt that cultural

differences impacted developing relationships based on different cultural norms. He stated:

From what I have seen, people in the States like to have a good time. They like to be chill

and have fun. They are much more chill than the Chinese. Chinese people are more

focused on getting a degree 'cause there's all this pressure from family, and you want to

do good for your country. But people in the States, they don't care about those things as

much. They do not get as stressed out as Chinese people do. I think people from China

worry too much because I see a different way, like my American friends.

Chen explained that he chose to avoid relationships with most domestic students because

he feared cultural differences would cause him to lose face. He elaborated:

I usually just hang out by myself. I like to work out and play video games and things like

that. I don't usually do things with American students because I don't think my English is

good enough for that. I might say the wrong thing and embarrass myself. I don't want to

look foolish or make someone think less of Chinese students because I am not very good

at making conversation.

If I do hang out with someone, it is usually one of my Chinese friends. I don't have to

worry about losing face with them because we understand each other. So, I just do things

with people like that. Some of my Chinese friends are good at making relationships with

American people, but I'm not very good at it. It doesn't bother me though.

Table 5 illustrates a sampling of participant quotes on the topic of cultural differences.

Table 5

Illustrative Quotes: Cultural Differences

Participant	Illustrative Quote
October	Chinese people don't mind talking about grades. It's a cultural difference. Like here in the United States, teachers will say that they will send your grade in an email. In China, your teacher stands at the front of the class and say, Li, you got a 98, Chan, you got a 74, and so on. So, everyone knows what grade everyone else got. It's different.
	I believe that having the experiences will get you there. But if you're just stuck in your dormitory looking at your computer, you're not actually going to learn about this culture. Chinese students need to expand their experiences. You can go to the supermarket and talk to the cashier or the shop assistant. You can go to the theatre more and watch more movies with no subtitles and be forced to understand more and more when you watch a lot of movies. If you are struggling to adjust, I think you should make an effort to help yourself. Getting transportation is how I become more involved in this society. We call Americans the country on four wheels.
Chen	I also feel somewhat that American people are really rich. I think because of their cars, their looks; they're really rich. That is different from so many Chinese people. The Chinese people who are rich don't want everyone to know. They try to keep it hidden to not embarrass others or make them feel shamed. However, American people who are rich want everyone to see it. Their cars, clothes, houses, and all their stuff says hey I am rich. I don't think it is wrong to be that way, it's just different from the way people in China think.
Wen	In China, when you say something controversial, you have to consider other people's feelings first. I mean, you have to care about other people's feelings first. China is like a collective country. The society is not about individuals. We believe you have to give up your personal or individual benefits to meet the group's requirements. And sometimes you just forget who you are and what you really want. You are sacrificing yourself to meet the other guy's needs. Not like in the States, where everybody is an individual. Everything is about the individual, and then maybe you think of other people afterwards. And I feel like that's a very natural way to consider yourself as first, and then if we have the ability to care about other people, we do it. That's how people here in the States are, and it makes sense to me. But in China, you have to sacrifice part of yourself to meet other's expectations or requirements.

Theme 3: Conditions in the United States

The third theme relates to conditions in the United States. The four subthemes that I extracted from the participants' narratives are illustrated in Figure 6. These subthemes are (3a) divergent reactions to the pandemic, (3b) drugs and crime, (3c) racism, and (3d) govermental policies. These four subthemes are presented in this section.

Figure 6

Theme #3: Conditions in the United States

Theme #3
Conditions in the U.S.

(3A) Divergent Reactions to the Pandemic
(3B) Drugs and Crime
(3C) Racism
(3D) Governmental Policies
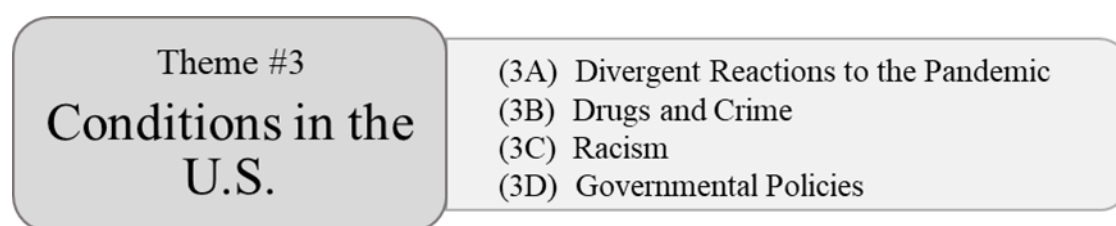
The third theme that emerged from the data was the participants' concerns about current conditions in the United States. The participants articulated four subthemes: divergent reactions to the pandemic, experiences with drugs and crime, concerns about racism, and U.S. government policies toward the Chinese. This category broadly includes factors considered outside the structure of the universities each attend.

Subtheme 3A: Divergent Reactions to the Pandemic

The first subtheme under the cultural differences theme addresses divergent reactions to the pandemic. Although I addressed COVID-19 earlier in the context of this chapter, it is worth noting that all three participants discussed the handling of the pandemic. This subtheme focuses not on the virus but on the contrasting ways China and the United States have responded to the pandemic.

The global pandemic of COVID-19 that struck in 2020 presented a shift across the world and higher education. With interviews taking place within the fall of 2020, this was of particular interest to the participants. Chen reflected:

I do feel like there are some downsides to American culture. Like maybe people, especially right now with COVID-19, people sometimes care too much about themselves and not enough about the others. Americans don't care enough for others, especially right now. In downtown, there are so many college kids just hanging out there without wearing their mask. I feel like that's kind of the downside of their mentality. They just think too much about themselves, kind of selfish. That's one of the downsides of people in the States, in my opinion. So right now, my friend, my family, and my friends can go outside in China. They can go outside without wearing a face mask. That started this past May, probably in Shanghai. No need to wear them there.

Chen felt that the group orientation of Asian cultures has normalized mask wearing and preventative measures from past outbreaks. The way China and other Asian countries have reacted to the pandemic is in stark contrast to the United States' response.

Wen also felt Americans are handling the pandemic very differently than Chinese people. He could not understand why Americans do not work together to get rid of the virus and comply with government mandates, stating:

In the States, I see no worry about their physical health. I live with the American guy, and he works as a bouncer guy in the bar, and every time he comes home, I feel like I have to clean the stuff we share. Every time I go outside walking on campus, I have to wear this mask and can't go to places or restaurants to dine. I feel like that's really affected my life a lot. But in China, it's way better. The government can block the whole city of

Chongqing, and the virus just is gone. They solved the problem. So, it's really hard here with the way people handle COVID-19. My life quality is really affected by this a lot.

Wen contrasted the Chinese response to government efforts to stop the pandemic with the way people in the United States reacted to their government's actions.

However, I don't think people will listen to the government. 'Cause my friends, most of my American friends, they think the government wants to suck their blood! Government is their enemy. They believe they have to protect themselves and their rights. They don't trust the government, let alone the government's guidelines or advice for people to wear a face mask. They just think their rights are more important than their health. They feel like they are strong enough, and their immune system is strong enough for them to fight against the virus. I feel that this will continue to be a problem in the States, at least until there is a vaccine to come out. I feel like the COVID-19 will continue to be a problem here. It won't get better here.

Besides the pandemic's effects on the participants, October, Chen, and Wen also listed drugs and crime as stressors that they have experienced on their campuses.

Subtheme 3B: Drugs and Crime

The participants mentioned illegal activities that had triggered feelings of fear. This also creates assumptions about the overall safety of the United States when viewed through Chinese norms. Wen and Chen both inferred feeling apprehensive about their exposure to drugs and crime, drawing parallels to other types of Americans. Wen described, "Another kind of group of American guys, specifically those who don't believe in God. They don't believe in the religion stuff, and they spare no effort to get wired like drugs, sex, and alcohol." Wen continued, "I feel like this is a group of Americans who want to do dangerous stuff. Like the ones that don't

believe in God, try their best to have fun. I don't get why." Wen was able to distinguish this group and address the impact the behavior could have on Chinese students. He shared:

> Just like every coin has two sides, they do a lot of dangerous drugs, very illegal stuff. That's the red line I won't touch, and it makes me nervous about being around that stuff, but the alcohol I do try. But I would say to new Chinese students, be prepared to live in a very wild world. There is more freedom over here, but there are more dangers here, too, such as drugs. It's much easier to get into touch with them compared to China.

Chen's personal experiences led to changes in his own living arrangement.

> I was living with an American last year, and he was my roommate. He was a good man, but he used drugs. So, I just moved out. He's a good man, but he smoked drugs. I didn't like that. I did not want to be around it. Smoking drugs in China is a felony. You will be put in jail. I don't smoke drugs, and my mom told me, just don't smoke.

These experiences can lead to Chinese assumptions about the United States as a dangerous place. October addressed his view of the dangers in the United States this way:

> I think most people, including my family, like Americans. They don't hate Americans. Most people think America is a developed country and a very rich country, but they also think that America is a place that's not safe. Just before I left China, my family told me to take care of myself. Take care of myself, stay away from guns, and stay away from drugs. Because I think drugs are very common here. We have drugs that are very easy to get in America.

October contrasted drug use in the United States with drug use in China and said:

> You will make your life worse if you smoke drugs in China. You go to jail. They will have you put into jail for more than 10 years, I think. In China, drugs are a felony, as I

said, and I see a lot of young people, they smoke drugs. It has really surprised me because I have seen a lot of young people like my age, just the same as my age, they smoke drugs. I don't think that this is a crazy place for your freedom. It's your right to smoke drugs, but that is a really addictive thing. They spend a lot of money on drugs. That doesn't make sense to harm your body. I can't understand them.

During interviews, Chen and Wen both mentioned a fear for their safety. Both had a first-hand experience with drugs and crime on- and off-campus, causing feelings of fear and anxiety. Chen stated:

I had a neighbor. He likes to smoke drugs, and he sold a lot of drugs to my roommate. He smoked drugs in his room every day. That smell is very pungent, and I didn't like it. Honestly, he's very nice. He was a very good guy, he treated me very friendly, but I didn't know what to say. The drugs make me scared, and it's too common here. I haven't met any discrimination or anything; it's the drugs and guns that scare me.

As Chen mentioned, the concerns extend beyond drugs and alcohol to firearms. Wen revealed:

People are friendly here, but sometimes I'm afraid of a gunshot. Because in China, we don't have guns. I just received an email from campus security, and they told me there's a gunshot, that something happened. It made me scared, so I honestly think it's a problem here. Because we don't have guns, and I don't really need to worry about guns in China. About a month ago, I was in my room, and there were some gunshots outside of my current location. It sounded so close and very scary. That was a late night, and I just heard someone fire gunshots near me. That time made me not feel safe here at School C.

The contrast of legal and illegal activities in the United States with the punishments and lack of accessibility seems to be a stressor for the participants.

Subtheme 3C: Racism

The context of conducting this study in 2020 presented opportunities for these international students to comment on the social and political unrest within the United States and to be a part of the national conversation. Accordingly, another theme that emerged as a stressor for the participants in this study was race relations. Wen voiced concerns about racism in the United States, although he did not have personal experiences of racism directed toward him. News reports of rioting and social injustice in the United States were concerns. He shared a general uneasiness with other Chinese students about the uncertainty of what might happen in his city and how it might affect him.

> I think politics and the death of George Floyd in Minnesota really gave me a chance to think deeper about the States and China's political system. Before that sad story happened, I feel like U.S.A. politics were the best. Before that, I thought that democracy was the best. But you know? Black people, I think they feel like the door is closed to them a lot of the time. There's kind of a door, just kind of rules that exist. There is a different set of rules for some people.
>
> The rioting and things that are going on right now in the United States are things that make me fearful, but I think they are things that are happening because so many people are angry about racism. I haven't seen it in my city, but I know it is happening in other cities in the States. These are scary times for everybody.

Chen was able to articulate how his position as an outsider impacted his view of the issue:

> It's not as good as it looks from the outside for me as a foreigner. I worry about what will happen with race and riots in this place, but I know it has to happen for things to get better. People have to understand each other, all people. I don't want the rioting, but I

want people to listen to each other and learn how to live together. I come from another

country, and there are many things I do not understand, but I do know that since there are

so many people who are different here, it can be hard for them to live together in peace.

In China, everyone is the same, so it's not so hard.

October felt that racism causes many Americans to disagree. He said:

I think racism is a big divider in this country. People hate others because they are

different. It's a scary time to be in America, but I hope things get better between people

who disagree because of their skin color. This makes no sense to me!

Subtheme 3D: Governmental Policies

Government policies are grouped into the final subtheme of conditions in the United

States. The Trump administration placed a heightened focus on Chinese relations. This fact has

led to strained relations between the two countries with potentially negative consequences for

Chinese international students. As previously described, Chinese international students are

mostly united in their concern about the American government's intentions for them. Chen

explained this uncertainty:

I think a lot of students from China are scared that someone will show up and say, "You

have to leave now." I'm not sure if the government will do that, but it's a real fear for

many of us because we don't know what will happen. I hope it doesn't happen. I know

the government said that if you take all online classes you would have to leave. Then they

came back and said that we would not have to leave. That's scary, because what if they

change their minds again? The government might say we have to leave because of

COVID. There are a lot of things we don't know right now.

