

CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN U.S. HIGH SCHOOLS:  
CASE STUDIES OF ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES

A Dissertation  
by  
PRUDENCE LEE BROOKS

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APPROVED BY:

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Leslie Cook, Ph.D.  
Chairperson, Dissertation Committee

---

Jesse Lutabingwa, Ph.D.  
Member, Dissertation Committee

---

Chuang Wang, Ph.D.  
Member, Dissertation Committee

---

Audrey Dentith, Ph.D.  
Director, Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

---

Max C. Poole, Ph.D.  
Dean, Cratis D. Williams School of Graduate Studies

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## **Abstract**

### **CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN U.S. HIGH SCHOOLS: CASE STUDIES OF ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES**

Prudence Lee Brooks  
B.A., University of North Carolina Charlotte  
M.A.T., University of North Carolina Charlotte  
Ed.S., Appalachian State University  
Ed.D., Appalachian State University

Dissertation Committee Chairperson: Leslie Cook, Ph.D.

The intent of this study is to investigate and better understand the academic and social challenges that Chinese international high school students are encountering during the acculturation process in the United States. A qualitative methodology and interpretative framework were utilized in a case study of three 9<sup>th</sup> grade Chinese students in a U.S. private high school. Methods of data collection included observations and semi-structured interviews with the participants. The findings of this research revealed a deficit in the support provided by the U.S. high school to the Chinese international students in order to overcome the students' challenges imposed by language barriers. Additionally, the lack of understanding from the faculty and the domestic U.S. students contributed to the challenges the Chinese international students faced. Limited English language proficiency negatively impacts the Chinese international students' social life as well as their academic performance. On a social level, the Chinese international students in this study indicated a willingness to integrate with native speakers. However, the relationship between the

Chinese international students and the native speakers proved severely impeded by the limited English language skills the Chinese international students possessed. Academically, Chinese international students find it difficult to achieve their goals because they are simultaneously learning the English language while attempting to grasp the content of their subject matter.

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Last but not least, I would like to thank my family. For my husband, Shane Brooks, who has been with me every step of the way and making this possible via positive expectations, patience, and love. For my daughter, Sharine, and my son, Dylan, who have been putting up with me during a time where I had spent long periods devoted to researching and writing, I thank them for their understanding. I also thank my brother, Michael Lee, who has always supported me and given me encouragement. Finally, I must acknowledge my faith, which has been my strength and shield as I moved along this path. I am truly blessed because of all the people that I mentioned above. This dissertation could not have been completed without their support. As usual, the people I have thanked are not liable for any errors that may have escaped attention. That responsibility is solely mine.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is a loving dedication to my guardian angel and my greatest mentor

My mother – Helen Fung (馮蓓珠)

I will miss you forever!

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### **List of Abbreviations**

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| ACT   | American College Testing                                  |
| CSIET | Council on Standards for International Educational Travel |
| ESL   | English as a Second Language                              |
| ICE   | U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement                  |
| IIE   | Institute for International Education                     |
| IRB   | Institutional Review Board                                |
| SAT   | Scholastic Assessment Test                                |
| SEVIS | Student and Exchange Visitor Information System           |
| SEVP  | Student and Exchange Visitor Program                      |
| SIOP  | The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol            |
| TOEFL | Test of English as a Foreign Language                     |

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

America's higher education system is one of the largest and most flexible in the world, supported with an enviable mix of public and private funding for research and academic innovation (Blumenthal & Grothus, 2008). Many international students from all around the world study in the United States each year. International students enrolled on U.S. campuses have proven to be beneficial in various ways. Research suggests that the opportunity for U.S. students to interact with students from other cultures better prepares graduates to compete in global economy (Lavelle, 2013). International students contribute to U.S. society not only academically but also by fostering the global and cultural knowledge and understanding necessary for effective U.S. leadership, competitiveness, and security (Anderson, 2005). Another notable benefit of increasing international enrollments is the tuition revenue. Most international students pay full tuition, and about two-thirds pay primarily using personal and family funds (Barber, 2013). While the U.S. economic recession has resulted in reduced state funding for academic institutions, the financial contributions of international students not only help maintain lower costs for domestic U.S. students, but they also improve the health of the community by further subsidizing the economy.

According to Farrugia (2014), 95% of international high school students are diploma seekers or exchange students who may change their status to diploma seeking. This means these students are potential postsecondary students for the U.S. higher education institutions. Consideration of potential benefits of enrollment of international high school students would suggest that the United States would profit on several levels from building and maintaining a

positive relationship between these students and U.S. institutions of higher education. The real-life stories about challenges of successfully acclimating international high school students into the American culture offers compelling evidence that U.S. educators on all levels should become involved as advocates and advisors for this growing population of exceptional learners.

### **Statement of Problem**

The following real-life experience was the impetus for this research. It is possible that these crimes committed were the consequence of the lack of support for Chinese students studying in the United States.

Yiran Liu was bullied by Yunyo Zhai, Yuhan Yang, and Xinlei Zhang at a local park in California on March 2015. All of the attackers and the victim were international students from China who were enrolled in high schools in California when the attack happened. Liu was forced to eat her own hair that was cut off by the trio (Chang & Shyong, 2015). In court, Liu testified that she was stripped naked, slapped hundreds of times, kicked with high-heeled shoes, her body burnt with cigarettes, and tortured in many other horrible ways (Chang, 2016). During the attack, Zhai told the others to slow down and do not hit Liu too hard, so they can torture Liu longer. The whole assault lasted for more than five hours (Chang & Shyong, 2015).

The media, when mentioning both the attackers and the victim in this case called them the “parachute kids.” According to Chiang-Hom (2004), the term *parachute kids* refers to the young students who are studying abroad in a foreign country by themselves. The majority of the parachute kids are between 13 to 17 years old (Chiang-Hom, 2004). This population of students usually live with their relatives or a host family; although some of them live in boarding schools or by themselves in housing purchased by their parents. According to Chang (2016), Zhai faced a sentence of 13 years in prison, while Yang and Zhang will be sentenced to 10 and 6 years

respectively. This sentencing represents far more stringent consequences than these same students would have faced had this crime been committed in China. It is highly possible that these students were never introduced to, nor did they understand, American cultural norms and had no conception of the severity of their actions. Yang's attorney said that "I'm sure they suffer [from] loneliness...., so they bond with other kids in the small Chinese circles with no supervision, [and have] no one to turn to for assistance" (Chang & Shyong, 2015). The case brought a spotlight on the rapidly growing number of Chinese international students in the U.S. high schools and became the catalyst for this research.

According to Farrugia (2014), the number of international high school students is rapidly increasing in North Carolina, as well as in many states across the nation. Her report stated that North Carolina, when compared to 17 other southern states, is third in hosting international high school students, exceeded only by Florida and South Carolina. North Carolina ranks sixth in the same group of states who have admitted international high school student in private secondary schools (Farrugia, 2014). As an educator in North Carolina, I became aware of plans for approximately 100 Chinese high school students slated to enroll in the local public and private high schools of Iredell County for the 2016-2017 school year. While the education circle is excited about the news, the incoming students have already raised debates over perceived racism by the community aimed at host families (Fuhrman, 2016). According to Fuhrman (2016), Tower Bridge International (TBI), which contracted with the schools in Iredell County to assist in attracting and enrolling Chinese students in the high schools expressed that the Chinese students cannot be placed with Muslim, gay, black, or Japanese oriental homes without permission from the student's parents. The exposure of the email caused the community to view the exclusionary requirements as discriminatory and based on stereotypical ideas that have negatively affected the

arriving Chinese students. However, the company's CEO claimed that the email was not from their employee. Meanwhile, the superintendent of the school district asserted that the district is committed to exposing students to diversity and cultural differences, and he encouraged families of all backgrounds to apply to be host families (Fuhrman, 2016).

International students in the U.S. high schools rarely receive adequate support from the schools (particularly in the private high schools). While most of the U.S. higher education institutions have a support system for international students, often providing student counselors, departmental advisors, and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, international students in U.S. high schools rarely see this level of support. The international high school students are often required to pay additional fees to enroll in an ESL program at private school, yet, not all private schools offer ESL programs. Additionally, many private high schools are small schools that have limited funding and staff, making it nearly impossible for them to have a department or counselors/advisors designated solely for international students. Meanwhile, implacable problems result when U.S. high schools' educators and administrators lack the knowledge of cultures, backgrounds, and educational systems of their students. For example, high school is defined as 10<sup>th</sup> grade to 12<sup>th</sup> grade in China. Due to the course credential system in U.S. high schools, some Chinese high school students have to repeat the 9<sup>th</sup> grade when they come to U.S. high schools; if not, they might have to study an extra school year to make up the school credits that were unacknowledged from their 9<sup>th</sup> grade Chinese education. Unless the parents, the guardians, or the agents discuss the issue in detail, some U.S. high schools may be unaware that the completion of middle school in China is equivalent to the completion of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in the United States. Consequently, some Chinese middle school graduate students are considered as high school freshmen instead of sophomore students when they enroll in the U.S.

high school. Some private schools prefer Chinese students to study an extra year, assuming that this time spent is an opportunity for the students to improve their English skills. However, such extra costs and time are unnecessary for many of the Chinese students because most of them can make progress academically with their classmates within several months to a year.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore, describe, and explain the challenges that the Chinese students are encountering in a private religious U.S. high schools. In order to gain a better understanding of the participants' challenges, the study also includes perspectives of the people around the participants, such as their parents, school teachers, domestic U.S. students, and host families. Specifically, this study aims at examining the Chinese international high school students' acculturation process experiences. Additionally, I will investigate the reasons why Chinese parents send their young children to the U.S. high school. Furthermore, the policies toward these students and the impacts the students are having on the U.S. higher education system are analyzed. My hope is that policymakers may use the findings of this study to provide more objective and equitable decision-making, and the U.S. educational leaders from postsecondary and secondary levels will be able to see the importance of this student population. The Chinese students in the U.S. high schools are a group of vulnerable population who are the minors without familiar social support networks, but they are contributing in many ways in the U.S. society. So far little attention has been focused on them in research field compared to the international students at the postsecondary level. These students urgently need supports from the educational leaders, the policymakers, and the researchers. Finally, I hope that this research not only allows Chinese students to have a successful study abroad experience in the U.S. high schools, but the U.S. higher education institutions will also benefit greatly by the increasing

number of this group of students.

### **Research Questions**

Bordage and Dawson (2003) emphasized that “the single most important component of a study is the research question. It is the keystone of the entire exercise” (p. 378). This study focuses on the Chinese students’ challenges in contemporary U.S. high schools. The primary research questions for this study is: What challenges do Chinese students encounter in U.S. high schools while coping with personal difficulties as they adapt in the acculturation process and managing major life adjustments with limited social and emotional support?

In answering the primary question, I also aim to explore the Chinese students’ motivation and supports needed to study abroad in U.S. high schools by asking the following sub-questions: Why do the parents send their adolescent children to a U.S. high school? How can the policymakers, the educational leaders in the higher education institutions and high schools help Chinese international high school students to overcome the challenges they are facing?

### **Significance of the Topic**

The three main reasons for choosing this population as subjects for the research are: 1) the rapidly growing number of Chinese international high school students have a direct impact on U.S. higher education institutions; 2) Chinese students represent the largest population among all of the international students in both secondary and postsecondary levels in the United States; and 3) many researchers have indicated that Asian international students experience more acculturative stress than European international students because the former may have greater cultural differences than the latter (Wei, Heppner, Mallen, Ku, Liao, & Wu, 2007).

Much research has been devoted to international undergraduate and graduate students. However, the increasingly large number of Chinese students in U.S. high schools now form a

more significant percentage of the total population of international high school students. Considering the growing number of Chinese students and their increasingly large proportion of the total number of individuals currently represented internationally in U.S. high schools, a paucity of studies exist that examine this shifting dynamic and its implications. As the leading country of origin among international high school students, Chinese secondary students make up 32% of all the international secondary students in the United States (Farrugia, 2014). The number of Chinese secondary students increased about 32 times from 2005 to 2015, compared to the number of Chinese international undergraduate students, which only increased about 13 times in the same time period (Institute for International Education, 2016; Department of Homeland Security, 2016). According to Kuo and Roysircar (2006), these unaccompanied minors have unique concerns given their young age and vulnerable status. Their research suggests that these adolescents are often not prepared in advance of their sojourn, and they are more likely to have difficulties to adapting to the new culture compared to the international post-secondary students. While many teachers, administrators, and host families wonder how they can best support their Chinese international students, there are very limited resources for them because these students are rarely the focus of research studies.

The newcomers will meet us two-thirds of the way to accept the things we want them take if we are willing to meet them more than half way with the things they want (Miller, 1924), though, the U.S. educational system and the legislative system are far from half way with what international high school students want or need. International high school students are suffering from policies that exploit good will and under serve the population by insensitive legislative measures and underfunded educational systems. Policies and systems were reviewed and discussed in detail in the political and legal perspective portions of this research.

International high school students create new recruiting opportunities for U.S. higher education institutions. Educators and leaders of the higher education field could play a pivotal role by encouraging more research studies on this topic to help nurture these potential students for the future. After all, if these international students are well prepared academically and socially when they are in U.S. high schools, then transition to U.S. higher education institutions is more likely to be successful.

### **Limitations**

This study is designed using qualitative case study methods (Yin, 1994) to explore, describe, and explain the challenges that the Chinese students are having in the U.S. private high school. Case study method was chosen because it excels at bringing us to an understanding of a *how* or *why* questions. Such questions “tend to deal with operational links which occur during a span of time instead of the incidents or phenomena which occur at intervals over time” (Schell, 1992, P.4). Moreover, case studies help researchers make direct observations and collect different data in natural settings (Bromley, 1986). Therefore, it is one of the best methods to gain a fuller picture of what life is like for the Chinese international students in the U.S high school and obtain deeper insights of the challenges that they are encountering.

However, every methodology design has its limitations, and the limitation of this study include: 1) data collection method (for the purpose of maintaining confidentiality, the interviews will be one-on-one only); therefore, the participants will be unable to exchange views, and a broader view cannot be presented; 2) research site – in an effort to conduct an in-depth investigation, the study was conducted in one religiously affiliated private school; therefore, conclusions are limited and ungeneralizable; 3) participants’ background – participants are in the same grade levels from 16 years old to 17 years old, two of them are taking most of their classes

with the 9<sup>th</sup> grade students while they are in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade because they came to the United States after the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Another participant came to the United States at the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Therefore, the length of their time spent in the United States are varied. The student who came to the United States in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade may not see the challenges of the acculturation process as the same as the students who started at the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Additionally, the students' English language skills may not be at the same level before they arrive in the United States.

### **Delimitations**

The study will be limited to Chinese international high school students in a single private school. This particular school was identified as a nonrandomized sample population for the research because of the personal relationships that exist among the researcher and the faculty. One important consideration for the sample population requires limiting the students to those who came to the United States since the 9<sup>th</sup> grade or after because including students who received elementary or middle school education in the United States would affect the validation of the research. The parents of the students, living in China, were interviewed late at night or early in the morning because of the time difference.

Case study research will be conducted because it is one of the best methods to study culture adaptation. Careful field observations and in-depth interviews with diverse groups of stakeholders (i.e., the Chinese students, their parents, educators, host families, and domestic classmates) will provide data that will contribute to this study and to other researchers examining the Chinese international high school students' experience as well as identifying emerging themes that may apply to other Chinese international high school students in similar public and private institutions.

One reason identified as a contributing factor in the limited academic literature on this group of students is the language barrier. For example, achieving truly informed consent with the student population and their parents who live in China involves clearly communicating the benefits and risks of the research study in their native language. Therefore, conducting this kind of research poses a significant challenge for some researchers. Irvine, Roberts, and Bradbury-Jones (2008) contend that “research studies involving diverse language speakers, data collection, transcription and analysis is best undertaken in the preferred language of the respondents, using native researchers; or insiders” (p. 46). In addition, the use of a participant’s native language can narrow the social and cultural distance between the interviewer and the participant (Liamputtong, 2008). My ability to speak Chinese allows the data collection in this research to have the possibility of drawing deeper socio-emotional insights, particularly for the Chinese international high school students. These individuals will be able to express their thoughts more accurately and meaningfully in their own languages.

### **Summary**

This study explores the challenges that Chinese international students are encountering through the process of acculturation in a U.S. high school. It also analyzes the reasons why the parents decided to send their young children thousands of miles away from their home country for a high school education. Furthermore, this study investigates how well the students acculturate by identifying their challenges and coping skills during the transition. The investigation applies Berry’s fourfold model to categorize and understand the students’ acculturation strategy.

This study includes a total of five chapters. The introductory chapter has addressed the research statement and purpose. Then a brief methodology and the research questions were

introduced. Additionally, the significance of this study centers on the imperative for more research in this area. Finally, the limitations, delimitations, key terms of the study were described in detail.

Chapter 2 begins with a comprehensive review of classic literature on acculturation theory. Next, the conceptual framework based on Berry's fourfold model is defined. Then, the implication of the theory as a framework on Chinese international high school students is introduced. Furthermore, the early and current research literature on the Chinese students in the U.S. high school is presented. Also, the impact of international high school students on the U.S. higher education system is explained.

Chapter 3 begins with the discussion of how and why the qualitative case study method was chosen for the methodology and how the participants were selected for this study. The primary data collection method used was one-on-one interviews with three Chinese 10<sup>th</sup> grade students and their respective teachers, school administrators, domestic classmates and host families. Additional data collection methods used included observations and document analysis. The ethical issues and the trustworthiness of the study are described. Further, the researcher's background and possible bias are introduced at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 4 presents the reasons the Chinese students are attending high school in the United States. The findings reflecting the challenges and coping skills of the participants are categorized under four major themes. The data collected data from the participants are reported.

To conclude the dissertation, Chapter 5 discusses the findings presented in Chapter 4 and provides the recommendations to policymakers and educational leaders. Lastly, the implications for future research are presented. Finalizing this dissertation, I have included a personal reflection on the case study process and my own learning as I engaged in this meaningful study.

## Key Terms

*Acculturation* - an adaption process towards an additional culture

*Assimilation* - abandon one's own native culture and replace it with the host culture

*Gaokao* - the Chinese college entrance exam, also known as National Higher Education Entrance Examination

*Integration* - maintain one's own native culture and adopting the new culture simultaneously

*Marginalization* - less inclined to interact socially with the host culture group as well as one's own culture group

*One-Child Policy* - a policy which restricted each couple to have only one child as part of the population control plan in China

*Separation* - value one's own culture more than the host culture

*WeChat* - a Chinese based social app which is similar to Facebook

*Zhongkao* - the Chinese high school entrance exam

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Increasing in frequency are news articles and forum discussions that raise concerns over the dramatic growth in the number of international secondary students studying in the United States and the associated issues that accompany the trend. However, most of these published articles and forums are based on reports from the Institute of International Education (IIE) and pieces of incomplete data from the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) provided by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Farrugia's (2014) IIE report *Charting New Pathways to Higher Education* may be the most thoroughly studied and widely cited work on this topic in the recent years. Many of the journals and articles on this topic after 2014 cited the report; several of them used the report as the single source. Farrugia's report is extremely powerful because it sheds insight on the importance of this group of students. The report raised awareness among educators as to rapidly growing number of international students studying in the United States. It also described how this new rising group of students may affect the future of U.S. higher education. However, the report did not emphasize or discuss the challenges these students are encountering. There are limited online news sources that have interviewed any international secondary students, educators, and administrators that unveiled some of the challenges the students encountered during their acculturation process. In addition to those reports, several research studies were conducted focusing on parachute kids including the social and psychological impacts on these students. The data from SEVP and IIE's reports predominantly focus on the postsecondary level international students.

The potential impact on the U.S. education field by the presence of international secondary students is grossly overlooked and underestimated by policymakers, educators, and researchers. There are limited research studies on this subject available in published journals, and insufficient documented data available from major educational organizations and government departmental agencies.

The remainder of this literature review is organized into three parts. First, the theoretical foundations for this research study will be introduced and the theoretical framework will be a part of the analysis; second, the topic of the research will be evaluated based on prior and current research studies; and third, the importance of Chinese international high school students to the U.S. higher education will be examined.

### **Acculturation Theory**

Acculturation is widely defined as “phenomena that result when groups or individuals having different cultures come into continuous firsthand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p.149). The root word for “acculturation” is culture. Both the prefix and the suffix are derived from Latin. The prefix *ac* is translated as *ad* in Latin, which means “toward,” which indicates direction or addition. The suffix *ation* is *atus* in Latin, meaning “a process” or “an action.” Thus, the word itself means “a process towards an additional culture” (Acculturation, n.d.). The term “culture” is used in social science research on a social group’s verbal and nonverbal behavior (Lewin & Somekh, 2011). Researchers use various words to describe the people who have continuous interaction with a new culture; such as aliens, newcomers, immigrants, minorities, foreigners, and strangers (Berry, 2006a; Gordon, 1964; Park, 1950; Plato, 348BC/1892; Redfield et al., 1936; Rudmin, 2003; Sam & Berry, 2010). Meanwhile, other words are being used to describe

the new culture that students are attempting to adapt to as well; for example, host culture, dominant culture, predominant culture, mainstream culture, superior culture, etc., in contrast of heritage culture, origin culture, home culture, and native culture are terms that are commonly used for newcomers' own culture (Berry, 2006a; Gordon, 1964; Park, 1950; Plato, 348BC/1892; Redfield et al., 1936; Rudmin, 2003; Sam & Berry, 2010). The following terms are used throughout this research: newcomer refers to a Chinese international student; domestic U.S. student refers to a local U.S. student; native speaker refers to a U.S. English speaker; home culture refers to Chinese culture; host culture refers to American culture; host family refers to an American family with whom the international student resides; home-pa and home-ma refer to the husband and wife of the host family.

Culture includes social norms, rules, etiquette, language, beliefs, habits, values, and ideas people use to bring their lives together and declare their way of life. Cultural adaptation is a product of interaction between two cultures; therefore, acculturation is more suitable to use when the study is analyzing the newcomers' situation in the United States (Berry, 2006a). Age is an important determinant of acculturation (Berry, 1997), Poyrazli, Arbona, Bullington, and Pisecco (2001) support this statement by claiming that older international students have more difficulties in adjusting than younger students because younger international students are more likely to be socially involved and thus have an easier transition to the host culture. However, most adolescent international students have fewer social supports and lack essential coping skills. For example, if a student deserved a much higher grade on an assignment, native adolescent would normally turn to his or her parents for support. International high school students, on the other hand, do not have these advocates readily available to call upon for help. Not only does distance hinder the opportunity for parental advocacy, few Chinese parents possess the ability to communicate using

fluent English with secondary level U.S. teachers. On a cultural level, most adolescents from China are taught not to argue or disagree with the elders or teachers, and have had limited social experiences compared to the adult international students. While adult international students tend to have social support from other adult friends who can provide effective suggestions and possible solutions to issues they may face, the adolescent international students lack this same level of support. Additionally, many adult students can turn to their department advisor or international department's counselor. Unfortunately, adolescents rarely have such equitable support opportunities from their schools. Some U.S. high schools (especially private high schools) do not provide advisors beyond the basic homeroom teacher.

### **Foundation and History of Acculturation Theory**

Acculturation theory has been scientifically studied and significantly applied in the social science fields of anthropology (Redfield et al., 1936), sociology (Kramer, 2003), and psychology (Berry, 2006a). This concept can be broken down into many different taxonomies, such as Berry's (2006) fourfold classification model (aka quadric-modal acculturation model), Gudykunst and Kim's (1992) adaptive evolution; and Eric Kramer's (2003) cultural fusion, cultural churning, and dimensional accrual. Early discussions around acculturation recognized it as an individual-level phenomenon (Thurnwald, 1932). According to Rudmin (2003), DeTocqueville expounded upon the acculturation process in America and Europe in early 1800s. However, the term *acculturation* did not enter the lexicon until 1880, when it appeared in a report by the U.S. Bureau of American Ethnography (Powell, 1880). John Powell is credited with creating the word *acculturation*, and he defined it as the psychological changes induced by cross-cultural imitation (Cortés & Sloan, 2013, p. 112).

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an increasing number of scholars studied acculturation (Rudmin, 2003; Berry, 2006a). Scholars started to write the acculturation theory histories as early as the 1900s. For example, Rudmin (2003) noted that a five-part review of 19<sup>th</sup> century acculturation research was published by Sarah Simons. Evidence from history was used to theorize about two-way processes of “reciprocal accommodation” that caused assimilation (Rudmin, 2003), Rudmin’s research stated that Thomas and Znaniecki introduced the first full psychological theory in 1918, and G. Stanley Hall became the first psychologist to write about acculturation. From the early 1900s to mid-1900s, the acculturation theory studies mainly focused on the group-level by scholars in America and Europe. That is because acculturation was first proposed by anthropologists as a group-level phenomenon (Redfield et al., 1936). After mid-1900s, the strong interest of psychology on studying individuals made a distinctive difference between the individual-level changes from the group-level changes on acculturation studies (Graves, 1967). Early U.S. theorists have established a rich body of theories and concepts based on the assimilation experiences of the newcomers who came from Europe from the 1820s to the 1920s, and such theories and concepts are the traditional perspective on assimilation. Later, four types of acculturation processes became the theory of “marginality acculturation” (Park, 1928, p. 881) which were declared as cultures that are marked by geography and by racial features. Gordon (1964) based on the work of his mentor, Park, proposed an assimilation model, which shows the process of how members of other cultures adapt to the dominant culture in a group-level and an individual-level.

The contemporary studies on acculturation primarily focus on the various strategies and how the strategies affect individuals adapting to their host culture. Evidence of the process of acculturation is the transition of an individual or a group of people who come from a different

cultural background and adapt the host culture, then gradually change their home culture, and finally psychological perspectives changes are manifested. Due to increasing issues surrounding migration, globalization, economic structures, study abroad, and violations of human rights, acculturation theory and research have become an important part of understanding the newcomers' adaptation process and outcome. Bhatia and Ram (2001) state that "to suggest that such a process [acculturation] is universal and that all immigrants undergo the same psychological processes in their acculturation journey minimizes the inequities and injustices faced by many non-European immigrants" (p. 9). Specific to this study, Chinese international students come from a totally different cultural background than European international students in the United States. Therefore, Chinese international students' acculturation process and challenges cannot be accurately reflected through a research of all international students in the United States.

### **Major Acculturation Theorists and Their Contributions**

There have been many influential acculturation theorists since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Only a few of the major theorists and their contributions will be introduced here. According to Persons (1987), sociologists William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki were the dominant scholars on ethnic relations. They presented the first psychological theory of acculturation in 1918. They argued that culture is formed by the process of understanding something perceived in terms of previous experience, such as beliefs, habits, associations, and attitudes. They are called "schemas" (Rudmin, 2003) because they have utility in a stable social environment. Two years after Thomas and Znaniecki's acculturation theory was presented, Berkson (1920) examined theories of acculturation in view of liberalism. His research noted that newcomers can immerse

into the host culture and still maintain their home culture through a formal education in the school as well as the family (Rudmin, 2003).

Assimilation, as a part of acculturation theory, was established by Robert Park (Rudmin, 2003). He was one of the major acculturation scholars in the United States between the 1920s and 1930s, and accordingly many assimilation theories are grounded in his work. Park assumed that “as American society continued to modernize, urbanize, and industrialize, ethnic and racial groups would gradually lose their importance” (Park & Burgess, 1924, p. 735). Scholars have studied, evaluated, and criticized Park’s assumptions for numerous years. One common criticism is that Park’s assumptions cannot be tested because he did not provide a timeframe. The criticisms indicate that people would never be able to prove or disprove Park’s theory, if it is not long enough for the assimilation process to complete. Park’s assimilation theory was also criticized for the lack of details; therefore, raised questions such as: “How would assimilation proceed? How would everyday life change? Which aspects of the group would change first?” (Gordon, 1964, p. 71). To make-up the absent fragments of Park’s theory on assimilation, Gordon made a major contribution to assimilation theory through his book *Assimilation in American Life* (1964). Gordon (1964) sees integration as a major step to assimilation during the acculturation process (p. 71). This proposal posits that some newcomers may assimilate from separation stage or marginalization stage; it is determined by each individual’s motivation and cultural background before they became assimilated. For example, if a marginalized newcomer is being accepted by the host culture group, he/she can be assimilated without going through the integration step. Bourhis, Moise, Perrault, and Senecal (1997) modified marginalization into two forms to describe the newcomers: the first form is to describe the newcomers who would like to learn the host culture but experience exclusion from the host culture group. The second form is

to describe the newcomers who are simply not interested in adopting the host culture. The researchers claim that the acculturation orientations of the receiving community include integration, assimilation, segregation, exclusion and individualism (Bourhis et al., 1997). Some studies of newcomers involve “assessment of the extent to which their experiences can be described in Gordon’s terms” (Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 826). Another major contribution to the field is called “ABCs of Acculturation” by Colleen Ward (2001). The “ABCs” refers to affective, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of the process of human life that change during acculturation (Ward, 2001). The ABCs tie to various theoretical perspectives dominating the field: a stress and coping theoretical framework, a culture learning approach, and a social-identification orientation to acculturation (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

In the field of education, acculturation theory has been widely applied for second language acquisition, and it is often used to measure how well international students adapt to the host culture (Schumann, 1986). John Schumann is well-known for a typology he developed, which explains the linguistic acculturation of a Second Language Learning group (2LL) to a Target Language group (TL) (Rudmin, 2003). Schumann’s (1978) language acculturation theory model predicts that the degree of a learner’s success in second language acquisition depends upon the learner’s degree of acculturation. Despite the fact that his language acculturation theory has been cited by many scholars who study second language acquisition, some critiques include the model “has not been the focus for analysis for some time [however] with some modification [it is possible] to turn out to be a useful framework for investigating the effects of social and affective factors in L2 acquisition” (Lybeck, 2002, p.174).

Critiques of most acculturation theorists’ backgrounds appeared when people started to notice that these theorists’ own histories actually played a critical role in theoretical

development. The acculturation field has been dominated by white males of European descent who often do not speak the newcomers' languages (Gans, 1997). The accuracy and representativeness of the acculturation theory concepts and aspects may possibly be affected by language barriers. Linguistic limitations or bias may have affected the results of their research. Meanwhile, Rudmin (2003) believes that there is an increasing number of scholars from different backgrounds who now study acculturation. He suggested that it is instructive to see the very high degree to which the history of acculturation research has involved minority heritage doctoral students researching the acculturative situation of their own groups.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The predominant concept of the acculturation theory in the field is the fourfold model by John Berry (1980). Redfield and his colleagues (1936) put forward the definition of acculturation by stating that “acculturation encompasses all forms of change” (p.314), and Berry (1980) claimed that such changes could be social, physical, and biological. His fourfold model contains acculturation strategies for both individuals and group-levels studies. The central part of the fourfold model is the concept that there are two independent dimensions underlying the process of acculturation of newcomers: 1) the maintenance of heritage, culture, and identity; and 2) the involvement with identification with their societies of settlement aspects (Berry, 1980). The fourfold model includes assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization (see Figure 1 below).

The model demonstrates how newcomers express their acculturated experience to the host culture. The Fourfold model has been widely applied by the scholars throughout acculturation studies (Rudmin, 2003). Many new ideas and models of acculturation theory were created based on Berry's fourfold model. After extensive review of the research in the field,

Berry's fourfold model most closely aligns with my own conception of the key principles of the theory. The concept of acculturation will be discussed in detail with the implications of fourfold theory as a framework for understanding Chinese international students in the U.S. high schools in the following sections.

