

**The Lived Experiences of Six Chinese
Graduate Students in North America**

by

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study of six Chinese graduate students coming from mainland China, explored their lived experiences in North America. From the qualitative data analysis, five themes emerged: (a) the experiences of the Chinese graduate students with language; (b) the Chinese graduate students' academic concerns; (c) the experiences of the Chinese graduate students with cultural differences; (d) the job related experiences of the Chinese graduate students in North America; (e) the advantages of a North American education for China. The study has provided some factors that influenced these six Chinese graduate students who came to North America to study and explored their reactions to the educational system in North America. It has also highlighted aspects of education in North America that can be used or adapted to a Chinese setting. Further, the study has shown that there are many things that one can learn from the lived experiences of these students from mainland China. The Chinese graduate students, based on their working experiences in North America, reported no big gender differences in finding decent jobs. The study found no big differences between science and non-science majors Chinese graduate students when studying or working in North America. The study has provided some suggestions for future research in the area of students' experience with language in North America, their motivation for selecting majors and finding jobs in North America whether based on their research interests or not, and the adaptability of these students to American society. It also suggested that how culture affects working relationships in China and in North America and how Chinese graduate students celebrate American holidays after they arrive in North America would be worthy subjects for further investigation.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This thesis documents a phenomenological study of the lived experiences of six Chinese graduate students in North America. van Manen (1997) defines phenomenological research as follows:

Phenomenological research is:

- the study of lived experience;
- the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness;
- the study of essences;
- the description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them;
- the human scientific study of phenomena;
- the attentive practice of thoughtfulness;
- a search for what it means to be human;
- a poetizing activity (pp. 9-13).

This thesis allows readers to listen to the voices of Chinese graduate students as they describe their university and working experiences and will indirectly challenge the stereotypical attitudes towards Asian students in university education in North America in the new millennium. In order to capture the true essence of these experiences, the methodology chosen employs qualitative interviews (the initial interviews, reflection follow-up, and telephone clarification) with six Chinese graduate students. This study may in some way increase awareness and understanding of the challenges Chinese graduate students have been facing. This aspect of Chinese graduate students has not been fully investigated in the past.

Purpose of the Study

The lived experiences of six Chinese graduate students in North America is the central focus of this study. Its purpose is twofold: (a) to discover some factors influencing Chinese graduate students who come to North America to study; and (b) to document the experiences they have been going through in universities and after graduation for the purpose of exploring their reactions to the educational system in North America.

Research Questions

Main research question:

What are the lived experiences of these six Chinese graduate students from mainland China in North America?

In light of this main research question, the following areas will be explored.

- 1) What can one learn from the lived experiences of six Chinese graduate students from mainland China in North America with reference to a) the academic issues related to studying in another society and b) the dynamics of adjusting to another culture?
- 2) What is the difference between science and non-science major Chinese graduate students when studying or working in North America?

Conceptual Framework

This study is based on the concepts of language ability, academic concerns and cultural differences. The figure below gives diagrammatic representation of the major concepts underpinning the study. The arrows infer that all three concepts are related and ultimately influence the lived experiences of six Chinese graduate students in North America (see Figure 1).