Like many Chinese international students, the participants had varying levels of concern about the possibility of having to leave the United States. Wen directly described his feelings about the U.S. government's position toward the Chinese government, specifically whether the Chinese are a threat. He stated:

I think Trump does not like the Chinese government. I think he doesn't trust the government. I understand. The Chinese government talks about becoming a bigger superpower than the United States. They want to take business to China, and that makes people angry or afraid. That makes Trump and other people feel threatened. Sometimes people treat all Chinese like we are here to cause trouble. I want to say to them that we just want to come to school here because we get a better education, and we can have a better job when we go back to China. We are not here to cause problems, but some people think so.

He continued his thoughts on how this might impact Chinese international students:

But people thinking that Chinese students are a part of that, I don't understand. Now there is the pandemic, and many people blame China for that. So, there are even more reasons for the Chinese to have to leave the United States. I don't know what will happen, but I am glad that I will be leaving soon because they might make all Chinese leave anyway. They might take away visas or not give any new ones. I don't know.

October was not as direct about his feelings toward his future in the United States. Like his fellow participants, October shared his concerns about the possibility of having to leave. October explained that his reason for staying at the same school to get his master's degree was directly influenced by a fear that he might lose his visa:

I want to get a job here and maybe get an internship or something. I just want to get some

experience. Considering the international environment right now, the Chinese people, in

general, are just not super welcome anywhere. I think my chances of finishing and not

having trouble because I am Chinese are best if I just stay here. However, I am not

planning to work here for a long time.

Yet, this strategy to stay in a time of uncertainty is complicated. October continued:

It's going to be hard with all that is going on right now, especially with the immigration

policy constantly changing. It's hard for me to get a working visa. So, if the opportunity

allowed, I want to stay and learn more. I stayed at School A for my master's degree

because I don't know if I will keep my visa. It seemed like a good idea to not cause

trouble by changing schools. I just want to finish before something happens. Things are

so strange right now with all that is going on in the United States and in other places. I

don't want to draw attention to myself, just keep my head down and finish.

October, Chen, and Wen are likely not alone in their fears of what might happen to them,

given the current instability of higher education. Their concerns are likely not unfounded or

unique to Chinese international students (see Table 6).

Table 6

Illustrative Quotes: Conditions in the United States

Participant	Illustrative Quote
October	Chinese students were thinking that the COVID thing would go all right. Even if the United States handles it badly, things will be better by June or July. But it is September, and things are still bad. The curve is still not completely flat. People are still debating whether or not they should wear masks, and we are still having protests and things like that are happening. So, it prevents people from being positive about things.
Chen	People are friendly here, but sometimes I'm afraid of a gunshot. Because in China, we don't have guns. I just received an email from campus security, and they told me there's a gunshot, that something happened. It made me scared, so I honestly think it's a problem here. Because we don't have guns, and I don't really need to worry about guns in China. About a month ago, I was in my room, and there were some gunshots outside of my current location. It sounded so close and very scary. That was a late night, and I just heard someone fire gunshots near me. That time made me not feel safe here at School B.
Wen	I think politics and the death of George Floyd in Minnesota really gave me a chance to think deeper about the States and China's political system. Before that sad story happened, I feel like U.S.A. politics were the best. Before that, I think that democracy was the best. But you know? I think Black people feel like the door is closed to them a lot of the time. There's kind of a door, just kind of rules that exist. There is a different set of rules for some people.

Theme 4: Language Challenges

Theme 4 relates to language issues that Chinese international students experience. The three subthemes of Theme 4 are (4a) language fears and Chinese honor, (4b) differences in syntax, and (4c) American reactions. Theme 4 and its subthemes are illustrated in Figure 7. I extrapolated these subthemes from the narratives of the participants during analysis.

Figure 7

Theme #4: Language Issues

Theme #4
Language
Challenges

(4A) Language Fears and Chinese Honor
(4B) Differences in Syntax
(4C) American Reactions
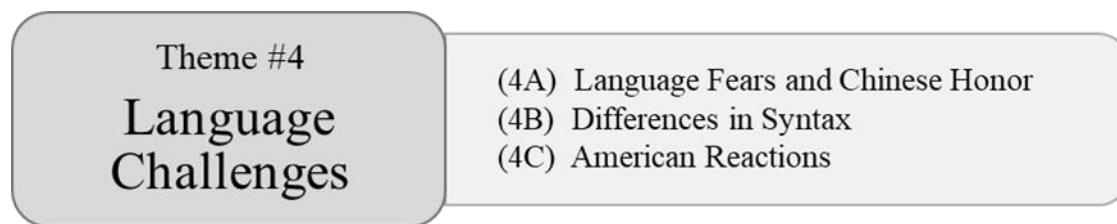
The final theme identified in the narrative was stressors related to language issues. The participants of this study mentioned issues with language more than any other challenge discussed.

Whether it is a lack of language proficiency, low self-perceptions, or both, language skills are crucial to Chinese international students. All three participants addressed language issues as the most critical factor of acculturation. Within this theme, three areas emerged from the participants' stories: their fears about language, differences in syntax, Americans' reactions, and then suggestions.

Subtheme 4A: Language Fears and Chinese Honor

The first subtheme under the language issues theme is language fears and Chinese honor. Participants expressed that fear was a common feeling experienced when they arrived in the United States. Chen explained:

> I was scared because when I came to America, I spoke very poor English, and at first, I did not want to talk to people. So, because I was afraid, I just did not try. I didn't want to say something wrong or embarrass myself.

Similarly, October mentioned fear when talking about his struggles with language.

I think a lot of Chinese students are afraid to speak English to Americans because they don't want to offend or be offensive to someone. They want to save face with people here. It is easier not to talk than to take the risk of saying something the wrong way.

Wen described the fear that Chinese international students experience as partly a cultural issue. He felt that Chinese people's cultural tendency to "save face" affects how they approach language usage. Wen explained saving face this way:

I think many Chinese students don't want to come across as stupid or not knowing. So, they just don't say anything unless they are sure what they are saying. They want to save face with others. They want to keep their respect. They want dignity. They just don't try sometimes. And then the problem is, things don't get any better. 'Cause you have to try. I just try, and if I make a mistake, oh well. But my English is getting much better because I try. I don't worry about saving face as much as many Chinese students do, but it is still a part of who we are.

Along with language fears and concerns over honor, the participants also identified differences in syntax as a stressor for them.

Subtheme 4B: Differences in Syntax

Differences in syntax is the second subtheme under the language issues theme. Broadly, it is understood that the regional accents in the southeastern United States are different from those that Chinese students learn while taking English in China. Wen explained that converting from the way sentences are structured in Chinese to English structure was very challenging. He described it this way:

One thing that is really difficult for speaking English is the order that you put words in a sentence. Chinese and English are similar in the order we put the parts, but in Chinese,

we don't have to be so strict about the order. For example, in English, you mostly have to put the subject, then verb, then the object at the end. In Chinese, we can mix the parts up more or even leave parts out, and it still makes sense. So, we have a hard time making sure the parts of our English sentences are in the right order. Things get mixed up sometimes.

October stated that part of the problem related to language and communication is how Chinese people and Americans use words and phrases differently. He explained:

It took a while to get used to it because we speak a different language. When I first got here, I wanted to speak, but a lot of the time, I was not very good at speaking English back then. So, people could not understand me, and I could not understand them. They would have to talk very slowly for me to understand them. Even then, I did not communicate very well with people speaking English to me.

Besides the speed of the language, the syntax and use of words are different. October explained:

Many times, we use words differently. For example, if someone is in your way, and you want to ask them to move a little bit so you can pass, you say, "Excuse me." But, in Chinese culture, you would first apologize. It's not really apologizing, but it's a more polite way to say, "Excuse me, could you move a little bit?" So, when I would say, "I'm sorry, can you let me pass?" people would look at me like, "What did you do? Why are you, sorry? Did you do something bad to me? Did you draw on my back?" It caused confusion.

October elaborated on his experience with language learning:

Later, I got better at saying the right things, but it did take some time. It was really hard even to have a simple conversation with someone when you tried to talk. So, language

was a big barrier, and the differences in culture, too. Also, the grammar as far as how we

organize words is slightly different from English grammar. Like, if you listen to a word,

you understand it, but when you combine it the first time you hear it, you probably won't

immediately be able to recognize it. Then, you concentrate so hard on which words to

use, and you lose track of what the other person is saying.

As Appendix H shows, the differences between the cultures have many roots in language that

were identified by the participants.

Subtheme 4C: American Reactions

The ways that Americans reacted to Chinese students are grouped as the third subtheme

of language. Because language is both an expressive and receptive tool, the input from

Americans could be a cause of stress for international students. October explained that he felt

embarrassed when Americans reacted in a way that made him feel inferior or not understood. He

clarified, "It's easy to get embarrassed when you make a mistake or say something and have an

American laugh at you or ask where you are from." He said this could cause stress if you let it.

October also articulated how differences in likes and dislikes between the two cultures

could cause stress for Chinese international students. These differences could lead Chinese

students to gravitate toward others who are like them. As he said:

I try to spend time with Americans, but it's hard because of cultural differences. It's also

mostly the language. Some things that I like are not interesting to the Americans I know.

Something I find interesting, they think it's just so-so. Also, there are many differences

because of language. I believe the difference in language is a huge barrier here. For

example, they find something interesting on a TV show that you don't watch, and when

they mention it, you don't know what they're talking about.

Language is a means to encode cultural expectations and knowledge, and even a grasp of the meaning of words may not impart their cultural meaning. As October shared:

> Another example is if they go to a store like Burrito Mama, the place where they make burritos, and you don't know that's a store. You're wondering, "Is that a lady that makes burritos?" You understand the word, but you don't have any idea what they are talking about. If you know that they are talking about somewhere that you eat, it will make it easier for you to join the conversation. If you don't know that, you need to listen more. But, by then, they have switched subjects, and you're like, okay, I'm just going to laugh.

The extra effort and stress can lead to changes with whom Chinese students spend time. October continued:

> So, after a while, I only hang out with the ABC, American Born Chinese, and Asian Americans. One of my friends is adopted. She was actually born in a city very close to Shanghai, but she doesn't remember ever being there. She is American and doesn't speak Chinese at all. Another friend is from a Chinese family, a second-generation Chinese immigrant. We have the culture to share but mostly about eating, like Asian food. Another is a Chinese American, so she speaks a little Chinese, but not a lot. That helped me get in the group faster because I could ask her, hey, do you know this word in English? Then I can quickly join in the conversation. So, it's pretty cool to just hang out with friends who speak your language.

October found a way to overcome the acculturative stress he experienced with American friends. By removing some of the language barriers, October was better able to develop relationships.

Wen mentioned his reaction to the dialect of many people in the southeastern United States in comparison to the way Chinese people talk:

I was really surprised at how people talk here in the South. They talk so slowly! And they use words that I have never heard of before. I learned some English in China, but I never heard words like "y'all" and "fixin' to" when I was learning English. I don't know for sure, but I think only people in the South use those words. I had never heard them before I came here.

Chen explained that he finds it much easier to understand others speaking English than to communicate with them because he could understand much more than he could speak:

I understand most all my classes, all my lectures in the American college. But I think my difficulty is expressing my ideas because I'm not speaking to everybody. I can understand them, but I cannot express my thoughts very clearly or very smoothly. I comprehend what they are saying. Understanding is not a challenge, but speaking is a challenge because I don't really talk a lot with Americans. So, if you don't practice your English, it will be no good. You have to practice, or your English will not be good.

Subtheme 4D: Suggestions

This insight also spurs opportunities for authentic recommendations from students like the participants based on their experiences. Chen continued his thoughts about language issues for Chinese international students and concluded with the following recommendation:

My idea is if you can, could you just give more chances for international students to improve their language. That is the most important thing to help Chinese students be successful in college here. I think a lot of international students, especially Chinese students, need extra practice in a way that doesn't cause so much fear.

This proposal is remarkably similar to the complaints that October addressed with the university recruiters' role and the struggles he saw with Global A. Additionally, Wen advised international students to improve their English language proficiency. He suggested that HEI leaders help international students with language skills:

I would say to Chinese students, do not think your English is good enough to start here. Improve your English as much as possible because it is hard to do well if your English is not good. If you don't understand the language and can't speak it, you will have a tough time. You have to use it and not be afraid even though you might make mistakes because American students might not talk to you until you try. But schools should help Chinese students practice and give international students opportunities to practice inside and outside of the classroom. And Chinese students should go to these gatherings, practice your English, and make friends. It's a good idea to do this if you want to do well here.

October had a similar comment about professors in the classroom and Chinese international students who do not speak good English. He suggested having patience with the students and making the classroom environment a safe place for students to try their English, even if it is not good. October said:

We [Chinese students] don't have a lot of interaction with the professor. Basically, it is more like come and go in some classes, but I think that's more core classes. Sometimes Chinese students asked questions in class. I know what they are trying to ask, but the professor doesn't really understand it, especially when it comes to some accents. Like for example, like catastrophe comes out "cutustrufee." It's all choppy like that. It's going to be hard to understand. Another example is the word ambulance sounds like "umblence." There are other words like that, too. People here can't understand what we are saying

because of a difference in accents, and maybe we talk faster, too. I know people in my

classes who are from here talk much slower than most Chinese people.