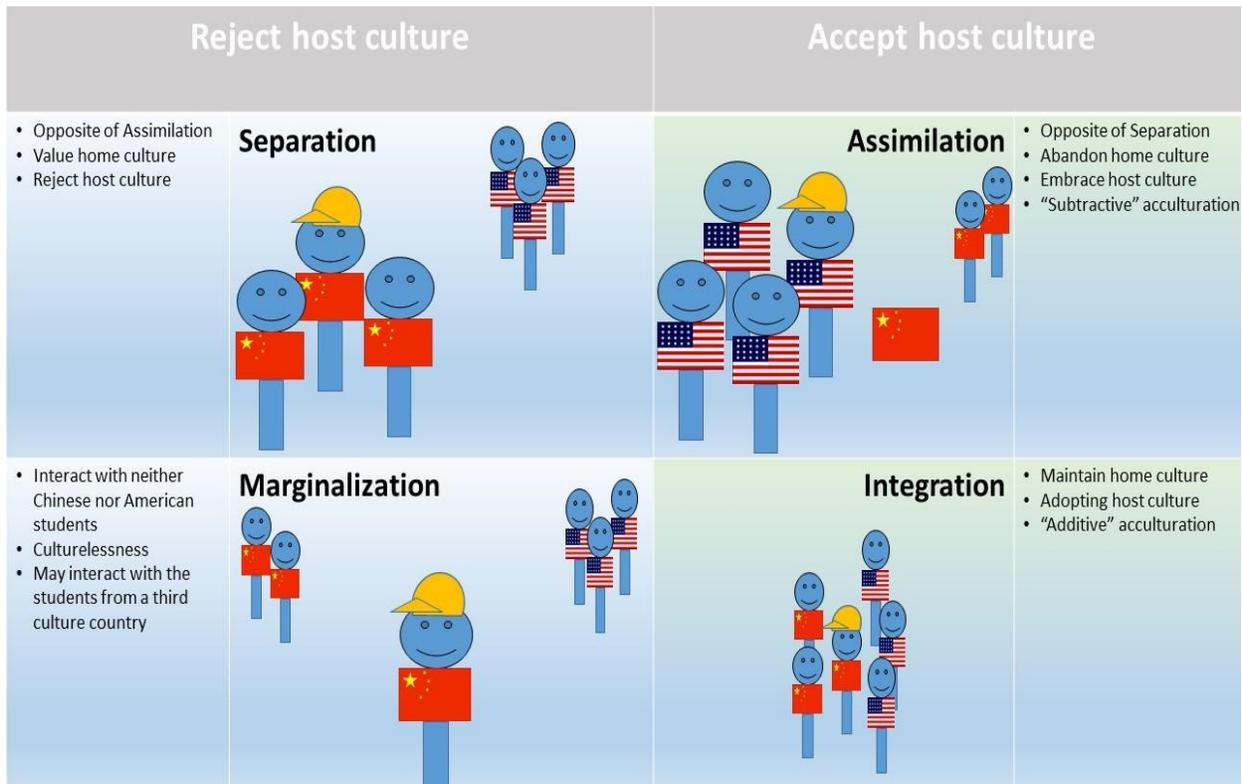


Figure 1. Berry's Fourfold Model of Acculturation (Berry, 1980).

**Assimilation.** Assimilation implies the complete loss of one's home culture when replaced with the new host culture (Wirth, 1945). A newcomer who is entirely assimilated normally acquires most of the traits and lifestyles from the host culture group. Berry (1965) contends that assimilation is the most studied and most commonly considered acculturative outcome. In fact, most of the early theories of acculturation assumed that the only preference outcome of acculturation is assimilation. The assumption of assimilation is also known as "subtractive" acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2010). Subtractive acculturation refers to newcomers

abandoning their own native culture and adopting the host culture. This exclusive division between only two alternatives sometimes may represent past acculturation processes or outcomes of the newcomers but not necessarily in the present. For instance, most of the Chinese international students lost contact with their own cultural group while they studied abroad in the United States decades ago. In the last century, international students find themselves assimilating into the American culture much easier and quicker. In the past, most international students wishing to return to their home country for a visit found it to be extremely difficult to do so because of the long distance and transportation expenses. Additionally, the high cost of international long-distance calls inhibited any quality or lengthy conversation. Therefore, these students were “forced” to assimilate to the host culture. However, the development of technology and wide availability of internet services enables more recent international students to maintain many aspects of their home culture while continue to build and enjoy close relationships with their old friends back home.

Hutnik (1991) stated that the assimilation would arise “when the negative connotations of minority group membership far outweigh the positive benefits, and when the internal representations of the majority are highly favorable” (p. 163). Early findings of the assimilation acculturation research claimed that the schools and families of newcomers preferred assimilation acculturation because they believed that assimilation was good for the students. Decades ago, most new immigrants in the United States wanted their children to speak English, so their children would blend into the new society faster. Many educators suggested that newcomers would benefit through assimilation into the new culture and, in particular, learning English. Their reasoning is based upon the knowledge that language barriers pose major problems for the academic success of immigrant children. Many early theorists believed that when newcomers

acclimate to a new culture through an assimilation process, they could improve both social life as well as academic performance. The process of assimilation may appear to offer advantages to immigrants; however, despite newcomers' efforts to assimilate, they may still be viewed as "perpetual foreigners," which is especially true for non-white newcomers (Sam & Berry, 2010). Despite the fact that globalization and cross-culture business endeavors provide exceptional advantages to bilingual speakers in American society, the disconnection from the native society and "coethnic peers" may contribute to an awareness of diminished emotional support especially for young international students when they need it the most (Sam & Berry, 2010).

**Integration.** Integration exists when newcomers are simultaneously maintaining their home culture while adopting the new culture: they value and practice both cultures. Borrie (1959) defined integration as "a dynamic process in which values are enriched through mutual acquaintance, accommodation and understanding" (p. 96). In contrast to assimilation, integration is an "additive" acculturation (Berry, 1980). While newcomers are learning about their new environment and interacting with the host culture group, they still maintain values, practices, and traditions of their home culture. Early theorists rarely mentioned the concept of integration. In the early 1900s, the acculturation report by Redfield et al. (1936) argued that the outcomes of acculturative contact should be acceptance, reaction, and adaptation. Their concept of adaptation is to "fuse the cultures into a harmonious, meaningful whole" (p. 152) or by switching back and forth depending on the situation (as cited in Rudmin, 2003).

Numerous studies found that integration strategy is the most adaptive form of acculturation which has better outcomes on newcomers in terms of psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Liebkind, 2001). Although most people from the host culture group seem to welcome the idea of integration, it appears to be selective. For example, when past

literature discussed the topic of integration, interracial marriage also is commonly addressed. A key concept of integration advocates for mutual acceptance of all cultures and values each equally. Some people reject the idea of interracial marriage, especially those who hold longstanding traditional values encouraged by their respective mainstream culture.

An assumption of integration perspective may be increasingly adaptive with transnationalism because most newcomers have no difficulty connecting with their origin country within the current global context (Birman & Addae, 2015). Integration can benefit both newcomers and host culture groups in instances when there is combined knowledge of both cultures. Thus, mutual acquaintances, accommodation, and understanding may only be beneficial for those individuals possessing the ability to speak an additional language and valuing the practices of two cultures. Overcoming such barriers can alleviate the negative aspects of ethnocentrism and expand the perspectives of individuals while providing greater knowledge and understanding of world cultures. To embrace this global perspective, many U.S. high schools and undergraduate schools now require students to take a minimum of two levels of one foreign language. In particular, newcomers are more apt to receive more social support from both members of their own home cultural network and the host culture group at the same time.

**Separation.** Separation is the opposite of assimilation. It refers to newcomers who value their own culture more than they value the host culture. Newcomers may embrace positive attitudes toward their own culture and hold negative views of a new host culture. These newcomers avoid or keep contradictory attitudes subdued as much as possible when initiating intercultural contact with other cultures (Bourhis, Moise, Perrault, & Senecal, 1997). Separation has not been a serious consideration for international students in the past; however, today's international students may have a different emotional experience from those of the past because

of a number of reasons which include the use of modern technology, air travel, and economic affluence. Now, airplane tickets are much more affordable for most of the international students, allowing them to visit home during long school vacations. International students are now able to contact their friends and family from home through social media apps (i.e., WeChat - a Chinese based social app which is similar to Facebook). Furthermore, they can shop online to obtain nearly whatever they want from their home country, including food and clothes. International students can also read news, watch television shows, and listen to their favorite songs in their native language, in contrast to the students like them who came here decades ago for which these advantages were not an option. Advanced technology and a broadened economy have made it so much easier for the international students to stay in contact with their own culture. At the same time, it takes these international students longer to adapt to the new culture.

According to Sam and Berry (2010), there is evidence that newcomers who are experiencing high discrimination are more likely to prefer separation. This assumption is an example of “reciprocity in mutual attitudes.” If newcomers experience rejection from the host culture group, they then tend to reject the host society (Berry, 2006b). Yet, some Chinese students choose to socialize with their Chinese friends in the U.S. high school, because they are surrounded by other Chinese students. In some private high schools, international students represent one half of the enrolled population and three-quarters of those students come from China (Krantz & Meyers, 2016).

**Marginalization.** Marginalization is the assumption that newcomers are less inclined to interact socially with the host culture group as well as their own culture group. In such cases, it cannot be called marginalization (Rudmin, 2003). Marginalization means the newcomers would like to be considered as part of the host culture group and/or their own culture group but fail to

achieve acceptance. Gordon (1964) described these individuals as “those who engage in frequent and sustained primary contacts across ethnic group lines ... who stand on the borders or margins of two cultural worlds but are fully members neither” (p. 56). Marginalized individuals consider themselves low in both origin culture and host culture identification (Yue & Le, 2012).

Marginalization often happens to the international high school students after they stay in the United States for long periods of time. Bourhis et al. (1997) presented two kinds of marginalization: anomie and individualism. Anomie describes the individuals who reject both cultures and experience cultural alienation or “culturelessness,” while individualism describes the rejection of cultural identities and labels, as they identify themselves as cosmopolitan and culturally free (Rudmin, 2003). Although most of the situations related to marginalization are considered negative, the notion of marginalization could also prove to be positive. While newcomers are marginalized from their home and host cultural groups, they might find acceptance by a third cultural group. For example, a marginalized Chinese international student may interact with some Southeast Asian (e.g., Malaysian) international students in a third cultural group.

Most often, immigrant children tend to adapt to the host culture and identify themselves as part of the host society. In contrast, adult international students tend to lean toward their culture group of origin. Adolescents mostly struggle between fitting into the home culture and the host culture. While currently Chinese adolescents are interacting with the host culture group every day, they can still stay in touch with their own culture much more conveniently and with regular frequency with the aid of advanced technology. Such unique connections denote the common practices that Chinese adolescents engage in that explain interstitial identification as part of a highly select bicultural group. Adolescent students from the bicultural group often

identify themselves as part of the developing host culture group or part of their own culture group depending on the situation and the people with whom they associate. For instance, when the adolescents complete their higher education in the United States and return to China, they tend to continuously practice certain cultural norms they adopted from the host country (e.g., continue to go by their English name and speak English even to their Chinese friends). On the other hand, these students continue to embrace cultural practices from their home country (e.g., preference for Chinese food and customs such as taking off their shoes when entering a house). The identification of a bicultural group is a lengthy cognitive process that adolescent students explore along the way. During the process of investigating how to and why they begin to identify with certain cultural groups, the question of cultural identity arises. This transitional time of growth may be responsible for behavioral and affective problems within their host culture group and their home culture group. Sometimes, students searching for their identity may feel that they are being marginalized or alienated by both groups or feel as though they do not belong to any of the culture groups available to them while being a part of international study programs.

### **Implication of the Theory as a Framework**

An important factor which should be considered when applying theoretical concepts to a statistical framework is to empirically examine changes that may occur to provide greater understanding of problems and the changes that occurs at the individual level. Even though international Chinese high school students who share the same cultural background and live in the same acculturative area, they may not have the same acculturation experience. For example, the Chinese students who study in the U.S. public high school and the Chinese students who study in the U.S. private high school may come from the same cultural origin and live with the same host family yet they have different responses to their experiences based on their own sets of

situational factors (Sam & Berry, 2010). The framework of acculturation explicitly shows the differences between adolescents and adult international students. Though both groups may encounter some similar challenges such as language barriers, there may be many differences between the two groups.

The phases of acculturation take time, and can be problematic and stressful. In order to overcome the challenges initiated by the acculturation process, students should be willing to learn not only the new language, but also learn about the range of acceptable behaviors, gestures, customs, and traditions of the host culture. Due to globalization and the popularity of U.S. culture around the world, most Chinese adolescents are exposed to the U.S. culture through media such as movies, television dramas, music, and the internet well before their arrival to the United States. However, this limited exposure may have created fallacies or confusion about the actual daily U.S. culture. Chinese adolescents may carry many misconceptions about the host culture and these misconstrued ideas could ultimately affect how they behave when they finally arrive and reside in the United States. For instance, it is very common to see some Chinese international students use foul language in English. Since these words appear in most Hollywood movies, television dramas and U.S. popular songs, the Chinese adolescent students assume it as a norm in the United States. Acculturation is a critical process for the Chinese adolescent students in the United States. Various strategies of the acculturation phases function differently for adolescent international students than they do for adult international students. Yet, the concepts of acculturation theory's interrelated aspects allow opportunities to analyze the complexity of a variety of case studies in a deep and precise manner. In addition, some educators do not have the platform to articulate their raised awareness and concerns about the ways in which the acculturation process impacts the international high school students' academic performance and

social life. Therefore, the theoretical framework of acculturation can provide a lens for educators, parents, policymakers, and administrators to understand this overwhelmingly underserved and overlooked group.

### **Chinese International High School Students**

Fully recognizing international students' need to develop their academic and career potential requires a clearer understanding of the countries of origin as well as a depth of knowledge about the challenges in policy and practice surrounding these students (Gordon, 2014). The remainder of this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section begins with an overview of the major trends and findings of Chinese high school students based on the historical and contemporary studies, which reference specific terms used for the international high school students' context. This section is followed by legal and political perspectives with a specific emphasize on the identification and description of the Chinese high school students. The third section elaborates on the advantages and disadvantages of participation of Chinese international high school students' in the program.

#### **Early and Current Research**

According to Clyde (1940), the trend of Chinese students studying in the United States began in 1871 after the two countries signed the Seward-Burlingame Treaty of 1868. The Treaty stated that "Chinese subjects shall enjoy all the privileges of the public educational institutions under the control of the government of the United States" (Clyde, 1940, p. 85) and provided mutual rights for the U.S. people. The first largest group of 30 Chinese international students came to the United States were adolescents under 18 years old. Qian and Chu (2002) stated that there were 122 families that reflected interest in hosting the 30 students. Their research further suggested that the Chinese international students gradually became Americanized; they started to

dress like Americans, played American sports, and even cut their traditional queue or long hair which symbolized their loyalty to their country.

The Chinese government saw evidence of change in these students sent to the United States to study and assumed that the students abandoned the Chinese traditions and acquired undesirable customs from the United States (Chu, 2004). At the inception of this agreement, the Chinese government intended these students to study mechanical engineering in the United States; however, it was the objective of the U.S. government to teach these same students about the Christian culture in hopes that they would return to China and assist the civilization in adopting Christian values (Chu, 2004). It became rapidly apparent that these two countries did not have common goals for those students. Ten years later in 1881, the Chinese government pulled the Chinese students back from the United States. Yung (1909) claimed that the U.S. government violated the treaty by shutting out Chinese students from West Point and Annapolis and cited this as the main reason the students were called back. By the time those students were recalled, some of them had already graduated from high school. Chu (2004) stated that two of the students had graduated from Yale, while 20 of them were still studying at Yale. Another four of them were enrolled at Columbia, seven of them at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and five of them were still in Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (Chu, 2004).

The second group of the Chinese international students came to the United States in 1909 (Chu, 2004). Chu's research indicates that the number of Chinese students studying in the United States amounted to thousands until 1949 and the flow of Chinese students stopped completely when the Korean War started. IIE's (2015b) Open Doors data show that China did not send any further students to study in the United States until the 1974 to 1975 school year. In 1979, China and the United States established diplomatic relations. A group of 50 Chinese international

students came to the United States (Qian & Chu, 2002). Since then, the number of Chinese international students has been growing rapidly. By the school year 2014 to 2015, there were 304,040 Chinese international students enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions (IIE, 2015a).

While most research about Chinese international students focuses on higher education institutions, little research has been conducted on the perceptions of international high school students and their roles. The shifting mobility trends of the incoming Chinese students require meticulous analysis of the challenges faced by current international high school students. With more concentrated research, data collection and analysis on Chinese international high school students in the U.S., higher education leaders will begin to understand how these students could positively impact U.S. higher education (Farrugia, 2014). Within the next decade, it is possible that the Chinese international high school students will outnumber the vast number of the Chinese international undergraduate college and university students, as the number of Chinese international undergraduate students has surpassed the number of Chinese graduate international students studying in the United States in the past decade. After a detailed analysis of the Open Doors data from IIE (2016) and the Department of Homeland Security (2016), the data indicate that there were only 9,304 Chinese international students at the undergraduate level and 47,617 of them at the graduate level in the school year of 2005 to 2006. Yet, the following decade saw the number of the undergraduate Chinese students increased to 124,552, which is 4,221 more students surpassing the graduate level in the 2014 to 2015 school year. Table 1 refers to the changes of the Chinese international students' academic level each school year within the last decade.

Table 1

*Chinese International Students' Enrollment by Academic Level*

| School Year | Secondary | Undergraduate | Graduate |
|-------------|-----------|---------------|----------|
| 2005/2006   | < 1,000   | 9,304         | 47,617   |
| 2006/2007   |           | 9,988         | 47,968   |
| 2007/2008   |           | 16,450        | 53,047   |
| 2008/2009   |           | 26,275        | 57,452   |
| 2009/2010   |           | 39,921        | 66,453   |
| 2010/2011   |           | 56,976        | 76,830   |
| 2011/2012   |           | 74,516        | 88,429   |
| 2012/2013   | 23,562    | 93,789        | 103,505  |
| 2013/2014   |           | 110,550       | 115,727  |
| 2014/2015   | 32,200    | 124,552       | 120,331  |

*Note.* Data were collected from *Institute for International Education, 2016*, and *US Department of Homeland Security, 2016*

**Legal and Political Perspective**

With the aim of effectually indicating the issues of international secondary education, it is essential to recognize the structure and the experiences from both international students and educators' perspectives in the U.S. high school. Identifying these perspectives can provide valuable insights into how to address the international secondary education issues and promote better understanding and more intelligent choices in political and legal initiatives. Data driven decision-making is particularly crucial to anticipate the challenges presented by the numbers of international students being admitted to the United States and assists in considering the legislative caps on enrollment in public schools (Farrugia, 2014). To understand the challenges, difficulties, obstacles, complications that the international high school students are encountering, one must first understand the regulations which govern this group of students.

The decisions that policymakers make about international students directly affect the choices international secondary students make about which schools to attend. Moreover, these rules and regulations could provoke the parents of these students to seek another host country with more welcoming and inviting policies such as Australia that can provide an impeccable

support structure for their children. A brochure from Australia's Department of Education (July, 2016), *International Student Guide 2017*, states that international students are allowed to study in many of the public schools in Australia (from the 1<sup>st</sup> grade to senior secondary school which is 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade). The Australian government provides various adequate supports for their international students, such as disability services, insurance, welfare, ESL programs, and scholarship funding. Although some of the supports require extra fees, many of them are provided free of charge. The Australian Government also initiated laws to protect the international students and to promote high-quality education for them so the students can enjoy a safe and quality study-abroad experience. These laws are known as the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) and have been specifically designated for international students who are under 18 years of age and enrolled in the Australian public schools.

**The Legal landscape.** Per the current U.S. law, international students can attend any state public high schools (except Hawaii and D.C.) or private high schools that are certified by the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), but they are not permitted to study in any U.S. public school under the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level (Department of Homeland Security, 2014). The choices of the type of school (private or public) determine how long these students are permitted to study and reside in the United States. Student visas that are issued for international secondary students in the United States are available under two types: F-1 visa and J-1 visa. The type of the student visas issued determine the length of stay for the international secondary student. The majority of the F-1 visa holders are diploma seekers, whereas J-1 holders are exchange students who normally stay in the United States for a short period of time (i.e., one semester or school year). Whether they are F-1 holders or J-1 holders, students are limited to stay only one year if enrolled in a public school.

The Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET, 2014) asserted that among 73,019 international secondary students enrolled in U.S. schools in 2013, 67% of them hold F-1 visas, and 33% hold J-1 visas. The number of J-1 holders is much lower at the postsecondary level, at only 9%. According to the requirement of Section 214(m) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (Department of Homeland Security, 2016), international students must pay full tuition to the school and school district at the public high schools. Even at the higher rate, the cost of tuition in public schools is still significantly lower than the typical private secondary schools. International high school students pay tuition ranging from \$3,000 to \$10,000 per single school year in a public high school and upward of several thousand to more than \$30,000 per school year for studying in a private high school (Farrugia, 2014). However, the postsecondary level data show that 65% of the international students enrolled in state (public) institutions, and only 5% of the all international secondary students who have the F-1 visa were enrolled in the public high schools (Farrugia, 2014). The J-1 visa is less popular because international students are limited to stay no longer than twelve months in public high schools in accordance with current law. Moreover, Section 625 of Public Law 104-208 (Department of State, 2016) asserts that international students are forbidden from enrolling in any funded adult education and language program (e.g., ESL). They may transfer to a public school but under extremely strict regulations. For example, it is against the law for international students in private schools to transfer to a public school if they study in any U.S. high schools longer than a year prior to the date of initial application. According to MacGregor (2014), international secondary students represent 0.5% of all U.S. secondary students, while postsecondary international students represent 3.9% of all U.S. postsecondary students respectively in 2013.

Nevertheless, private schools benefit from the rules because the regulations which only apply to public high schools, as private schools receive the enrollment of the majority international secondary students. The tuition in private schools tends to be at least two to three times that of public schools; furthermore, many private schools require international students to pay additional handling fees or international admission fees. Since more than half of the international students are diploma seekers, they find little choice but to pay an extremely high rate of tuition to complete their diploma at a private school.

**Political context.** A country's success is not simply based on its legislative system and institutions. It also requires the U.S. policymakers' efforts. A review of the literature shows a clear picture of the current U.S. policy that could be changed to support an increasing number of international students enrolled in U.S. high schools. The key international student policy question is who can be issued the student visa to study in the United States? In 2014, U.S. Department of State declared that 595,569 F-1 visas be issued which would include the higher education sector. However, more than 173,062 of those were denied (Karerat, 2015, September 14). At Michigan State University, a post-secondary graduate school noted that although they worked diligently to and sought out the best and brightest students in China, these students were rejected by the visa officials (Chang, 2003). The same study also claims that the visa officials rejected applicants without any explanation or reason. An applicant who was rejected in Shanghai may be granted a visa by another visa official or from a different embassy in another city of China. These instances then suggest that visa officials make their decisions based mainly on their own preferences or feelings, and the entire visa application process is simply a matter of luck (Chang, 2003).

A second policy concern is how to ensure the international secondary students receive support, assistances, quality education, and a safe environment in which to study. IIE's study on international students notes that the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State is considered the driving force of the U.S. government to promote U.S. higher education abroad (Obst & Forster, 2004). The study shows the U.S. government developed policies, including sponsoring large exchange programs such as the Fulbright Program, to provide financial help for international students in higher education institutions. The U.S. education policymakers can support international secondary students by also implementing similar policies in the public and private high schools to encourage more international students to study in the U.S. high schools. As noted earlier, the majority of international secondary students are enrolled in private schools in the United States. Some private schools take advantage of the needs of the international secondary students; their tuition is extremely expensive with neither a quality corresponding education nor a suitable learning environment. In the case of parachute kids mentioned above, the high school, which served predominantly Chinese students, charged \$13,000 a year for tuition with \$1,500 a month for homestay (Chang, 2016). One of the defendants in this case was at his school for several years but did not learn much English because the school did not have many domestic U.S. students (Chang, 2016). Additionally, Chang (2016) stated that the school is "a cluster of portable classrooms tucked away in the back of a Rowland Heights strip mall. The athletic facilities are minimal: three worn basketball hoops, a volleyball net and a soccer goal on a small patch of parched grass" (para. 27). Funding ESL programs and providing financial assistance can be extremely helpful for international students who attend private schools. Unlike public schools, private schools do not receive federal funding to provide ESL programs. Furthermore, while the U.S. government has set strict rules that govern the public

high schools, they should also recognize that private schools urgently need regulations that protect the rights of international students and thus enhance the reputation of a U.S. education.

In addition to the consideration of facilities and environments of private schools, it is even more important to address the quality of academic instruction international secondary students receive. Unlike many public-school teachers who are trained to teach non-native speakers with certain skills (i.e., Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol, SIOP), private school teachers rarely possess such skills. Often, these unskilled teachers think that an international student is being silent simply because they lack sufficient English language skills. Silent periods for these students are essential and normal at the beginning of their study abroad journey. In fact, most non-native students need a certain amount of time for them to function effectively in the new learning environment and language learning process. Depending upon each student's personality and previous English level, this accommodation for international learners can last from days to months. The silent period is a common strategy for enhanced learning for ESL teachers and grade teachers who have many experiences teaching newcomers. To augment the quality of education international students receive, teachers in the private schools should be required to have basic knowledge and skills about how to appropriately and effectively deliver content to non-native speakers in their classes. These teachers need to understand the difference between teaching domestic U.S. students and non-native speakers and adjust their teaching accordingly. Often a Chinese student in addition to learning American history in a class, it is likely to also be learning the English language. While trying to learn about U.S. history, they are also developing listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills, while trying to understand the definition of vocabulary words, sentence structure, and grammar at the same time. If a teacher can understand the difficulties these students are encountering in the

classroom, they can adapt their teaching (e.g., teach with visual aids) and are better able to accommodate the needs of student and more effectively assist them in acquiring content knowledge.

A third policy concern is the new policy proposals under Trump's administration. This administration recently proposed two policies which may deeply harm the international student enrollment in the United States. The first policy proposed was "Travel Ban" – a policy that tighten the visa issue to the visitors from six countries (Saul, 2017), which included international students and scholars. India, which was included in this ban, has been second only to China in sending students to the United States to become enrolled in our educational system. Headlines in India have been reporting for weeks about possible restrictions on H-1B and other visa programs in the United States (Fischer, 2017). Another proposed policy is to overhaul the H-1B visa program. Fischer (2017) stated that "any policy that might erect hurdles on the pathway from college to work could depress international enrollments." Being able to gain work experience in the United States is highly valued by international students and a great consideration when applying for higher education institutions abroad. Although it may take months or years to implement the new regulations, the negative impact is already reflected in the increasing number of international enrollment at the U.S. higher education institutions. After the new policy was proposed, a survey of 250 colleges and universities reports nearly 40% of overall declines in the number of international applications (Saul, 2017).

Trump's "U.S. First" political theme has brought attention to the world's news reports; hence, the parents of the potential international students became more concerned about safety issues as a result of the increase in hate crimes toward the minority and foreigners in the United States. Decisions of policymakers not only affect the future of international students' future, but

also affect the local communities and students. International students can and do bring valuable cross-cultural experiences to the U.S. high schools, thus expanding global perspectives of current domestic U.S. students. The local communities also benefit on both financial and cultural levels from hosting international students. Furthermore, “the increasing openness of secondary schools to international students is providing more and more opportunities for international students to pursue secondary education in the United States, thereby expanding the available pathways to U.S. higher education” (Farrugia, 2014, p.25). Most of these younger international high school students are going to continue their education in the U.S. higher education institutions. As the students noted in the case of the parachute kids, most of them enrolled in the U.S. high school hoping to get a jump-start on admission to an American college (Chang & Shyong, 2015). Therefore, the decisions of policymakers are crucial not just for the Chinese students, but impact enrollments in U.S. higher education institutions and the communities surrounding them.

### **Debate Over Chinese International High School Students**

IIE (2017) data reveals that the total number of Chinese students in the United States rose by 48% between 2013 and 2016. China’s growing economy has enabled parents to financially support their children as students in Western countries at younger ages than in previous years (Farrugia, 2014). The remarkable increasing numbers of Chinese students enrolling in U.S. secondary schools, the associated social problems, and community benefits have drawn some media attention. Economic benefits provided by the expenditures of Chinese secondary students raised debates over the new regulations included in the travel ban. The most contentious argument aimed at international secondary students from non-English speaking countries appears to revolve around the issue of the intrinsic academic, and economic value of having international students leave their families and home culture to study in a U.S. high school. The following

section will investigate the debates over advantages and disadvantages of being a Chinese international secondary student through the personal perspectives of the three subjects of this study.

**Advantages.** For most Chinese parents, there are several reasons they want their children to study in U.S. high schools: First, many Chinese parents consider an education in a U.S. high school as a pathway for their children to enroll in the highly competitive U.S. higher education system (Farrugia, 2014). Due to the high volume of postsecondary level student applications, the acceptance rate of the student visas is rather low (Chang, 2003). Second, some parents are not certain that their children can excel on the Chinese Zhongkao, a crucial exam for middle school students that determines their distribution into high school, or Gaokao, which is an extremely competitive entrance exam for Chinese local higher education institutions. Third, study in a U.S. high school allows their children to spend more time in preparation for the SAT and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) (Fischer, 2010). Enrollment in U.S. high schools would lay the groundwork for their child and increases the chances of admission to an ideal U.S. postsecondary institution. Fourth, some higher education institutions do not require international students to provide their TOEFL score if they completed their high school degree in the United States. Fifth, U.S. schools can provide students more opportunities to develop their leadership skills, creative thinking skills, and collaboration skills; which are very important components of U.S. college success. These crucial academic abilities are attributable toward success both in and out of college. Mark Butt, an associate dean of admission at Emory University in Atlanta states:

One of the things we look for in an applicant is how much they have participated in extracurricular programs. Not every [secondary] schooling system emphasizes the holistic development of a student. Non-measurable skills such as communication,

creativity and critical thinking, and the opportunity to take on leadership roles may be more available at U.S. high schools. (Wilkerson, 2015, para.11)

Sixth, U.S. high schools prepare international high school students to succeed on a social level (Hopkins, 2012). The transition from high school to college can be a challenge for many students, especially for those who come from a different cultural group. Prior knowledge of English terms, cultural norms, and habits can help international students adapt to college life much easier.

Furthermore, learning the English language is one of the main reasons that parents encourage their children to study in the U.S. high schools. Krashen (1982) believes that most of a person's second language is acquired not learned. He asserts that acquiring a language is a process in which the person is unaware of the new knowledge being obtained, but is able to utilize that knowledge. Many parents consider that enrollment in U.S. high schools as a way to provide their children the "environment" to acquire English naturally because their children will have no choice but to use English to communicate with native speakers in their daily lives. According to Schumann (1986), language is the most important factor in successfully acculturating. His research indicates that it is more difficult for adults to develop a second language, and it is difficult for young children to maintain their native language in a host country. His study shows that those students who arrive as adolescents have a better chance of retaining their native language and culture, because they have already established such knowledge since they were young (Schumann, 1986). Meanwhile, adolescents can learn the new language quicker and easier compared to adults. If students come to the United States as adult students, they will have to overcome the difficult processes of learning the new language and adapting the new culture. If the parents send their children to the United States too early, their

children's native language ability and sense of origin culture will be greatly reduced. Ignoring the age of students can create large cultural and language gaps between parents and children. Based on these implications, the high school level appears to be the most preferable timing for the Chinese adolescents. Enrollment in U.S. at the high school level can most likely provide the best outcomes for new language and culture learning, as well as the first language and the retention of native cultures.