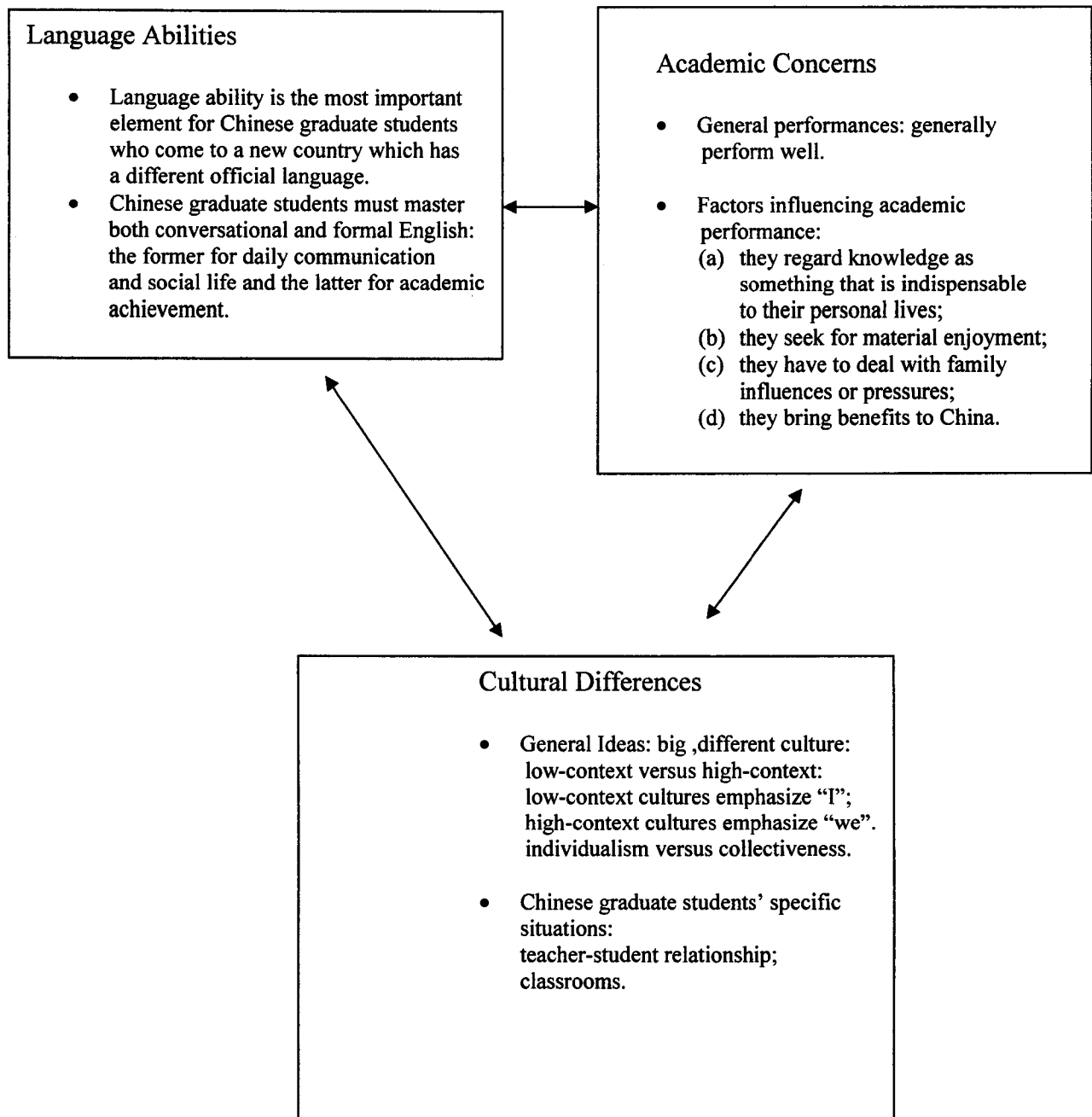


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Language ability is the most important element for everyone who comes to a new country which has a different official language. Many researchers have found that Chinese graduate students have to use English not only in oral but in written contexts (Wang, Martin & Martin, 2002; Chen, 1999; He, 1999; Meng, 1999; Wan, 1999; Fu & Townsend, 1998; Jin, 1998; Sun, 1997; Lao, 1993; Portin, 1993; Zhu, 1993; Feng, 1991). PRC students must master both conversational and formal English, the former for daily communication and social life and the latter for academic achievement (Feng, 1991). Chinese and English belong to quite different language groups. The English language belongs to an alphabetic system while the Chinese language belongs to the ideographic system. Chinese students grew up speaking Chinese as their mother tongue, an entirely different language from English (Wan, 1999). In addition, the ways of teaching English and learning English in China are unique. Grammar translation, memorization, direct, and audio-lingual methods for learning are used by the majority who study English in China (Portin, 1993). Students know the grammar and the vocabulary of English, but they are still “deaf and mute” in English when they learn English in China (Wan, 1999). In addition, the way of writing English by Chinese graduate students is quite different from native English speakers. The purpose of Asian writing is to show the beauty of words and expressions. Asian students consider writing to be like painting. They spend most of their time selecting words and polishing structures rather than speculating, questioning, and exploring ideas (Wang, Martin and Martin, 2002). The above facts can explain why Chinese graduate students have so much difficulty using English. Language ability has a big influence on Chinese graduate students’ academic performance and understanding of American culture.

Most research dealing with international students’ issues indicate that academic concerns is the most decisive factor for the well being of international students. Chinese graduate students

perform well in their academic fields (Wan, 1999; Zhong, 1996; Zhang & Carrasquillo, 1992; Feng, 1991; Upton, 1989). They generally appreciate their opportunity to study in the United States, value education, study hard, and are very purposeful and successful (Feng, 1991).