These language differences can be a challenge for teachers and students. October

explained that language differences could lead to miscommunication.

It can be challenging for professors. Sometimes they try to listen, or they say talk to me

after class after two or three times of this miscommunication. But Chinese students don't

want to do that. They don't talk to teachers after class because it's too scary. So, many

students don't understand what the professor is asking, especially the homework part.

That can create many misunderstandings, and the Chinese students miss the point. They

don't really get it, so some of them don't do the work. Professors make it scary for the

Chinese, and they give up. They don't make it scary on purpose, but that is what happens.

Besides the language issues listed above, the three participants mentioned other

differences in the Chinese and English languages that make speaking to Americans a challenge.

Differences in the alphabet, intonation, and the fact that they learned English from people who

were not native speakers all contribute to language being the Chinese international student's

greatest challenge during acculturation. Table 7 illustrates some of the quotes provided by the

participants on the topic of language issues.

Table 7

Illustrative Quotes: Language Issues

Participant	Illustrative Quote
October	Many times, we use words differently. For example, if someone is in your way, and you want to ask them to move a little bit so you can pass, you say, "Excuse me." But, in Chinese culture, you would first apologize. It's not really apologizing, but it's a more polite way to say, "Excuse me, could you move a little bit?" So, when I would say, "I'm sorry, can you let me past?" people would look at me like, "What did you do? Why are you, sorry? Did you do something bad to me? Did you draw on my back?" It caused confusion.
Chen	I understand most all my classes and lectures at college. But I think my difficulty is expressing my ideas because I'm not speaking to everybody. I can understand them, but I cannot express my thoughts very clearly or very smoothly. I comprehend what they are saying. Understanding is not a challenge, but speaking is a challenge because I don't really talk a lot with Americans. So, if you don't practice your English, it will be no good. You have to practice, or your English will not be good.
Wen	One thing that is really difficult for speaking English is the order that you put words in a sentence. Chinese and English are similar in the order we put the parts, but we don't have to be so strict about the order in Chinese. For example, in English, you mostly have to put the subject, then verb, then the object at the end. In Chinese, we can mix the parts up more, and it still makes sense. So, we have a hard time making sure the parts of our English sentences are in the right order. Things get mixed up sometimes.

Chapter Summary and Preview of the Next Chapter

This chapter reported the stories of three Chinese international students studying in the southeastern United States. Data analysis revealed many examples of the vast differences in China's culture and the southeastern United States. These differences play a prominent role in acculturative stress among Chinese international students attending university there. The results of this study revealed four major themes: (a) university experiences of the participants were mostly positive with a few exceptions, (b) cultural differences play a significant role in acculturation and acculturative stress, (c) conditions in the United States were cited as a

significant stressor for the participants, and (d) language issues are the most critical factor in a successful transition to attending university in the southeastern United States. All three participants agreed that the hospitality of those who live in the southeastern United States helped them overcome acculturative stress.

Chapter 5 places the findings within a theoretical context to make sense of these stories and themes and discusses the practical implications for this study. The findings provide information for HEI leaders who want to help the Chinese student population on their campuses. It may also benefit Chinese international students who are considering coming to the southeastern United States to study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of limitations and suggestions for further research opportunities in this area.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this narrative study was to understand Chinese international students' perceptions of the factors, if any, that may lead to acculturative stress while attending a four-year public university in the southeastern United States. One broad question and one subquestion guided the inquiry: How do Chinese international students understand their cultural and academic experiences at a public, four-year university in the southeastern United States? How does living in the southeastern United States affect acculturative experiences?

The findings from this study may help inform practice among higher education leaders who seek to improve Chinese international students' experiences on their campuses in the southeastern United States. Additionally, this study contributes to the growing field of literature on the acculturative experiences of Chinese international students living and studying in the United States. The subsequent sections of this chapter revisit the study's background, methodology and findings, conclusions, and implications. The chapter concludes with recommendations for possible future research and final remarks.

Revisiting the Study

Problem of Practice

Chinese students are the largest group of international students studying in the United States; however, they do not thrive at HEIs (Poyrazli & Isaiah, 2018; Will, 2016; Young, 2017). Cultural and academic variances between China and the United States cause difficulties for these students (Yeh & Inose, 2016; Yeo et al., 2019). Chinese international students experience elevated levels of homesickness and anxiety, making it difficult to thrive (Zhang & Jung, 2017). Chinese international students often report problems with acculturation (Zhou et al., 2018).

Acculturation may cause heightened psychological suffering, often referred to as acculturative stress (Fritz et al., 2008; Park et al., 2014). Berry (1970) first defined acculturative stress as negative outcomes associated with adapting to another culture. Many Chinese international students admit to elevated stress levels when studying in a culture other than their own (Ge et al., 2019). However, cultural variations may prevent a clear picture of how many students experience acculturative stress (Chu & Sue, 2011).

Chu and Sue (2011) found that individuals from Asian cultures are less likely to be forthright about their stress levels associated with acculturation. If this is accurate, the incidence of acculturative stress may be more widespread than was originally thought. Therefore, the number of Chinese students suffering from acculturative stress and the extent is not clear (Chu & Sue, 2011), which warrants further investigation.

Methodological Background

Narrative research tradition helps the researcher understand the participants' perspectives through the stories of their lived experiences (Clandinin, 2016). I used this approach to explore how the participants' experiences shaped their reality while studying at a four-year university in the southeastern United States. The purpose was to gather rich data about how the three participants in this study understand the factors that may have caused them acculturative stress. Braun and Clarke (2006) advocate using thematic analysis to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and ideologies posited in the data. Following this advice, I employed two coding cycles and thematic analysis to make sense of the participants' stories, which I gathered through three interviews with each participant.

Saldaña (2016) recommended using a mixture of coding and analysis tools to make the analysis coherent and useful to the study. I used inductive analysis and focused coding, revealing

the embedded themes and patterns within the narrative pages. Upon completion of the analysis, four main themes emerged from the data. The four major themes are (1) university experiences, (2) cultural differences, (3) conditions in the United States, and (4) language challenges.

The thirteen subthemes related to each major theme are (1a) treatment of Chinese students, (1b) recruitment, (1c) relationships with faculty, (2a) cultural hierarchy, (2b) exposure to American culture, (2c) difficulties connecting, (3a) divergent reactions to the pandemic, (3b) drugs and crime, (3c) racism, (3d) governmental policies, (4a) language fears and Chinese honor, (4b) differences in syntax, and (4c) American reactions. Figure 5 presents these graphically.

Figure 5 Revisited

Emergent Themes from Participants' Perceptions

Theme #1 **University Experiences**	(1A) Treatment of Chinese Students (1B) Recruitment (1C) Relationships with Faculty
Theme #2 **Cultural Differences**	(2A) Cultural Hierarchy (2B) Exposure to American Culture (2C) Difficulties Connecting
Theme #3 **Conditions in the U.S.**	(3A) Divergent Reactions to the Pandemic (3B) Drugs and Crime (3C) Racism (3D) Governmental Policies
Theme #4 **Language Challenges**	(4A) Language Fears and Chinese Honor (4B) Differences in Syntax (4C) American Reactions

Methodology

In exploring how the participants understood their experiences at a four-year university in the southeastern United States, I opted to use open-ended questions with minimal interruptions to allow the speakers to drive the conversation. Essential to this study's goal was to maintain the participants' perspective and let their voices be heard. Potter and Hepburn (2005) asserted the importance of staying true to the participants' understanding of their experiences. Bochner (2012) suggested using first-person storytelling to understand the lived experiences of participants. Corden and Sainsbury (2006) found that participants generally prefer their actual words depicted in the research. Therefore, I presented the data in a first-person format. This format allows the reader to make interpretations of the data alongside the researcher. Those interpretations are presented in the next section.

Conclusions

Hofstede's (2011) model highlighted the variances between China and the United States and provided insight into understanding why so many students from China struggle with acculturation. The effect of these differences was evident in the narratives of the three Chinese participants in this study.

Analysis Findings

This section presents the conclusions formulated following the data analysis process. Thematic analysis of the data revealed four major themes and three or four developed subthemes. These themes show major stressors as the three participants in this study experienced acculturation. These themes may be common to other Chinese international students in the southeastern United States. The major themes with their subthemes are presented in Figure 5.

I developed four conclusions based on the themes listed in Figure 5 and the stories discussed in Chapter 4. These themes address the study's purpose and the research question, which was to understand the factors that may lead to Chinese international students' acculturative stress. Many of these conclusions address on-campus concerns, which parallels the findings of the research. Analysis of the narrative data indicated that the majority of acculturative stressors originated on campus for the participants. The following conclusions address my interpretations of the experiences of October, Chen, and Wen.

Conclusion #1: University Interactions in the Southeastern United States Are Largely Positive With a Few Exceptions

This study's first conclusion centers on the participants' responses to questions about their interactions with faculty members and peers at their respective universities. At the time of this study, all three participants studied at a four-year university in the southeastern United States, which influenced their narratives' backdrop. Many of their stories involved interactions that took place on campus during their time of acculturation. As such, October, Wen, and Chen spoke a great deal about their experiences with the university, faculty members, and their peers. During the analysis of these stories, I identified three subcategories that relate to university interactions. These three topics are (1a) treatment of Chinese students, (1b) recruitment, and (1c) relationships with faculty. Figure 8 illustrates the summary of interactions the participants experienced on campus during their time of acculturation.

Figure 8

University Interactions of Chinese Students in the Southeastern United States
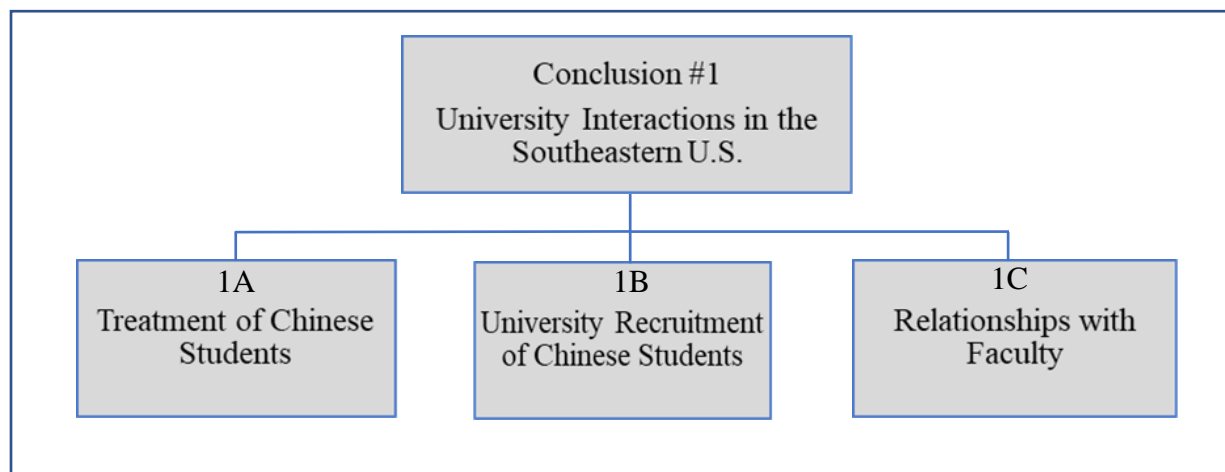
Treatment of Chinese Students

Each participant felt that their university had provided adequate support to them through their first year in the United States. However, all three participants conveyed examples of how their university was deficient in supporting them in a critical time of acculturation. A lack of school support is a problem addressed by other studies investigating Chinese international students' challenges during acculturation (Oramas et al., 2018; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017). The participants addressed negative experiences associated with prejudice toward Chinese students. Additionally, the students shared how misconceptions about Chinese students caused them undue stress in their classes. These negative experiences were often caused by well-meaning faculty who made assumptions about them, which the participants deemed unfair and unfounded.

University Recruitment of Chinese Students

While discussing university interactions, the participants identified Chinese students' recruitment as a problematic issue on their campuses. The process of international student recruitment is generally regarded as positive and beneficial to universities and students alike (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2010). However, the benefits to universities may not outweigh the potential

dangers to the international students whom they recruit (Falcone, 2017). Efforts to increase profits drive HEIs to enroll Chinese international students who are not qualified to be there. Two of the three participants mentioned practices on their campuses that benefited the university but not necessarily the Chinese international student population.

Recruitment of Students Who Are Not Prepared

The first concern addressed the practice of recruiting Chinese students who were not prepared for university rigor in the United States. The participants communicated the experiences of fellow Chinese students who were recruited in China by their university. The students did not speak English or spoke only basic phrases. Yet, they were accepted and invited to travel to the United States. These students were enrolled in a provisional program where they had to take English classes while paying university tuition. If they were able to achieve benchmark English proficiency, then they could enroll in university courses. If they did not reach the benchmark, they could continue taking English courses or return to China.