There are numerous benefits for the U.S. education system as well through inclusion of more international secondary students at the high school levels. The international secondary students can offer many positive impacts on learning environments and communities (Wilkerson, 2015). The timing is advantageous because adolescents are beginning to think of future careers and academic aspirations, and research has shown that their decisions and preferences are formed by the surrounding culture (Birman & Addae, 2015). While attending a U.S. high schools, international high school students may be more easily influenced by their experiences to remain in the United States and continue their higher education instead of other popular English-speaking countries for Asian international students (e.g., Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, etc.). In addition, the skills and aptitudes inherent in the international secondary students' experiences contribute to global competencies of U.S. domestic students. The U.S. Department of Education (2012) declared that global competence must become part of the core mission of education from K-12 through graduate school. This federal agency published its first official strategy report for international education and has indicated the importance of attaining global competence:

Students today will be competing for jobs with peers around the world and those jobs will require advanced knowledge and non-routine skills. Transglobal communication and

commerce are increasingly part of the daily work of large and small businesses, which face difficulties in hiring employees with the requisite global skills, including cultural awareness and linguistic proficiency. To be successful in such an environment, students will need to perform at the highest academic levels and have the capacity to understand and interact with the world, including language skills and an appreciation for other countries and cultures. (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, p. 2)

Thus, international secondary students can enrich the efforts of U.S. high schools to encourage a learning environment that includes international students and provide opportunities for diverse student experiences, knowledges, and perspectives to develop the global viewpoints of local students (Farrugia, 2014). Another important impact on the U.S. educational system is the full tuition paid by the international secondary students which are paid in full by the students and their parents without the assistance of United States federal or state funding, financial aid, or scholarships.

**Disadvantages.** Although there are many benefits that U.S. secondary education can provide to international high school students, the transition might be too overwhelming for some students to handle (Hopkins, 2012). It is argued that international secondary students are too young to be separated from their parents. Noted in a court document from the case of the parachute kid, the defendants and their families urged Chinese parents to think carefully before sending their children to the United States without supervision (Chang, 2016). One of the defendants said:

They sent me to the United States for a better life and a fuller education. Along with that came a lot of freedom, in fact too much freedom ... Here, I became lonely and lost. I didn't tell my parents because I didn't want them to worry about me. (2016, para. 19-20)

The degree of freedom that accompanies study abroad programs can result in a number of potential problems since these individuals are young and used to strict parental control.

International high school students often are exposed to and able to explore tobacco, alcohol, early sexual activity, and substance use at a young age (Birman & Addae, 2015). Some of these behaviors are regarded as normal to some degree for domestic U.S. adolescents. As a result, the U.S. acculturation may be a risk factor for young international students who lack the maturity to make the right choices or demonstrate the inability to avoid behavior issues associated with high risk groups.

The process of study abroad for international students in the U.S. high schools entails loss of a familiar support network comprised of family and friends. Developing and participating in new social networks to replace those supports lost in their native culture is a difficult, risky, and a lengthy process. Often poor communication between parents and students becomes an issue due to the physical distance and different time zones between them. Parents often know very little about their children's daily lives during their residence in the United States; moreover, many Chinese parents are neither familiar with the U.S. culture and education nor fluent in English. Hence, parents may not be able to provide advice and guidance for their children when their children are encountering challenges in the United States. Once international students learn that their parents cannot help them, eventually they stop turning to their parents with problems and concerns. As a consequence, the less parents know about their children's lives, the less they can monitor their children's life activities and choices (Birman & Addae, 2015).

As mentioned earlier, language acquisition is one of the main reasons for the parents to send their children to U.S. high schools. However, the majority of international secondary students who are pursuing a high school diploma are Asian students; Chinese students account

for nearly half of this group in the 2013 school year (Farrugia, 2014). The study notes that the traits of this student profile indicate that international enrollments may provide global diversity for a school but fail to represent a whole range of international students from various parts of the world. A large group of international students who are from the same country are obviously subject to excessive interaction within their own culture group as an inevitable result of familiarity and common experience. Although, social support from the co-ethnic group can bring a satisfying relationship to the international students (Sam & Berry, 2010); the culture gap between them and the host culture group may be enlarged and eventually bring negative impacts to their social life and academic performance (i.e., it would take much longer for them to show improved use of the English language). Thus, it is only when the learning environment is welcoming and safe that students can gain confidence and second language (L2) learning can occur (Krashen, 1985).

During cultural transitions, some students may lack the necessary skills to absorb the host culture; this may make everyday social encounters more difficult (Masgoret & Ward, 2006) and may result in students feeling mildly depressed, anxious, stressed, and uncomfortable. Krashen (1982) contends that “low anxiety appears to be conducive to second language acquisition” (p. 31). Stressful interaction and or lack of social connection with domestic U.S. students may slow down language learning processes for some Chinese students and thus deteriorate their academic performance. Subsequently, it may negatively affect their college application. Furthermore, the purpose of study abroad and the goal of cross-cultural learning would be greatly diminished.

### **Importance of International High School Students to Higher Education**

Higher education plays an important role in the development of people, communities, institutions, and nations, while internationalization and globalization are increasingly becoming a

priority for higher education around the world (Dolby & Rahman, 2008). Chinese International students in higher education institutions contributed \$9.8 billion to U.S. economy in 2015 (IIE, 2015b). This student cohort presents mounting significance to U.S. higher education's shaky bottom lines financially, and many institutions welcome them as a dynamic way to globalize their campuses. However, IIE's Open Doors (2015b) data show that the rapidly increasing number of Chinese students has slowed down over the years, Table 2 refers to the description of the total number of the Chinese international students in the postsecondary level that includes undergraduate, graduate, non-degree program, and Optional Practical Training (OPT). Among them, non-degree program and OPT represent an insignificant number of students who do not affect enrollment growth in U.S. four-year educational programs. The table also reflects the percentile of increase in Chinese students has slowed significantly since the school year of 2010.

Table 2  
*Open Doors Fact Sheet: China*

| Year    | # of Students from China | % Change from Previous Year |
|---------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2005/06 | 62,582                   | 0.1%                        |
| 2006/07 | 67,723                   | 8.2%                        |
| 2007/08 | 81,127                   | 19.8%                       |
| 2008/09 | 98,235                   | 21.1%                       |
| 2009/10 | 127,628                  | 29.9%                       |
| 2010/11 | 157,558                  | 23.5%                       |
| 2011/12 | 194,029                  | 23.1%                       |
| 2012/13 | 235,597                  | 21.4%                       |
| 2013/14 | 274,439                  | 16.5%                       |
| 2014/15 | 304,040                  | 10.8%                       |

*Note.* Adapted from *Open Doors Data* by Institute of International Education, 2015

Fischer (2010) indicates that one of the main reasons why the increases in enrollment will inevitably slow in the future can be explained by the declining population of college-age students resulting from China's one-child policy. The study also noted that there is greater competition from other English-speaking countries and China's own educational policy changes, such as the

implement of *The Thousand Talents Plan* in 2008 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (“The Thousand Talents Plan,” 2010). One of the main purposes for developing the plan is to encourage more talented Chinese students to stay in China for higher education. The Chinese government recruits outstanding educators as college professors in China who are graduates of or currently teaching in prestigious universities from Western countries. The salary and benefits are very competitive. Although the plan welcomes anyone to apply, it is the government’s goal to attract Chinese educators who are not currently residing in China. The slogan on the official website says “Your country needs you, your country welcomes you, your country puts hope in you” (“nide zuguo xuyao nimen, nide zuguo huanying nimen, nide zuguo ji xiwang yu nimen”,你的祖国需要你们,你的祖国欢迎你们,你的祖国寄希望于你们) (“The Thousand Talents Plan,” 2010). The evidence suggests that to remain competitive in this area would require development of comprehensive national recruitment strategies. Nevertheless, quality domestic education will someday eliminate the need to study abroad.

Accordingly, most of the international high school students came to the United States in hopes that they can gain an admission advantage in applying to U.S. higher education institutions (Wilkerson, 2015). Under the increasing tightened budgets in the higher education institutions, acknowledging that this cohort of international secondary students who can be recruited locally offers a notable benefit for numerous U.S. higher education institutions. Dr. Rajika Bhandari, Institute of International Education’s (IIE) deputy vice president for research and evaluation noted:

U.S. institutions are going to need to think about where they recruit and how they are recruiting international students because it is no longer going to be the case that all

potential international students are based overseas. Some of them might be based right here at home in secondary schools. (As cited in MacGregor, 2014, p.1)

In addition, if the international secondary student is applying with credentials from a U.S. high school, it facilitates the review processes for higher education admissions and departmental administrators. Tacey from Texas A&M (Hopkins, 2012) agreed with Dr. Rajika Bhandari's statement:

It's much easier to compare apples to apples when you're looking at students coming from a U.S. institution, regardless of whether they're international students. The requirements for admission are much clearer when you're looking at a transcript from a high school in Dallas than a transcript from a high school in Beijing. (As cited in Hopkins, 2012, para. 11)

Moreover, when international high school students go to the postsecondary level, more often they have already successfully adapted to life in the United States. They may already have the language, academic and cultural skills that can contribute to their success on campus, and they can also serve as a "potential resource" for other new first-time international students to help them to adjust the campus life in the United States (Hopkins, 2012).

### **Conclusion**

There is a rapidly growing trend of increasing numbers of international secondary students in the U.S. high schools. These students have shown to have great impacts on local communities, high schools, and higher education institutions. Yet, few studies have examined the promise as well as the problems associated with this specific group of international students. Predominantly, current research is focused mainly on Chinese post-secondary students. Previous and current data, reports, and articles provide nuanced visions of the close connection between

the international high school students and the postsecondary institutions in the United States. Future research to track the global academic mobility of international secondary students would provide a greater insight into how many of those students actually stay in their host country to continue their higher education. Research on the types of postsecondary institutions in which the international high school students eventually enrolled would also provide valuable information to postsecondary educational leaders for their future recruitment preparation.

In summary, my exploration of the literature of Chinese international high school students offers depth and clarity to the acculturation theory and the political structure behind this underserved group of students. This intimate knowledge of international students in the U.S. high school program also affirms the need for research to further identify valuable insights from different viewpoints.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology and procedures used to conduct this study. First, I will discuss the research design selected for this study and its elements. Next, I will provide a detailed description of the participants and sample selection process. Then I will outline methods of data collection, data coding, and data analyses procedures. Last, I will describe the ethical issues, trustworthiness, and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures. Data gathered through interviews and observations were used to find the answers to the following research questions:

- What challenges do Chinese students encounter in U.S. high schools while coping with personal difficulties as they adapt in the acculturation process and managing major life adjustments with limited social and emotional support?
- Why do the parents send their adolescent children to a U.S. high school?
- How can the policymakers, the educational leaders in the higher education institutions and high schools help Chinese international high school students overcome the challenges they are facing?

### **Research Design**

This study utilized a qualitative approach strategy due to its special value for investigating complex and sensitive issues (Trochim, 2000). When deciding whether case studies can be useful for exploring the Chinese international high school students' challenges, Rowley's (2002) three factors that determine the best research methodology were considered: a) the types of questions to be answered; b) the extent of control over behavioral events, and c) the degree of

focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events. The case study was chosen because most of the case studies focusing on contemporary events within a span of time with little or no control (Schell, 1992; Yin, 1994), and this study is focusing on the Chinese students' challenges during the acculturation process to a contemporary U.S. high school.

Additionally, a case study method provided a deeper and more detailed investigation of relevant behavior that could not be manipulated (Schell, 1992). Compared to other research methods, one of the strengths of case studies is that evidence can be collected from multiple sources (Rowley, 2002). While different data collection sources may have different strengths and weaknesses, research designs that include multiple research sources tend to be the strongest ones and most sound (Esterberg, 2002). Another strength of case studies is its ability to examine, in-depth, a case within its real-life context, and it enables a researcher to investigate important topics not easily covered by other methods (Yin, 2003). Therefore, a case study method was the most suitable by which to gain a fuller picture of what life is like for the Chinese students in the U.S. high schools and obtain deeper insights of the challenges that they are encountering.

### **Participants and Sampling**

The participants in this research were purposefully selected. Purposive criterion sampling was used for the recruitment because such sampling involves selecting research participants according to the needs of the study, and is commonly used in qualitative research (Patten, 2009). Researchers can choose participants who give a richness of information that is suitable for detailed research (Patton, 2002), and who fit certain criteria that applies to the study. The selection criteria for inclusion in this study were students from mainland China only (i.e., excluding Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan due to their different educational systems) and who are in 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade with an F-1 student visa.

The sample for this study are three 10<sup>th</sup> grade Chinese students. The pseudonyms assigned to the students in this study are: Alan, Becca, and Cindy. The principal of the school, after being informed of the criteria of this study, referred them to me. The IRB required translation verification if the participants were not fluent in English. However, I was exempted from the requirement because I am Chinese and fluent in my language of origin. Additionally, the IRB required the researcher to obtain consents from all the participants and their parents because the participants were minors. Since the parents of these participants were unable to speak English, I translated the consent form for them through WeChat and transmitted the forms via the Internet and asked them to return the consent forms to me with their signatures.

### **Data Sources and Collection Methods**

A good case study benefits from having multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003). In this case study, pictures and videos were taken to record the important gestures, facial expressions, language skills, and environment during the observations and interviews. Participant artifacts were collected through items such as school work, report cards, and certain program documentation. A protocol consisting of a written questionnaire for both face-to-face and WeChat interviews were used to obtain data. The interviews were both formal and informal conversational types with open-ended questions, depending upon which was the most appropriate at the time. The interviews were one-on-one. The semi-structured interviews focused on the purpose of the research endeavor and allowed that purpose to guide the interview process. Thus, the fundamental principle of the qualitative interview was to provide a framework within which respondents could express their own understandings in their own terms (Patton, 2002). I captured participants' views of their own experiences in their own words by recording with a cellphone for later transcription and analysis.

Data from this research was collected through a) pre-interview with the participants; b) observations of the participants at the school cafeteria and classrooms; c) follow-up interviews after the observations; d) post interviews with the participants; e) interview with the domestic U.S. students; f) interviews with the school administrators and teachers of the participants; g) interviews with the host families of the participants; h) interviews with the parents of the participants; and i) analyses of participants' homework and report cards. I collected the data in the spring semester of 2017. All interview questions for the participants (see Appendix A) and the other people around them (see Appendix B) were prepared beforehand. The interview questions for the participants were revised and edited several times after I tested questions on students who are not related to the participants. The pre-interview allowed me to understand the background of these participants. The observations exposed the participants' social life and academic performance from another perspective. All observations were done according to the observation guide (see Appendix C), and the details about the observations were recorded on the observation protocol forms (see Appendix D) during the observations. Interviews after the observations helped me understand how the behaviors of participants related to their acculturation status. At the end of the study, I conducted the post-interview which gave me the opportunity to ask the participants additional questions as a follow up after I interviewed people around them and close to them.

### **Data Analysis**

Case study researchers need to do data collection and data analysis together (Yin, 2003); therefore, body language and facial gestures of the participants were recorded during the interviews by taking field notes. Analysis is the process of bringing order to the data, organizing the collected information into themes, patterns, categories, and basic descriptive units (Genzuk,

2003). To organize the data, I took notes to capture and highlight main points as observations and interviews progressed. As soon as the observations and interviews were completed, I reviewed the notes and I included a formative feedback on the notes according to my own experiences, thoughts, and feelings as part of the field data. Descriptions were clearly separated from interpretations and judgments.

To interpret and analyze the data, I transcribed data collected from the interviews to get a general sense of the complete body of responses and ideas. During the analysis process, data reduction strategies are essential (Krueger, 1994). I read the transcripts to get an overview of the entire process, then looked for statements and phrases related to the topic, and pulled them from each transcript. After all statements and phrases were pulled out, they were grouped into meaningful categories or descriptive labels, then organized to compare, contrast and identify patterns (Sangasubana, 2011). I formulated meanings from the important statements. The meanings were organized into themes, which were categorized. A color-coded system was used to highlight specific themes and a number/letter listing for the sub-themes (see Appendix E). Two examples of the color-coded transcript are shown below (see Figure 2 and Figure 3).

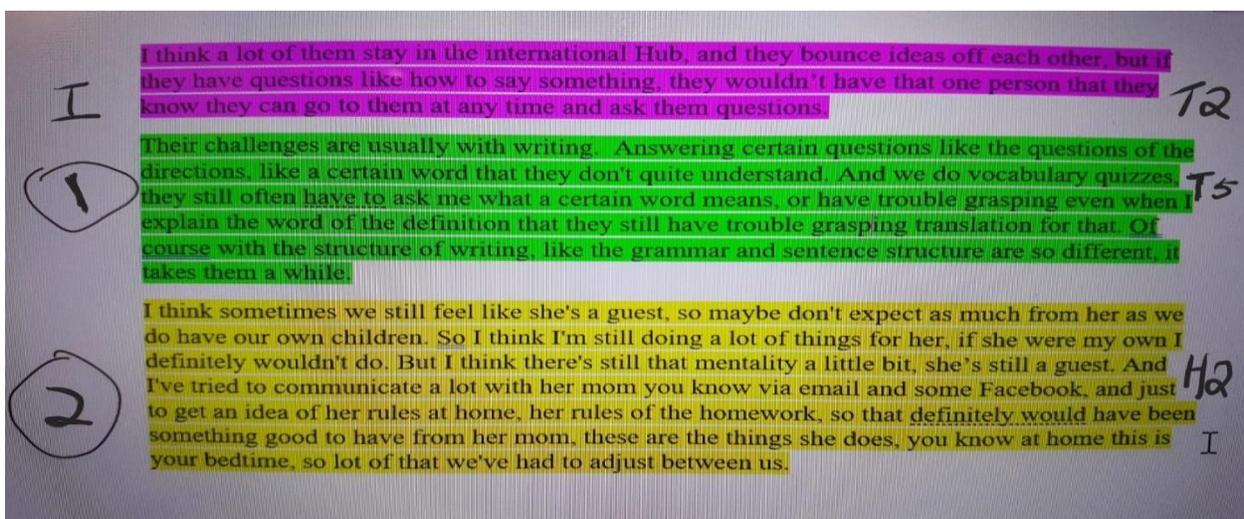


Figure 2. Color-Coded Transcript Example 1.

Example 1 shows the color-coded transcript with the native speakers. The English letters and the numbers on the right designates the source of the data. They are coded as follow: H represents the host family members, T represents the teachers, A represents the principal, D represents domestic U.S. students. Each theme was assigned a highlighted color. For instance, the pink highlighted paragraph means it is categorized under Theme 1 – *Social Challenges*. The Roman number ‘I’ on the left means it belongs to the main theme, and the ‘T2’ on the right means it came from the second teacher on my interview name list. Another example is the green highlighted paragraph. The color denotes that this quote is assigned to the second theme – *Academic Problems*. The number on the left means the quote belongs to the first sub-theme which is *Language Barriers for Academic Problems*. And the ‘T5’ on the right indicates that the quote came from the fifth teacher on the interview list.

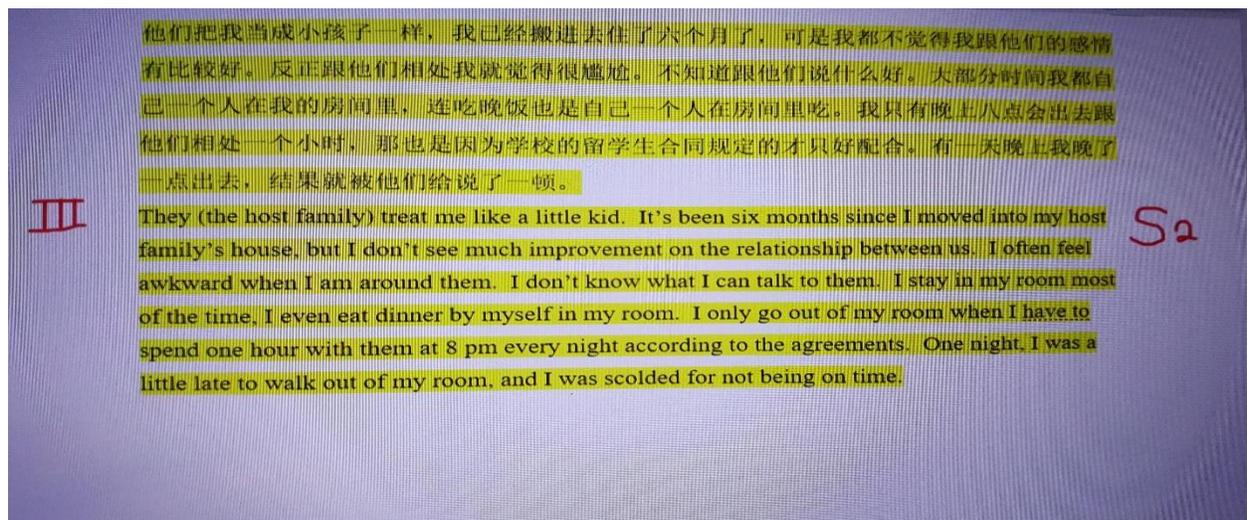


Figure 3. Color-Coded Transcript Example 2.

Example 2 shows the color-coded transcript with Chinese language speakers. The English letters and the numbers on the right describe from whom the words were quoted. They are coded as follows: S represents the participants (Students), P represents the parents of the participant, O represents the Chinese students other than the participants. This example shows the original

Chinese words came from the participant 2 – Becca, because ‘S2’ is her specified designator.

The paragraph highlighted in yellow means it is categorized under Theme Three – *Host Family Relations*, and the Roman number ‘III’ means the quote is under the main theme.

### **Ethical Issues**

According to Creswell (2009), researchers must anticipate any ethical issues that may arise during the qualitative research process. He also states that researchers should protect their research participants by developing trust with them, promoting the integrity of the research, guarding against misconduct and any impropriety that might reflect on their organizations or institutions, and cope with new and challenging problems. This study was conducted with the approval of the IRB at Appalachian State University (see Appendix F).

Prior to the interview, the consent form was signed by the participants (see Appendix G) and their parents (see Appendix H) and completed a demographic form of relevant background data. I began with a statement of the ground rules for participation, including the confidentiality pledge. I also made the research goals clear to the participants. Meanwhile, each participant was given a pseudonym and an offer to review the results of the research if they would like to read them. Site documents such as report cards, teaching materials, homework, and the host family agreement greatly enriched the observations and the interviews. However, I understand that privacy or copyright issues may apply to those documents, so I inquired about it when I obtained such documents. I did not use any document for which I do not have the permission to use.

There are not always pre-established borders when conducting a qualitative research. Sometimes it is difficult to determine when to stop collecting data. There is a thin line between collecting information for “legitimate” research purposes and invading the privacy of

respondents (Esterberg, 2002). Therefore, if I felt the contents were too private or unrelated, I tried to change the subject or guide the participants back to the topic related to the study.

The principal was provided details of how this study was going to be conducted in the school. He was made aware that the data collected from the school will remain confidential and any participation by employees in this study would strictly voluntary, as stated on the letter of agreement from the participating agency (see Appendix I). He also understood that I was going to interview and observe the participants in the school as scheduled on a timetable (see Appendix J). If there were any changes to the schedule, I ensured the principal was informed.

### **Trustworthiness**

According to Yin (2003), the main idea of collecting case study data is to “triangulate” evidence to make finds as robust as possible. Thus, triangulation of observation data alongside in-depth interviews and field documents (including artifacts collected from participant analysis) add more facets to the interpretation and enhance trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009). In-depth interviews can provide insight into thoughts and feelings of the participants; however, participants’ behaviors do not always coincide with what they say. Direct observation permits one to see how people behave, as well as witness the whole process unfold over time. Sometimes artifacts collected from the participants are invaluable sources of information for the researchers to see if the participants’ words are matching their work.

Validity can be captured through trustworthiness, and trustworthiness is determined by credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Creswell & Miller, 2000). For credibility, I analyzed the data through a process of reflecting, examining, judging, and exploring the relevance and meaning of observable and interactive responses that will eventually reveal developing themes and eventually developing themes and main ideas can accurately describe the

experience. Dependability was established with the audit trail, which involved maintaining and preserving all of the data, such as notes, transcripts, and artifacts. Confirmability was determined when I linked the data to their sources. For accuracy, all interview questions were in English; however, the interviews with the Chinese students and their parents were conducted in their native language. Therefore, the quotes used for the Chinese students and their parents were translated from Chinese into English directly during the interviews with the exception of the direct observation, the conversation between Chinese students and the native speakers were in English. I used their exact English equivalent on my observation protocol notes. For the purpose of being more accurate, I repeatedly play the audio and edited the translation to reassure the most appropriate English words and phrases were used for translation of Chinese words. Finally, member check technique was used for this study. After I transcribed the participants' interviews, I used WeChat in June to send transcriptions to the participants who were on summer vacation in China. I asked the participants to review and verify the transcripts with their parents and to make changes directly on the transcripts. Then I talked to them on the phone to confirm the changes were understood correctly.

### **Researcher Background and Bias**

My assessment of the research questions has led me to choose the qualitative method of research because it enables “researchers to mention relevant details of their personal backgrounds in order to inform readers of their research about possible sources of bias in their collection and interpretation of the data” (Patten, 2009, p.20). As I was born in China and raised in Hong Kong, this qualitative research allowed me to use my backgrounds and experience as an international student when I first came to the United States in 2004. I had worked as an ESL teacher in Taiwan for nearly eight years prior to my arrival in the United States. I obtained my

Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language degree from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and the Educational Specialist degree from Appalachian State University. Prior to being admitted to the doctoral program, I worked as an English as a Secondary Language teacher in a public school in North Carolina. Currently, I am teaching Chinese at a local community college.

Growing up, my education took place in Hong Kong, which was still a colony of Britain. Therefore, I did not experience the culture shock that many other Chinese international students encounter (e.g., language barrier, religion, social, and Western food). I was familiar with the educational systems and policies of the United States, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, but less so concerning China's education system or policy. However, I have gained a tremendous amount of knowledge about China's secondary education since beginning this research.

According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), two analysts handling the same set of data may discover a few categories during the process of thematic analysis. However, experienced researchers have determined that it is advisable for data analysis to be carried out by a few analysts so that the final list of thematic findings produced does not reflect a single researcher's bias. Therefore, although much effort was given to ensure that I bracket my assumptions and biases, this study may still be at risk of researcher's bias because I alone handled the data. As the sole researcher, I believe it is only appropriate for me to highlight the possible influences that I may extend to this research.

Though a cultural insider may be more sensitive and responsive to the research participants (Liamputtong, 2008), this study may be exposed to insider bias because I was educated as an international student from China as well. Therefore, I cautiously set aside potential prejudices and biases throughout the research phases in order to qualify the research as

both representative and accurate. I also constantly evaluated my objectivity, especially when I was interpreting the findings that may be influenced by personal experience. Recognizing that cultural and linguistic skills are important, even before the research itself begins (Wustenberg, 2008), my research was judicious in maintaining an objective position. As an insider, I had numerous advantages that allowed me to better understand the topic since I share the same cultural background and language with the participants. This identity contributed to my confidence in the expressions and interpretations of the qualitative data. Additionally, knowing that I used to be an international student, the participants in this study were very open while communicating with me about many issues being discussed. Participants' parents also showed support when I was obtaining consent for the research as well as conducting interviews with them because of the trust they placed in me as an insider researcher. The parents and the participants believed that I could help to make their voice heard by the host families, school teachers and administrators.

While there were various advantages of being an insider researcher; however, the insider status also gave me an edge. Being a former Chinese international student in a U.S. higher education institute, my lack of knowledge of host religion and cultural background made me an outsider to the participants' school. The study required extensive hours to acquire the knowledge of this U.S. private Christian school's culture and system. For example, male and female students are separated during most of the school activities; for example, during lunch time, the students of different genders have their meals at the different tables. Furthermore, gaining the trust from the teachers and the host families took a little longer time for me to establish as an outsider of the school. In summary, whether the researcher is an outsider or insider, there are various issues one must carefully observe to collect valid data (Unluer, 2012).

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings and Analysis**

In this chapter, I begin by introducing the background information of the school and the participants. Then, I discuss the reasons why the Chinese parents send their teens to U.S. high schools. To fully understand the challenges that the Chinese international students are facing in the U.S. high schools, one must consider the impetuses that motivated these students to leave their families and friends to study in a high school far away from their home country. Therefore, I will examine a variety of explanations that clarify the driving forces for international students from China pursuing high school education in the United States. Lastly, to understand the challenges overcome and the coping strategies applied by these Chinese students, I analyze the four major themes that emerged through the data coding process: (1) Social challenges; (2) Academic problems; (3) Host family relations; and (4) Financial obstacles.

I assert that the young participants in this study emerge as voices of authority regarding international high school students through their study abroad experiences. Their voices reveal this vulnerable group of minors who are overlooked by their international hosts. In order to amplify their voices and concerns, I translated the participants' interviews from Chinese, and the English quotes used in the findings are as accurate as possible.

Additional sources of data were collected from the participants' parents, host families, domestic U.S. students, as well as school teachers and administrators. The interview questionnaires (Appendix G) for the parents, host families, domestic U.S. students, school teachers, and administrators were designed to discover the international students' challenges from other perspectives. This range of perspectives provided additional verification of student responses by triangulating the data collected from participants in the study.

## The School and the Participants Profile

All participants in this study attend the same private Christian school. The school facility is a two-story building located in a small town of a southeastern state of the United States. The main building of the school is shared in half with its church affiliate. The two entities share a huge indoor gym where the students can play indoor sports. Several outdoor fields are available for students to play soccer, golf, and baseball. The school has a total enrollment of 232 students and 22 teachers from pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The average class size is 16 students with a teacher-student ratio of 1:11. Minority students (who identify themselves as Hispanic, black, Asian, American Indian, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander) comprise 15% of the student population while each member of the faculty is Caucasian. Ten percent of the student body is international with 80% of them being Chinese, the rest of the 20% are Vietnamese and Korean students. Within the past 2 years, Chinese students have transformed the student body of this school. Only one Chinese international student previously attended this high school during the 2014-2015 term. Most Chinese students enrolled in the school through a China based study-abroad agency that started managing the international enrollment process two years ago. The young Chinese students often turn to the services of study-abroad agencies because their parents are inhibited by the language barrier and are unable to help them with the U.S. school application or assist them with the school issues. The study-abroad agency serves as an intermediary between schools and the parents. More detail about the Chinese study-abroad agencies are discussed under Theme Four *Financial Obstacles*. The principal explained a number of reasons the school started to accept more international students to their school:

It's an opportunity to educate them [international students] and share the gospel.... The international students bring many benefits to the whole community and our [domestic]

students. For the community, the students and their parents help the local business, and [they] also help the economy of the host families.... As far as the benefits to our [domestic U.S.] students, international students create a diversity in the student body. Our [domestic U.S.] students' overall cultural competency skill has improved through interacting and speaking with the international students. It is a skill that will help them when they go to the college, and they will be better equipped for careers in the global job market. Additionally, Chinese students' tuition allow us to offer more scholarship [funding] to our local students who are in financial need. After all, 65% of our local students are on scholarships.

The principal reflected the motivations behind the increase in Chinese students are religious, cultural, and financial.

Although China is the largest atheist country in the world (Larmer, 2017), more than half of the Chinese international students have enrolled in private religious-affiliated U.S. high schools. For the school in this study, officials see the international student population as an opportunity for their church to branch out into a worldwide arena through the education. For the parents of these participants, some chose the religious affiliated school mainly because they believe the learning environment is safer and offers more discipline for their young students. The principal's impression of the desires of parents for their international students echo their expectations and reliance upon the school's administration:

Some Chinese parents will not tell their child no, they want us [the school] to tell the child no, they want us to make the decisions.... These cultural or boundaries were not what I expected. For example, one of my [international] students wanted to change a host family..., I found out the real problem was that his host family would not let him go out

on a motorcycle ride with a [domestic] classmate who has bad reputation with behavior problem and sexual activity. After his parents learned the real problems was not what they were told by their child, they still told the child that they will make sure the school changed the host family for him or they will let him go to another school. Meanwhile, the parents were telling the school that they will respect any decision we make. If the parents can't control their children and are afraid of them, then I don't think I can accomplish a whole lot with their children. If the students were immature in their home country, they're still that way here, and it takes a while to change.

The school teachers and the host families spend enormous amounts of time with the students and their homework, helping them catch up to acquire the appropriate skill levels. However, the parents must support these school personnel and host families and work with them to discipline their children accordingly in order in order to promote the best possible learning outcomes for the student. The administrator of the school explained that it would be extremely difficult when parents are giving opposing opinions from the school and the host families.