The participants stated that many of these students came without fully understanding what was expected of them. They likely believed that they were starting university courses immediately. However, they had to pay university tuition even though they were not taking university classes. The participants described these students as overwhelmed but hopeful that they would pass their English courses and begin their degrees. However, many fail to pass the prerequisites of their degree programs.

Targeting of Wealthy Chinese Families

Another concern mentioned by the participants was the obvious targeting of Chinese students from wealthy families. One participant observed that many of these recruited Chinese students, who did not speak proficient English, came to the United States with an attitude of

entitlement. These families expected the exorbitant amount of money it cost to send their child to the United States to guarantee an American degree. The participants described these students as lazy and disruptive. Consequently, they often are not academically engaged. The participants felt frustrated because they did not want Chinese students to have a reputation tarnished by these individuals. Moreover, they blamed the university for recruiting them and blamed their families for sending them without proper preparation.

Chinese student recruitment has become a significant focus of many HEIs as Chinese students contributed $15 billion to the U.S. economy in 2018 (IIE, 2018). With almost 370,000 incoming Chinese students pouring into the United States, colleges and universities find themselves competing to recruit more and more of these high tuition-paying students to their campuses. Furthering the already convoluted market for international students, enrollment numbers for Chinese international students have flattened over the past three years (IIE, 2019a). The recent trend could cause greater competition to recruit international students, regardless of their ability to succeed in a degree program.

Relationships With Faculty

All three participants felt that their interactions with university employees were beneficial and positive for the most part. The participants stated that professors regularly went beyond what they expected faculty members to do in their role as teachers. Some participants gave examples of professors who met with them outside of school hours and answered after-hour phone calls to help them with questions about assignments. Most professors were helpful and understanding of the challenges faced by these Chinese international students.

However, there were a few exceptions, mostly dealing with how Chinese people are perceived by Americans. These perceptions were usually misconceptions based on a lack of

knowledge between the two cultures. For example, one participant told a story of how a faculty member assumed that China's people use the bathroom differently than Americans. This misperception was evident when a Chinese student was accused of soiling a toilet with no evidence or reason to believe so. Lee and Rice (2007) confirmed that misperceptions between cultures could cause distrust and prejudice, usually directed toward expatriates.

All three participants mentioned experiences with faculty members who treated them differently because of the perception that Chinese students are more likely to cheat on tests and assignments than other students. At least two participants acknowledged that the perception is not entirely inaccurate. Other studies cited the Chinese people's collectivist orientation as a possible reason for cheating if they believe it would help the diaspora (Zhang & Yin, 2019). Robinson and Kuin (1999) found this to be true among Chinese international students who exhibited higher acculturative stress levels. Nevertheless, the participants in this study asserted that even though they never cheated on tests, they still felt a distrust from a few professors because of this general perception that all Chinese students are likely to cheat. The participants made it clear that only a small element of their professors seemed to have this mentality.

To summarize the first conclusion of this study, it is important to note that although the participants had experienced these challenges during acculturation, all three described their university experience as positive, overall. Still, the participants' narratives indicate areas for improvement for HEI leaders. Treatment of Chinese students, university recruitment of Chinese students, and negative relationships with faculty were key influencers of acculturative stress among the three participants of this study.

Conclusion #2: Cultural Differences Have a Powerful Influence on Chinese International Students' Acculturative Experiences in the Southeastern United States

Cultural differences account for many of the challenges Chinese international students have encountered in acculturation (Oramas et al., 2018). The literature suggests that variances play an essential role in the experiences of Chinese international students who are studying in an unfamiliar culture (Will, 2016; Young, 2017). These differences can lead to stress for the expatriate living in a foreign culture, and the greater the differences, the greater the perceived stress can be (Liu, 2009; Rice et al., 2016).

The differences between Chinese and American cultures affect Chinese international students' ability to adjust and thrive (Berry, 2006). Additionally, differences in core belief systems and social structures influence how students adapt and flourish after leaving one culture for another culture (Ward et al., 2005). This study supported the notion that the two cultures involved are vastly different in many ways. The participants addressed these differences frequently in their stories.

The participants in this study cited multiple examples of cultural differences that have influenced their acculturative experiences in the southeastern United States. All three participants mentioned everyday experiences, such as transportation problems, food differences, finding stores, and even the difference in light switches. Lu et al. (2020) stated that daily life activities could be difficult for Asian students dealing with acculturation. The participants discussed how activities that are usually simple could be a challenge for those who are not accustomed to the culture. Figure 9 illustrates the effects of these cultural differences.

Figure 9

Effects of Cultural Differences on Chinese International Students' Acculturative Experiences
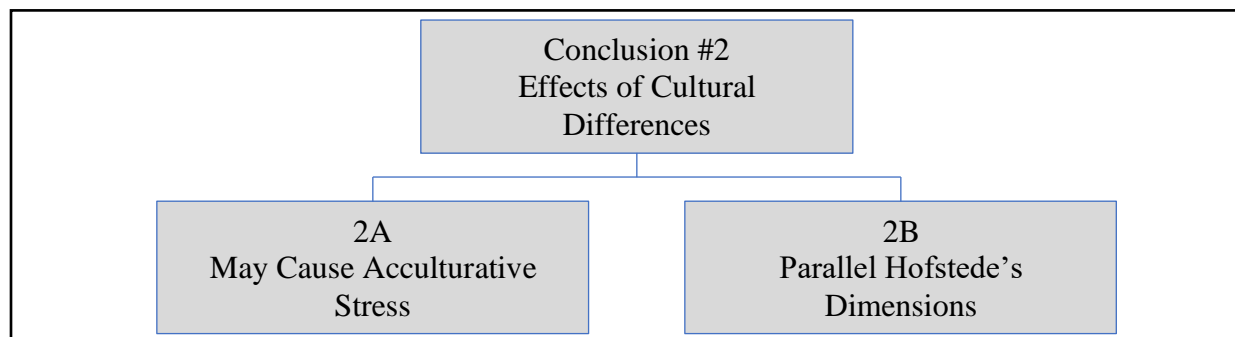
Hofstede's Model of Cultural Differences

Hofstede's (2011) cultural differences model served as a lens through which the personal narratives were analyzed. Table 8 illustrates these dimensions and corresponding definitions. Viewing the participants' stories through this model's lens suggests alignment with previous studies comparing the United States and China within five of Hofstede's dimensions. The only dimension that the participants did not seem to address was masculinity versus femininity. Hofstede's work suggests a closely correlated view of this category between the two cultures, which could account for the lack of direct findings in that area.

Table 8

Hofstede's Six Cultural Dimensions and Corresponding Definitions

Hofstede's Cultural Dimension	Definition of Each Dimension
Power Distance Index	The extent to which the less powerful members (family, for instance) accept and expect power to be distributed unequally.
Individualism vs. Collectivism	A preference for a loosely knit social framework versus a tight-knit framework with unquestioning loyalty.
Masculinity vs. Femininity	Social norms set expected affective gender roles. Masculine cultures are much more openly gendered than feminine societies.
Uncertainty Avoidance Index	Uncertainty avoidance concerns a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity.
Long- vs. Short-Term Orientation	In a long-term culture, the fundamental notion is that the world is in transition and preparing for the unknown is vital.
Indulgence vs. Restraint	In an indulgent culture, it is desirable to be free. Doing things to gratify your impulses is accepted and even extolled.

Note: These dimensions were created by Hofstede in 1980 and expanded in 2011. From *Dimensionalizing cultures: The Hofstede model in context* by G. Hofstede. (2011). *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, *2*(1), 1–26.

Throughout the coding and analysis process, I noted each instance in which a participant addressed one of the six cultural dimensions described by Hofstede. Table 9 illustrates the number of times a participant addressed one of the six dimensions. The participants discussed five of the six dimensions without prior knowledge of Hofstede's work. The five dimensions that were intimated were woven throughout the participants' stories and the emergent themes in Chapter 4.

Table 9

Coding Frequencies of Each Cultural Dimension Among the Participants

Cultural Dimension	Wen	October	Chen	TOTALS
Hofstede - Individualism vs. Collectivism	11	7	5	**23**
Hofstede - Long- vs. Short-Term Orientation	6	3	9	**18**
Hofstede - Power Distance Index	6	4	5	**15**
Hofstede - Indulgence vs. Restraint	5	3	4	**12**
Hofstede - Uncertainty Avoidance Index	1	3	2	**6**
Hofstede - Masculinity vs. Femininity	0	0	0	**0**
Totals	**29**	**20**	**25**	**74**

Note: Table 9 indicates the coding frequency of each dimension. The findings indicated by Table 9 parallel Hofstede's data for the six dimensions illustrated in Table 2.

As noted in Table 9, the most frequently addressed dimension was individualism versus collectivism. This dimension is defined in Table 8. The number of times the participants mentioned topics related to individualism or collectivism parallels Hofstede's (2011) findings. Shuai et al. (2015) found that even students who were considered more progressive among peers in China tended to be more collectivistic while studying in the United States. All three participants supported Shuai et al.'s (2015) findings with a tendency toward collectivism, although Wen was the least collectivistic of the participants. Table 9 illustrates the coding frequencies for each of Hofstede's dimensions.

The participants acknowledged the gap between cultures when speaking about their perceptions of Americans. They said that they were not entirely surprised by the differences, but it was explicit, nevertheless. The participants also noted the dimension of individualism versus collectivism in their description of the factors behind Chinese and American students' career choices.

Long-Term Versus Short-Term Orientation

The second most common dimension in the study was long-term versus short-term orientation. This dimension addresses how every society chooses to maintain connections with its past while facing the challenges of the present and future (Hofstede, 2011). This study's findings for the long-term versus short-term orientation correlate with Hofstede's conclusions. The participants described a long-term orientation of Chinese people in contrast to the transitory perspective of Americans. The participants noted these differences through the encounters they had with individuals in the United States.

These findings parallel Wang et al. (2014), who stated that Americans struggle to understand the long-term perspective of Chinese counterparts when building relationships. Chinese put a much greater emphasis on building relationships that will last beyond the immediate social interaction. In the Chinese context, building relationships is a slow process that takes time, but they believe it is worth the effort. In contrast, Americans emphasize short-term objectives (Wang et al., 2014).

Power Distance Index

Power distance conveys the degree to which the less powerful individuals within a culture accept the unequal dispersal of power (Hofstede, 2011). An example of power distance in this study was cultural hierarchy. Cultural hierarchy relates to how different individuals within society view their rank or role (Bell & Pei, 2020). In China, Confucianism influences cultural hierarchy and the importance of filial piety (honoring parents and other elders), kinship (family first), loyalty (to the community), and obedience (to authority; Bell & Pei, 2020). These ideas tend to run counter to American culture, based on the ideals of individualism and equality (Greenhouse, 1992).

Indulgence Versus Restraint

The concept of indulgence versus restraint addresses the extent to which people within a society try to control their impulses or desires (Hofstede, 2011). China is categorized by restraint, whereas the United States is comparatively indulgent. All three participants noted this contrast in the way people in the United States are more focused on leisure and entertainment. One participant described how people in the United States handle wealth compared to the Chinese. He stated that Americans tend to flaunt their wealth and use it for self-gratification.

Xie et al. (2020) discussed the stereotypes that Americans tend to think that all Chinese students are rich, while Chinese tend to believe that Americans are all wealthy but guarded about it. These misconceptions only add to the tension between the two cultures (Xie et al., 2020), a notion that was supported by the three participants. One participant noted that Americans choose college majors based on self-interest, which contrasts with Chinese students' priority to select a career path based on the needs of family or country.

Uncertainty Avoidance Index

Uncertainty avoidance index was mentioned only rarely by the three participants. This finding correlates with Hofstede's data for China and the United States since both cultures have a relatively low score (Hofstede, 2011). The participants' responses indicated a concern for uncertainty avoidance, although not as frequently as the previous dimensions.

In summary, the findings of this study parallel Hofstede's model closely. The cultural differences discussed in this chapter address the participants' experiences with acculturation in the southeastern United States. These experiences align with five of Hofstede's dimensions, which show vast differences between the cultures of China and the United States. The participants confirmed that these differences play a substantial role in the acculturation process of Chinese international students. Future studies could shed more light on the correlations

between cultural diversity and acculturative stress among Chinese international students in region-specific areas of the United States.

Conclusion #3: Current Political and Social Conditions in the United States Cause Stress Among Chinese International Students

The current political and social climate in the United States is unstable for international students, and specifically those from China. The ongoing pandemic, drugs, crime, racism, and political divisiveness cause stress among the Chinese participants. It may be generalized that other Chinese international students are experiencing anxiety from increased unrest in the United States (Wen et al., 2020). Despite all three participants living at small campuses in the southeastern United States, each had experienced stress related to these factors. Wen et al. (2020) confirmed that many Chinese suffered discrimination in recent months for reasons such as backlash to the pandemic.

Current conditions in the United States are forcing a growing number of Chinese students to consider transferring to other countries that are more friendly to incoming Chinese (Yu et al., 2014). If this occurs, HEIs in the United States could suffer from income loss from outgoing Chinese international students. The study participants did not mention a desire to transfer but did talk about the stress these current conditions had caused. Figure 10 illustrates the summary of political and social conditions causing stress for the participants of this study.

Figure 10

Political and Social Conditions in the United States That May Lead to Stress
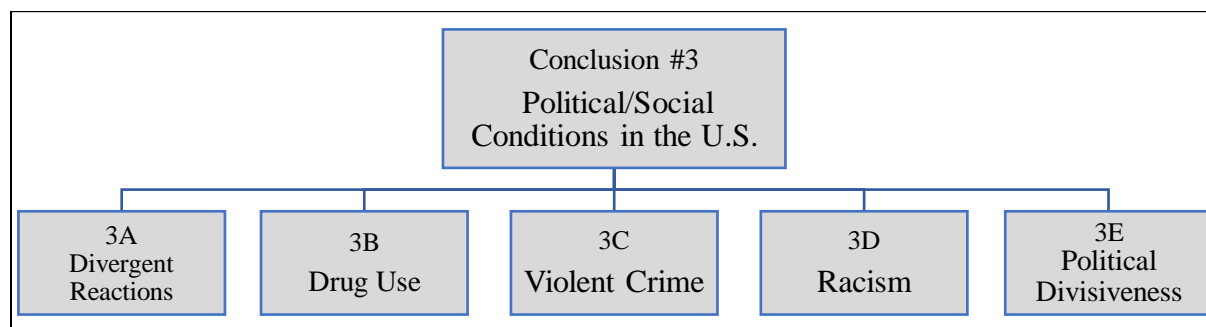
Divergent Reactions to the Pandemic

The unusual and traumatic circumstances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted Chinese international students in unprecedented ways. The U.S. government required some students from China to leave the United States in certain instances (Rauhala, 2020). In other situations, Chinese students who were expecting to come to the United States had to stay in China for the current school year. Most Chinese students, including the participants, have been negatively impacted in some way by the pandemic. Each of the participants discussed the stressful effects the pandemic has placed on them. Although most people have suffered because of COVID-19, Chinese students have experienced greater than average pressure because of the virus's effects (Wen et al., 2020). The participants attribute this pressure to people who blame Chinese people for the outbreak.

Drug Use

The participants' encounters with illicit drugs on and off campus contributed to acculturative stress. Drug use was common among the participants' American friends and acquaintances. The most common drugs abused on campuses are alcohol, Adderall, marijuana, and ecstasy (Addiction Center, n.d.). Other drugs are used and sold, as well, in lesser quantities.

Attributing factors for on-campus drug abuse include stress, course load, curiosity, and peer pressure (Addiction Center, n.d.). As students face the elevated demands of coursework, jobs, internships, social responsibilities, and more, many students resort to drug use to manage stress. Other students take stimulants like Adderall to stay awake longer to study or complete homework (Aberg, n.d.). Additionally, other students experiment with drugs out of curiosity. Many students who abuse drugs do so because of pressure to "fit in" or belong to a peer group (Aberg, n.d.). In any case, the number of students abusing drugs has increased by 7% over the past five years in the United States (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2020). This alarming trend might explain why all three participants described their exposure to drug use as a common event.

Two of the participants mentioned stories of people selling drugs in their apartment complex or dorm. All three participants experienced marijuana use in their presence, and two experienced other types of drug use. All three participants stated that their experiences had caused discomfort or fear.

Crime in the Southeastern United States

The participants shared that crime was another stressor for them since arriving in the southeastern United States. The three participants of this study described situations where crimes involving guns occurred near their residence. Two participants told stories of hearing gunfire outside their room and the feeling of overwhelming fear that it caused. The third participant addressed a violent crime that happened to an acquaintance and the feelings he experienced because of this. All three stated that their exposure to violent crime was shocking and frightening, especially since they had never experienced anything like it in China.

These stories are not surprising, given the steady rise in crime on HEI campuses around the country. The NCES (2019) reported an increase in the total number of on-campus crimes every year since 2013. Furthermore, a recent study by Edwards (2020) found that the southeastern United States contained six of the 10 most dangerous college towns in America. The same report identified the 10 safest college towns in America. Of the 10 schools that were ranked safest in the nation, none were located in the southeastern United States (Edwards, 2020). These findings confirm the participants' opinions that crime is a serious problem on campuses in the southeastern United States.

Racism in the United States

The video of George Floyd's death caused by police in Minneapolis triggered protests around the country and the world. It brought renewed awareness to the high-profile deaths of African Americans and ongoing unease about systemic racism in the United States. A study by Edwards (2019) found that "African American men were about 2 1/2 times more likely than White men to be killed by police." Additionally, "Men of color face a non-trivial lifetime risk of being killed by police" (p. 16793).

George Floyd's death and other injustices led to demonstrations and rioting in many cities leading up to the time of this study. This unrest created awareness of inequality and fear that violence may spread to the participants' hometowns. Although the participants agreed that the unjust treatment of African Americans needs to stop, they expressed feelings of fear over racial unrest that might affect them as outsiders in a country that seems to distrust Chinese people.

Political Divisiveness

Adding to this frightening social climate and the ongoing pandemic of COVID-19 is the news of political unrest in the United States. The participants cited political events that have negatively affected Chinese international students as a major stressor for them. The animosity between China's government and the Trump administration has created a backdrop of uneasiness for the Chinese participants in this study who fear retribution by the U.S. government.

In September, over 1,000 Chinese students had their visas revoked under the suspicion that they were participating in espionage for the Chinese government (Au & Wilhelm, 2020). This response is one example of the ongoing hostility toward Chinese students by current and previous government leaders. Additionally, government officials have stopped Chinese students to interrogate them about their possible connection with the Chinese government. One student stated that officials questioned him to see if he was in the United States to steal technology from the U.S. government (Feng, 2020).

The participants expressed worry over recent rulings that Chinese students might have to leave the country because of COVID-19 or immigration policy changes (Treisman, 2020). In July, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced that international students who did not attend on-ground classes would have to vacate the country or transfer to a school that offered on-ground courses. Immigration and Customs Enforcement rescinded this decision after many schools threatened to sue the government to protect their international students from deportation (Ortiz, 2020). These and other political unrest have caused many international students to fear deportation, including this study's participants. At the time of this writing, the participants were anxious about the presidential election and how it may affect their future at

American HEIs. The fear of the unknown weighs on them as the participants wonder if the government will revoke their visas.

In summary, the Unites States' ongoing social and political conditions were key antecedents to the acculturative stress the participants addressed during their interviews. All three participants addressed acculturative stress associated with exposure to these conditions, despite describing their college town as small and safe. The narratives indicated fear of the unknown regarding the participants' futures.

Conclusion #4: Language Challenges Are the Single Greatest Stressor for Chinese International Students in the Southeastern United States

Despite the stress caused by university concerns, differences in cultures, and political or social unrest, the participants' greatest stressor was language problems. Based on the number of codes, language challenges were the most frequent stressor mentioned by the participants during their interviews. Additionally, this stressor affected the participants on and off campus in their interactions with people in their communities.

Language challenges are the most significant stressor of international students in general and Chinese students, specifically (Will, 2016; Wu et al., 2015). Dima (2019) cited a lack of language proficiency as a significant barrier in Chinese and domestic students' cultural relations. However, Ma (2020) suggested that low self-assessment of English skills leads to passivity in social exchanges rather than actual English capability.

A poor self-assessment may explain at least part of the reason why the participants were not as comfortable connecting with others compared to their domestic counterparts. Jiang et al. (2017) suggested that educators in the United States realize the differences in students' difficulties in academic, oral, or written English and speaking, listening, reading, or writing. The

participants agreed that HEI leaders should address such differences separately and support

learning English as a second language.

Whether the reason is a lack of proficiency or a lack of confidence, Chinese international

students understand the importance of improving their ability to speak English while living in the

United States. All three participants addressed language challenges as the most critical factor of

acculturation. Within this theme, three areas emerged from the participants' stories: their fears

about language, differences in syntax, and Americans' reactions. Figure 11 illustrates these three

points.

Figure 11

Language Challenges for Chinese International Students in Southeastern United States
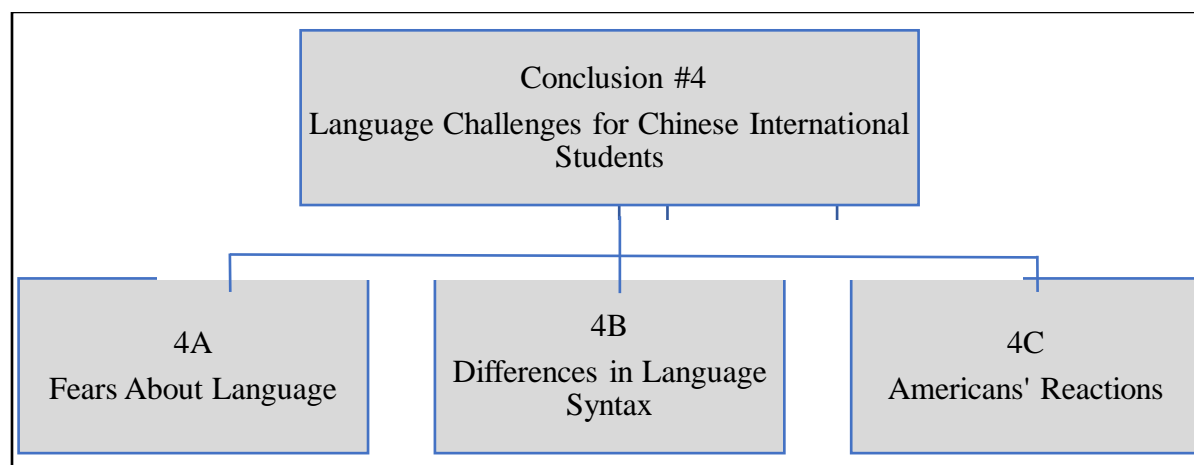
Fears About Language

Among the participants' concerns about language is a fear that they will embarrass

themselves or say something offensive (Jiang et al., 2017). The cultural need to save face

contributes to the participants' concern for protecting their honor (Yu & Wen, 2003). It also

influences the Chinese cultural requirement to preserve the honor of others. It is common to feel

apprehension when a person does not understand the language while immersed in another

culture. This feeling is compounded when the cultures differ as greatly as China and the United

States (Will, 2016). The participants also discussed the academic challenges presented by a lack

of English proficiency. Although the participants in this study were ultimately able to acquire

adequate English to succeed in their educational programs, they knew many Chinese students

who were not passing their classes because of language challenges.

Differences in Language Syntax

Differences in language structure also influenced the ability of the participants to gain

confidence in their English abilities. Sentence structure and other variations in grammar

negatively affected the language acquisition of the participants in this study. Furthermore,

sentence structure in English is considerably disparate from sentence structure in Mandarin (Eng

et al., 2018). This divergence in syntax creates a steeper learning curve for Chinese trying to

learn English in the southeastern United States.

Another language concern centered on the differences in southeastern Americans'

English dialects versus the English taught in Chinese schools. According to the participants, this

Chinese version of English is quite different from what people speak at their campuses. The

participants described instances in which the local dialect caused them confusion and

embarrassment. Also, participants told stories of how their dialect of English confused domestic

students. Wolfram and Schilling (2015) discussed how different dialects could exacerbate the

process of acquiring a new language and building communication confidence. Pronunciation of

diphthongs and vowels varies greatly from Southern dialects and non-Southern dialects of

English (Wolfram & Schilling, 2015). For example, the word *bed* is usually a one-syllable word

in most English dialects, but in the Southern dialect, people often pronounce it like *beyud*

(Wolfram & Schilling, 2015). Simple differences in pronunciation like this make acquiring

English a challenge for nonnative speakers. The participants of this study confirmed the struggles associated with communicating in the southeastern United States.

American Reactions

The third stressor for Chinese international students is the reaction sometimes received from Americans when trying to converse in English. The participants described situations where domestic students laughed at them or corrected their English. For the participants, these were very embarrassing moments. Native English speakers at their university locations were generally polite and gracious with the participants' efforts to communicate. Nevertheless, these negative experiences made the participants withdraw from relationships with domestic students and connect instead with fellow Asians.

Cowley and Hyams-Ssekasi (2018) confirm this tendency in international students to seek out relationships that provide comfort and familiarity as a coping mechanism. This reaction only increased the divide between the Chinese participants and their domestic counterparts. One participant acknowledged that withdrawing was not a healthy choice but felt it helped him handle the stress associated with communication.

In summary, the challenges associated with language acquisition and communication during the acculturative process are a major stressor for many Chinese international students. The unique difficulties of learning and communicating in the southeastern United States may exacerbate acculturative stress among Chinese international students.

Implications for Research

The four main themes that I identified in this study are (a) university experiences, (b) cultural differences, (c) conditions in the United States, and (d) language challenges. These four themes and their subthemes present possibilities for future research concerned with the

acculturative experiences of Chinese international students. This narrative study's findings shed light on the factors that may contribute to acculturative stress among Chinese international students.