### **Participants' Profile**

All three participants are in 10<sup>th</sup> grade from the same class in this U.S. private high school, but they only attend three classes together, biology, P.E., and math. Alan and Becca are like many other Chinese students; they completed middle school in China (which is equivalent to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in the United States) before they came to the U.S. high school. More detail regarding the Chinese education system will be provided in the next section of this chapter. Although Alan and Becca were able to transfer some of their 9<sup>th</sup> grade credits to the U.S. high school from China, there are still many 9<sup>th</sup> grade classes that they need to take. Therefore, even though they are enrolled in grade 10, they are actually taking many of the classes in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

According to the principal, Alan and Becca should be able to graduate with their 10<sup>th</sup> grade classmates in 2019 because they will not be taking any foreign language classes. Since they are acquiring English as a second language, English is considered as their foreign language. These students are allowed to enroll in additional classes to earn the credits they miss during their English classes.

The following section introduces a brief background of the participants and a typical current daily life information.

**Alan's background.** Alan came from Hunan, China, six months prior to participating in this study. Hunan province has a population of 67 million and a total area of 81,853 mile<sup>2</sup>, it is the 7<sup>th</sup> most populous province in China (China provinces, 2016). Alan is an only child. He started to learn English at the kindergarten level. Despite the many years studying English, he does not consider himself fluent in his spoken English. Alan always wanted to study abroad and he believes he will be studying in a U.S. university someday. He persuaded his parents to let him start his U.S. education earlier, so he could dedicate more time to preparing for the college entrance exams for the U.S. higher education program he is considering. He went through a study-abroad agency to apply for admission to this U.S. high school. The goal of his study abroad is to make preparations for admission and earning a degree from an Ivy League university.

In the United States, Alan lives with a local host family assigned by the school. The host family has four members: Home-Ma (the name participants call the mother of the host family), Home-Pa (the name participants call the father of the host family), their adult son, and adult daughter. Alan's Home-Pa and the Home-Ma are a middle-aged couple. Their son and daughter are both in their early 20's. The house is located in a rural area and features four bedrooms. It is

about 30 minutes' drive from the school. Alan shares a bedroom with another international student who is two years younger. Alan and his roommate rarely talk; although, they attend the same school and came to the United States at the same time from the same country and earned admission through the same study abroad agency. Alan's words describe the relationship with his roommate, "We don't click."

During the weekdays, Alan gets up at 5:30 a.m. to do his homework and leave the house with his roommate by 7:00 a.m. every morning. His Home-Ma works for their high school, she gives them ride to the school every day. School ends at 3:00 p.m. and sometimes Alan volunteers for the school ball teams, keeping scores or selling tickets at the door. If Alan does not need to volunteer that day, he and his roommate have to wait for their Home-Ma to leave the school until 4:30 p.m. daily until her workday ends. Then he listens to music and studies English until dinner. His host family and roommate like to have dinner in the living room while watching television. Most of the time, Alan simply brings his dinner to his room and eats it alone. He said that he does not like to watch television with them because there are no subtitles. He reads books and magazines or plays cards online while he eats dinner in his room. He goes to bed around 10:30 p.m. every night.

During the weekends, Alan gets up around 8:00 a.m. in the morning. As soon as he gets up, he talks to his family in China for about 30 minutes by using WeChat. Then he spends hours watching videos and movies online. Alan always attends church with his host family from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. every Sunday; however, sometimes on weekends only Alan and his roommate are at home alone.

**Becca's background.** Becca came from Jiangsu, China, six months ago. Jiangsu province has a population of 79 million and a total area of 39,768 mile<sup>2</sup>, it is the 5<sup>th</sup> most

populous province in China (China provinces, 2016). She started to learn English in the third grade. Becca is the only child in her family. She has lived with her mother since her parents' divorce. Becca's mother decided to send her to study abroad because most of her relatives' children study abroad in the Western countries and her horrible experience taking Zhongkao, the Chinese high school entrance test. Becca thought study abroad was a good idea for her. She was expecting an easier learning experience and greater personal freedom in the United States. Becca and her mother started to prepare for the study abroad program about eight months before she entered the U.S. high school. They learned about this North Carolina school through a study abroad agent. Becca's objective for studying abroad is to gain admission to a respected U.S. university.

In the United States, Becca's host family was assigned by the school. Her Home-Pa and Home-Ma are about 60 years old. They both work during the day. Their children are all grown and have their own families, but they live near their children. The host family's house is also located in a rural area. The residence is about 40 minutes' drive from the school.

During the weekdays, Becca gets up at 5:50 a.m., she makes breakfast for herself and leaves the house by 7:15 a.m. every morning. Her Home-Pa sends her to school and her Home-Ma picks her up around 3:30 p.m.; they normally arrive at home around 4:15 p.m. every day. She consistently takes a nap and runs on a treadmill after she gets home. Then she does her homework and studies English until dinner. After dinner, she spends one hour sitting in the living room with the host family. Most of the time, they watch television together. Before she goes to bed around 11:00 pm, she likes to read her favorite Chinese novels.

During the weekends, Becca does not rise until she wakes up. She spends many hours exercising. She enjoys cooking lunch for herself because her Home-Parents are vegetarians, so

she likes to cook something different during the weekends. She watches Chinese movies online or reads her Chinese novels in her room during the day. She studies English or school work if there is an upcoming test. Sometimes she also volunteers at soup kitchens during the weekends.

**Cindy's background.** Cindy came from Shanghai, China, eighteen months ago. Shanghai city has a population of 24 million and a total area of 2,317 mile<sup>2</sup>, it is considered China's most cosmopolitan city (China provinces, 2016). Cindy is the only child in her family. Like most of the Chinese students in China, Cindy also started to learn English in the third grade. Unlike Alan and Becca, Cindy does not have any high school credits issues because she came to the United States as soon as she finished the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in China. She has been taking all the classes with her same grade level classmates except foreign language class. Since she does not need to take any foreign language classes, the foreign language period is an independent study time for her. Cindy came from a single parent family. She lives with her grandmother and her father. Her father did not think that she could make it to any good high school in China, so he decided to send her to the U.S. high school. She applied for the U.S. high school through her aunt who lives in the United States. Cindy's goal of studying abroad is to get into a U.S. college where she can study Art and Design.

In the United States, Cindy lives with her aunt and uncle. They have two children, but both are in college away from home. Their children only come home during long vacations. Although Cindy's aunt is Chinese, the family speaks English at home because her uncle and her cousins do not speak Chinese. However, her aunt always cooks Chinese food at home, and her Chinese friends in the high school are envious that she can have Chinese meals all the time.

During the weekdays, Cindy begins her morning at 7:00 a.m. each day. She and her aunt leave the house by 7:45 a.m. because her aunt's house is only ten minutes' drive from her school.

Her aunt picks her up at 3:00 p.m. from school every day. She regularly takes a nap when she gets home. Then she does her homework and studies English until dinner. She hangs out with her aunt and uncle or studies a little more until bedtime.

During the weekends, Cindy starts her day very late in the morning. She spends hours drawing pictures or making anime dolls with clay. She rarely studies on the weekends unless there is an upcoming test. Sometimes, she goes to the public library or Christian Ministries to do her community service for the school requirement.

### **Reasons to Attend a U.S. High School**

Chinese parents send their teen children to the United States for a high school education for many reasons; this section identifies the reasons cited by the participants' parents. The findings are divided into four categories: (1) Highly competitive higher education system in China; (2) A pathway to the U.S. higher education system; (3) The rapidly rising middle class in China; and (4) The one-child policy. Though there may be other reasons for Chinese students to enroll in U.S. high schools, such as air pollution, learning ability, or integration problems in their Chinese school, the reasons identified in this section came from the participants' parents.

#### **Highly Competitive Higher Education System in China**

China's educational system is quite different from the United States' educational system (see Table 3 below). In China, there are two grueling exams after elementary education that determine Chinese students' future and their lives. Individuals can be assigned to high schools, colleges, majors, and ultimately jobs and careers based on these two test scores (Lambert, 2015). The unrelenting pressure to study for these two high-stakes exams is perhaps one of the most common reasons explaining why parents sent their children to U.S. high schools. The two exams are Zhongkao and Gaokao.

**Zhongkao.** Zhongkao is a Chinese high school entrance exam. Students have to make a very good grade on Zhongkao in order for them to be admitted to better high schools; otherwise, they can only go to lower ranked high schools, vocational schools, or start working at a young age. China adopts a system of nine-year compulsory education, the first nine years of the education (1<sup>st</sup> grade to 9<sup>th</sup> grade) is free. Going to a good high school means there will be a chance for the student to make a good grade on the Gaokao.

Table 3  
*China's Educational System*

| Age     | School     | Grade Levels                        | Standardized Exam | Standardized Exam Score |                   |
|---------|------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
|         |            |                                     |                   | Good                    | Poor              |
| 15 - 17 | High       | 10 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup> | Gaokao            | College                 | No college        |
| 12 - 14 | Middle     | 7 <sup>th</sup> – 9 <sup>th</sup>   | Zhongkao          | High school             | Vocational School |
| 6 - 11  | Elementary | 1 <sup>st</sup> – 6 <sup>th</sup>   | N/A               | N/A                     |                   |

Many Chinese students come to U.S. high schools after they finish the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in China. Some of the parents may not know there is a difference between the education systems of the United States and China before they plan to send their children to the United States. When they start to apply for the U.S. high school, their children are already in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. But, some parents know the difference between the two systems, and they still choose to send their children to the United States after the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Alan's mother explained her reasons for sending her son to the United States after the 9<sup>th</sup> grade:

I feel more secure this way because there would be a backup plan for my son if he does not like the U.S. high school after he went there for a while. He could still come back to study in a high school in China. Without his Zhongkao score, he won't be able to come back to study at any regular high schools. I know he might have to study an extra year in

the U.S. high school because of the school credit issue, but I think it is more important to have a backup plan for him.

Having students complete the qualifying tests appears to not only provide a potential ranking for student options, but also offers an assurance of placement in the Chinese system should the international program prove unacceptable. Perhaps more parents are like Becca's parents, they did not plan to send their child to the U.S. high school before Zhongkao. The experience of Zhongkao changed their mind. Becca's mother recalled "their" experience of Zhongkao:

I felt like it was not an exam just for the student. It was an exam for the student and the entire family. Becca studied until midnight every day and she had to go to cram schools for extracurricular courses all day long during weekends. It began a year before the Zhongkao. During those months, I had to change my lifestyle to cooperate with her daily schedule. For example, I had to be so quiet at home, no more TV shows at certain time or talk loud on the phone. I was scared that I would interrupt her study or sleep. She was under such a great pressure every day. She could not eat well or sleep well, things got worse when it was closer to the time to take the exam. If she had to go through so much to just take the Zhongkao, I cannot imagine what she would be if she had to take the Gaokao. Finally, I thought to myself, these high-stakes exams are not for everyone. My daughter was not learning. Like most of the other students, she was simply stuffed with everything into her little brain that she thinks it might appear on the exam papers.

Therefore, I decided that she should try to get a different kind of education! I want her to learn knowledge and live happily at the same time.

The competitive nature of such high stakes testing offers an incentive for Chinese parents to seek alternative options for their children's education that include study abroad in a U.S. high school.

**Gaokao.** Gaokao is a Chinese college entrance exam and it is the most important exam for Chinese students. Scoring well on the exam has lifelong consequences, such as gaining admission to a top-tier college, pursuing a graduate study worldwide, and obtaining high-level employment. On the other hand, failing the Gaokao almost guarantees that students will only be able to work at a low-level employment their entire life, it also makes their family “lose face”—a term Chinese people use to describe a person dishonored by a certain object, event or action. The result of the exam determines which university a student can attend, and consequently much of the rest of their future, so the students are under enormous pressure to excel on this aptitude test. Starting this year, cheating behavior during the Gaokao could result in as much as seven years in prison; dishonest students, if discovered, will also be banned from taking any other national education exams for three years (Tan, 2016). All of the Chinese international students and their parents in the U.S. high schools surveyed in this study who did not have to take the Gaokao reported their relief as well as their parents. Alan’s mother stated the rationale for bypassing the Gaokao in favor of learning English, preparing for enrollment in an American university, and improving the odds of achieving a college degree for her son:

They [some Chinese students] cannot get into a good U.S. college because they spend the last year of their high school prepare for the Gaokao only. By sending Alan to the U.S. high school, he will be able to improve his English and fully prepared for the TOEFL and the SAT in the U.S. high school, meanwhile, he can also maintain good grades on the other subjects. Therefore, he should have more chances to get into a top-tier U.S. university.

Many parents opt to send their young age children to U.S. high schools because they know their children can make good scores on the TOEFL and the SAT and this will enable them to be

admitted into a top-tier U.S. higher education institution.

Cindy was 14 years old when she came to the United States; she left China as soon as she finished the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Cindy's father explained why he sent her to the United States at that age:

It would be a waste of time for Cindy to go to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in China and take Zhongkao.

She won't make a good grade on Zhongkao based on her average school performance....

Therefore, I can say that there would be no chance for her to go to any college if she gets her high school education in China. I'd rather her go to the U.S. high school, at least she can spend four years to improve her poor English.... And hopefully, she can make an acceptable grade on the SAT and TOEFL; then she may be able to get in an average ranked U.S. college. After all, any college degree is better than no college degree for her future.

Most of the Chinese parents want their children to go to college as a pathway to career success (Martin, Wang, & Ma, 2015). The Gaokao exam is metaphorically illustrated by the Chinese expression, "thousands of soldiers and tens of thousands of horses across a single log bridge" ("qianjun wanma guo dumuqiao", 千军万马过独木桥). Millions of Chinese students take the Gaokao in order to get accepted by colleges and universities every year; for instance, more than 9 million students took the Gaokao in 2017 (Abbey, 2017), yet less than half of them will receive letters of college acceptance, and only around 5% of the examinees will be admitted into the 112 top ranked colleges and universities (Gu, 2017). China's education department has made many changes of Gaokao along the way. For instance, beginning in 2017, students in Shanghai and Zhejiang can take the foreign language exam twice a year instead of once a year. The better grade will be used for the Gaokao's total score; another change allowed students to choose three

personally preferred subjects from the elective subjects besides the three core main subjects (Liu, 2017). Becca's mother expressed her opinions of the changes in this way:

I believe there will be a change in China's education that the lessons in school will not be exam oriented, and the students will not have so much pressure over the high-stake exams any more. But with the snail-pace that things tend to go, I don't foresee it happen within this ten years.

Parents apparently understand that changes in the educational system of China have typically been extremely deliberate and usually required an extended period of time to be implemented.

### **A Pathway to the U.S. Higher Education**

“We've typically tended to focus on higher education when we're thinking of inbound student mobility, but we haven't paid enough attention to the fact that students from overseas are beginning to study abroad at younger and younger ages and that high school does provide a pipeline, or pathway, [...], into higher education,” said Dr. Rajika Bhandari, Institute of International Education's (IIE) deputy vice president for research and evaluation (Redden, 2014, p.1). The ultimate goal of initiating studies in a U.S. high school is to enhance skills and provide pathways leading to a U.S. college or university degree for most Chinese students. For Chinese students to get accepted by a U.S. college or university, they must be a competitive candidate for the U.S. college and university admission. Making good scores on the college and university entrance tests is the key to open the doors to U.S. colleges and universities for Chinese students.

All Chinese international students who apply for the admission to U.S. colleges and universities are required to take two standardized tests—the SAT and the TOEFL. For both tests, a high level of competency in English is essential. These two notoriously difficult tests are used by thousands of U.S. colleges and universities to help select international applicants. According

to an affidavit filed by an agent of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, one controversial way of meeting the requirement is to hire an imposter to take the tests (Farivar, 2017). Fifteen Chinese students were indicted for tests fraud in 2015; the indictments involved the U.S. Departments of Homeland Security, the Educational Testing Service, the College Board, and the U.S. Department of Justice (Redden & Jaschik, 2015). In May 2017, four Chinese students were charged with TOEFL fraud. Three of them repeatedly failed to meet the minimum required score on the TOEFL; they took the risk to pay imposters to take the test for them. Based on the fraudulent scores, all three students were accepted by acclaimed U.S. colleges and universities. However, they are now facing up to five years in prison, a fine of \$250,000, and deportation after their sentence has been served (Farivar, 2017; Hu, 2017). These cases show that no matter how outstanding a student's other subjects are, the student will not be accepted by the U.S. colleges and universities without adequate English skills for them to achieve a satisfactory score on the standardized tests.

**SAT.** Although both the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) and the ACT (American College Test) are U.S. college and university entrance tests, the SAT is the most popular entrance test for international students (Redden & Jaschik, 2015). The SAT is more well-known globally and it has more testing centers around the world. As the country of origin for the largest number of international students coming to the United States, China creates the greatest demand for the SAT by its students seeking college and university admission. For instance, 29,000 Chinese students took the SAT during the 2013-2014 school year, which is close to half of all the East Asian test-takers (Dudley, Stecklow, Harney, and Liu, 2016). There are 25,000 testing centers that administer the SAT in 192 countries every year (Edwards, 2014). Ironically, there is no SAT testing center in mainland China. Chinese students who need to take the SAT must go to nearby

regions such as Hong Kong, Macau, or Taiwan. Completing this requirement has proven to be a great hardship for Chinese students who want to study abroad in the United States. Becca's mother described how study in the U.S. high school is an advantage for her daughter:

I believe Becca can do well on her SAT when it's time for her to apply for the U.S. college. She will be well prepared for the test in the U.S. high schools. She's already done PSAT and ACT practices in her U.S. high school in 10<sup>th</sup> grade.... Becca gets to take the PSAT in her high school, and if she needs to take the SAT, it is only 15 minutes for her to go to the SAT testing center. In China, students must go through a lot to just take the SAT. For example, a friend of mine took her daughter to Hong Kong to take the SAT about a year ago, she booked the flight tickets and a hotel room, and she also took days off from work for the test. Not long after they came home from Hong Kong, they were informed that the test scores were cancelled for the test material has been exposed to the public before the test. Everything they had done was wasted – the time, the money, the hard work.

“No result found” was the computer message that appeared consistently when searching the internet for China's test centers under *Find SAT Test Centers* on the College Board website. In a telephone conversation with an official of the College Board regarding the SAT testing center in China, College Board staff, Richard (Agent number k474492) said:

In mainland China, we don't have any testing center. Chinese students will find it necessary to travel to Hong Kong or nearby countries such as Korea and Japan to take the SAT. It is because the Chinese Ministry of Education in China has their own rule about the SAT testing center, and I can't discuss about that. Though there are several private high schools in China that can administer the SAT in their schools, only the students from

those high schools can take the SAT there.

When the staff was asked about locations and names of those private schools, he said that he cannot provide such specific information; he was unable to tell me how many of those private high schools were sanctioned to offer this test in China either.

**TOEFL.** The TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is an English language proficiency exam widely used in the world for all non-native English speakers who seek admission to colleges. It is recognized by more than 9,000 higher education institutions and agencies in more than 130 countries (Farivar, 2017; Hu, 2017), such as New Zealand, Canada, Australia, the U.K. and the United States. Chinese students must have the TOEFL score when they apply for a U.S. college and university. However, increasing numbers of U.S. colleges and universities waived the TOEFL for international students who received their high school diploma from a U.S. high school under one condition, the students must have completed all four years of high school in the United States. Cindy's father stated one of the benefits of studying in the United States:

Cindy was fortunate that she did not have to take any standardized tests to go to the U.S. high school. It allows her to take time to learn English in the United States before she takes the college standardized tests.... There is no way that Cindy can make an acceptable score on TOEFL if she never went to the U.S. high school. After four years of high school education in the United States, I believe she can make an acceptable score on TOEFL. But I read some of the U.S. colleges will waive the TOEFL test on the international students who complete four years high school in a U.S. high school and received their high school diploma.... I am hoping this advantage will help her to reduce some competitors from China and better her chances of getting into a U.S. college. After

all, a college degree from the United States still carries a lot of weight compared to an average Chinese college.

The admission requirements for the U.S. high schools are much more lenient compared to the U.S. colleges and universities. Admission to most of the U.S. high schools does not require any standardized test scores. To apply for a U.S. high school, international students normally provide their transcript from the Chinese middle school, three reference letters, and the application form to the U.S. high school. A few U.S. high schools also require an online interview and/or a standardized test score such as *TOEFL Junior* – a TOEFL for students from 11 to 15. Therefore, going to a U.S. high school presents a valuable opportunity for Chinese students with insufficient English proficiency to start their education in the United States.

Meanwhile, the Chinese parents involved in the study also expressed how the U.S. high school experience can help their children greatly when they go to the U.S. colleges and universities. Alan's mother expressed her optimism about the educational opportunity in U.S. high schools:

The Chinese teaching style and their classroom culture is quite different from American's. There are bad and good on both sides. However, I believe my son will learn more about how to think critically and be more creative in a U.S. high school. Then he can apply those skills in the college and adapt the U.S. college life with no time.

The transferable skills from Western international education offer advantages that many parents acknowledge. Becca's mother also contended:

In the U.S. high school, Becca can join the afterschool club or sports team even in the senior year because these afterschool activities will help her college application positively in the United States.... Students in China would not dare to join any activities

other than studying Gaokao in their senior year. Moreover, Becca can take college credits while she is in the U.S high school. Then she can take less classes in the college. Taking college classes in the high school is free. This way, we can save some money when she goes to the college. She can also graduate earlier from the college.”

Many Chinese parents consider an education in a U.S. high school as a pathway for their children to enroll in the U.S. higher education system (Farrugia, 2014). These Chinese parents have different expectations for their children than their own parents had. While the Chinese notoriously rigid education seems unchangeable and unshakable, it drives them to find an alternative way for their children: study abroad (Gu, 2017). The advantages of U.S. international high schools apparently are more evident to parents who have been well informed.

### **Rapidly Rising Middle Class in China**

The rapidly increasing number of Chinese students in the United States has been attributed to China’s economic growth. As of May 2016, there were 1.34 million multimillionaires in mainland China; 10.7% or 130,000 more than the year before (Shi, 2016). According to a 2016 survey in Shanghai, 83% of China’s millionaires are planning to send their children to study abroad for a college degree (Larmer, 2017). Moreover, China’s fast-growing economy has contributed to a rapidly growing middle class. China has emerged as the country with the largest economy and it has the largest middle class in the world (Huang, 2015). The expanding wealth in China provided more diversity in study options for the students. To better prepare the students who plan to pursue a higher education degree in Western countries, there are two common options for the Chinese parents. One of the options is to enroll in an international program, and another option is to enroll into an international high school in China (Gu, 2017). China and the United Arab Emirates now hosts the largest number of international schools in the

world (Wechsler, 2017). According to Gu (2017), “together with the international divisions embedded in regular schools, these international programs are often branded as providing access to ‘international elite education’ and ‘world top university admissions’ ... many are run by agents seeking to make a quick return on investment, rather than teach children effectively.” Among all of the countries, China’s international schools charge the most expensive tuition fees. The median tuition for a six-grade student at an international school is US\$36,400 a year in China (Gu, 2017; Siu, 2016). The questionable teaching quality and extremely high tuition at the international schools compel parents to choose to send their children to study abroad as early as elementary school.

### **One-Child Policy**

China’s one-child policy restricted each couple to have only one child as part of the population control plan. It has been an official Chinese government social policy for more than three decades since 1979. This policy was officially replaced by a two-child policy in 2016 (Zhang, 2017). However, the Chinese family structure was significantly impacted and the one-child policy effect imposed on Chinese society will last for at least another decade. Most of the Chinese teenagers live in a ‘4-2-1 family’ (four grandparents, two parents, and one child). Chinese cultural tradition emphasizes the family’s responsibility in taking care of older adults (Lou & Ci, 2014); therefore, the first and second generation of the family put all their hope on the third generation. If the third generation was tracked in the lower-tier education institutions or lower-level work force, this can be harsh for the whole family. As China has risen in wealth, a greater percentage is choosing areas of interest for their children’s college and university major (Matthews, 2017). The four grandparents help the parents to support their child’s interests and cultivate the child’s talents by seeking out opportunities for growth in those areas. Sometimes it

means they will have to pay a great amount of money. Becca's mother commented on their personal strategies for managing financial obligations associated with the international high school choice:

Our family is far from rich. If it only depends on me and her father to pay the U.S. high school's tuition, we won't be able to afford it. My parents and her dad's parents all financially support Becca's education, such as talent class, cram school, and U.S. education. They want her to have the best education she could get, so she can end up with a job that she likes and pays well in the future.

Most of the Chinese students in the United States are the only child of their family at home. The one-child policy has contributed greatly to the changes of the trend of Chinese students studying abroad in recent years. According to a 2016 survey conducted by a Shanghai-based research firm, the average age that parents are willing to send their children to study abroad has dropped from 18 to 16 in 2014—the first time it has reached the high-school level (Larmer, 2017). Table 1 from Chapter 2 shows the number of Chinese graduate students were five times greater than the number of Chinese undergraduate students in the United States during the school year of 2005/06. But starting in school year 2014/15, the undergraduate students from China surpassed the graduate students from China in the United States. As far as the Chinese secondary students, the population of this group studying abroad in the United States has grown 365 times (Tang, 2013) within seven years only in Beijing City – the capital of China. In the school year of 2005/06, there were 65 high school students from China studying abroad in the United States; but the number went up to 23,795 in the school year 2012/13 (Tang, 2013). Moreover, Gu (2017) claimed that “between 2010/11 and 2014/15, the number of Chinese students enrolled in Fine and Applied Arts programs on U.S. campuses more than tripled – a much faster rate of growth

compared to the traditional leading fields of studies, such as engineering, business and management, and math and computer science.”

Today’s Chinese parents have a different attitude from ten years ago when it comes to their only child’s education. They value the development of skills in critical thinking and creative problem solving than high pressure, test-oriented learning style and memorization study method (Gu, 2017). They consider as many opportunities as possible to avoid the chance that their children may fall into a job in the lower-tier society.

### **Understanding the Challenges**

Due to the vast cultural differences between life in the United States and China, Chinese students often go through a lengthy acculturation process in the United States. This section introduces four themes of the major challenges that the international students face during the acculturation process. Chinese international students in both colleges and high schools encounter similar challenges; however, college and university international students are adults and they receive various forms of assistance that the high school students do not have. For example, international students in the colleges and universities may have financial difficulties like their high school counterparts; however, they have the ability to pursue part-time jobs while in colleges and universities or the ability to apply to different kinds of international student scholarships provided by their colleges and universities or organizations. Also, when college and university international students encounter any challenges academically or socially, the strategies they could use to cope or solve the problems may be more prevalent. For instance, college or university international students may ask for help from their department advisor or counselors for international students. Additionally, college and university students could seek help from their adult friends or classmates. Hence, international high school students have far fewer options

when they encounter many similar challenges.

Among all the challenges faced by the Chinese international high school students, the foremost challenge to achieving academic success may be learning English as a second language. Most college and university international students have to prove that their English language proficiency is sufficient to gain admission into most U.S. colleges and universities. In contrast, English language proficiency is not a requirement for international high school students. The principal of the participants' school described how he identifies the qualification of the international students and how sometimes he gets discouraged by the U.S. embassies overseas:

When I make decision on accepting an international student, I focus on a student's character and integrity ... and take in the (international) students who are great [academically] in their home country. However, many of them [international students] are not coming as strong in their English [skills] as I want them to be, and it's a challenge in classes today. Next year, I am going to be more selective in the [accepting international] students. A Skype interview with the students which allows me to learn their English proficiency will be needed.... It takes a lot for me to find a good student, toughest of all that we had to deal with is when we recruited some good students from overseas, the students were rejected by the U.S. embassies in their countries. And there's nothing we can do about (this situation) but give up. I mean we would approve them [international students], but not the U.S. embassies overseas.

Many of the international high school students arrive in the United States with limited English language proficiency. These students often find it more difficult to assimilate with the host culture and achieve their study goals because of their inadequate English language proficiency. Therefore, language barriers will be analyzed as a sub-theme under Theme One

“Social Challenges” and Theme two “Academic Problems” accordingly. Another sub-theme under each major theme is coping skills and problem-solving strategies. This sub-theme shows how the Chinese students use their own ways to overcome the challenges. The challenges of receiving approval for a student visa by the U.S. embassies in the international students’ home countries is discussed under Theme Four “Financial Obstacles.”

### **Theme One: Social Challenges**

Social challenges focus on the participants’ interaction with the school faculty members and the domestic U.S. students because the international high school students spend most of their time in the school. The relationship between the participants and the host families is discussed under Theme Three “Relationship with the Host Family.” Through the interviews, all participants expressed that they would like to make friends and interact more with the native speakers. Social engagement has been quite a challenge for some of them. The principal explained the difficulties of integrating Chinese students socially on campus:

I can see why it is difficult for the international students to get into their [domestic U.S. students’] circles. Because many of our [domestic U.S.] students grew up here from the [same] school [system] since kindergarten. In fact, even some American students transferred from other schools have a hard time breaking in. Meanwhile, I noticed some international students are hopelessly addicted to their technology and often choose to stay in their comfort zone [with the other international students who speak the same language as they do]. For instance, I see some of them walk around with their earphones constantly on their ears, and their cellphones are always in their hands. These students are extremely dependent on their technology even in the church.... They don’t interact with anybody.... They have to walk out of their comfort zone if they want to build a relationship with the

people. The boys (international students) seem like more extroverted than the girls. The principal's descriptions of the international students were confirmed during my observation, I did notice that many Chinese girls have earphones in their ears or using their cellphones before and after schools. Becca and Cindy have more difficulties with social interaction compared to Alan. This young man struggles less than the other two participants.

The interviews with the participants allowed me to understand what social challenges the participants encountered from their perspectives. The following passages showed how each participant described their social life in their school.

Alan described his relationship with the domestic U.S. students and school faculty around him in the school:

I like to interact with the domestic U.S. students very much. I mean, I like to spend time with the other Chinese students in my class too. I can talk to them about anything and they will understand. But they are all girls, it would be weird if I eat lunch with them or hang out with them too often. So I spend most of my time with domestic U.S. students in the school, and I also interact with them through social app after school. Even though, sometimes I am not really interested in the topic they are talking about, I still talk to them about it. I see it as an opportunity for me to practice my English skills and learn more American culture. As far as the teachers, I only interact with them when I need to.

Becca described her relationship with the domestic U.S. students and school faculty around her in the school:

I really want to interact with native speakers more often, that's the purpose for me to be here; however, I find it very difficult for me to make friends with them no matter how hard I try. Perhaps it is because the language and culture differences, I don't know. It has

been 6 months since I started school here, I still don't interact with the domestic U.S. students much, maybe three or four times a week when the teachers assign me in the same group with them. The teachers are very patient, friendly, and helpful. But I only discuss about my school work with them.

Cindy's described her relationship with the domestic U.S. students and school faculty around her in the school:

The only interaction between me and the domestic U.S. students is when the teachers assign us in the same group during the class. I want to interact with them more, but I don't know how. I am always nervous when I talk to them. Sometimes I don't understand what they are trying to tell me or ask me, even if I clearly heard what they have said to me. I can't respond to them in proper English if I don't know what is considered as proper in English. I always answer them in a way that I thought it's proper, or think very hard before I answer them. Then they thought I space out or simply being mean. One of the girls in my class, she came to me several times and told me that I am mean for no reason. It really depressed me. I don't interact with the teachers often, I try to take care of my school work all by myself.

The observation notes echoed the participants' self-description about their relationships with the native speakers in the school. Becca and Cindy stay close to each other for support most of the time, while Alan interacts with both Chinese and domestic U.S. students frequently. However, both Becca and Cindy stated that they are eager to establish friendships with students outside their own group. Unfortunately, Becca and Cindy seem to be discriminated by the non-Chinese speakers due to their limited English skills. According to Ee (2013), international students tend

to encounter microaggressions in everyday life; microaggressions include insults based on one's race, language, and accent.

During an observation at the school cafeteria, I noticed that Becca and Cindy were eating lunch together. They spoke Chinese to each other the entire time. Even though a Vietnamese international student sat across from them and ate lunch with them, they continued their conversation in Chinese. After the observation, I asked them separately why they did not change their language to English so the Vietnamese classmate would understand what they were talking about and might join their conversation. Becca replied:

Although we are in the same class, I do not know her very well. She seems very nice whenever she is around the domestic U.S. students. But when she is with us [Chinese classmates], she always has a “poker face” on her. I don't think she is interested in talking to us; she is just sitting with us so she doesn't look weird sitting by herself.

Cindy's response about using Chinese in front of the Vietnamese student is a good example of why she would not like to talk in front of people in English:

She (the Vietnamese student) likes to hang out with the domestic U.S. students. She sits with us during lunch time because the domestic U.S. students probably don't like her that much. I talk to her sometimes, but she always criticizes my English and says my English is poor ... like some of the other domestic U.S. students say to me. So I try not to talk to her too often.

Sometimes the participants also encounter microaggressions when they are with the other international students whose English language proficiency is more sufficient than the participants. The domestic U.S. classmates of the participants sat at two different tables during lunch, boys and girls were separated. Alan is the only Chinese male student; therefore, he

naturally sits with the other male classmates. It creates more opportunities for him to interact with the native speakers. I asked Becca and Cindy why they do not join the other female classmates to eat lunch together. Becca said:

I tried to have lunch with them before, but I couldn't understand their conversation most of the time. I felt like a fool when they laughed about things I didn't understand. I sat there just looked at them laughing. Another thing is that when I sat with them, I felt like I was taking English class. I had to concentrate to what they were talking about. It was very tiring after a while. I just want to relax and eat lunch with someone who can speak Chinese.

One situation that Becca expressed anxiety about was the instruction from teachers for students to work in groups. During the class observations, I noticed Becca and Cindy always worked together when the teachers asked the students to work in groups. The thought of working in groups filled Becca with dread. She said:

I wish all of the teachers would just assign us into groups when they ask us to work in groups or exchange homework to grade by students. There are only two teachers who would assign the students when we work in groups. Most of the girls in my class are in their own circle. Of course, they would choose to work with their friends. I feel extremely lonely at such moments. I don't like to feel left out. Therefore, if I knew Cindy was not coming to school that day, I would not want to go to school that day either. The feeling of being the last one without a partner to work with is awful.

During an observation at the school cafeteria, I saw a Chinese student that I met through the participants. She ate all the food on her plate. I asked her if she has always liked Western food. She showed me a picture that was screen captured from a cellphone. The picture showed an 8<sup>th</sup>

grade Chinese student who was looking at his plate with some food left in there. The caption of the picture says, “When he’s disappointed they don’t serve cat or dog” (see Appendix K). The Chinese student told me:

This picture was posted yesterday on Snapchat. I don’t want someone posting something on Snapchat with a caption like that about me, haha [laugh]. I have to be careful not to be targeted for things like that because I really don’t want to be laughed at for such things. So I try to eat all the food in my plate. [Look serious] The domestic U.S. student should not have posted this picture with that caption, I wish he knew how we really feel. We like Western food. It’s just sometimes we really miss Asian food that we used to eat every day. Most of the domestic U.S. students are very nice though, only one or two of them are mean.

I asked the participants if they knew about the picture. They said every Chinese student in the school knows about it. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade Chinese student was the one who screen captured the picture, and he posted it on his WeChat. But as far as they knew, nobody reported the incident to the school administrator or the teachers. Soon after the incident, I was invited to give a speech about multicultural inclusive environments to the students in the school. The principal told me that he thinks the students need to learn how to treat people with different cultural backgrounds with respect.

In between the time of the observations and the interviews with the Chinese students, I had the chance to talk to several domestic U.S. students. I asked them some questions about their relationships with the Chinese students in their class. One of the domestic U.S. students described her Chinese female classmates saying:

I don't see them (international students) interact with us inside or outside of school much. At the beginning of the year, we all [girls] sit together. Gradually they just went apart from the mainstream. The girls sit by themselves and keep to themselves. It's kind of like they're in their little circle. I don't know why they are not joining us. Is it because they don't care? Or not interested? Or not understand what we talk about most of the time? A lot of them show potential at P.E. class, but they don't play sports or come to the games. Maybe they want to focus in school first. I think we would get to know them more if they would.

Being invested in the international student program would require researching the cultural background of all international students, learning about their education backgrounds, preparing a multicultural environment that is inclusive and aimed at welcoming these individuals into the learning environment. The data collected in this study reflected many signs of the school's failure to accommodate diverse needs or provide a culturally inclusive learning environment for the international students. The statement from the domestic U.S. student echoes the same sentiments of the principal in that international students may not find the support they need from the host school. Observations revealed that Chinese students rarely interact with the domestic U.S. students and reminded me of what Cindy said in an earlier interview. She thinks the after-school sports and clubs are:

I can tell the domestic U.S. students like to join after-school sports team and clubs. I would love to join the school's sports team too. I asked my dad about it, but he said no, because he's scared that I would get hurt. He said it would cost a lot of money if I get hurt in the United States. He also said that I should focus on studying and get in a good

college. So I joined the International Club in the school. But if they [the school] have some sports that I am good at, I would probably make my dad let me join it.

The school has several sports teams which include golf, softball, baseball, basketball, soccer, and volleyball teams. Becca and Cindy are either unfamiliar with the sports or consider the sports unsuitable for girls. Becca expressed her feeling about the school sport teams:

I wish they have badminton team or ping pong team. Several of my classmates are on the softball team, I have no idea what they are doing in the field. The only school sport that I am familiar is soccer because my cousin plays soccer in school; but I am a girl, I don't play soccer.

According to the participants, they are all the members of the International Club. The International Club was established several months ago, and the members of the club are mainly Chinese students. Everyone speaks Chinese during the club meeting. They watch Asian movies, celebrate Chinese festivals, and eat Chinese food together during the meetings. For Chinese students, the International Club serves as their main support group. Celebrating one's own culture maintains connections to heritage, values, and relationships.

Chinese students choose not to engage in after-school sport teams may make them appear uninterested in socializing with the domestic U.S. students. Chinese students spend most of the time with each other inside and outside of school (e.g., after-school club and field trips) making them appear unapproachable for the domestic U.S. students. A domestic U.S. student described how she sees her Chinese classmates:

I love Asian culture and I am glad that we are having more and more Chinese students in our school. Most of them in my class have good manners and hold the doors for people. I

would like to learn more about their country and culture. I really wish they would talk to us [domestic U.S. students] more often. It seems like most of them are very shy.

Chinese students possess limited vocabulary in the English language which makes it difficult for them to engage in a meaningful conversation with native speakers. This lack of conversation tends to provide a false impression that most of the Chinese students are shy. One of the teachers described her Chinese students:

The girls (Becca and Cindy) tend to really cling to each other from what I see. They are very quiet, but they do socialize as they eat for sure. Most of the boys [international students] are a little bit more willing to branch out, step out of their comfort zone is what I've noticed, and they like mingle with the other students. The girls [domestic U.S. students] in this school are a lot more excited, I don't know... kind of like really bubbly, and then I saw the international girls are a little bit more quiet and reserved, there is a little difference in personality, which is okay. Alan is more willing to mingle even though it may have something to do with his personality too, he jokes around and being silly, and they think he's funny and everything.

Becca commented about how native speakers think she is shy:

I am quieter when I am with the native speakers. They think I am shy. I just went with it. In fact, I know I am not a shy person. I love talking to people. I just don't have the common topics to talk with the domestic U.S. students. Sometimes it's just because I don't know how to say what I want to say in English.

Based on the observations and the interviews with the teachers and domestic U.S. students, the female participants stayed together most of the time. They stayed in the Chinese group, and they bounced ideas off each other, but if they had questions such as how to solve a problem culturally

or how to say something in English, they would not have a native speaker that they could contact to ask those questions. Furthermore, the lack of social interaction with domestic U.S. students slowed down their language learning process and weaken their academic performance critically. This lack of social interaction could prove to negatively impact their college application. Ultimately, the purpose of study abroad and the goal of achieving cross-cultural learning would be greatly diminished. There are barriers in the environment that keep the Chinese students from interacting with the native speakers. The environment is not conducive to the Chinese students' full participation. It appears that the school leaves these Chinese adolescents to fend for themselves as far as adapting to a new culture and an unfamiliar environment. Moreover, one must understand that these Chinese students were removed from their comfort zone since the day they arrived in the United States by themselves. Study in the United States is full of challenges for the participants. They have to learn how to adapt themselves to a new school and a new culture in addition with language barrier every day. It requires patience, supports, understanding, and empathy from the people around these Chinese students in order for the Chinese students to overcome their fear and difficulties due to the language barriers.

**Language barrier for social challenges.** A language barrier exists whether the Chinese student can speak English fluently or not. Among the participants, Alan's English proficiency is above average. Becca's English proficiency is average, which means she is able to understand and express at least half of the time during the conversation with native speakers. On the other hand, Cindy's English proficiency shows a lower-than-average level, she cannot understand or express herself in English most of the time. Cindy described how her personal language barrier affected her social life with the domestic U.S. students.

When I just arrived here [the United States], I tried to talk to the domestic U.S. students as often as I could, so I can learn the language faster. My English was much worse than now. Most of the time when I talked to my classmates, they had no idea what I was trying to say. And when they tried to talk to me, I didn't understand them neither. Gradually they just don't talk to me anymore. Now my English has improved some, but I still struggle with the pronunciation and proper words usage. To me, I feel like they [native speakers] always talk very fast and use some phrases that I never learned before. After they [native speakers] say something, I have to generate every word in my mind and interpret the meaning of it, then I can think how to reply them in English.

A domestic U.S. student told me how she thought the international students' language skills were a barrier to becoming friends:

When I talk to most of the international students, some of them just smile or respond with a short answer. Sometimes I can't help but wonder if they really understand what we are talking about. I wish they would just let us know if they don't understand. I know most of us [domestic U.S. students] are willing to help them understand better. It's hard to have a meaningful conversation with them if they don't understand us, and I think most friendships start with a meaningful conversation.

Becca described how the barrier of having low level of English skills affected her social life with domestic U.S. students:

I think my English is ok, but I don't understand when they (native speakers) use phrases such as *bless your heart*. I understand every word in the phrase, but I just couldn't figure out what they were trying to say and what I should reply them when they say those phrases. All I could do is give them a smile and check the translator for that phrase

later. ... Moreover, most of them speak very fast. For example, I can only understand 70% of what my teachers are saying in the classroom. It seems like their pronunciation is also a little bit different from what we learned in China. I know I can ask them but I feel embarrassed whenever I have to ask them to slow down or repeat too often.

Sometimes the language barrier is not simply the lack of language skill itself, it also involves understanding and knowledge of the U.S. cultural and geographical location norms. Many U.S. southern phrases can be difficult for the Chinese international students. The phrase *bless your heart* is a double edged phrase that even for people immigrated to the United States for many years may not fully understand it. The phrase has both positive and negative meanings, depending on the situation. Alan often interacts with the domestic U.S. students, sometimes language barriers are still present and bothersome to him. Alan explained his struggles with English through his personal interactions:

It is difficult for me to understand their jokes and sarcasm. When I hang out with my friends, we joke around. But sometimes I have no idea why they laugh after someone told a joke. I think sometimes it could be because the person just made an inside joke, or maybe Chinese and Americans have different *xiaodian* (“sense of humor” 笑点)... A funny joke won't be funny anymore after it is explained why it was funny. It is awkward when we don't understand each other's jokes.

The participants are expanding their English vocabulary every day. This is all part of the acculturation process. Though Alan's English proficiency is better than the other two participants, he still has language barrier issues that challenge his conversations with native speakers. However, this study showed that he is able to fit into the circles of the native speakers more successfully compared to the female participants of this study. There are several reasons

why Alan fits in: Alan demonstrates the personality of an outgoing person who likes to interact with people, and he is willing to adapt and meet the expectations of other people. Furthermore, he is the only Chinese boy in his class. Alan's experience reveals that international high school students can improve their social life even if the language barriers exist.

**Coping skills and problem-solving strategies.** When the participants were asked what strategies they have used to build a better social life with the native speakers, their initial responses were mainly focused on how to improve their English proficiency. Alan noted his challenges with language acquisition:

I think my social life will be even better if I can improve my English a little more. To improve my English skills, I read English magazines and books such as *Old Man and Sea*. I also watch as many English movies as I can. When I watch movies, I always watch it with the subtitle first. Then I would watch it again without the subtitle on. I can learn the pronunciation, the English phrases, terms, and practice my listening skills through watching movies. I think it is the most effective and efficient way to improve my English skills. I even read the movie reviews and critics in English. This way, I can talk to the domestic U.S. students about the movie. But the most successful strategy for me is to put myself out there and immerse myself. I don't allow myself to stay in the huddle with the Chinese students too long or too often.

Cindy expressed her strategies in this way:

I like to play video games and watch anime [animation] online. So I try to learn all of the English vocabulary words about these two things. I think if I should ever have small talks with foreigners [native speakers], then I can use those words to chat something interesting with them. I also try to attend all the parties that I am invited to.... Even

though most of the time, I was just sitting there doing nothing, I still think I should be there because I wanted to show them that I am trying to be part of them. Just like sports, I know they (domestic U.S. students) like sports, but my dad would not let me play.... My strategy to solve this problem is to keep score at the games. I get to participate in the game with them in some way, and I also get to do my volunteer hours for the school requirement.

Becca's response to her coping strategies emphasized language, her statement also revealed one important coping strategy to maintain her mental health by using positive self-talk:

I know I have to improve my English, because it is the key to make friends with Americans. I make myself to memorize at least ten new vocabulary words every day. At the same time, I am trying to develop a thicker skin, not feel embarrassed or awkward too easily.... I also learned how to stop people and asked them to repeat things or slow down when I couldn't understand. Sometimes, I ask them to spell the words for me too. This way, I can check the words with my dictionary later. I often encourage myself with words like *'it's ok to be left out or lonely, things will get better soon.'* I even try to use some English with my Chinese friends in the school now.

All of the students talk about the awkwardness, the nervousness, and the isolation they feel. Thus, the emotional toll seems to be making the transitional process more difficult for these Chinese students.

### **Theme Two: Academic Problems**

Under theme two, the academic expectations for the international students are investigated. To understand the international students' academic challenges, one must understand these students' prior educational experiences, learning environment and culture are very different

from those in the United States (Ma & Wang, 2014). In most of the public Chinese grade schools, the classrooms typically have one teaching aid—the chalkboard. The classrooms in the U.S. grade schools have a whiteboard with colorful markers, a laptop, and a projector as basic equipment. Alan described the differences between the United States and China’s high schools:

In China, there are so many students in each class. The lunch time is two hours and each class period is longer. We rarely used any technology in the Chinese classroom unless it’s a computer related class.... The subject contents tend to be easier in the U.S. school. So some of my friends in China considered that I am on a vacation because they think that there is no pressure in the U.S. schools. It is not true though. I have to overcome the challenge of language barrier. I memorize tons of vocabulary words every day and study hard on the contents of each subject. I also have to prepare for the TOEFL and SAT exams.

As Alan notes, most of the Chinese classrooms contain more than 40 students, and it is difficult to have much interaction between teachers and students. Moreover, Chinese high school teachers have to prepare the students for the Gaokao. They have little choice but to encourage their students to take as many notes as they can in the class. Students write down everything they see on the blackboard and everything they hear from the teacher as fast as they can. One of the participants’ teachers noticed how her Chinese students are learning in her class, she commented:

I prepare a PowerPoint for each new lesson. I told my students that they can get a copy of the PowerPoint if they need. But only one Chinese student came to me for the copy of the PowerPoint. It is good to take notes for certain main points of the lessons, but I let my students know that they need to listen to me instead of focusing on copying everything

from the PowerPoint to their notebooks during the class. They could miss a lot of important things by doing that sometimes.

During the observation in a biology class, the teacher was giving a lecture with a PowerPoint. While other domestic U.S. students were listening to the ideas the teacher was teaching, Alan, Becca, and Cindy were furiously copying the words into their notebooks. The note taking behavior was found during different class observations. Figure 4 shows a sample class note which was taken by one of the participants during English class. Once the participants finished taking the notes, they used their cellphones to translate those terms that they did not understand. Sometimes they translate those words immediately, but most of the time, they can only translate the words when they get home because they are usually too busy taking other notes.

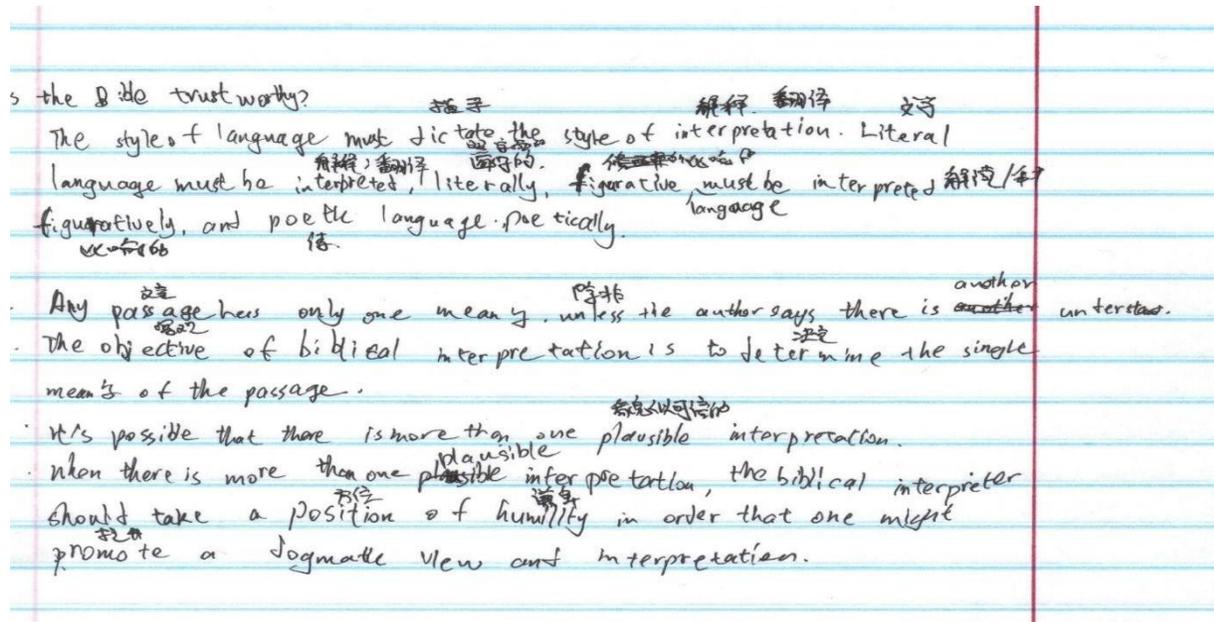


Figure 4. A class note taken by one of the participants.

The participant copied everything from the whiteboard or the PowerPoint to the notebook. When their teachers stopped writing, they explained or gave lecture about what was on the whiteboard or PowerPoint slide. Furthermore, when the teachers stopped to ask questions from time to time,

the domestic U.S. students would raise their hands and try to answer the questions, but the Chinese students could not because they were busy writing notes.

When the class was over, I asked the participants if they understood what the teacher was talking about. Cindy explained her lack of participation in class with these words:

When the teachers ask questions in the classroom, I never raised my hand in the classroom even if I knew the answer. Sometimes it is because I am not sure what words I should use or how to express it in English. Sometimes it is because I am scared that I might answer it wrong and people would laugh at me. Also, I am not used to the teachers ask many questions in the classroom. I think in the classroom, the teacher should teach students new knowledge, and the students should be listening at all time. During the group activities, many times I don't know what to say or don't know what other students are talking about.

Chinese classrooms tend to be completely teacher directed (Lambert, 2015). The teachers dominate the class and give exam-related lectures. By contrast, American teachers encourage students to discuss in groups, share personal experience and thoughts, solve problems through research, and to do projects with classmates. Some American teachers who do not understand the classroom culture differences between the United States and China may be confused by the Chinese students' low participation in the classroom. One of the Bible teachers shared his thoughts about the reluctance of international students to participate in the exchange of ideas in the classroom:

I think part of that is the subject matters. I teach an academic Bible class.... The class is really intensive with discussion. It would almost be like having a speech class! They [international students] rarely ask any questions, and they shy away when I ask them

questions. Did they get it or not get it? I was not sure because they're not really talking to me. I thought 'what am I doing wrong'. Perhaps they are just not paying attention? Or they don't care...?) When I finally had them open up and talk to me, I realized they just need to be more confident. I don't think there's a whole lot that they can do to prepare for being confident, it's something that you have to get out of there and do it. It's kind of personality too, some of them are more natural and just jumping in, but for many of them it just takes longer to adapt and build their confidence. Most of them get energetic in a year. The ones [international students] I had last year, they do well this year.... They do well on tests, especially on written tests.... Their writing really shows what their opinions are on certain situations.

Reticence to participate in class and emboldening students to ask questions seems to be a concern of teachers who expect student involvement in the learning process. While students appear to be comprehending information, the feedback loop in the classroom needs greater emphasis.

China's education is best known for its high pressure and test-driven learning. On the other hand, U.S. education is known for inspiration, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, team-work, and collaboration. The biggest difference between the Chinese classroom and the American classroom is perhaps how the teachers deliver the content of their courses. In China, regurgitation and memorization of the content of the courses are the main focuses of assignments and exams. Most Chinese students find difficult in transitioning to their U.S. high school and their grades often reflect these struggles. Becca talked about her struggle when she just started classes in the United States:

I've always made good grades when I was in China. But I couldn't understand anything in the U.S. classes at the beginning. I didn't know what the teachers were talking about and just sat there doing nothing in the classroom. And the way how the teachers teach us in the U.S. classroom is so different from Chinese teachers at home...; for example, I am not very good at speaking up about my thoughts in front of the whole class or in groups, but many classes require students to talk in front of everybody. I made terrible grades at the beginning of the semester.... Back home, I can hire a tutor or go to the cram school. But I can only depend on myself here!

Unlike the domestic U.S. students, international students do not have the help or guidance of their parents. Most chose not to tell their parents about the challenges they are going through because they do not think their parents can help them with anything academically. One of the teachers described the differences between the domestic U.S. students and the international students on this issue:

There is definitely no communication between the international students' parents and the teachers. I don't even know what goes on back there in their home. We contact the domestic U.S. students' parents when they are not doing great on a subject or how they're doing with report cards; of course, every nine weeks or midterm we will contact them too. If we see them [domestic students' parents] out, we will talk to them about their students.... I rarely have any host family ask me how their students doing in the class.... I guess the international students' parents just have to continue to encourage their students to give their best. Also, the students have to be proactive and come to the teachers when they have any questions. They usually don't come to me unless they need some sorts of help, such as explain a grade or something. I guess they are quite independent.

This teacher expresses some personal views regarding the limited interaction of educators and parents who are important stakeholders in the learning process at this level. The educators also note the imperative for international students to assume a stronger role in taking personal responsibility for their studies. However, the ability to interact with the native speakers is a vital part of the acculturation process. Such sociocultural adaptation is affected by the length of residence in the host country, cultural distance, cultural knowledge, and the amount of contact with native speakers (Yang, Noels, & Saumure, 2006). The participants are still quite new to the United States, and they lack U.S. cultural knowledge. Since the home culture of these participants is completely different from the host culture, it will take time for them to adapt the new culture. In addition, the school or the faculty members did not seem to assist in creating opportunities for the Chinese students to connect with the native speakers inside or outside of the school.

The academic progress and social life of international students relies heavily on their teachers. One of the math teachers recognized the special needs of her international students and so she used a unique method to develop these young international students' confidence, language skills, and leadership:

Most of the international students excel in math.... Math is more as an international language, it is not as difficult for most of them because they have a lot of those concepts already. I challenge the international students, such as setting up stations and let them have opportunities to share their knowledge with other students, giving them teaching opportunities. A lot of the time, when you teach something you even learn it deeper.... Both setting up stations in class and Math Club after class would give the international students a good opportunity to communicate with other students, so they can practice

their language and get to know the local students, such interaction is what they need the most. Meanwhile, it will give them confidence too because they get to use English, but it's in a subject that they comprehend and they get.

Like many teachers, this teacher reinforced the notion of model minority toward the Chinese students. Although some Chinese students may make better grades on math and science compared to other subjects, some Chinese students find themselves struggling with math and science due to the English terms. Meanwhile, the teacher identifies the value of interaction, engagement in the subject matter, and social opportunities as essential elements in student development. Teachers can encourage them to use the resources and provide opportunities for international students to take a more active role in enhancing their skills and communication abilities.

**Language barrier for academic problems.** Chinese students who did not grow up speaking English find the language barrier as the most significant challenge for them to achieve their academic goals. When the teachers of this U.S. high school were asked what kind of challenges their international students faced, many of their initial answers were the language barrier. One of the teachers commented about how she thinks the language is an obstacle for her international students:

The international students' challenges are usually with writing..., it takes them a while to catch up. At the same time, they tend to lack speaking skills. Speaking and reading are quite different for a non-native speaker.... It shows that they can read much better than they can speak.... They definitely struggle with answering certain questions of the directions and certain word that they don't quite understand. They have to spend a little longer to translating vocabulary and understanding directions than working on their

homework sometimes. Although they are allowed to use their cellphone as a translator during the classroom.... I think if they had a background in English, it [using translator] might hinder them from learning it. Sometimes we don't know if they are using the cellphone for the class or personal such as texting or searching answers, which are not allowed in the classroom.

The observations of this teacher reflected the complexity of using technology in their language acquisition and the instructional activity. It reflects the mistrust of the school faculty and the lack of knowledge of language acquisition. Teachers should understand how important it is for Chinese students to have access to the digital translators during the learning process.

In China, English class is compulsory beginning at the third-grade level and is offered once or twice daily. Similar to many other subjects in China, the English class is also taught with a test-oriented method. English classes focus more on writing and reading. Chinese students cannot apply their English knowledge in their daily lives because of a lack of opportunities for listening and speaking in their English classes in China. Becca described how her language pulls her grades down:

During the classes, there are too many vocabulary words that I don't know, so I wouldn't understand the contents, such as history class. I may be able to fully understand by reading it if a sentence is on the whiteboard. But if the teacher was saying the sentence in her lecture, it would be difficult for me to understand because of my insufficient English listening skill. Even math, I know most of the concept of what I am learning, but there are some terms that I am not familiar with, such as Geometry. My grades were affected because of that.

Becca's acknowledgment of the limitations of both her vocabulary development and her listening capabilities are significant indicators of second language challenges. Two math quiz samples (see Appendix L) collected from one of the participants showed that she was able to complete the calculation of the problems correctly; however, the word problems and the terminology part for the Geometry were done incorrectly.

The participants also claimed that English class did not present the level of difficulty that they had imagined. Bible and history classes were reported as the most difficult subjects for them. It is especially challenging for many of the Chinese students to go to Bible class with no prior knowledge of Christianity. They must spend extensive time on Bible study by memorizing the vocabulary words and understanding the stories. Cindy's statement corroborated the other two participants' thoughts:

I have to memorize a lot of English terms in biology, Bible and history classes. My dad sent me to a Christian school because he thinks it is a safer place for studying abroad in the United States. But I didn't know anything about Christianity before I came to the United States. It makes Bible class extremely difficult for me. And many of the vocabulary words in the biology and history class are either very long or nouns that I've never learned before. I spent a lot of time to translate the vocabulary and memorize the words, then I forgot them the next day. It made me very frustrated. Sometimes I remember the word, but I forgot how to apply it in the contents. For example, after I memorized how to spell the word *Picasso*, I forgot his nationality and his time period. The frustrations of these Chinese students are obvious from the commentary and indicate the complexity of attempting to accomplish relatively uncomplicated learning assignments. Most of the time, Chinese international students are not simply learning content knowledge, they are

simultaneously trying to learn the language. Sometimes they may know the answer of a question, but they forgot how to pronounce or spell the English word of the answer. A history quiz sample and a biology quiz sample (see Appendix M) were collected from a participant. The participant made 100 on the True or False part, which clearly showed the participant comprehended the contents of the lesson. Yet the participant did not do well on the parts which required her to write down the answers by spelling the vocabulary words.

**Coping skills and problem-solving strategies.** The common strategies that the participants used to overcome the academic challenges in the U.S. high school were note-taking and memorization, similar to their prior study habits in China. Alan shared his experience on how to study in the U.S. high school:

Since I've already learned most of the biology and math concepts in China. What I don't understand are the English terms for these subjects. I take notes in every class. When I get home, I translate all the terms on my notes, then I study the contents. If I have other school problems, I would ask the older international students first. They normally know how to help me because they've already taken all the classes before, and they tend to understand what I need better because they had gone through everything I'm going through now, especially the first few weeks when I just arrived here."

Becca added this perspective on the differences in her study practices in China compared to the United States:

My teachers allow us [Chinese students] to use cellphone to translate the vocabulary that we don't know. I use my cellphone's dictionary to translate and pronounce the new vocabulary I learned in the classroom. I also ask my teachers to download their PowerPoint on my flash drive every time we start a new unit. It helps me tremendously!

To prevent myself being too lazy, I am setting up my own study time table. I try to follow the timetable to do certain things every day, so I wouldn't waste too much time.

Cindy talked about what she does to improve her grade in Bible class:

My aunt bought me a Chinese-English Bible. I can read the Chinese part first and then read the English part. It helps a lot. My uncle would watch movies or cartoons about Christianity with me. We would discuss about the stories every time after we watched something. We go to church... on Sunday. After church, he would explain to me what the pastor was talking about that day. Whenever I have any questions about Bible, I know I can always go to my uncle to ask him.

These comments suggested that comparative literature and some non-traditional forms of entertainment can serve to improve communication skills. Although Cindy's uncle does not speak Chinese at all, having relative as support is a huge advantage for Cindy. Moreover, tutoring sessions combined with instructions from the teacher are apparently valuable.

Although the participants have to deal with a different classroom culture and language barriers in the U.S. high school, oddly, they felt studying in the U.S. high school was not as difficult as Chinese high schools. Alan made these comments about out-of-class assignments and how they affected his learning strategies:

Since there are very little homework assignments and they are not as difficult in the school, I have so much more spare time here compared to China. I spend most of my spare time to memorize the vocabulary. I write down all of the new vocabulary words, the pronunciation, the type of the word [e.g., verb, noun, adjective], the English and the Chinese definition on a piece of paper, then I can study them wherever I go.

Fortunately, the participants indicated that having additional time out of class to reflect on their language acquisition and extra time for practice was beneficial. The way Alan studies the new vocabulary is quite common among the Chinese international students in his school; a sample of it shows the participants are not only memorizing the English and Chinese definition of a word, they also try to memorize the spelling, the part of speech, the pronunciation of the word as well (see Appendix N).

According to some of the teachers from the participants' U.S. high school, these Chinese students' content knowledge seems to be comparable to most of the domestic U.S. students in the school. Building confidence and learning more English vocabulary words should prove to help these students to more quickly acclimate to the U.S. classroom culture. The more they ask questions and share their thoughts, ideas, opinions, culture, and experiences, the more they may be able to accomplish in their U.S. schools. Furthermore, it is a norm for most of the Chinese international high school students to go through their first quarter of the school year with unsatisfactory grades; however, once they adapt to the teaching style and overcome the language barrier, they tend to show great progress and it reflects on their report cards (see Appendix O).

### **Theme Three: Host Family Relations**

Most of the host families in this school prayed about it when they heard about the opportunity to host international students. Many of them are trying to promote Christianity in a different part of the world. They knew the situation with the Chinese students and how important this program was for students to come to the United States to study. Some of the host families considered this role as a host as a great way for their own children to experience a different culture without leaving home. Unlike the majority of the college and university international students staying in a school dormitory or sharing an apartment with friends, most of the

international high school students live with their host families in the United States. Only a few of the international high school students stay in a school dormitory or with their relatives.