These findings coincide with previous research on acculturation and acculturative stress associated with language and cultural differences. However, this study also identified factors not previously cited by other studies. One of these factors was the current social and political climate that is growing more hostile toward Chinese students in the United States. Another factor identified in this study were university practices that may lead to unnecessary challenges for Chinese students. Practices of some university employees, such as racial profiling and recruiting students unprepared for schooling in the United States, cause Chinese students to experience undue stress as they navigate academia in American HEIs. Appendix I illustrates the findings of this study in relation to previous results in the literature (see Appendix I).

This study's findings offer new perspectives on the antecedent factors of acculturative stress and support previous findings on the topic (see Appendix I). This research is vital because it enhances the existing canon of literature by presenting new insights into Chinese international students' challenges and experiences, particularly from a region of the country that was previously unresearched in this area.

Implications for Practice

Political and social issues have led to a downward trend in international student enrollment in American HEIs (IIE, 2019c). The uncertainty of international student enrollment disquiets HEI leaders in the United States during a time with so many unknowns. When the pressure to increase enrollment is intense (Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018), and student population diversity is critical (Geddie, 2015: Hakkola, 2019), HEI leaders are obligated to attract and retain

a diverse student body. Research has shown the importance of retaining Chinese international students at HEIs (Qi et al., 2018; Yeo et al., 2019).

Higher education institution leaders should provide appropriate support for students who may be experiencing acculturative stress (Qi et al., 2018; Yeo et al., 2019). Accomplishing this task would require greater insight into the needs of Chinese international students (Qi et al., 2018). The purpose of this study was to provide that insight through the lens of the participants and their experiences.

The participants' shared experiences allow HEI leaders to glimpse behind the curtain of international student life at three universities in the southeastern United States. These stories illustrate some of the many challenges that international students face as they attempt to navigate living in an unfamiliar culture. By reading the participants' narratives, HEI leaders can better understand how the stressors mentioned in this study may cause Chinese international students to feel overwhelmed, isolated, and frustrated. This knowledge should lead to compassion for these students and actions that will provide lasting improvements for their learning experience.

While the benefits of international student attendance are many, challenges exist for HEI leaders. Fostering communication and positive relationships between local students and international students is beneficial for both groups, but it is not easy to cultivate on campus (Jenny et al., 2019). The challenges compound when the two cultures are very different from one another (Akanwa, 2015; Falcone, 2017). Higher education institution leaders can find it challenging to meet the needs of students with varying cultural backgrounds and preferences. It is crucial to train faculty to understand better the various cultures represented in their classrooms. Few schools have found a cohesive way to foster enthusiasm among their faculty for such training (Haigh, 2018). This study may provide beneficial information to HEI leaders as they

seek to improve resources for international students and educate staff members about the needs of this student population.

International students from China have a significant role in higher education (Will, 2016). Chinese students comprise the most significant percentage of international students (IIE, 2019a). Accordingly, higher education leaders must understand how acculturation affects them to ensure that HEI leaders provide the best care possible for the largest group of international students on their campuses (Fritz et al., 2008). The suggestions provided by the participants at the end of Chapter 4 help guide HEI leaders toward practices that will improve the success rate of Chinese international students in the United States.

Future Research

As a result of this study's findings, I suggest the following recommendations for further research. First, I recommend a deeper analysis into university recruiting practices of Chinese students to American HEIs. The negative results of overrecruiting that the participants of this study illustrated warrant further investigation. These practices may be occurring at other universities and colleges in the United States. If that is the case, HEI leaders should not only be aware of the practice but also work to ensure that international students are safeguarded throughout the recruitment and transition processes.

Researchers might consider a further investigation into Chinese international students' acculturative experiences in the southeastern United States since this is a relatively novel area of research. I also recommend similar qualitative studies of Chinese students in other regions of the country as a comparison to this study. The findings of this study may or may not be unique to the southeastern United States. Finally, researchers might further explore the antecedent factors that cause cultural disengagement among Chinese international students. A deeper examination of

these factors might reveal a clearer picture of the causes behind Chinese international students' cultural disengagement.

      In conclusion, this study provides valuable insight into the acculturative experiences of Chinese international students at a four-year university in the southeastern United States. Chapter 2 provided a foundation for existing data on international students in general and Chinese international students specifically. Additionally, I presented information about acculturation and the stress associated with acculturative experiences for Chinese international students. Chapter 3 explained the methodology and reasoning behind my choice to use a narrative research tradition to research the three participants' acculturative experiences in this study. Chapter 4 presented the findings of my narrative analysis of the participants' stories, and the major themes and subthemes were identified. Finally, this chapter presented four conclusions and their subcategories situated in the existing body of literature. Suggestions for further research followed implications for research and practice.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

Dear Darren,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled

(IRB# 20-116   )is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Experiences of Chinese Students in Higher Education in the Southeastern United States:

A Narrative Study

Interview Protocol

Interviewee: _____ Pseudonym: _____

Gender: _____ Age: _____

Academic Level: _____Undergraduate (year _____) / _____ Graduate (year _____)

Interviewer: *Darren Dean*

Session 1 Date: _____

Location: _____ Time Started: _____ Time Ended: _____

Introductory Phase: *The first interview helps to build rapport with the participant and gain*

trust between the participant and the researcher (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

1. Are you currently enrolled in a higher education institution? Where? How long have you

   been attending?

2. Are you currently employed? If so, where? What do you do there?

3. Can you tell me about your life and family in China?

4. What are you studying in school, and why?

5. How many close friends do you currently have?

6. Can you tell me a little about them?

Session One Notes:

Narrative Phase: *During this phase, the participant will be encouraged to tell their story (Doody & Noonan, 2013).*

7. Please share your experiences before arriving in the United States.

8. Can you tell me about your experiences with living in the United States?

9. How would you describe your school experiences at _____?

10. How would you describe your social experiences in the United States?

11. Why did you decide to study in the southeastern United States?

12. How do your experiences in the United States affect how you feel?

Session Two Notes:

Questioning Phase: *This phase will focus on gathering data about the acculturation experiences of the study participants. The questions for these interviews will be more open-ended. The researcher should adjust the direction of the interview to fill in any gaps (Dilley, 2000).*

13. What have you enjoyed most about living in the United States?

14. What challenges have you experienced?

15. Why did you decide to study in the United States?

16. What has helped you to adjust to life in the United States?

Follow-Up Questions

Session Three Notes:

Appendix C: Consent Form

Study Title: Experiences of Chinese Students in Higher Education in the Southeastern United States: A Narrative Study

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You may be able to take part in a research study. The title for this study is listed above. This form gives information about the study, including the risks and benefits to you if you participate. Please read this form carefully and ask the researcher any questions that you may have about the study. You can ask about research activities and any risks or benefits you may experience. You may also wish to talk about your participation with other people, such as your family doctor or a family member.

It is up to you if you want to be a part of this study. You do not have to be involved at all. You may refuse to participate or stop your participation at any time and for any reason without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION:

This research study is to better understand the experiences of Chinese international students as they adjust to life and education in the United States. Many international students experience problems with acculturation. Acculturation is the process of one person or group adopting cultural traits of another group of people. You may have experienced some of these difficulties as you have adjusted to life in the United States. The leaders of colleges and universities need to know how international students are doing at their school. If they are struggling, leaders need to know so that they can do things to make the experience better for other international students who come to their school.

Since you have lived through this process, I would like to hear about your experiences of adjusting to school, a different culture and language, and anything else you would like to share

about your time before and after coming to the United States. Your stories may help other people who are struggling with acculturation, too.

If you are chosen to take part in this study, you will be asked to join three online meetings with the researcher over the course of two weeks. Each visit is expected to take 30 to 120 minutes. During these visits, you will be asked to take part in the following: You will be asked some questions so we can get to know you better. An example would be how long you have been in the United States? You will also be asked to share any stories that come to mind about your experience with acculturation. You might be asked some follow-up questions at the end to help the researcher understand your stories and to avoid any mistakes on the part of the researcher.

RISKS & BENEFITS:
There are few risks to taking part in this research study. The following is a list of the possible risks, including the dangers of those risks and how likely they are to occur. The primary risk is breach of confidentiality, which can be serious. However, as will be described in the next section, we are taking robust measures to minimize this risk, so the risk is extremely slight. Additionally, you might be asked to recall difficult memories about your time before and after moving to the southeastern United States; these memories might cause emotional pain for you if your experiences were very difficult during this time.

There are possible benefits to being in this study. You may benefit from sharing your stories with others and sharing may help you understand those experiences better. The researchers cannot guarantee that you will experience any personal benefits from participating in this study.

PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY:

Any information you provide will be kept secret as far as it is allowable by law. Some specific data may have to be shared with individuals outside of the study team, such as members of the ACU institutional review board. Otherwise, your confidentiality will be protected by making sure that all documents are locked away in a safe. All Zoom meetings will be password protected so that only you and the researcher will be able to log in. Once the interviews are finished, the recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer until it is transcribed using an online service called TranscribeMe! TranscribeMe! is fully compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) requirements, with multiple safeguards designed to protect the privacy and security of your personal information. At no time will your information be left unprotected. Once the recordings have been transcribed, the data will be coded.

CONTACTS:

If you have questions about the research study, the lead researcher is Darren Dean and may be contacted at xxx-xxx-xxxx, email: xxxxx@acu.edu, address: xxxxx. If you are unable to reach the lead researcher or wish to speak to someone other than the lead researcher, you may contact Dr. xxx at xxx-xxx-xxxx. If you have concerns about this study, believe you may have been injured because of this study, or have general questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact ACU's Chair of the Institutional Review Board and Executive Director of Research, xxxxxxxxx, Ph.D. xxxxxxxxxx may be reached at

(325) xxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxx@acu.edu
320 Hardin Administration Bldg, ACU Box 29103
Abilene, TX 79699

Consent Signature Section

Please check the first box below if you voluntarily agree to participate in this study. If you do not wish to participate, then check only the second box below. You should receive a copy of this signed consent form. Check one of these boxes only after you have read all of the information provided and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. You do not waive any legal rights by signing this form.

☐ **I agree to participate in this study.**

☐ **I choose <u>not</u> to participate in this study.**

_____   _____   _____

Printed Name of Person Obtaining   Signature of Person Obtaining   Date
Consent   Consent

Appendix D: From Codes to Themes (Sampling)

Sample list of Codes to Themes linked to Subtheme 3B: Drugs and Crime

Coding Process:	Full Transcription Text	First-Round Coding	Second-Round Coding	Theme Identified	Subtheme Identified
Coding Tools Used:		Narrative Coding Method Applied	Patterns/Focused Coding Methods Applied		
	I think I don't like that I can't go outside after 8:00 p.m., just for physical health. Physical safety, you know? Yeah, yeah, I kind of feel that you know, in China when I get hungry, I can go outside like even in the middle of the night like 2 or 3 a.m.	I don't like that I can't go outside after a curfew of 8:00 p.m. because of safety concerns. In China, I can go outside anytime and not worry about my safety.	Crime / Safety Concerns in United States	Conditions in the United States	(3B) Drugs and Crime
	Yeah, the gun violence. The violence here in the States. I don't like it. It makes me worried, you know, about going anywhere.	The gun violence in the United States. I don't like it. I worry about my safety.	Crime / Safety Concerns in United States	Conditions in the United States	(3B) Drugs and Crime
	I tell new students from China, ones that just get here that don't know, don't go outside at night, yeah, it's going to be dangerous areas.	I tell new students to not go outside at night because it's not safe in this area.	Crime / Safety Concerns in United States	Conditions in the United States	(3B) Drugs and Crime

	People they friendly here, but sometimes I'm afraid of a gunshot. Because in China, we uh, don't have guns. So, I just received an email from campus security, and they told me there's a gunshot, that something happened. It made me scared, yeah, so I honestly think it's a problem here. Because we don't have guns, and I don't really need to worry about guns in China you know.	It's friendly here but sometimes I'm afraid when I hear a gunshot. In China we don't have guns. I just received an email from campus security, and they told me that there were gunshots. That scared me.	Crime / Safety Concerns in United States	Conditions in the United States	(3B) Drugs and Crime
	About a month ago, um, I was in my room, and there were some gunshots outside where I stay. It sounded so close and it really scary. That was like a late night, and I just heard someone fire gunshots. That time made me not feel safe here at School C.	About a month ago, I was in my room and there were gunshots outside. It sounded close and I was scared. It was late and I heard gunshots. I didn't feel safe.	Crime / Safety Concerns in United States	Conditions in the United States	(3B) Drugs and Crime