In the participants' school, there are only five international students that live with their aunts and uncles. However, these students treat their aunts and uncles just like other host families because none of them had met their aunts and uncles before they came to the United States. During the interview, the principal pointed out that one of the biggest challenges that the high school personnel were facing were the relationships between the international students and their host families. The following passages show how the participants described their relationship with their host families. Alan described his host family experience in this way:

In general speaking, my host family is very nice. But they treat me stricter than my parents. I have to put my cellphone in the living room at 8:00 p.m. every night. I was accused that I took the cellphone back in the middle of the night, but the truth was I forgot to put my cellphone in the living room that night. Also, I cannot go out to play with my classmates unless I have their permission.

His comments suggested that trust and control issues may be interfering with his relationship in the host family.

Becca indicated trust issues were a concern as well:

They [the host family] treat me like a little kid. It's been six months since I moved into my host family's house, but I don't see much improvement on the relationship between us. I often feel awkward when I am around them. I don't know what I can talk to them. I stay in my room most of the time, I even eat dinner by myself in my room. I only go out of my room when I have to spend one hour with them at 8 pm every night according to the agreement. One night, I was a little late to walk out of my room, and I was scolded for

not being on time.

The breakdown of close relations can impact the emotional well-being of students in cases where the host family is unable to communicate a sense of warmth.

Cindy lives with her aunt and uncle, she made these observations:

I never met my aunt or uncle before I came to the United States. My aunt has many rules at home.... Although she is my aunt... it is not the same as living at home with my dad and my grandmother. My grandma used to make my bed and breakfast for me every morning. I did not need to clean my bedroom or bathroom neither. No house chores for sure! I was too busy to study every day. I do a lot of things here that I did not need to do when I was in China. I miss my grandma and I am going to treat her a lot better than before when I go back home.

The adjustments of living with a new family, even individuals related to the students, provides evidence that the transition phase of study abroad is never simple or without some personal adjustments. Many Chinese international students were well taken care of by their parents and grandparents, some of them even have a-yi (“housemaids” 阿姨) who do all the housework and take good care of them at home. As soon as these young students arrived in the United States, they were essentially forced to learn how to take care of their daily life by themselves.

**Rules.** Host families are normally assigned by the school or homestay coordinators. The host families normally receive a monthly stipend range from \$700 to \$1,500 depending on their location. The host family candidates must go through a background check and sign an agreement (see Appendix P) before they can host an international student. The agreement denotes the host family and the student’s responsibilities and rights. One of the agreement statements says that students should limit their shower or bath time to ten minutes. Alan talked about the agreement:

The students and the host family should be able to add some statements on the agreement. For example, my host family does not limit the length of my shower time; however, they said that they prefer me not to take a shower after 9:00 p.m. because the shower noise would disturb their son. The bathroom is right above their son's bedroom.

The stipulations for the living agreement do affect the students by placing restrictions on their behaviors. Becca also commented on the agreement:

Some of the rules on the agreement are not being fair. For example: "The international students shall have NO boyfriend/girlfriend relations." I don't understand why the domestic [U.S] students in the school can have boyfriend or girlfriend relations, but we [international students] cannot have a boyfriend or girlfriend relation. My mom said that she wouldn't have problem for me to have a boyfriend.

I asked the principal to explain the reasons behind these rules. He stated that he sees the dating issue as a potential social problem for international students; consequently, he thinks there should be no dating as part of the agreement. His rationale that international students are not allowed to have boyfriend/girlfriend is because he cannot "control" these relationships. If he does not know the person, then a romantic involvement will be out of his "control." He does not feel comfortable allowing these young students to date while their parents are overseas.

According to the agreement, the host family should provide two meals during the school days and three meals on the non-school days to the students. Lunch is provided by the school during the school days. As in many cultures, food is the favorite or central topic of a country. People from different cultural backgrounds eat in their own traditional way. Accommodating cultural norms in the host family requires considering not only the way of that food is prepared but also the time that individuals typically have their meals. When discussing cultural

differences, food is initially mentioned by all participants during the interviews. Chinese international students tend to have difficulty adapting to the U.S. food culture. American family meal times seem more spontaneous, while most Chinese families tend to have a set regular time for each meal every day. Alan expressed how he has had difficulty adapting to the eating habits of his host family:

When I was in China, we always eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner at the certain time.... In the United States, sometimes I eat dinner after 9:00 p.m. and weekends' meal time is even more unpredictable.... I understand that I should try to adapt the U.S. way of eating since I came here to learn the culture, and this [eating at different time every day] is part of the American culture. But I always have health issue with digestion if the meal time is not regular every day. I don't think my body is adapting the meal time very well here. I talked to my host family about the meal time issue, but they said that they cannot change it due to a family member come home late at night, and it is too much trouble to prepare dinner twice. So I talked to my mom about it, and she let the agent know that I will need to change a host family next school year.

Chinese parents need to be advocates for their children in the same way Alan's mother did. She showed strong support to her child whenever he needed help to deal with challenges. Other two participants' parents tend to let their child to handle the challenges and ignored their needs during their acculturation process.

All participants and their parents claimed that their relationship has improved since the participants came to the U.S. high schools. The participants showed their parents appreciation and patience more often than they used to. The quality and the quantity of communication between the Chinese parents and their children increased significantly since the Chinese students

came to the United States. Alan described how his relationship changed with his family and friends in China after he came to the United States:

I was too busy doing my homework and study for the exams in China. I actually talk to my parents more often than before, because I have much more free time here. We talk about everything on every Wednesday night and weekends—morning and evening. I also talk to my friends in China a lot, I don't tell them about my challenges in the United States though, because they think I should feel lucky to be able to study in the United States. On the other hand, they always complain about their life in China.

Communication with family and friends appeared to be psychologically and emotionally beneficial considering the experiences that have provided new perspectives for these international students. Becca described how her relationship changed with her family and her friends in China after she came to the United States:

I understand my mom better than before.... I was not willing to talk to my mom very much when I was home. Now I talk to her twice a day through WeChat before the school starts and after dinner. But I can't talk to my mom about my challenges in the school or things happened with the host family. She can't speak any English and she couldn't help me anyway. If I ever complained about anything, she would be mad at me and tell me to talk to the agency instead. One time I had a stomachache and the P.E. teacher still insisted that I should join the class to take the P.E. class. If I were in China, my mom would write a note to the teacher and then I could rest in the classroom during the P.E. class. I can't tell my friends in China about my loneliness or difficulty in the United States neither, because they won't understand, they think I should be glad for what I got. When I talk to my friends, they always ask me to buy things for them from the United

States and complain about their school life in China.

Becca's mother cannot speak or understand any English, therefore, she is incapable of communication with the school or the host family on Becca's behalf. Although she could have contacted the agency when Becca needed help, she chose not to because she wanted Becca to handle the issues by herself. According to Becca, her mother is very busy working every day. She wants Becca to learn how to be an independent person. Cindy's statements below also revealed how her parents were unable to advocate for her due to their language barrier. Furthermore, her statement described that her change in geographic proximity and the resulting cultural changes inhibited her ability to communicate with family, stay in touch with them regularly, and maintain relationships with former friends. Cindy described how her relationship changed with her family and her friends in China after she came to the United States:

I never showed much love or appreciation to my grandma before I came to study abroad. When I went back to China in summer last year, I let my grandma know how much I love her and miss her. I tried to help her more often and be more patient when I was with her. When I am in the United States, my grandma calls me twice or three times a week.... As far as the challenges that I am having, I don't talk to any of them [father or grandmother.] They can't help me anyway. None of them can speak English. I talked to some of my Chinese friends at the first year when I got here, but now I don't have any contact with them anymore. I guess we just lost common subjects to talk about after a long time not being together.

Parents' inability or unwillingness to advocate for their children were clearly shown through Becca and Cindy's interviews. Once international students learn that their parents cannot help them, eventually they stop turning to their parents with problems and concerns. Consequently,

the less parents know about their children's lives, the less they can monitor their children's life activities and choices (Birman & Addae, 2015). Meanwhile, students indicated a degree of maturation and recognize the level of misunderstanding that exists among family and friends about their studies abroad.

The host family is like a family for the international students; however, it takes time for some of the students and the host families to adjust and adapt to their new life. Things are especially chaotic and unsettling at the beginning of the school year. Little to no communication occurs between most of the host families and the parents of the Chinese students as a direct result of language barriers. One of the host family members described her challenge of being part of the host family:

I think sometimes we are not sure if we should treat her (the international student) as our own children or a guest.... It would be nice if we could get more information from her parents to get an idea of her rules at home before she gets here. You know like 'what sort of rules would you like us to have her do...?' So lots of that we've had to adjust between us and the student, communicate back and forth but still there are things that it's just where we are parents? Versus this is not our child! For example, she got her cellphone taken the other day at the school because she was texting in her locker, so the teacher saw her one time and kind of let it slide. And then the teacher saw her again and so he took it. At the school, when they take the cellphone and the parent has to pick it up. I'm thinking what do I do? I know what I would do to my own children... but what should we do about that with her?

It is becoming more apparent that the agency is not providing sufficient information to the school and the host families. If the school knew more about the students in advance, they could place

the students with a more suitable family. Many host families contended that it would be a lot better for them as well as the students if rules were imposed from the start, so that expectations for the students' behavior were understood from the beginning. The expectations of the home family and the host family may not be the same, so the students will have to learn to adapt. If more specific information about the students was collected and shared before they arrive to the United States and if host families were better versed in the students' culture, the students would encounter a much easier transition period. One of the host family members said:

Let us know more about the students and their culture; this can help us to understand things better, so we would have been more prepared. For example, the student's personality, family traditions, culinary preferences, health issues, hobbies, likes and dislikes. When the student first came, we were getting ready to eat, my kids had started eating, and my husband and I were just talking. The student was sitting there and I said "You can start eating," but she said "No, no, I have to wait for the oldest person to start eating before I do." We wouldn't have known if I didn't pay attention, little Chinese tradition things like that would be nice to know before we get our student.

The level of advanced preparation and orientation for all parties involved becomes evident through the experiences of the stakeholders.

Some international students have made the transition easy, but many of them have struggled a little bit more through the process. Another host family member shared her thoughts on how she thinks the relationship between the host family and the student is going:

We were strangers to the student not long ago, she needs time to get to know us. I am hoping that she will be more open soon and talk a little bit more with us, (but) the student stays in her room most of the time. According to the host family and student agreement,

we should spend one hour together every day. We tried to chat with her at least one hour every night, but she did not talk much most of the time. Eventually our one-hour interacting time turned into watching television together.... Sometimes it can be very frustrating. We would love to help her in any way we could. But if she doesn't talk to us, we won't be able to help her without knowing what she needs.

While all relationships differ between host families and their charges, communication is absolutely the one factor that directly affects the bonds necessary to facilitate the academic and social success of the student. Chinese international students tend to have close connections with each other in the same school. They share feelings and support each other through their WeChat group. Inevitably, the students compared their host family to circumstances that have been shared about other host families. A host family member mentioned how the student would compare his own host family with other students' host family:

One of the host families is extremely wealthy. They take the Chinese student dine out in the fancy restaurants at least once a week and they let the student buy whatever snacks he wants. The family even took the student to Mexico on a cruise trip during the Spring Break. I was asked to provide the similar treatment by the Chinese student who live with me, and I understand why he thinks he should be treated the way another student is treated because both students are paying the same amount of the stipend to the host family. But we are not wealthy, and we cannot afford to provide him what another family provides to their host student. I think it is more important for the international students to experience how an average American family is.

Atypical experiences are subject to scrutiny by other students. It is suggested that guidelines should govern the amenities provided by host families to students. Although many of the

Chinese students go through a difficult time with their host families, eventually, these students should come to recognize their host families' efforts to assist them in overcoming the challenges they are facing. Due to the timing of this research, two of the participants are still in their early stage of adapting to their new life. Therefore, it is normal for the students to overlook the efforts their host families had given toward improving their relationships.

**Freedom of mobility.** When the participants were asked what they missed the most about their home culture, they all answered 'freedom'. The international high school students' freedom of mobility is minimized because they are minors who are living under the supervision of a host family. Host families must agree to accept the liability of ensuring the minors are safe and secure at all times. The students may be unable to experience the personal freedom they enjoyed while living at home. One of the reasons Becca wanted to come to the United States to study was her preconceived belief that she would have more freedom as a student in the United States. She expressed her disillusionment with her new environment in this way:

I was excited when I was coming to the United States, because I thought I could finally do whatever I want. But ... the freedom that I have in the United States is so much less than I used to have in China.... I cannot go out by myself whenever I want to in the United States, I have to tell my host family to take me anywhere I want to go. Sometimes I decided not to go out because I don't want to bother them. And if I want to go out with a classmate, I'll have to get permission from the host family and the principal.... I must turn in my cellphone at 8:00 p.m. every night except during the weekends. After I came to the United States, I realized that my mom wasn't really that strict after all and I shouldn't have complained so much when I was at home.

Alan also commented about the freedom he lost since he came to the United States:

I never thought of the public transportation here would be so inconvenient. I feel like I live in a forest now! Back home, I can hop on a bus to meet my friends to watch a movie in the theater or many places are walking distance from where I used to live. Right here, I haven't even seen one taxi yet. I can't go anywhere without my host family's permission and their ride.

The social restrictions of international students can be exasperating for those who have grown up more independently with their families. Cindy also talked about her life without the freedom of mobility in the United States:

I stay at home on the non-school days every day unless my aunt and uncle are going out together; then I get to go out with them. My social life is with my aunt and my uncle. There is no social life for me! Life here is extremely boring. Although I studied a lot when I was in China, I still went out with my friends every once a while. I used to walk to the subway and take it to wherever I want to go. I miss the time that I went out shopping and eating with my friends terribly!

Unlike the domestic higher school students, most of the international students in the U.S. high schools are not allowed to drive any motor vehicle. Additionally, public transportation in many U.S. rural areas is very limited or non-existent. Subsequently, the international students must depend upon their host families to transport them everywhere.

**Coping skills and problem-solving strategies.** During the student interviews, Alan and Cindy also stated that they would have preferred to have had more details about the host families before they were assigned. Alan talked about his approach to resolving problems with his host family:

Most of the time I get along with my host family just fine. But if there is something that I

am not used to or I don't like, I normally try to tough it out. If I really can't do it any more or do not agree with the way how things are, then I would let my host family know how I feel and hoping things would change. If things are not changed after I talked to them, then I would tell my mom and let her talk to the agency. The agency would take care of the things then.

Students often feel forced to take measures to make a point when family members appear unresponsive to unacceptable circumstances. Becca discussed her methods for adapting to issues while living with her host family:

I try to change myself to fit in the host family. For example, at first, I would not eat anything that doesn't look good or I don't like. But now I would at least taste it before I turn it down. Also, I learned how to cook by myself. I am going crazy without Asian food. As far as lack of mobility freedom, I started to shop online when I have free time. It is not as excited as shopping in the mall with my friends, but at least I still get to shop.... My mom wanted me to handle things by myself in the United States; therefore, if something unhappy happened between me and the host family that needs to be changed or improved, I would contact the agency and let them take care of it. If they didn't take care of it, then I will let my mom know.

The variance in the processes of resolving conflict with their host families suggests that mediation between students and their hosts would provide an avenue to open the discussion and achieve resolution to interpersonal problems. The process may also influence acculturation, as Becca tried to change without an advocate.

Cindy lives with her aunt and uncle, she talked about her relationship with them:

Although I do not need to sign an agreement with my aunt, my aunt has many rules at

home. Sometimes when I get so annoyed by some of her rules, I would talk to her about them. After we talk, it is either she changed the rules or I must follow the rules. No matter what, I think it is worth a try to let her know how I feel. I never told my dad or my grandma about the rules, because they are always on her side.

While relationships with host families that are related by kinship would appear to provide a better prospect for fewer issues, Cindy's experience implies that living outside the primary family relationship may always present complications, regardless of the family ties. Furthermore, Cindy's uncle and cousins (aunt and uncle's children) cannot speak Chinese, Cindy was told to always speak English at home.

The principal of the school understands the importance of having more details about the international students from the parents and more details about the host families for the students. He told me that the school is creating packets for future international students and the associated host families so they might learn more about each other prior to meeting. The school also is determined to create better communication channels between the host families and the biological family, sending the requirements for curfews from the host families to the students' families and making sure that they have no problems with those curfews. Parents can also provide rules they have at home to share with the host families. Thus, the host families can set up guidelines ahead of time based on the parents' expectations. Additionally, students' parents also suggested that the school or host family should provide some extracurricular activities for the students to interact with other native speakers.

#### **Theme Four: Financial Obstacles**

It is expensive for international students to come to U.S. private high schools to study. Unlike international students in the U.S. colleges, there are no scholarships or work opportunities

for international high school students. International students in the U.S. high schools rarely have any scholarship resources, and they cannot work while in the United States. International high school students depend solely on their parents for their financial needs. Their parents are not only paying for their tuition, but they are also paying for other expenses, such as a host family fee, a study-abroad agency fee, a cram school fee, and travel expenses every year. At a regular private high school, living costs and fees are likely to add up to at least \$35,000 per year, but the opportunity to study in some U.S. high schools may require much higher expenses. Among all the costs, the study-abroad agency and cram school costs are the only optional costs, but these support services are commonly chosen by Chinese students. The following findings come from the interviews with the parents.

**Study-abroad agency.** Due to the language barrier that exists between the inhabitants of both countries, most Chinese parents would choose to hire a study abroad study-abroad agency to help them with the application process which would come at a very high cost. Consultant agencies often provide admissions consulting, school application service, tests and interview preparation lessons, essay editing, and translation service, categorized as the “packaging application.” They “package” the students’ accomplishments and capabilities to make them appear more attractive for the Western education institutions (Matthews, 2017). Both Alan and Becca went through a study abroad agency to enroll the U.S. high school. Each student pays fees to both the school and the agency that totaled approximately \$36,000 annually. The principal delineated the payments in this way:

The parents are responsible for paying for the agency \$17,000 and the rest of it goes to the school which includes the full package of the tuition, lunch, fees to the host family, student insurance, uniform, school trips, and English support class in needs.

One of the parents talked about the annual fee: “I don’t want to pay so much for my child to study abroad but that’s how much everyone else is paying. What can I say? It is a norm here!” Only families with extensive resources are able to meet the financial expectations of these agencies. Cindy did not come to the United States through an agency, unlike her Chinese classmates who are paying \$36,000 a year, she is paying \$16,000 every year for the tuition and all of the living costs. Cindy’s father expressed his gratitude for admission without help from an agency:

We are very lucky, because my cousin lives in the United States, and she helped us with the application process. She did not charge me for anything. Most of my friends are not as lucky; they are paying more than doubled of the amount we are paying annually just because they hired an agency at the beginning. However, I am paying for her to study TOEFL and SAT in the cram school. It is easily US\$5,000 for a 19-day course! I paid US\$10,000 for two courses last summer.”

Some of the U.S. private schools charge international students different tuition rates than their domestic U.S. students are required to pay. For example, a Texas private school charges domestic U.S. students \$12,500 a year, but \$28,000 for the international students. Before committing to study abroad, parents need to make several decisions, choosing the destination, the cost factors, and the type of school. Most of Chinese parents are unfamiliar with the U.S. education system, immigration policy, and school application requirements. Compounding these challenges is the fact that many of the parents lack sufficient English skills. At the end, the final decisions are greatly influenced by a study abroad study-abroad agency. Becca’s mother shared her experience:

The agency suggested this private school in the United States, I agreed because United

States is very famous of its education in China. But I was kind of regret that my decision was made too rush on that. It was after I sent Becca to the United States, a friend of mine told me that she sent her child to a Canadian public school. I did not know that Chinese students can study abroad in a public school. The cost of the tuition and living in Canada was almost half of what I paid for Becca. I heard Canada's education is very similar to the U.S. education, and it is a lot safer in Canada.... One thing I am glad is that Becca's school is a Christian school. I would like to think a Christian school's discipline and moral values should be closer to our Chinese culture.

Not all consulting agencies use ethical practices or actually offering the advertised services, many Chinese parents are still seeking help from the agencies due to the language barriers. As the number of international high school students increase, the options under consideration for such students may become more competitive on a national level and selective by parents based on media reports.

**Cram school.** In addition to hiring a consulting agency, many Chinese parents tend to send their children to cram schools to learn English. Although, most U.S. high schools do not require standardized language proficiency tests for access purposes, essential English language proficiency would prove beneficial for admissions interviews with the school administrators conducted via the internet and student visa interviews with the immigration officers at the U.S. embassy. Failing either of the interviews may result in the study abroad plan to be delayed or abandoned. Therefore, many students go to cram schools to strengthen their English skills. Cindy talked about her experiences:

My father enrolled me in a cram school program which was designated for the students who are going to study abroad. The teacher told us what questions the school

administrator and the immigration officer might ask us. She taught us what to say and what not to say for the best outcome.... I know my father paid a lot of money for me to study at that cram school, so I studied very hard even though I was extremely tired every day. Fortunately, the U.S. high school accepted me without an interview. But I was very nervous when I had the interview with the immigration officer. The student before me was rejected that day. Thankfully, I did get to use what I learned from the cram school and I was granted a student visa immediately. All my hard work was not wasted!

Even after the Chinese international students start high school in the United States, they continue their cram school life most of the time. Chinese cram schools are gradually growing in some major U.S. cities, such as San Francisco. On the weekends, Chinese students in those cities attend cram schools to take TOEFL preparation class or SAT preparation class. For those who do not live in those major U.S. cities, they return to the cram schools during the summer. Cindy talked about her cram school class in China:

I took a TOEFL preparation class last summer. All of my classmates were the Chinese students in the U.S. high schools like me. I met some of my best friends at the cram school because obviously only they know what I am going through. The class started at 8:00 a.m. until 6 p.m. Monday through Friday. Then we had self-study time from 6:30 p.m. until 9:00 p.m. There was an hour and a half lunch break at noon. We had vocabulary quiz every day. I had to memorize 50 to 100 vocabulary words a day. The teacher read everyone's score out loud in front of the class. It would be very embarrassed if I made a low score. So I studied until very late every night. My summer vacation in China is very busy and tiring. I barely had time to spend with my family and friends in China.

The long study hours and the associated expense did not deter the parents or students. Becca mentioned why she was going to the cram school this summer:

The cram schools give students the booklets which include correct answers for the past SAT questions and passages. The cram schools said the SAT reuse the past test questions and passages. Sometimes they even have the actual SAT tests. I don't know how they got it, but they do. A six-week course costs around \$3,000 plus the airplane ticket, my mom has to pay around \$5,000 for me to study in China's summer cram schools. But we both think it is worth for the time and money to study at the cram school if that would help me to gain admission to a top-tier U.S. college.

To prepare for study abroad is a long and complicated process. Home support is essential for students as they make difficult decisions and complete the necessary steps to receive their student visa. Moreover, once they decide to send their children to overseas for secondary education, parents work tirelessly to earn the large sums of money to cover the costs. Mounting debt and concerns about financial security create pressure for both parents and students. Cindy and Becca both expressed that they felt guilty when they made poor grades in school. These young students said they knew how much their parents paid for their education, and they felt so much pressure from the parents. Their parents constantly reminded them that they should study well in the United States in order to find a good job in the future, so they could take good care of their parents in their senior years.

**Coping skills and problem-solving strategies.** Some students like Becca forgo pleasures to make their study abroad more affordable for the family. Becca talked about the strategies she practiced helping her family:

Since I cannot make money, the only way to help my family is not to shop as often as I

used to. I went shopping a lot at home [in China]. Now I don't shop near as much as before. I am trying to save money for college.

Cindy described how she feel about the financial pressure and the strategies she was going to use to help ease the financial challenge:

My father's business went down and had to shut it down. I am scared that I could not even finish the high school in the United States. My grandmother told me that they would sell their house in China for me to finish my education in the United States if they had to. It makes me feel even more pressure. My dad told me that our family's future is in my hand. He also said things like I will be in the lowest tier in the Chinese society forever if I could not graduate from the U.S. high schools and get in a good U.S. college. I wish I could work or make money somehow, so I can share some financial burden with them. I even thought about to sell my paintings online. But I dropped the idea when I heard that I could be deported if I make money in the United States as an international student.”

As few options exist for international high school students to navigate the financial obligations associated with their study abroad, the only available options for these adolescents is to study as diligently as they could, so they would eventually graduate, find gainful employment and repay their parents. Because the Chinese parents repeatedly reminded the participants of the exorbitant costs of enrolling in the U.S. high school, the students felt the weight of the financial worries and it impacted them on several levels. The participants expressed on several occasions how helpless they felt when they had to deal with the financial challenges.

### **Conclusion**

Chinese students in the U.S. high schools encounter many challenges while they acculturate to the host culture, and inadequate English language proficiency could intensify the

level of other existing challenges. The findings of this research reveal that very few supports are provided by the school to overcome their challenges due to the cultural and language barriers. Additionally, more empathy and understanding from the faculty and the domestic U.S. students are needed. The interviews show many faculty members, host family members, and the domestic U.S. students lack knowledge about where these Chinese students come from and what they are experiencing as a student in the United States. Furthermore, the study uncovered that these Chinese students were subjected to cultural discrimination on multiple platforms including sports. The structure of U.S. sports is unique and thus requires additional time for international students to understand the rules. The school should provide some culturally inclusive sports for students from different cultural backgrounds. The study also exposed the microaggressions that Chinese students are experiencing against their culture and English proficiency. Young students and female students, in particular, were more likely to be victims of microaggressions (Ee, 2013). For instance, Cindy was criticized and verbally attacked simply because of her insufficient English skills; another Chinese student was insulted publicly through the social media simply because the domestic U.S. student's ignorance of Chinese culture. There is little support provided by the school or parents, so it remains the sole responsibility of the Chinese students to manage microaggressions against them and to care for their wounded emotions, dignity, confidence, and feelings.

Limited English language proficiency negatively affects the international students' social life and academic performance. From the social perspective, the Chinese students in this study indicated a willingness to integrate with native speakers, but difficulty in forming relationships would continue until the obstacles of limited language skills were overcome. From an academic standpoint, it is difficult for these international students to achieve their goals because they are

simultaneously learning the language while trying to understand the content of their subject matter. Consequently, helping Chinese high school students to improve their English proficiency as quickly as possible is essential in order to minimize the length of time to successfully accomplish the acculturation process and moderate many other related issues that communication challenges pose.

Finally, the self-reported findings of this study revealed the significant motivations for international students choosing to study in the United States. The evidentiary commentary suggests that these students carry the burden of extremely high expectations from their families. For some of these students, summer vacation is packed with intensive TOEFL or SAT preparation courses in China. Furthermore, instead of paying for four years of U.S. college and university education costs, the Chinese students are paying for eight years of U.S. education costs. Consequently, the financial burden to these Chinese parents and the pressure on the Chinese students caused by these burdens is immeasurable. Based upon the evidence of these interviews, many young students from China and their parents inevitably must assume great risks and navigate numerous challenges to participate in the international student study in the United States. Students in international study programs must be prepared to adapt to social challenges, to accept as second-language students that this pathway poses academic trials, to acknowledge that acclimating to a new culture and living with an unfamiliar host family will not be easy, and to understand that financial obstacles accompany opportunity.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusion**

In Chapter 5, I discuss the research findings as they address this study's research questions. The findings from Chapter 4 pertained to the following research questions:

- What challenges do Chinese students encounter in the U.S. high schools while coping with personal difficulties as they adapt in the acculturation process and managing major life adjustments with limited social and emotional support?
- Why do the parents send their adolescent children to attend a U.S. high school?
- How can the policymakers, the educational leaders in the higher education institutions and high schools help Chinese international high school students to overcome the challenges they are facing?

I also present the recommendations, limitations and implications for future studies. At the end of this chapter, I conclude with a description of my own experience with this qualitative case study and reflect on my final thoughts.

#### **Discussion**

With this research, I set out to understand what challenges the Chinese high school students are encountering in the U.S. private high schools. The findings showed that the participants are facing four challenges: a) social challenges; b) academic problems; c) host family relations; d) financial obstacles. The study using Berry's (1974) fourfold model, evaluates acculturation processes of the participants toward the host culture. The fourfold model raised two important questions in his acculturation conceptual framework: 1) how much do the newcomers want to maintain their own cultures and identities; and 2) how eager are the newcomers to have

contact and participate with those who are outside their group in their everyday life. The responses of these two questions lead to the choices of one of the fourfold model options - assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization

Based on the data collected from the interviews and the observations, no participants showed any sign of marginalization nor assimilation. Marginalized individuals consider themselves low in both origin culture and host culture identification (Yue & Le, 2012), and the assimilated individual abandons their own native culture and adopts the host culture (Sam & Berry, 2010). Alan is in the *Integration* stage of the acculturation process. He is able to balance his relationship with the domestic U.S. students and the Chinese students at the same time. Alan's acculturation process is more successful in part because of his language skills. According to Alan's teachers and host family, his English conversational skill was better than the other two participants when he started the U.S. high school. Becca and Cindy are likely in the *Separation* stage of the acculturation process mainly because of their insufficient language skill. They avoided contradictory attitudes and appeared subdued as much as possible when initiating intercultural contact with other cultures (Bourhis, Moise, Perrault, & Senecal, 1997). They preferred to have meals by themselves and they rarely had any contact with other native speakers unless required to do so; however, such behavior is understandable while the school is sorely lacking a multicultural inclusive environment. The environment is not conducive to the Chinese students' full participation. The school seems leave the Chinese students to fend for themselves as far as adapting a new culture and an unfamiliar environment. Figure 5 below shows Alan, Becca, and Cindy's current acculturation levels based on Berry's fourfold model. Although Becca came to the United States one year later than Cindy, Becca was able to catch up to the

same acculturation level as Cindy as a result of Becca’s self-motivated learning ability and goal setting study skills.

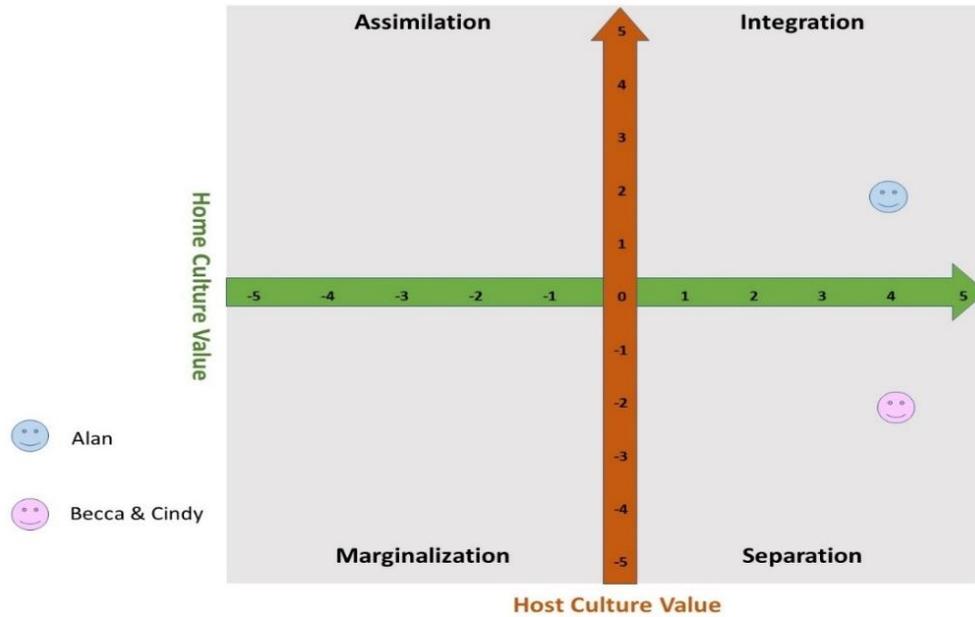


Figure 5. Acculturation Levels Based on Berry’s Fourfold Model.

When the participants of the study were asked to clarify their willingness to adopt American values or maintain their native cultures and identities, each claimed that they wanted to maintain their own cultures and identities; however, they did express dispositions that included adopting the host cultures and making new friends in the United States. When asked how eager each participant was to have contact and participate with individuals outside their immediate group in the educational setting and their host families, they expressed an eagerness to develop relationships and desire to have the opportunity to participate with people outside of their program in their everyday activities. Yet, the observations and the interviews from the people interacting with the participants contradicted the self-reports by the participants and indicated that the female participants were not as eager, as they had originally responded, to interact with outside groups because of their challenges with the language barrier.

Berry's theoretical framework appears to have applied well to participants' acculturation process toward host cultural groups in this study. However, his fourfold model does not indicate the importance of how language barrier affects newcomers' acculturation process. On the other hand, Schumann's (1986) acculturation theory claims that language is the most important factor in successfully acculturation. The findings of this study supported Schumann's theory: language barrier is shown as the major factor underlying the causes of the first three challenges for the participants. Those challenges could be minimized if there were enough communication between the international students and the native speakers (e.g., domestic U.S. students, teachers, and host families). However, sufficient communication requires adequate language skills, especially in the ability to express one's self verbally. It is no wonder that second language acquisition has been often used to measure how well international students adapt to the host culture (Schumann, 1986). International students in colleges and universities have already proven their adequate language skills through TOEFL and SAT exams before they enrolled into the U.S. colleges and universities. Meanwhile, most of international high school students came to U.S. high schools without adequate language skills; nevertheless, many colleges and universities provide various support such as writing centers, ESL programs, and free tutoring to help the international students to overcome their language barriers. Most of international high school students have no such support.

Evidence shows that newcomers from different cultures who are experiencing high discrimination are more likely to prefer separation (Sam & Berry, 2010). Based on the interviews with the domestic U.S. students and the teachers, Becca and Cindy were being rejected from the host culture group simply because the host culture group lacked understanding of the cultural background of the Chinese students. Additionally, the Chinese students lacked sufficient English

skills to communicate with the native speakers. The language barrier created a wide gap between the female participants and the native speakers. According to Krashen (1985), it is only when the learning environment helps students feel comfortable and confident that second language (L2) learning can occur. The school in this study is new to hosting international students, thus as shown in the findings, there is a need for a multicultural inclusive environment for the international students. While the faculty members do not understand the behaviors of Chinese students and the domestic U.S. students do not show empathy toward the Chinese students, it is understandable that Becca and Cindy tended to seek each other's company most of the time. Social support from the co-ethnic group can create satisfying relationships for international students (Sam & Berry, 2010). Becca and Cindy's close friendship can create support they each needed. On the other hand, their close friendship can also create a culture gap between them and the native speakers. Eventually, this coping strategy may slow down their acculturation process.

Considering the research question as to how well international students acculturate by managing major life adjustments with limited social and emotional support, the evidence from this study poses concerns. The primary issues emerging from the research indicate that direct connections to language communication problems, inadequate support services at the high school, as well as advocacy limitations interfered with smooth acculturation. Many international high school students come to the United States with insufficient language skills and lack the ability to communicate extensively with their classmates, teachers, or host families in fluent English. The high school's support to the international students has proven to be limited as well. The school depends upon faculty members to serve multiple roles in assisting students. The participants, as minors, depend heavily on the agency when compelled to resolve significant life events. The agency may be able to help them with host family changes or airport pickup

arrangements, but the agents cannot assist students when immediate help is needed. For instance, recalling Becca's stomachache that required her to rest during P.E. class, because of the time difference, she was unable to approach the agency at the time she needed assistance. According to the participants, they always had to wait for days or even weeks for the agency's response to certain questions they had posed. This delay in response suggests that the advocacy role of agents needs to be addressed. The Latin term *in loco parentis*, translated as "in the place of a parent" recognizes how organizations have the legal responsibility to assume many of the functions and responsibilities of a parent, especially parents lacking bilingual skills. The poor communication with the host family apparently failed to fulfill the advocacy role that the student had been accustomed to at home. The findings suggest that the participants are experiencing large gaps in having their needs met. When navigating acculturation by handling complications related to life events with perfunctory social support, international students are at an extreme disadvantage relative to their American peers in their classrooms.

The loneliness associated with separation anxiety, limited communication, and accommodating an unfamiliar culture consistently reappeared in the research. While the transition to a new culture can be psychologically brutal to a minor, Chinese parents and their students believed the high school education in the United States helped to not only successfully transition these youths into a higher education institution, but also their children to develop a stronger level of resilience and to live independently, proactively, and confidently. However, during the time-consuming acculturation transition, many Chinese international high school students feel lonely, homesick, confused, frustrated, and trapped. The findings showed that the Chinese students must overcome their feelings that range from reticence to embarrassment or intimidation while communicating with their domestic classmates and their host families as a

consequence of the obvious language barrier. The responses of the participants underscored the negative effects of the poor exchange of ideas, marked by the need for more sophisticated social skills and language proficiency. In addition, when international high school students face family financial issues, they cannot seek employment or apply for financial aid/scholarships in contrast to adult international students at colleges and universities who have those options. Issues related to expenses result in enormous stress and pressure on parents that burdens these young students. Although they talked to their parents frequently, the thousand miles distance and the different time zones between the parents and the students made seeking immediate help or comfort from their parents difficult for students. Eventually, many international students learned to hide their emotions and difficulties from their parents, their teachers, their host families, and their classmates.

### **Recommendations**

Chinese students in the U.S. high schools helped to change the overall age of Chinese immigrants in the U.S. population of immigrants. The greatest growth in age groups was between the ages of 15 to 19 for Chinese immigrants due, in part, to the rising numbers of international high school students (Jensen, Knapp, Borsella & Nestor, 2015). This group of young adults face similar challenges to international college and university students. Although their challenges are similar, there are many programs and supporting agencies for international students enrolled in colleges and universities. The need for and the limitation of services currently available in many U.S. private high schools made this issue especially critical. In this particular section, the recommendations address one of the research questions: How can the policymakers, the educational leaders in the higher education institutions and high schools help international high school students to overcome the challenges they are facing?

## **Recommendations for the Policymakers**

The trend of Chinese high school students studying abroad is growing rapidly worldwide. Larmer (2017) observed that the enrollment of the Chinese students cannot be driven just by a push from China, but also by a pull from the United States. The new U.S. government's policy proposals toward foreign visitors strengthen the perception of potential international students that the United States is no longer as welcoming to international learners. While many countries are implementing new policies to welcome international students, the United States' new policies are raising barriers that inhibit international students' plans. Here are four recommendations for the policymakers:

1. U.S. policymakers should rethink the one-year-only exchange program for the international students in public schools. The unavoidable damage of policies that restrict the potential for qualified students to enter the United States would be devastating for the U.S. high schools and candidates for higher education. For instance, "the Canadian immigration bureau (CIC) initiated a new type of visa for students in grades 10 to 12—the Secondary Pilot Program—to simplify the visa application procedures and financial requirements for international students. The initiative [was] built on an already robust number of Chinese students studying in Canada" (Gu, 2017). Unlike the rigid U.S. immigration law that only allows international students to attend public schools for one year, many Australian and Canadian public schools accept international students who are willing to pay their way. According to Chow (2014), the Toronto District School's international student population has increased by 40% and three quarters of them are from China. Meanwhile, Vancouver's main school board forecasts to collect C\$20 million in international fees this coming year (2014). Besides policy changes, Canadian

Education Department also encourages their school systems to create friendly and welcoming school websites for international students from elementary to secondary education. The websites are easily accessible and available for parents of promising international students to follow the links and apply for their schools.

2. Develop education policy for students who are under age 18 to protect the minor international students in the United States. Chinese parents invest heavily in a U.S. education for their children, yet the financial windfall is captured by intermediary agencies and some cash-hungry schools (Larmer, 2017). Knowing that entering the U.S. education system is the most expensive opportunity in the world (Mckenna, 2015), many Chinese middle-class parents who want to send their children for an English-language high school education but cannot quite afford the high tuition fees in the United States, they may instead turn to other English-speaking countries' high schools for a more affordable option (Chow, 2014). Such consequences could negatively affect the U.S. higher education's international student enrollment. Policymakers should set up regulations similar to Australia's to protect the international high school students. Under Australian government legislation, the ESOS framework protects the rights of international students which includes a Tuition Protection Service (Department of Education and Training, n.d.). Moreover, Australia has a supportive education law for international students designated especially for learners under age 18.
3. U.S. policymakers can make the United States a stronger advocate for international student study programs by developing policies that enhance the United States' profile abroad and attract international students to the highly regarded educational institutions in the United States (elementary and secondary schools, language schools, and higher

education institutions). A hostile and inflexible immigration policy can deter the international students and may result in their seeking learning opportunities in other less restrictive countries, such as Canada and Australia. The competition for such students can hinge on perceptions of personal safety, quality of education, good living conditions, and the desire to embrace the international student programs that are more welcoming.

Potential international students and their parents may feel inhibited about coming to the United States to study since the new U.S. government administration has recently introduced new policies toward foreigners, such as the travel ban (Saul, 2017) and the modification of the H-1B visa program (Fischer, 2017). These proposed new policies will negatively affect recruitment of international students. Nearly 40% of the higher education institutions are reporting overall declines in applications from international students and the decline of the Chinese applicants was the most significant (Saul, 2017). Many Chinese parents and students are becoming increasingly concerned about hate crimes in the United States as evidenced recent domestic conflict. Trump's "America First" political actions and the ripple effect inevitably makes international students have second thoughts about choosing to study in the United States.

4. Whereas language barriers are some of the biggest challenges for most of the international secondary students, policymakers could set up regulations for private schools to provide ESL programs for international students.

Although the United States is still the number one destination for most Chinese international students, many English-speaking countries are highly motivated to replace the United States' title as the number one destination for international students. Many Western countries have been creating strategies to increase international high school student enrollment.

Immense policy changes are needed in order to be competitive in international secondary students' enrollment, and it is the policymakers' responsibility to ensure the changes are positive steps to promote the most environmentally friendly productivity known to man—learning. The policymakers' decisions could determine the future trend for attracting international students and impact the number of international student enrollment in U.S. higher education institutions.

### **Recommendations for the Higher Education Administrators**

Beyond the many benefits that Chinese students bring to U.S. high schools, host families, and their communities, this population comprises a potential vein of highly qualified students destined to advance to U.S. higher education institutions, acknowledged by their proven diligence and accelerated skills as bilingual students. Moreover, in 2014, Chinese international students spent almost \$10 billion on tuition and other goods and services in the United States (Dudley, Stecklow, Harney, and Liu, 2016). Since most international students do not qualify for financial aid and consequently pay full price for tuition, fees, and services, higher education institutions rely more heavily than ever on international students for much needed revenue. Current competitive forces in higher education, budget cuts, and reduced funding have created huge financial problems for many private and state universities in recent years.

The trend of an increasing rate of international students coming to the United States to study in higher education institutions has demonstrated weakness recently and experienced a decline every year since the 2009-10 school year from 29.9% to 8.1% in 2015-16 school year (IIE, 2016). The population of students, ages 18 to 23 years, has dropped by nearly a quarter in the last decade in China (Matthews, 2017), which could be one of the reasons that explains the slow deterioration in the rate of Chinese international student enrollment. Meanwhile, the number of Chinese international high school students in the United States is growing rapidly.

According to Chow (2014), most Chinese students studying in Canadian high schools choose to continue their higher education in Canada. Therefore, an inclination to remain in the host country after the secondary level has a net effect of losing international high school students to other English-speaking countries. Such a loss of high school students may result in a decline in the number of international students choosing to enroll in U.S. higher education institutions. “The shifting mobility trends of the incoming international high school students require meticulous analysis of the challenges of the current international high school students for the U.S. higher education leaders to understand how these students could positively impact U.S. higher education” (Farrugia, 2014). Higher education leaders can help to increase the number of international students in U.S. higher education institutions by encouraging more international students to study in U.S. high schools. Here are five strategies that higher education leaders should consider:

1. Urge the policymakers to review and change current rigid policies to entice more international high school students to enroll in the United States.
2. Encourage and support more research to address concerns about issues international students face when enrolling in U.S. high schools.
3. Establish higher education partnerships with private high schools promoting international student programs. For instance, Queen’s University in Canada has partnered with the local district public schools to create a program that allows international students preferred admissions if the student graduated from the district public high schools (Chow, 2014).
4. Differentiate the admission policies for graduates of U.S. high schools’ international student programs as opposed to high school students migrating from their country of

origin with a foreign high school diploma, seeking a bachelor's degree (Farrugia, 2015). The advantage international students possess as graduates of a U.S. high school may include a better understanding of the U.S. education setting, cultural skills, and greater understanding of English. Students with acculturation advantages may require fewer support needs during the higher education application and integration process once reaching the university. Eliminating the language admission test – TOEFL for international students who are graduates of U.S. high schools would be a good example of privileging study abroad. Toronto's largest school board is currently in negotiations with the University of Toronto to waive English-proficiency exams for those who graduated from their high schools (Chow, 2014). Although a few students may still have language or academic difficulties, their high school transcripts and SAT or ACT scores should adequately reflect their English proficiency levels.

5. Cross-training and collaboration among admission team members are essential (Farrugia, 2015) because the domestic admissions staff from the higher education institutions may encounter international students during the outreach and recruitment activities in the U.S. high schools.

International students help universities to meet budgets and subsidize institutional expense that ultimately benefits domestic U.S. students. A decision made by an international high school student may have long-term effects for the student's higher education plan. With the growing competition from the higher education of other Western countries and the declining population of college-age students in China, it is essential for U.S. higher education to do more to make themselves attractive to potential Chinese international students. Losing these international students who may be attending high schools in other countries could likely be a

great loss for U.S. higher education and the U.S. economy. Providing a clear and sensible higher education path for international students in the United States offers encouragement to these highly motivated, exceptionally skilled, and uniquely talented individuals from U.S. high schools when making college decisions.

### **Recommendations for the High School Educators**

International student enrollment is an efficient way to make up revenue shortfalls for many U.S. high schools. This research suggests that the number of international high school students will grow even faster in the near future. However, the trend of international students enrolling in the U.S. high school is a recent phenomenon; the past decade has seen the development of international programs in many high schools that are still new to accommodating this group of students. U.S. high schools with international programs need to be well prepared for addressing the needs of these students. Most international high school students are minors who have left their family's support system and their lifelong friends to study independently in a foreign country. The responsibilities of high school leaders include ensuring that these minors are well taken care of by launching programs and establishing plans to help the students' transition into American life socially, psychologically, and emotionally in order to be academically successful.

The proposals focus mainly on student support, administrative advancement, and financial incentives. Primarily, the following paragraphs propose recommendations that offer some critical suggestions designed to increase student support. More specifically these suggestions advocate change that encourages host schools to become more culturally diverse, provide a more culturally inclusive environment, facilitate the acquisition of legal documentation, and initiate an information clearinghouse for students and host families. Other

recommendations urge improving the educational quality of host schools directly affecting international student development that include professional development of teachers and greater cultural awareness. An important proposed change is related to an administrative shift in managing student credits as well as developing a collaborative alliance with higher education. In addition, greater financial support in the forms of scholarship or grants may be essential to remain competitive in the international student enrollments.

U.S. high schools providing international student programs should offer a culturally inclusive environment to all students. One option might include establishing multicultural assemblies for teachers, staff members, host families, domestic U.S. students, and international students. Encouraging students to talk about differences without making judgments and teaching students to maintain positive interaction with students of different racial and cultural backgrounds is a desired result. Schools attempting to create a welcoming environment might provide a culturally inclusive menu in the school cafeteria to promote multicultural awareness. Many international students will appreciate the thoughtfulness and the domestic U.S. students would get to become acquainted with non-traditional cuisine of cultures through different food choices.

To help the school environment to become more culturally diverse, high school recruiters should find ways to recruit more international students from different countries other than China. Obviously, there is limited diversity among current international students in U.S. high schools. About 75% of today's students are Asian and primarily come from China (Farrugia, 2015). A more diverse school environment can provide opportunities for the majority group of international students to interact with international students from different countries. International students seem more willing to make friends with other international students who

come from different countries other than their own. For example, a Chinese student may open up to a Korean student more than domestic U.S. students because they know the Korean student may be unable to speak fluent English and share equal challenges adapting to a major life adjustment in a new culture. Therefore, a variety of international students may tend to be more patient with each other developing conversation skills. The language barrier would not be under as much scrutiny if students from multiple cultures used the wrong English word or the pronunciation were incorrect. This approach may enhance learning and social engagement as well as facilitating the psychological problems of isolation.

Many young international students appear passive due to their age, cultural training, and uncertainty of their capabilities. The quality of their study abroad experience often heavily relies on the atmosphere promoted by their school and their host family's social arrangement. Therefore, high schools appealing to international students may find it crucial to arrange a variety of activities and events to expose these students to facets of American culture as well as formal and informal language. For instance, the school can organize cultural events, such as potluck parties or bowling during non-school days among host family members and their domestic classmates. Such events provide venues for informal debriefings in addition to casual conversations creating a sense of unity of the program and complementing the sense of humanity in the student experience.

High school administrators and staff should coordinate support group counselling meetings for international students. To identify and diffuse issues that arise, these mandatory meetings should be held regularly. During the meetings, international students can discuss concerns or issues with their academic progress and accommodation. The meetings should be both one-on-one as well as group discussion meetings. Typically, international students can learn

from another international student's experience. For example, counseling and peer interaction can provide learning strategies for dealing with emotions when students are homesick.

Commonly, simply being able to talk to someone when feeling emotionally distraught makes lonely students feel better. Students learning adaptive behaviors will sense that they are not alone in managing their emotions and learn that they do not have to deal with the difficulties alone.

High school administrators and staff should facilitate the integration of international students into the domestic population through extracurricular activities, such as academic festivals, cultural exchange events, and activities in informal settings designed to help students develop collaborative and social skills. Even though international students are no longer in their home country, many are still under pressure from their parents to excel academically in order to gain admission into top-tier colleges and universities. Therefore, it is essential for the schools to encourage international students to participate in after-school activities. Becoming active in after-school activities can help them to make new friends with domestic U.S. students and experience more elements of the U.S. lifestyle. Additionally, after-school activities can be a positive component for inclusion in the college and university application.

Developing a "buddy" system with a domestic and an international student can ease transition concerns if pairing is done correctly. Many international students feel lost when they enter classrooms in the U.S. high school for the first time. They are unfamiliar with the U.S. grade school's schedule, and they have yet to make friends or understand the language extensively. International students find it extremely difficult for them to integrate with domestic U.S. students initially. A carefully designed buddy system can help the transition period tremendously for their new school life. Designating appropriate domestic U.S. students in the partnership allows international students to become familiar quickly with the environment and

the schedule. Knowing what to do at the certain time and where to go for certain classes would lower stress levels as well as provide a trustworthy confidant. Domestic buddies can also bring the international student into their friends' circle.

Setting up a tutor program for both domestic U.S. students and international students can help the international students build their social network if properly prepared by high school administrators and staff. Many Chinese international students are well-known for their talented mathematics and science abilities. These students can serve as peer tutors for domestic U.S. students who need to improve in those subjects. Conversely, domestic U.S. students can tutor international students in English to reciprocate. After all, most of the international students need to improve their English, especially their conversational skills. The tutor sessions can be used as credits toward the international students' community service or volunteer hour required for high school graduation. The tutor program is an effective way to promote interaction between the domestic U.S. students and the international students. The net effect for both groups of students can be equally beneficial. Tutor services can provide essential support needed by international students, both academically and socially.

U.S. high schools need to understand the immigration policy regarding to their international students and assist them to acquire the necessary documents. International students coming to the United States do not have a social security card or driver's license. Unlike college and university international students who have college identification cards, the only photo identity document for underage international high school students is their passport. These minors can easily misplace such important documents. It would be extremely troublesome if they lost them, because they are minors who are not with their parents in their home country. Therefore, it would be helpful if they have a state identification card. For example, international students can

bring their F-1 visa to the DMV in North Carolina and apply for a proper identification card (see Appendix Q). Students could use the identification card in some circumstances without concerns that they may lose it. Such identification should be acceptable for admission to the SAT test, TOEFL test, senior trip, fishing, and travel.

International students need to know more about the host families and their household they are assigned to live with during the following four years. Learning as much as possible about characteristics, such as interests, personality, cultural background, hobbies, health issues, and entertainment choices before students are assigned. Sharing detailed information about the potential international students to the possible host families before students are assigned could prove to be advantageous to both parties. Questions about students' diet requirements and possible health issues could be addressed in questionnaire form. An introductory video shared among student candidates and potential host families could provide a welcome message and a chance to exchange family values. Questions such as requirements for a strict meal schedule and/or food preferences could be addressed. All stakeholders would complete a wide-ranging survey to allow students and the host families to acknowledge potential incompatibilities before students are assigned to a host family.

Maintaining educational quality is crucial for future success. According to a Foreign Policy survey in 2015, 78% of the Chinese students claimed that the leading influence on their decision to study in the United States is the quality of education (Ebrahimian & Wertime, 2016). Due to the fact that many potential international students are discouraged by the language barrier, schools should implement ESL programs and incorporate SIOP training for teachers. Providing teachers professional development for the efficient and effective instruction of international students could be a tipping point in encouraging uncertain candidates to choose

U.S. schools. One hat does not fit all, teaching international students typically requires extra efforts as well as innovative methods. For example, it is helpful for international students to have visual aids when learning new information. Teacher training should include group assigning skills in the classroom. For international students, participating in group work is extremely important for expanding international students' social networks. For some it is the only opportunity to interact with domestic U.S. students. During group work, students share their unique thoughts, create common products, and listen to each other. Group work provides an opportunity for international students and domestic U.S. students to learn about each other as well as from each other.

Clearly defined credits required by U.S. schools will help international students plan for a smooth transition to graduation. Administrators and officials have an obligation to develop and establish a consistent credit system for international students from different education systems of collaborative countries. For example, many Chinese high school students come to the United States after the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The U.S. high schools promoting international programs with standardized curriculums should identify specific Chinese courses that are transferable in an effort to improve the concerted effort of consistent academic completion.

Partnerships with universities or colleges may increase the international enrollment of U.S. high schools. Collaborative programs and direct partnerships between high schools and higher education institutions could serve to attract more international students to study in the U.S. higher schools. Such articulation agreements could create pathways to higher education programs promoted by high schools.

While scholarships are unavailable for most international students at the secondary level (Farrugia, 2015), almost all international students pay their way in U.S. high schools out of their

own pockets. However, providing scholarships to international students who have financial needs may help high schools to recruit very talented students. The enticement of such financial awards may also increase the number of international students from diverse economic backgrounds and ethnic groups.

While changes are essential for maintaining U.S. superiority in attracting international students, a program cannot remain static with expectation that the leadership it currently possess is sustainable. More work needs to be done to understand the decision-making process of international students in order to determine how the United States can remain the most sought-after destination for international students. Understanding the challenges and needs of international parents and their students as they matriculate to study abroad programs in other Western countries presents many opportunities for further study.

### **Limitation and Implications for Future Research**

Researchers can expect certain challenges when studying groups of international high school students. For me, overcoming difficulties of locating limited sources of information on international students in the U.S. high schools is challenging due to inadequate records as well as inaccessible data. Unlike the international students in U.S. colleges and universities, there are limited studies focusing on international students in U.S. high schools currently. Another challenge for future researchers is the limitations of studying participants who are minors and who speak limited English. Certainly, the challenges of communicating with their parents who live thousands of miles away with a twelve-hour time difference further complicates such research.

Although this study revealed some core challenges of Chinese international high school students, limitations of this study exist. Future researchers could involve enhancing several areas

that may serve to enrich international high school students' study abroad experiences: 1) the location of the participants' U.S. high school; 2) the residences where participants may be located; 3) the previous educational background of the students; 4) the reasons for studying in a U.S. high school; 5) comparative studies between the international high school students and the international college and university students; and 6) insights or reflections from the domestic U.S. students about the development of the international student programs. The following passages illustrate these concepts that address future topics for research.

The location of this study was inclusive of only one religious private high school in a rural area. Further research could include non-religious private high schools and urban high schools. International students enrolled in urban high schools may not encounter mobility challenges similar to the issues experienced by students in rural areas. Big cities' public transportation offers greater mobility and freedom than suburban and rural area in the United States. However, students may face other challenges, such as over populated numbers of Chinese students in the same school. As the number of Chinese native speakers increase in a school's population, the unintended result may be a decline in the compelling need to interact with English-speaking students.

This research excluded students who live by themselves or in a school dormitory. Future studies could explore the relationships that emerge with international high school students who reside in school dorms. Those students may not have challenges with host families; however, most of their roommates may be Chinese students. Understanding how sharing the living environment in a cultural cocoon affects learning the host language and adapting to the host culture may offer directions for future studies.

Students' prior education before they enrolled in a U.S. college or university may affect the study outcomes greatly. A study of international college students' challenges who are graduates of Chinese high schools with quite different preparation compared to international college students who are graduates of U.S. high schools would offer a fertile field of study. Graduates of U.S. high schools as international students may not experience similar language barriers and cultural difficulties as frequently as students who are graduated from a high school in China. Inadequate language proficiency and lack of cultural competence suggest that earlier preparation in U.S. high schools may serve to reduce the levels of other challenges as well as support the success of highly talented students.

Further study could also investigate other reasons Chinese students enroll in U.S. high schools. Some possible motives for high school students to study abroad in United States, such as second-generation students from wealthy families who possess global ambitions in careers seek to immigrate to Western countries, trying to avoid air pollution in China, and avert problems with integration, or academic achievements in their schools at home. This study did not attempt to include participants in this study for such reasons. A wealthy family may buy a house in the United States near their child's high school and let the child live by himself/herself. The parents may also consider buying a car for their child. This kind of students would have immense degree of freedom and mobility (such as the students in the parachute kids' case that I mentioned before). However, they may experience homesick worse than the students who are cared by a regular host family or who are accompanied with other Chinese students in the dorm.

A comparative study that depicts the differences between international high school students and international college students would be informative in exploring interesting data. A future study could help all stakeholders to recognize the needs of international high school

students and might focus on how the challenges affecting these two groups of students solve problems differently.

Additionally, future studies may include more feedback from domestic U.S. students interacting with international students. These students spend most of their time with the international students in classrooms and informal settings in schools. They may not know exactly the challenges international students are going through; however, their opinions and feedback could prove beneficial to future international students in many ways.

In summary, most Chinese students in U.S. high schools have exceedingly limited support from their parents and their schools. Insufficient skills in English fluency and living in a totally different country from their homeland pose obstacles that challenge students socially and academically. These minors urgently need their voice to be heard, and researchers can help speak to the issues that affect them most by the data they collect. “As researchers, we must turn our attention to understand and theorize the ways in which certain classes of people come to be written off, forgotten, or understood to deserve their particular forms of suffering” (Holmes, 2013, p.183). I deeply believe it is researcher’s job to use the authority of their findings to speak up for this vulnerable group in society. I am hoping that this research will inspire more people to become more proactive in the development of international student education in U.S. high schools.

### **Conclusion**

Many international students who have studied abroad in the United States have become leaders and scholars in their country of origin. They are informal ambassadors of the United States. This global exchange of ideas, cultures, and thinking is especially valuable for Chinese international students. According to Johnson (2012), the current Chairman of China, Jinping Xi,

who stayed with a host family in Iowa 32 years ago revisited his American family in 2012. He also signed agreements with Iowa's American grain companies to increase soybean imports to China during the trip. Moreover, the host family's child became an economic consultant, and he travels frequently to China (Johnson, 2012). The value of international student exchange may be incalculable for future development.

Most Chinese people learn about Americans through overelaborated Hollywood movies and the internet, which is censored by China's government. Citizens of China may find it easy to develop a false impression of U.S. culture through entertainment mediums. However, when international students study in the United States at a young age, they have the opportunity to learn about the true culture found in this country. More than half of international students claimed that their study abroad experience in the United States helped them to have a positive view of the country (Westervelt, 2017). The remunerations of promoting Chinese international students study abroad appears immeasurable for potential benefits to this nation.

Although the United States has consistently been the leading destination for international students in the world, U.S. higher education institutions are facing stronger competition from additional Western countries. Meanwhile, Chinese students are also learning that they have other educational options outside of the United States. The new reviews for college applications show a slump in the numbers of international students choosing to study in the United States. Recent changes to visa rules and immigration policies by the U.S. government are dampening U.S. education institutions' ability to attract international students. Innovative and creative Chinese international student recruitment strategies are needed more than ever. This research intentionally targeted international high school students in the United States with the assumption that this group of students impacts U.S. higher education significantly in the future. In light of

much available evidence, one of the main reasons that Chinese parents send their teenage children to study abroad is because of the pathway to the United States higher education. Losing an international student in the U.S. high school is more than likely eliminating a potential candidate as an international student in a U.S. higher education institution. Therefore, policymakers and administrators from higher education institutions should find ways to actively support, promote, and channel foreign students to the United States as a preferred high school education destination.

As a Chinese researcher who was not raised in China, I am extremely grateful for the gracious way that the participants and their parents educated me. I now believe immersing myself in this immense knowledge of China's educational system and its intricacies has brought great awareness of the critical thinking influencing Chinese students. During the interviews with the educators and the host families of the participants, I learned the complexities of a system that affected the participants. Much of this information was not exposed through the interviews with the participants or the observations. I also noticed how little some of the educators and the host families knew about their international students' academic background, cultural background, family background, current challenges, and future academic plans. Ancillary information about these matters arose when discussing similar questions about their international students. Many educators and host families of the participants expressed a need to have a better understanding of such information at the beginning of the school year. This case study method required enormous energy to collect and transcribe the various data, not to mention the long and complicated selecting, coding, and analyzing process; however, its multiple data sources provided me multiple sources of evidence to conceptualize a better understanding of the challenges Chinese students are facing in the U.S. high school.

In conclusion, this research makes me believe the trend of Chinese student enrollment in U.S. high schools will continue to be robust. The potential scope for study and improvement of international students' academic, social, and cultural experiences of studying in the U.S. high schools promises to encourage additional study. My hope rests on the belief that the research will benefit the voices of this vulnerable but valuable population, amplified by future researchers and heard by leaders and program developers.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions for Chinese International Students

(Pre-Interview)

#### Oral history and background questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. Can you tell me a little bit about your family?
3. Can you tell me when you decided to study in the United States?
4. Did you make the decision? If not, who?
5. Did you want to come to the US to study? Why? Or why not?
6. What do you think about being a high school student in the United States?
7. What do your friends at home think about your study abroad?
8. Do you have any friends from home who is also studying abroad like you?
9. Why did you come to the U.S. high school to study?
10. What is your plan after you graduate from high school?
11. Can you describe the learning culture in your previous institution in China?
12. Can you describe the learning culture in the U.S. high school?
13. What differences are there between the US high school and Chinese high school?
14. How long have you been studying English?
15. How much do you think the native speakers can understand you in English?
16. How much do you understand the native speakers when you have conversation with them?
17. Can you express yourself clearly and fully in English?
18. What is your goal for study abroad?
19. What are the top three challenges for you to study abroad (before and during study abroad)?
20. Do you have anything interesting or important happened about your study abroad experience that you would like to share with me?
21. Do you have any questions? Or anything that you would like to add?

Note. Question number 16 and number 17 will be asked at the end of every interview. Each interview will last around one hour and thirty minutes.