Appendix E: COVID-19 Timeline
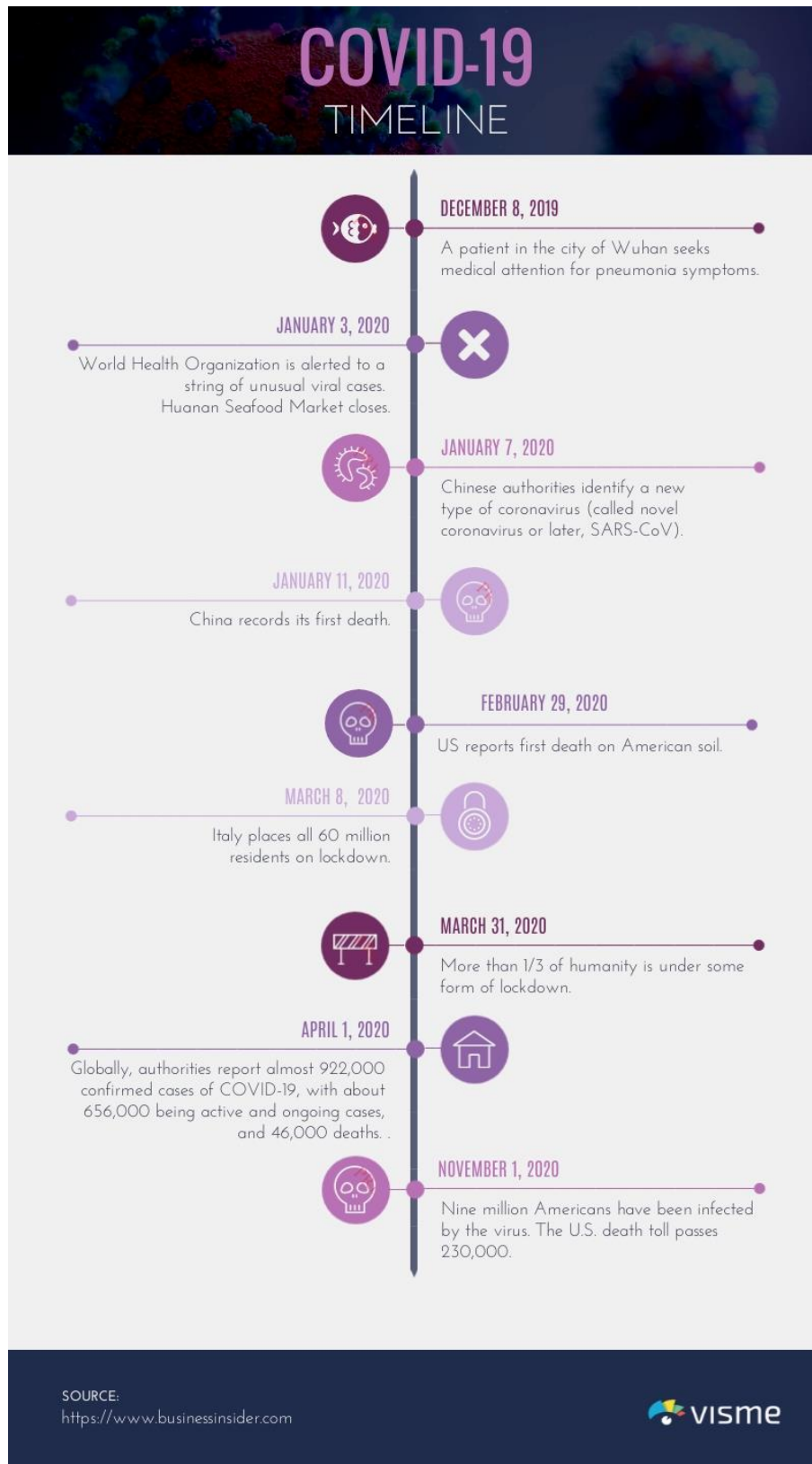
Appendix F: Daily Confirmed COVID-19 Cases

Number of daily confirmed cases for China and the United States
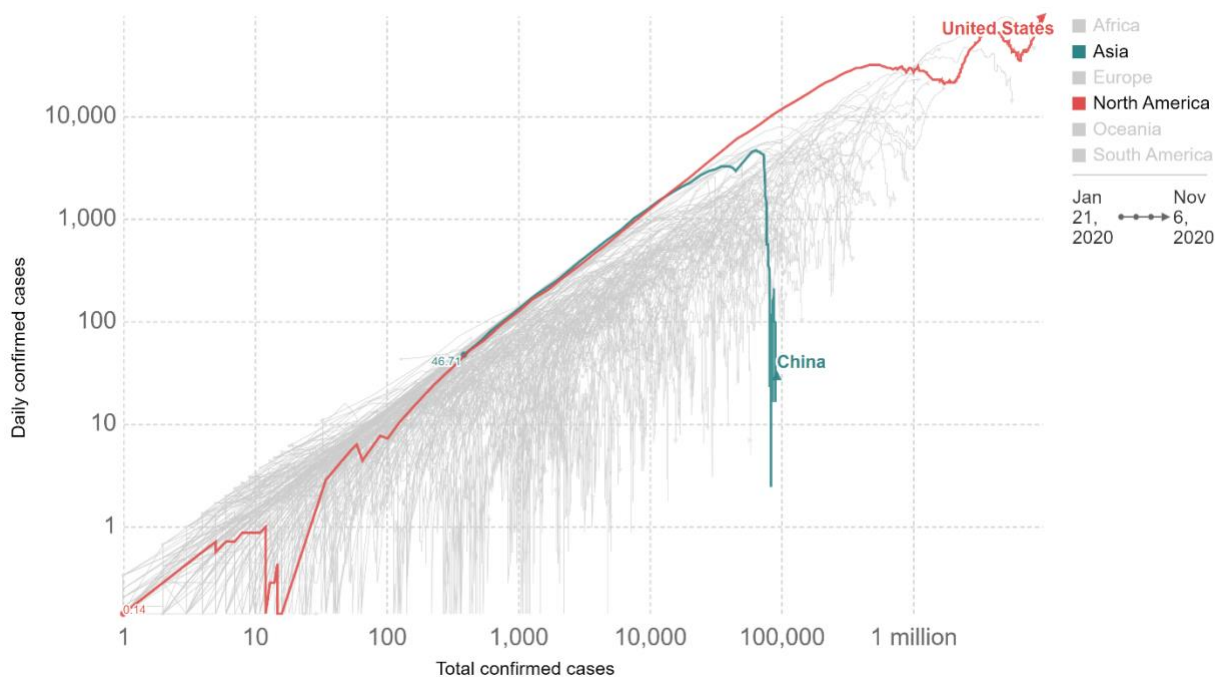
Situation update worldwide. Date range is from January 21 to November 6, 2020. Grey lines represent other countries' total confirmed cases. Source: WHO and European CDC. November 6, 2020.

Appendix G: Coding Sample

Output of Codes from Dedoose (Sample)

Title: **Chen** Transcript (1).docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 23 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Undergraduate School
Attended: School B Employment: Unemployed Field of Study: Accounting
Pseudonym: **Chen**
Codes Applied: Faculty University Experience

The staff is always friendly, and I can see all my professors.

Title: **Chen** Transcript (1).docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 23 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Undergraduate School
Attended: School B Employment: Unemployed Field of Study: Accounting
Pseudonym: **Chen**
Codes Applied: Faculty University Experience

I didn't learn anything from that course, but I got a, I got an easy A from the course. Yeah, he didn't teach anything. Yeah, he just showed up and just lectured and went away. He didn't teach anything.

Title: **Chen** Transcript (1).docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 23 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Undergraduate School
Attended: School B Employment: Unemployed Field of Study: Accounting
Pseudonym: **Chen**
Codes Applied: Academic Advisers University Experience

I had a tour guide. A guide. He, he helped me a lot, and he's American. His name is Jacob, and he helped me allowed to practice my language a lot. Yeah, I practice my language.

Title: **Chen** Transcript (1).docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 23 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Undergraduate School
Attended: School B Employment: Unemployed Field of Study: Accounting
Pseudonym: **Chen**
Codes Applied: Consequences University Experience

I say some of [the] Chinese students. They have their families is rich and later, they don't really care about your academic, their courses, they just play video game stay at home.

Title: **Chen** Transcript (1).docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 23 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Undergraduate School
Attended: School B Employment: Unemployed Field of Study: Accounting
Pseudonym: **Chen** Crime:
Codes Applied: Consequences University Experience

I don't study very hard, but I know my GPA is not really high; GPA is like 3.3. But I don't study very hard. I do what I have to do, but I don't do a lot of extra additional works on study. I just finished all the study that my professor required.

Title: **Chen** Transcript (1).docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 23   Sex: Male   Level of Completion: Undergraduate School
Attended: School B   Employment: Unemployed   Field of Study: Accounting
Pseudonym: **Chen**
Codes Applied: Faculty University Experience

My professor, they really helped me a lot. And every time I have a problem, I email them every time I have a problem. You know, and they replied me very quickly, and they just helped me a lot in all friendly.

Title: **Chen** Transcript (1).docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 23   Sex: Male   Level of Completion: Undergraduate School
Attended: School B   Employment: Unemployed   Field of Study: Accounting
Pseudonym: **Chen**
Codes Applied: Grades University Experience Conditions in United States

Sometimes we can't get a good grade. I don't know why, perhaps they don't work. They don't study a lot. I think, I don't know how to define how did you find the struggle like is it tough times starting or at tough time at life, I don't know.

Title: **Chen** Transcript (1).docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 23   Sex: Male   Level of Completion: Undergraduate School
Attended: School B   Employment: Unemployed   Field of Study: Accounting
Pseudonym: **Chen**
Codes Applied: University Experience

As I know Australia diploma, college in Australia is much easier than living in America; I know some people they have trouble at School B is go to Australia to get there. Because they told me you Australia started is much easier than America. Costs much less money. You have nicer pressure in Australia. School is easier.

Title: **October** transcription.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 24   Sex: Male   Level of Completion: Graduate   School
Attended: School A   Employment: Employed   Field of Study: Graphic Design
Pseudonym: **October**
Codes Applied: Grades University Experience

I'm doing not very good. Not very good. You have like four subjects, math, English, Chinese, and one other of your choice, and I choose the history. And did pretty good on history and okay on math and Chinese, but I only got 79 out of 150 in English.

Title: **October** transcription.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 24 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Graduate School Attended: School A Employment: Employed Field of Study: Graphic Design Pseudonym: **October**
Codes Applied: University Experience

I actually think the structure is good but the problem with the program is later on they try to that they try to recruit more and more students in and they make class only for the international student. Majority of them is Chinese. And the problem is they come here, but they are not enrolled.

Title: **October** transcription.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 24 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Graduate School Attended: School A Employment: Employed Field of Study: Graphic Design Pseudonym: **October**
Codes Applied: University Experience

Like you say, hey, if you have like a student want to go because I go through an agent to do all my paperwork, and they helped me to select the school, and they wanted to get more and more students, and the most important thing, they trying to get more and more qualified students out there. More like, you know, they didn't pass, or they didn't have any like language background they kind of bad.

Title: **October** transcription.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 24 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Graduate School Attended: School A Employment: Employed Field of Study: Graphic Design Pseudonym: **October**
Codes Applied: University Experience

Yeah, and they just want to bring them here just completely take them. Just as long as the parents actually pay, they bring the student here.

Title: **October** transcription.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 24 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Graduate School Attended: School A Employment: Employed Field of Study: Graphic Design Pseudonym: **October**
Codes Applied: University Experience

Like you collect people here, and if they pass this, yeah, I think you can stay. If you don't, we're going to send you.

Title: **October** transcription.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 24 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Graduate School Attended: School A Employment: Employed Field of Study: Graphic Design Pseudonym: **October**
Codes Applied: University Experience

They just like, they don't care. They just want a student to come in, and they don't want to make sure every student gets enough learning process. So, I know a lot of students. They are rich, their family is rich, they didn't get a good grade on GaoKao, so they just want to send their kid.

Title: **October** transcription.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 24   Sex: Male   Level of Completion: Graduate   School Attended: School A   Employment: Employed   Field of Study: Graphic Design
Pseudonym: **October**
Codes Applied: University Experience

Their parents want to send their kid, and they come here and just like all they do. Just like get a fancy car, get things, and they're not really taking care. They are not really paying attention during the class, and they are not really trying to learn. They are more like, just come here to have fun. Yeah, those are a lot of students.

Title: **October** transcription.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 24   Sex: Male   Level of Completion: Graduate   School Attended: School A   Employment: Employed   Field of Study: Graphic Design
Pseudonym: **October**
Codes Applied: Faculty University Experience

Like my professor really gave me a lot of help and helped me to revise my paper, although I think they shouldn't do that. But, you know, I also learned, so that's the ultimate purpose is you learn. So, as you learn like the pass maybe can be a little, you know, flexible. And also, my history class teacher. He's very, he's very nice and very kind. He also provides me a lot of help, I would say all the core class I took, they're pretty good.

Title: **October** transcription.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 24   Sex: Male   Level of Completion: Graduate   School Attended: School A   Employment: Employed   Field of Study: Graphic Design
Pseudonym: **October**
Codes Applied: Faculty University Experience

We don't have a lot of interaction with the professor, basically like is this more like come and go, but I think it's a core class. So it doesn't really matter that much sometimes. Chinese student asked questions, but it can also be cause like I want to hear and I understand what they talking about because I know they're crappy English and what they are trying to ask. But the professor doesn't really understand it.