## Interview Questions for Chinese International Students

(Follow-up Interview)

### Acculturation questions

1. What does a typical school day look like for you?
2. What does a typical weekend day look like for you?
3. Describe some of the major cultural differences that you have noticed?
4. How well do you consider yourself adapt the host culture? Why?
5. When you have questions or concerns about certain things, but you do not know how to express it in English, what would you do? (i.e., if you have a serious stomach pain and you do not want to attend school that day.)
6. How often do you interact with the host family?
7. What kind of rules does your host family have? What do you think of the rules?
8. Can you tell me about what your relationship with domestic classmates / teachers / host family are like?
9. How eager are you to have contact and participate with those who are outside your group in your everyday life?
10. Have you put in enough effort to try to interact with your domestic classmates? Why or why not?
11. Do you think your domestic classmates make effort to try to interact with you? Why or why not? If yes, in what ways do they interact with you?
12. What do you think of the after-school sports and clubs?
13. Have you ever feel like you were being left out? (e.g., you were not included in the games or parties) If yes, how do you feel?
14. Do you like to interact with native speakers?
15. Who do you interact the most in United States?
16. How do you contact your family / friends at your home country?
17. How is your relationship between you and your family / friends after study abroad?
18. How often do you contact them?
19. When do you contact them? (Days / Time)
20. What kind of information you like to share with your family and friends about your life in the US?
21. What kind of information you might not share with your family and friends about your life in the US?
22. How much do you want to maintain your own cultures and identities?
23. In what way you miss your home culture the most?
24. What strategies do you use when you encounter the challenges mentioned above?
25. Do you have anything interesting or important happened about your study abroad experience that you would like to share with me?
26. Do you have any questions? Or anything that you would like to add?

## Interview Questions for Chinese International Students

(Post-Interview)

### Academic questions

1. Can you describe what a good student is to you?
2. Can you define what a good teacher is to you?
3. What are the top three challenges or barriers to success that you face in this school?
4. What strategies do you use to overcome the challenges and barriers that you have faced?
5. Would you consider yourself a self-motivated person? Do you think it is important?
6. Do you set goals for your study? If yes, how do you plan to reach these goals?
7. Do you receive any help or feedback from people around you while you are working toward your goals? If yes, what kind of help and feedback?
8. What strategies do you use to reach your goals? How do you modify your goals if you realize that the goals are set too high or too low?
9. How can setting goals help you in the U.S. school?
10. What kind of supports do you receive from your school?
11. How do you expect from the teacher here to help you to learn effectively?
12. What kind of improvement you have made since last interview? How did you improve it? Did the teacher help you or otherwise?
13. What are the changes that you realized in your personal, academic, or social life?

### Exit questions

1. What the gains have you benefited from studying abroad so far?
2. What difference would it make if you had never studies abroad?
3. Is United States the same as how you thought it was?
4. Is there anything that you wish you would have known before you came to the United States?
5. What advices would you give to the future Chinese international students for them to be successful in the U.S. high schools?
6. Do you have anything interesting or important happened about your study abroad experience that you would like to share with me?
7. Do you have any questions? Or anything that you would like to add?

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions for People around the Participants

#### Interview Questions for Participants' Parents

1. Why did you send your kids to the U.S. high school?
2. When did you start to plan for your child to come to the US to study?
3. How did you find the school? Why did you choose this school?
4. What is your biggest concern for your children to study in the US by themselves?
5. Did you notice any changes since your child came to the US? (personality, academic, relationship between the child and family / friends)
6. Is financial an issue for you to send your child to study in the US?
7. How often do you and your children contact each other?
8. How often do you communicate with the school or the teachers?
9. Is there anything that you think the school/ teacher/ agent/ host family can do to better your child's study abroad experience?
10. What suggestions would you give to the other Chinese parents who are considering sending their children to the US high school?

#### Interview Questions for Host Family Members

1. Why did you want to host an international student?
2. After you started to host an international student, is it like what you thought?
3. What challenges a host family might encounter for hosting an international student?
4. What kind of suggestions would you give to the future international students and their parents?
5. Is there anything the school can do to help the host family and the students?
6. What rules do you have for the international student?

#### Interview Questions for Domestic U.S. students

1. Do you know what challenges the international students may be facing?
2. Do you consider the international students interact with the local students often enough? Why or why not?
3. What suggestions would you give to the future international students?
4. What kind of help do you think the local students can offer to the international students?
5. Do you have any questions or would you like to add anything?

#### Interview Questions for Teachers

1. What kind of challenges do your international students are facing?
2. In your opinion, how can the high school teachers (school / host family/ family/ local students) help them?
3. In your opinion, what the international students could do to improve their (school/study/social) life in the US?
4. What kind of suggestions would you give to the future international students?
5. Do you have any questions or would you like to add anything?

## **Appendix C**

### **Observation Guide**

1 week before the observation

- Get the participant's class schedule
- Contact the school (administrator and faculty) and ask for permission to observe the participants

2 hours before the observation

- Prepare the "observation packet" – includes pens, extra battery for the picture device (my cellphone), notebook.
- Dress properly

15 minutes before the observation

- Turn off the cellphones

During the observation

- Listen and observe (be selective what to observe)
- Keep the focus on the participants and people around them
- Follow the participants

After the observation

- Write detailed field notes immediately
- Save the pictures on the USB device and delete them from the cellphone

## Appendix D

### Observation Protocol

The observations will be in both academic and social settings. They will be in the classrooms during different classes (e.g., P.E, History, English), in the cafeteria during lunch time, and an event when the Chinese students are with their host families (e.g., family gathering, dine out, birthday party). There are three main reasons that I decided to observe the Chinese students at these locations and during these events. First of all, I will get to observe how the Chinese students interact with the domestic U.S. students, their teachers, and their host families. Those are the people who surround them most of the time while they are in the United States. Secondly, observation of these activities will help me gain some understanding of the acculturation process and self-regulation. Lastly, observation of the students' behavior in such settings provide verification and validity while complementing similar data (e.g., During the interview, students may think that they were left out by the domestic U.S. students. Observation may show that he/she was included but he did not realize it due to the culture differences).

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Observation A B C D E Length of the Activity: _____  |   |
| Date: _____ Time: _____ Site: _____  |   |
| Participants: _____  |   |
| Grand tour question:   |   |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Descriptive Notes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Physical setting:</li> <li>2. Description of activity:</li> <li>3. Description of individuals engaged in it</li> <li>4. Sequence of activity over time</li> <li>5. Interactions</li> <li>6. Unplanned events</li> <li>7. Participants comments</li> </ol> | <p style="text-align: center;">Reflective Notes</p> <p>[Reflective comments: questions to self, observations of nonverbal behavior, my interpretations]</p> |

**Appendix E**  
**Color Codes of the Data**

- I. **Social Challenges**
  - 1. **Language Barriers for Social Challenges**
  - 2. **Coping Skills & Problem-Solving Strategies**
- II. **Academic Problems**
  - 1. **Language Barriers for Academic Problems**
  - 2. **Coping Skills & Problem-Solving Strategies**
- III. **Host Family Relations**
  - 1. **Rules**
  - 2. **Freedom of Mobility**
  - 3. **Coping Skills & Problem-Solving Strategies**
- IV. **Financial Obstacles**
  - 1. **Study-Abroad Agency**
  - 2. **Cram School**
  - 3. **Coping Skills & Problem-Solving Strategies**
- V. **Reasons to Attend a U.S. High School**
  - 1. **Highly Competitive Higher Education System in China**
    - a. **Zhongkao**
    - b. **Gaokao**
  - 2. **A Pathway to the U.S. Higher Education**
    - a. **SAT**
    - b. **TOEFL**
  - 3. **Rapidly Rising Middle Class in China**
  - 4. **One-Child Policy**

## Appendix F

### IRB Request for Initial Review



**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**  
Office of Research Protections  
ASU Box 32068  
Boone, NC 28608  
828.262.2692  
Web site: <http://researchprotections.appstate.edu>  
Email: [irb@appstate.edu](mailto:irb@appstate.edu)  
Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #00001076

**To:** Prudence Brooks  
Graduate School  
CAMPUS EMAIL

**From:** Lisa Curtin, PhD, IRB Chairperson  
**Date:** 11/28/2016  
**RE:** Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)

**STUDY #:** 16-0293  
**STUDY TITLE:** Listening to Chinese International Students in U.S. High Schools  
**Submission Type:** Initial  
**Expedited Category:** (6) Collection of Data from Recordings made for Research Purposes,(7) Research on Group Characteristics or Behavior, or Surveys, Interviews, etc.  
**Approval Date:** 11/28/2016  
**Expiration Date of Approval:** 11/27/2017

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study for the period indicated above. The IRB found that the research procedures meet the expedited category cited above. IRB approval is limited to the activities described in the IRB approved materials, and extends to the performance of the described activities in the sites identified in the IRB application. In accordance with this approval, IRB findings and approval conditions for the conduct of this research are listed below.

All approved documents for this study, including consent forms, can be accessed by logging into IRBIS. Use the following directions to access approved study documents.

1. Log into IRBIS
2. Click "Home" on the top toolbar
3. Click "My Studies" under the heading "All My Studies"
4. Click on the IRB number for the study you wish to access
5. Click on the reference ID for your submission
6. Click "Attachments" on the left-hand side toolbar
7. Click on the appropriate documents you wish to download

#### **Approval Conditions:**

Appalachian State University Policies: All individuals engaged in research with human participants are responsible for compliance with the University policies and procedures, and IRB determinations.

Principal Investigator Responsibilities: The PI should review the IRB's list of PI responsibilities. The

Principal Investigator (PI), or Faculty Advisor if the PI is a student, is ultimately responsible for ensuring the protection of research participants; conducting sound ethical research that complies with federal regulations, University policy and procedures; and maintaining study records.

Modifications and Addendums: IRB approval must be sought and obtained for any proposed modification or addendum (e.g., a change in procedure, personnel, study location, study instruments) to the IRB approved protocol, and informed consent form before changes may be implemented, unless changes are necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. Changes to eliminate apparent immediate hazards must be reported promptly to the IRB.

Approval Expiration and Continuing Review: The PI is responsible for requesting continuing review in a timely manner and receiving continuing approval for the duration of the research with human participants. Lapses in approval should be avoided to protect the welfare of enrolled participants. If approval expires, all research activities with human participants must cease.

Prompt Reporting of Events: Unanticipated Problems involving risks to participants or others; serious or continuing noncompliance with IRB requirements and determinations; and suspension or termination of IRB approval by an external entity, must be promptly reported to the IRB.

Closing a study: When research procedures with human subjects are completed, please log into our system at [https://appstate.myresearchonline.org/irb/index\\_auth.cfm](https://appstate.myresearchonline.org/irb/index_auth.cfm) and complete the Request for Closure of IRB review form.

**Websites:**

1. PI responsibilities:

<http://researchprotections.appstate.edu/sites/researchprotections.appstate.edu/files/PI%20Responsibilities.pdf>

2. IRB forms: <http://researchprotections.appstate.edu/human-subjects/irb-forms>

CC:

Leslie Cook, English

## Appendix G

### Assent for Minors

**Title:** Chinese International Students in U.S. High Schools: Case Studies of Academic and Social Challenges

**Principal Investigator:** Prudence Brooks

**Contact Information:** brookspl@appstate.edu

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Leslie Cook (cookls@appstate.edu)

### Joining a Research Study

#### What is research?

Research is a way to test new ideas. Research helps us learn new things.

Being part of a research study is your choice. We are asking you to join a research study. You can say Yes or No. Whatever you decide is OK.

#### Why are we doing this research?

In our research study, we want to see what strategies the Chinese students apply when they encounter academically and socially challenges in the U.S. high school.

#### What will happen in the research?

I am asking your permission to allow me to observe and interview you. I will observe you in the school for one morning or one afternoon, an interview will be followed after the observation.

Then I will spend about one to two hours to observe you in your host family's house or a family event that you are with your host family (e.g., family reunion) two weeks after the first observation. Another interview will be followed after the observation. You, your school, and the host family will be informed at least one week in advance before each observation.

#### What are the good things that can happen from this research?

What I learn in this research may not help you now. When I finish the research, I hope I know more about the Chinese international secondary students' challenges and needs. I also hope that the policies toward international secondary students become more evenhanded and responsive to the students; through this study, educational leaders from postsecondary level and secondary level will be able to see how to assist this prospective group of students to be well prepared for the acculturation process and the U.S. higher education; and for the future international students and their parents, it can guide them and show them what to expect and what to prepare before the students arrive the country.

#### What are the bad things that can happen from this research?

There will be no foreseeable risks or bad things associated with your participation. However, if ever you decide you don't like to answer the questions or being observed, you can pass without answering it or ask me to stop. It is ok if you choose to do this.

#### What else should you know about the research?

Joining a research study is your choice. You can say Yes or No. Either way is OK.

If you say Yes now and change your mind later that is OK. You can stop being in the research at any time. If you want to stop, please tell me.

Take the time you need to make your choice. Ask us any questions you have. You can ask questions any time.



## Appendix H

### Consent to Participate in Research Information to Consider About this Research

**Title:** Chinese International Students in U.S. High Schools: Case Studies of Academic and Social Challenges

**Principal Investigator:** Prudence Brooks

**Contact Information:** brookspl@appstate.edu

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Leslie Cook cookls@appstate.edu

My child agrees to participate as an interviewee in this research project, which concerns what strategies the Chinese students apply when they encounter academically and socially challenges in the U.S. high school. The interviews will take place at home and school, there will be three interviews and each interview will be about 1 to 2 hours. My child understands the interview will be about the challenges he/she is encountering academically and socially.

My child understands that there will be no foreseeable risks associated with his/her participation. My child also knows that this study may explore and expose the Chinese high school students' challenges and needs in order for them to get the attention and assistance. Principal investigator hopes that the policies toward international secondary students become more evenhanded and responsive to the students; through this study, educational leaders from postsecondary level and secondary level will be able to see how to assist this prospective group of students to be well prepared for the acculturation process and the U.S. higher education; and for the future international students and their parents, it can guide them and show them what to expect and what to prepare before the students arrive the country.

My child understands that the interviews will be audio and video recorded and may be published. My child understands that the audio recordings of the interview may be linked on a website if I sign the authorization below.

My child understands if I sign the authorization at the end of this consent form, photos may be taken during the study and used in scientific presentations of the research findings. My child gives Prudence Brooks ownership of the tapes, transcripts, recordings and photographs from the interviews she conducts with me and understand that tapes and transcripts will be kept in Prudence Brooks' safe. My child understands that information or quotations from tapes and transcripts may be published with his/her approval. My child understands he/she will not receive compensation for the interview.

My child understands that the interview is voluntary and there are no consequences if he/she chooses not to participate. My child also understand that he/she does not have to answer any questions and can end the interview at any time with no consequences.

If my child has questions about this research project, he/she can call Prudence Brooks at  
or the Appalachian Institutional Review Board Administrator at 828-262-2692,

through email at irb@appstate.edu or at Appalachian State University, Office of Research Protections, IRB Administrator, Boone, NC 28608.

This research project has been approved on \_\_\_\_\_(date) by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Appalachian State University. This approval will expire on [Expiration Date] unless the IRB renews the approval of this research.

My child requests that his/her name **not** be used in connection with tapes, transcripts, photographs or publications resulting from this interview.

My child requests that his/her name **be used** in connection with tapes, transcripts, photographs or publications resulting from this interview.

By signing this form, my child and I acknowledge that we have read this form, had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and received satisfactory answers, and want to participate. My child and I understand we can keep a copy for my records.

---

Participant's Name (PRINT)

Signature

Date

By proceeding with the activities described above, my child acknowledge that he/she has read and understand the research procedures outlined in this consent form, and voluntarily agree to participate in this research.

### **Photography, Audio and Video Recording Authorization**

With your permission, still pictures (photos), audio and video recordings taken during the study may be used in research presentations of the research findings. Please indicate whether or not you agree to having photos or videos used in research presentations by reviewing the authorization below and signing if you agree.

#### **Authorization**

My child hereby release, discharge and agree to save harmless Appalachian State University, its successors, assigns, officers, employees or agents, any person(s) or corporation(s) for whom it might be acting, and any firm publishing and/or distributing any photograph, audio or video footage produced as part of this research, in whole or in part, as a finished product, from and against any liability as a result of any distortion, blurring, alteration, visual or auditory illusion, or use in composite form, either intentionally or otherwise, that may occur or be produced in the recording, processing, reproduction, publication or distribution of any photograph, audiotape, videotape, or interview, even should the same subject me to ridicule, scandal, reproach, scorn or indignity. My child hereby agrees that the photographs, audio and video footage may be used under the conditions stated herein without blurring my identifying characteristics.

---

Participant's Name (PRINT)

Signature

Date

## Appendix I

### Letter of Agreement from the Participating Agency

#### Letter of Agreement

**Date**

To the Appalachian Institutional Review Board (IRB):

I am familiar with *Prudence Brooks*' research project "*Listening to Chinese International Students in U.S. High Schools: The Challenges They Encountered Academically and Socially*". I understand \_\_\_\_\_ involvement to be *allowing students and faculty members to be interviewed, providing archival data, and allowing students to be observed.*

As the research team conducts this research project I understand and agree that:

- This research will be carried out following sound ethical principles and that it has been approved by the IRB at Appalachian State University.
- Employee participation in this project is strictly voluntary and not a condition of employment at \_\_\_\_\_. There are no contingencies for employees who choose to participate or decline to participate in this project. There will be no adverse employment consequences as a result of an employee's participation in this study.
- To the extent confidentiality may be protected under State or Federal law, the data collected will remain confidential, as described in the protocol. The name of our agency or institution will *not be* reported in the results of the study.

Therefore, as a representative of \_\_\_\_\_, I agree that *Prudence Brooks*' research project may be conducted at our agency/institution, and that *Prudence Brooks* may assure participants that they may participate in interviews and observations, and provide responsive information without adverse employment consequences.

Sincerely,

**[name & title of agency/institutional authority]**

## Appendix J

### Timetable

|        | February                 | March                    | April                    | May              | June                | July               |
|--------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Week 1 | Parent 1<br>Intv         | Obs Becca<br>Intv Becca  | Parent 1<br>Intv         | Data<br>Analysis | Writing<br>Findings | Writing<br>Results |
| Week 2 | Obs Alan<br>Intv Alan    | Parent 2<br>Intv         | Obs Cindy<br>Intv Cindy  | Data<br>Analysis | Writing<br>Findings | Writing<br>Results |
| Week 3 | Teachers<br>Intv         | Staff Intv               | Principal<br>Intv        | Data<br>Analysis | Writing<br>Findings | Writing<br>Results |
| Week 4 | Host<br>Family 1<br>Intv | Host<br>Family 2<br>Intv | Host<br>Family 3<br>Intv | Data<br>Analysis | Writing<br>Findings | Writing<br>Results |
|        | Obs Becca<br>Intv Becca  | Obs Alan<br>Intv Alan    | Obs Cindy<br>Intv Cindy  |                  |                     |                    |

Note. Obs: Observation      Intv: Interview      DCs: Domestic Classmates

**Group 1 Participants:** Alan, Becca, and Cindy

**Group 2 Participants:** Three Parents

**Group 6 Participants:** School Principal, Teachers, and Staff Members

**Group 4 Participants:** Three Host Families

## Appendix K

### A Picture Posted on Snapchat by a Domestic U.S. Student



# Appendix L

## Math Quiz Sample I

$86 + 3$

$(89)$

NAME  
ALGEBRA II HONORS  
QUIZ (8.1-8.3)

State whether the equation represents exponential growth or exponential decay.

1)  $y = 72(1.6)^x$

exponential growth

$4$

2)  $y = 3^x$

exponential growth

$*$

3)  $y = 2\left(\frac{1}{3}\right)^x$

exponential decay

$4$

Evaluate each expression to four decimal places.

4)  $e^{-2.5}$

$0.0820$

5)  $e^{\frac{1}{3}}$

$1.3956$

6)  $e^{\sqrt{2}}$

$4.1133$

-2) Find the amount in a continuously compounded account.

principal: \$5000

annual rate: 6.9%

time: 30 yrs.

$$5000 = 5000 e^{(0.069 \times 30)}$$

$$= 0.0064$$

$A = P e^{rt}$

$= 5000 e^{(0.069 \times 30)}$

$= 160715.4314 \text{ \$}$

$\$39,624.12$

~~$\$1,133.33$~~

wrong

-2) You place \$900 in an investment account that earns 6% interest compounded continuously. Find the balance after 5 years.

$$900 e^{(0.06 \times 5)} = 4778.26 \text{ \$}$$

$\$1,214.87$

Rewrite the log form in exponential form or the exponential form into log form.

10)  $\log_3 729 = 6$

$3^6 = 729$

11)  $\frac{1^2}{2} = \frac{1}{4}$

$\log_{\frac{1}{2}} \frac{1}{4} = 2$

12)  $\log 10 = 1$

$10^1 = 10$

$10^1 = 10$

13)  $8^{-1} = \frac{1}{8}$   $\log_8 \frac{1}{8} = -1$

OVER

## Math Quiz Sample II

Geometry  
Quiz: 5-1 to 5-3

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Inscribed  
Median  
Centroid  
Circumcenter  
Incenter

Altitude  
Circumscribed  
Orthocenter  
Concurrent  
Point of concurrency

Using the terms above, fill in the following blanks:

1. When three or more lines intersect, they are called concurrent ✓.
2. The **point** where three or more lines intersect is called the point of concurrency ✓.
3. The point of concurrency of the **perpendicular bisectors** of a triangle is the Centroid ~~X~~ Circumcenter ✓.
4. A circle can be Circumscribed ✓ **around** the above triangle.
5. The point of concurrency of the **angle bisectors** of a triangle is the Median ~~X~~ Incenter ✓.
6. A circle can be inscribed ✓ **inside** the above triangle.
7. A Incenter ~~X~~ median is a segment whose endpoints are a **vertex** of a triangle and the **midpoint** of its opposite side (bisects opposite side).
8. The point of concurrency of these 3 segments in #7 is the Circumcenter ~~X~~ Centroid ✓ of a triangle.
9. The **perpendicular** segment from a vertex to the line containing the opposite side is the Altitude ✓ of a triangle; may not always be in the triangle.
10. The point of concurrency of the segments in #9 is the Orthocenter ✓ of a triangle.

## Appendix M

### History Quiz Sample

Vespucci

17. For whom was the New World named?

\_\_\_\_\_

18. What important river did Hernando De Soto discover?

Mayflower compact

19. What document of self-government did the Pilgrims sign when they first arrived in America?

Roman Catholics

20. What visionary governor wanted to make the Massachusetts Bay colony "a model of Christian charity"?

Roger Williams

21. What founder of Providence, Rhode Island, advocated complete separation of church and state?

Connecticut

22. In what colony did the Quakers undertake a "Holy Experiment"?

\_\_\_\_\_

23. Besides tobacco, what other major crop was grown in the Carolinas?

English

24. What colony was started as a place for debtors?

T  F

25. John Cabot's discovery of Newfoundland became the basis for England's later claims in North America.

T  F

26. Columbus believed until his death that he had reached Asia.

T  F

27. Magellan returned to Spain aboard Victoria after sailing around the world.

T  F

28. Hernando Cortes, the first Spanish explorer of the New World, conquered the Aztec empire.

T  F

29. The colony on Roanoke Island became known as the "Lost Colony" because its inhabitants disappeared without a trace.

T  F

30. Harvard was America's first college.

use separate paper

31. How did the defeat of the Spanish Armada affect the course of history?

use separate paper

32. Describe the adventures of Captain John Smith. Include the settlement of Jamestown.

4

## Science Quiz Sample

-9

### Chapter 2 Matter

$\frac{6}{15}$

40%

### 2A Section Quiz

1. Scientists describe matter as something that has ? and occupies ?.
2. What is an atom?  
the smallest ~~things~~ ~~divi~~ ~~division~~ ~~divisible~~ ~~pa~~ ~~can not~~ ~~cut~~.  
PARTICLE OF MATTER      divistable pa
3. The 3 particles make up atoms are proton, electron, neutron; what are their charges and where are they in the atom?  
-6
4. What do we call two or more atoms bonded together?  
molecule.
5. An atom that is electrically charged because it has gained or lost electrons is a(n) ?.
6. The first person to develop a theory of the atom was a Greek scientist. ~~or~~

## Appendix N

### Vocabulary Study Note

#### Lesson Thirteen

1. holocaust (hol'ə'kɒst) n. a great or complete destruction of life.  
大毁灭
2. embroil (em'brɔɪl) v. to draw into a conflict or fight.  
使卷入
3. anachronism (ə'næk'rɒ'nɪzəm) n. something existing outside of its proper time.  
过时/不合时宜
4. denigrate (den'i'græt) v. to attack the reputation of; to speak ill of.  
诋毁, 诽谤
5. humane (hyū'mæn) adj. kind; compassionate.  
善良的, 仁慈的.  
ant: inhumane; cruel.
6. effusive (ɪ'fju:zɪv) adj. emotionally excessive; overly demonstrative.  
过于感情, 热情  
ant: reserved; restrained.
7. defunct (dɪ'fʌŋkt) adj. no longer in existence.  
已死的, 不复存在的  
不会再存在
8. lackey ('læk'ē)n, a slavish follower.  
仆人, 跟班
9. envisage (envɪz'ɪdʒ) v. to form a mental picture.  
设想, 想象
10. lament ('læmənt) v. to mourn.  
悼念.  
ant: rejoice.

# Appendix O

## Report Card

| Course                            | Teacher                                      | Q1       | Q2       | Sem1    | Q3       | Q4 | Sem2 | Final |
|-----------------------------------|--|----------|----------|---------|----------|----|------|-------|
| Bible 101*                        |  | 82<br>C  | 97<br>A  | 90<br>B | 94<br>A  | 76 | 78   |       |
| Computer Applications*            |  | 98<br>A  | 99<br>A  | 99<br>A | 99<br>A  | 72 |      |       |
| English 1*                        |  | 95<br>A  | 98<br>A  | 96<br>A | 93<br>A- | 88 | 88   |       |
| Honors Geometry*                  |  | 95<br>A  | 92<br>B+ | 94<br>A | 94<br>A  | 88 | 88   |       |
| Physical Education/Health-Female* |  | 94<br>A  | 95<br>A  | 95<br>A | 93<br>A- | 87 | 82   |       |
| Physical Science*                 |  | 76<br>D+ | 83<br>C  | 79<br>C | 85<br>B- | 78 | 78   |       |
| World History*                    |  | 62<br>F  | 77<br>C- | 68<br>F | 84<br>C+ | 72 | 72   |       |
| Numeric Averages                  | (Average of Courses in period marked with *) | 86.0     | 92.0     | 89.0    | 92.0     |    |      |       |
|                                   | This Period Only                             | 86.0     | 89.0     | 89.0    | 90.0     |    |      |       |
|                                   | Cumulative                                   |          |          |         |          |    |      |       |

| Daily Attendance | 1st |     | 2nd |     | Sem1  |    | 3rd |    | 4th |       | Sem2 |     | Total |
|------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|----|-----|----|-----|-------|------|-----|-------|
|                  | Ex  | Unx | Ex  | Unx | Total | Ex | Unx | Ex | Unx | Total | Ex   | Unx |       |
| Absences         | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0     | 3  | 2   | 0  | 0   | 5     | 5    | 5   | 5     |
| Tardies          | 0   | 1   | 0   | 1   | 2     | 0  | 0   | 0  | 0   | 0     | 0    | 0   | 2     |

**Please Note** ONLY FIRST AND SECOND SEMESTER GRADES WILL BE RECORDED ON TRANSCRIPTS FOR 9TH-12TH GRADE STUDENTS.

Reminder: Students who earn a D or an F in any class for the 9 weeks are required to attend mandatory tutoring. Students will be notified what day and where the tutoring sessions will be held.

| Letter Equivalents |                     | Letter Grade Scale |              |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| <b>Grade</b>       | <b>Description:</b> | A                  | 94.00 100.00 |
| O                  | Outstanding         | A-                 | 93.00 93.00  |
| S                  | Satisfactory        | B+                 | 92.00 92.00  |
| N                  | Needs Improvement   | B                  | 86.00 91.00  |
| U                  | Unsatisfactory      | B-                 | 85.00 85.00  |
| WP                 | Withdrew Passing    | C+                 | 84.00 84.00  |
| WF                 | Withdrew Failing    | C                  | 78.00 83.00  |
| Aud                | Audit               | C-                 | 77.00 77.00  |
|                    |                     | D+                 | 76.00 76.00  |
|                    |                     | D                  | 71.00 75.00  |
|                    |                     | D-                 | 70.00 70.00  |
|                    |                     | F                  | 0.00 69.00   |

## Appendix P

### International Student Homestay Agreement

I. Term: August 1<sup>s</sup>, 2016- May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017

II. Homestay family shall:

1. Provide for family promotional materials and correspondence to Chinese families.
2. Provide personal bedroom, suitably finished with a desk and reading lamp (2 students of the same sex may room together).
3. Provide reasonable access to and use of the common areas of the home.
4. Provide access to and use of a washer and dryer.
5. Provide orientation to the community, school, and church that the family attends.
6. Provide integration into the home and family.
7. Provide 2 meals per day on school days, and 3 meals per day on non-school days.  
Breakfast will be light and able to be prepared by the student.
8. Provide for airport pick-up and drop off and other appropriate transportation needs.  
Host parents must have a current driver's license on file and proof of vehicle insurance.
9. Provide a current criminal record check for all household members, age 19 and older. No new adult may take residence in the house during this contract period.
10. Not allow the student to drive any motor vehicle.
11. Provide and have on file proof of adequate liability insurance to cover the international student. Be sure to notify your agent of a change in risk for your home.

12. Keep all information about the student confidential. Personal information will be shared only with Agents.
13. Act as a caring, judicious parent and regard your international student as family.
14. Provide for an environment conducive to study and a homework.
15. Be supportive in showing interest in the student: student programs, attend parent/teacher conferences as requested, and report any academic difficulties so that timely intervention can be undertaken, such as tutoring.
16. Provide the student with a house key.
17. Provide an English only environment.
18. Provide email and internet access.
19. Set clear, reasonable, and age-appropriate rules for the student and make sure they understand. Curfew for high school students is 10 pm Sunday-Thursday, and 12 am Friday and Saturday, unless at a school, church, or family sponsored event. Phones must Be turned in at 8PM nightly. Only parents may talk to students after 8PM.
20. Not allow use of drugs or alcohol.
21. Advise of any medical emergency or accident. Provide care; the student has medical insurance.
22. Notify of any incompatibility issue between the family and the student. The student may be removed.
23. Understand that may remove the student without notice and without compensation if an emergency situation arises. This situation is determined by administrative staff or Staff.
24. Never leave the student alone or unsupervised overnight.
25. Understand that the International Student is not your babysitter.

26. Understand that any overnight travel out of the state requires prior approval by
27. Not allow the student to participate in dangerous activities. If in doubt, ask administration.
28. Understand that failure to properly supervise or protect the student could hold you legally responsible.
29. Assist in buying a cell phone. They are responsible for buying the phone and charger.
30. Assist in the student opening a bank account.
31. Set at least 1 hour around dinner time each night for family communication to discuss current events, news, family etc.

III. The International Student shall:

1. Keep their bedroom clean and tidy.
2. Make their bed.
3. Keep bedroom and personal items organized.
4. Be respectful.
5. Limit shower/bath to 10 minutes.
6. Assist in cleaning kitchen.
7. Ask permission for snacks in bedroom.
8. Perform own laundry.
9. Seek permission to download music, Skype or install movies online.
10. Be committed to their school work.
11. Be responsible for expenses outside of the home.
12. Turn in phone at 8PM nightly.
13. Participate in family time discussions
14. Have NO boyfriend/girlfriend relations.

Appendix Q

International Student Identification Card



## **Vita**

Prudence Lee Brooks was born in Shanghai, China, and raised in Hong Kong. She moved to Taiwan and lived there for ten years before she immigrated to the United States. She earned the Bachelor of Arts degree and the Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language degree from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. In the spring of 2012, she entered Appalachian State University to study Adult and Developmental Education, and in May 2013 she was awarded the Educational Specialist degree. In August 2013, Ms. Brooks started work toward her Educational Doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at Appalachian State University.

Being a versatile educator for almost twenty years, Prudence has taken the opportunity to instruct a wide variety of students from different backgrounds and education levels (K-16). However, the passions that make her an exceptional educator are not only her love for teaching ESL students or Chinese language learners, but also sharing the knowledge of Chinese culture. Prudence serves on the committee at the Multicultural Affair Office of Catawba Valley Community College. She resides in Hickory, North Carolina with her husband and two children.