Title: **October** transcription.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 24   Sex: Male   Level of Completion: Graduate   School Attended: School A   Employment: Employed   Field of Study: Graphic Design
Pseudonym: **October**
Codes Applied: University Experience Conditions in United States

But Chinese students don't want to do that. They didn't talk to teachers after class because that is too scary. So, a lot of students [don't] understand what the professor is asking like, especially the homework part. They can create really a lot of misunderstanding, like the Chinese students like miss the point, they don't really, they don't do the homework on purpose, some of them don't do it. Some people did.

Title: **October** transcription.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 24 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Graduate School Attended: School A Employment: Employed Field of Study: Graphic Design
Pseudonym: **October**
Codes Applied: University Experience

Not everyone is cheating. American students cheat. They cheat a lot. We students, we know that. We see that! And that they cheat in a very dumb way, very obviously. If you want to cheat find some high tech or write stuff like tiny or like shrink them. You're like a watch thing like those kinds of things. Be creative when you're cheating. Don't just write on your lap with super big words.

Title: **October** transcription.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 24 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Graduate School Attended: School A Employment: Employed Field of Study: Graphic Design
Pseudonym: **October**
Codes Applied: FacultyUniversity Experience

I would encourage them to talk to their professor more. A lot of students come here with the complaint that they don't really understand the professor and the professor doesn't really care about us. But, from my experience because that is not the case. Most of the time, if the professor doesn't know what you're doing or what you need, it is hard for them to provide you with help.

Title: **Wen** Transcript.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 25 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Graduate School Attended: School C Employment: Unemployed Field of Study: Materials Engineering
Pseudonym: **Wen**
Codes Applied: China vs. United States University ExperienceHofstede - Power Distance Index

In the classroom, students don't show enough respect to their teachers. I mean, it's good to be creative, to have your own opinion. But you should have some critical thinking to have to use some supporting material to argue with the professor instead of, you know, some very emotional response.

Title: **Wen** Transcript.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 25 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Graduate School Attended: School C Employment: Unemployed Field of Study: Materials Engineering
Pseudonym: **Wen**
Codes Applied: University Experience

Some students argue with the professor, with the teacher, and as a result, you know, the students will say I don't know. I don't know, just that cannot stop, and they continue the class. I feel like that's not very efficient or respectful. You know students, should you know the classroom really should have more critical thinking.

Title: **Wen** Transcript.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 25 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Graduate School Attended: School C Employment: Unemployed Field of Study: Materials Engineering Pseudonym: **Wen**
Codes Applied: University ExperienceChina vs. U.S.

Here I think students should try harder and also answer the questions the professor asks. They don't seem to try very hard.

Title: **Wen** Transcript.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 25 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Graduate School Attended: School C Employment: Unemployed Field of Study: Materials Engineering Pseudonym: **Wen**
Codes Applied: FacultyUniversity Experience

Some professors are very like critical and some professors are very idealistic.

Title: **Wen** Transcript.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 25 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Graduate School Attended: School C Employment: Unemployed Field of Study: Materials Engineering Pseudonym: **Wen**
Codes Applied: FacultyUniversity Experience

He spent a lot of time working on his own research, so I had to learn myself by watching YouTube videos and using the internet to help me. But he was busy taking part in their conferences with other guys from their industry trying to make his you know his research right instead of mine.

Title: **Wen** Transcript.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 25 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Graduate School Attended: School C Employment: Unemployed Field of Study: Materials Engineering Pseudonym: **Wen**
Codes Applied: University Experience

I feel like most of my colleagues and classmates are from China or South Korea, Japan. You know all international students. Actually, in the states you know in their engineering school almost all their Asia guys you know go there right? Yeah, few Americans.

Title: **Wen** Transcript.docx

Descriptor Info: Age: 25   Sex: Male   Level of Completion: Graduate   School Attended: School C   Employment: Unemployed   Field of Study: Materials Engineering Pseudonym: **Wen**
Codes Applied: University Experience

One guy comes from Pakistan and the other six guys are from China, and one is from Taiwan.

Title: **Wen** Transcript.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 25   Sex: Male   Level of Completion: Graduate   School Attended: School C   Employment: Unemployed   Field of Study: Materials Engineering Pseudonym: **Wen**
Codes Applied: University Experience

I know if you want to know more about the knowledge, you want to learn, try the English version, not read the Chinese textbook.

Title: **Wen** Transcript.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 25   Sex: Male   Level of Completion: Graduate   School Attended: School C   Employment: Unemployed   Field of Study: Materials Engineering Pseudonym: **Wen**
Codes Applied: University Experience

I feel like School C, they do a good job, but I think they can organize more activities to offer the Chinese international students or other country's students to communicate. To work with local American students, to get more American influences. Some Chinese guys are shy, you know. And what if the university could offer more opportunities for students to get more influences. That would be way better.

Title: **Wen** Transcript.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 25   Sex: Male   Level of Completion: Graduate   School Attended: School C   Employment: Unemployed   Field of Study: Materials Engineering Pseudonym: **Wen**
Codes Applied: University Experience

And Chinese students are really good with mathematics. Maybe the Chinese could offer like tutorial stuff for American students to help them. They could both get to know each other better that way.

Title: **Wen** Transcript.docx
Descriptor Info: Age: 25   Sex: Male   Level of Completion: Graduate   School Attended: School C   Employment: Unemployed   Field of Study: Materials Engineering Pseudonym: **Wen**
Codes Applied: University Experience

But School C offers a lot of hospitality. More than other schools in the States.

Title: **Wen** Transcript.docx
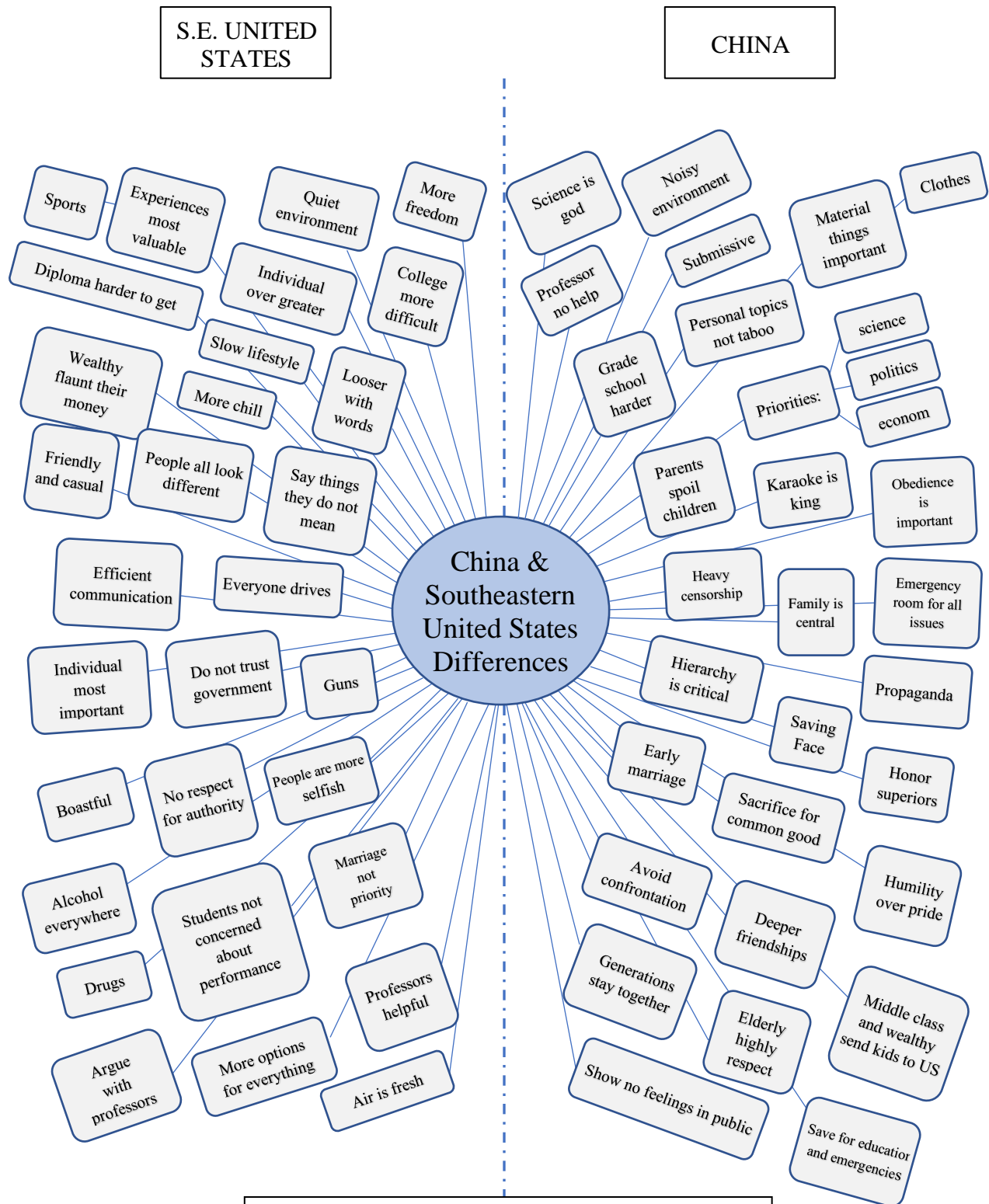Descriptor Info: Age: 25 Sex: Male Level of Completion: Graduate School Attended: School C Employment: Unemployed Field of Study: Materials Engineering Pseudonym: **Wen**
Codes Applied: University Experience

Well, I haven't gone to school at others, but people I know say that my experience is better than their experience at schools in other places.

Appendix H: Differences in China and Southeastern United States

S.E. UNITED STATES	CHINA

China & Southeastern United States Differences

S.E. United States

- Sports
- Experiences most valuable
- Quiet environment
- More freedom
- Diploma harder to get
- Individual over greater
- College more difficult
- Wealthy flaunt their money
- Slow lifestyle
- Looser with words
- More chill
- Friendly and casual
- People all look different
- Say things they do not mean
- Efficient communication
- Everyone drives
- Individual most important
- Do not trust government
- Guns
- Boastful
- No respect for authority
- People are more selfish
- Alcohol everywhere
- Students not concerned about performance
- Marriage not priority
- Drugs
- Professors helpful
- Argue with professors
- More options for everything
- Air is fresh

China

- Science is god
- Noisy environment
- Clothes
- Professor no help
- Submissive
- Material things important
- Grade school harder
- Personal topics not taboo
- science
- politics
- econom
- Priorities:
- Parents spoil children
- Karaoke is king
- Obedience is important
- Heavy censorship
- Family is central
- Emergency room for all issues
- Hierarchy is critical
- Propaganda
- Saving Face
- Honor superiors
- Early marriage
- Sacrifice for common good
- Humility over pride
- Avoid confrontation
- Deeper friendships
- Generations stay together
- Elderly highly respect
- Middle class and wealthy send kids to US
- Show no feelings in public
- Save for education and emergencies

(October, personal communication, September 8–14, 2020)
(Chen, personal communication, September 8–14, 2020)
(Wen, personal communication, September 8–14, 2020)

Appendix I: Antecedent Factors of Acculturative Stress

Source	Theory	Design	Scope of Study	Major Antecedent Factors Found	Context	Participants
This Study	Inductive	Qualitative Narrative Tradition	Empirical	(a) University interactions in the southeastern United States are largely positive, with a few exceptions. (b) Cultural differences have a powerful influence on Chinese international students' acculturative experiences in the southeastern United States. (c) Current political and social conditions in the United States cause stress among Chinese international students. (d) Language issues are the single greatest stressor for Chinese international students in the southeastern United States.	Four-year university in the southeastern United States.	Three Chinese international students over age 18.
Oramas et al., 2018	Chinese students' perceptions and expectations versus their actual experiences may cause acculturative stress	Qualitative	Effects of expectations on acculturative stress	(a) Linguistic challenges affect Chinese students' understanding of lectures and decrease classroom participation. (b) Cultural challenges from limited social relationships and decreased communication with instructors causes stress. (c.) Learning styles contribute to success or failure of Chinese students in the United States. (d) Limited exposure to American culture may prevent successful adjustment and ultimate academic success of Chinese students in the United States.	Four-year university in the United States.	11 Chinese international undergraduates in China; 11 Chinese international graduate students in the United States.

Source	Theory	Design	Scope of Study	Major Antecedent Factors Found	Context	Participants
Qi et al., 2018	Inter-personal problems' effect on acculturative stress	Quantitative Surveys (Time 1 and Time 2)	Effects of interpersonal problems on acculturative stress	(a). Interpersonal problems lead to acculturative stress. (b) Acculturative stress compounds social adjustment difficulties. (c) Chinese students with lower agency tend to struggle more with acculturative stress.	United States	243 survey participants (Time 1); 177 of those participants (Time 2).
Zhang & Jung, 2017	Underlying factors that cause acculturative stress in Chinese international students	Quantitative Surveys	Association between students' background characteristics and dimensions of acculturative stress	(d) Chinese international students who are more comfortable in using the English language may experience less specific acculturative stress. (e) Undergraduates are more likely to experience higher perceived discrimination and fearfulness than are graduate students. (f) Perceived social support from family was positively associated with acculturative stress.	Chinese international students who are studying in the United States.	262 survey participants.