Chinese graduate students study very hard. They go to the library to work on their assignment or any kind of work. They all are under great academic pressure. They are either sponsored by government or family to study and if they can't do well in school, they will feel embarrassed or lose face (Feng, 1991). They have their desires to perform well: they regard knowledge as something that is indispensable to their personal lives; they seek for material enjoyment ; they have to deal with family influences or pressures and bring benefits to China (Li, 2003 ; Chen, 2001; Wan, 1999; Bai, 1998; Zhong, 1996; Zhang & Carrasquillo, 1992; Zhao & Xie, 1992; Feng, 1991; Upton, 1989).

Cultural differences are the main reason explaining Chinese graduate students' language abilities and academic performances. The main differences between Chinese and American culture are explained through: high-context culture versus low-context culture; collectiveness versus individualism (Yang, 2001; Ting, 2000; Wan, 1999; Shen, Sullivan, Igoe & Shen, 1996; Zhong, 1996; Chen, Ryan & Chen, 1992; Zhang & Carrasquillo, 1992; Feng, 1991; Upton, 1989). High-context cultures emphasize "we", whereas low-context cultures emphasize "I". Low-context cultures value "individual orientations, overt communication codes, and maintain a heterogeneous normative structure with low cultural demand/low cultural constraint characteristics" (Ting-Toomey, 1985). High-context cultures value "group-identity orientation, covert communication codes, and maintain a homogenous normative structure with high cultural demand high cultural constraint characteristics" (Ting-Toomey, 1985). American culture emphasizes individual effort and accomplishment, whereas the Chinese basically shun

individualism in favor of collective effort. In contrast to the relatively liberal American culture, Chinese cultural and social systems are much more conservative (Shen, Sullivan, Igoe and Shen, 1996). Chinese schooling focuses on conveying established knowledge instead of cultivating individuality or critical thinking abilities, while the American educational philosophy promotes individuality, and values personal opinions (Yang, 2001). American culture values individuality, competition, and independence; in sharp contrast, Chinese culture values collectiveness and cooperation. American culture values self-expression, whereas Chinese culture emphasizes self-control (Feng, 1991). Chinese value family loyalty and unity and Chinese culture emphasizes honor and respect for the elderly (Zhang & Carrasquillo, 1992). American culture respects various religions, whereas China shows no respect for religion (Feng, 1991). Some researchers (Chen, 2001; Ting, 2000; Wan, 1999; Upton, 1989) have highlighted the basic root of Chinese culture—Confucianism. China is an ancient civilization, and for over 2,000 years, attitudes toward education were strongly influenced by Confucian philosophy (Chen, 2001).

Confucianism- a powerful Asian cultural tradition, for example, bestows paternalistic authority and unconditional respect to teachers (Ting, 2000). Traditional Chinese culture is built upon a value system crystallized in Confucianism that indicates a linear hierarchy. This hierarchy is characterized by various dominance-obedience relationships: men dominating women, old dominating young, and the emperor dominating everyone else (Pan et al., 1994). Since there are big differences between Chinese and American culture, Chinese graduate students have specific situations: teacher-student relationship; classrooms and other things to deal with.

An understanding of the above three concepts is integral to a study such as this one. On some level it could be said that language ability is the prime concern of Chinese graduate students in North America. Without language ability, there is almost no use to talk about

academic concerns and cultural differences. However, all three concepts provide a clearer picture of the lived experiences of six Chinese graduate students in North America.

Personal Ground

Through reviewing materials related to Chinese graduate students in North America, I have found that many graduate students have written their dissertations focusing on the status of Chinese graduate students in North America. The following ones are examples of these: Su's (1995) dissertation: "The social interactions of Chinese students at the University of Toronto: communicating with Canadians"; Yeh's (1995) dissertation: "Communication concerns of Chinese graduate students and their American advisors during interactions in educational settings"; Lin's (1998) dissertation: "Chinese graduate students' perception of their adjustment experiences at the University of Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania)"; Liu's (1999) dissertation: "Learners' attitudes, contact and oral ESL proficiency: a study of Chinese graduate students at United States universities"; Qin's (2000) dissertation "Reweaving self: changes in self-understanding among Chinese women graduate students in the United States" and Hu's (2001) dissertation: "The academic writing of Chinese graduate students in sciences and engineering: processes and challenges". In addition, I myself have met some Chinese graduate students in Canada and have found that Chinese graduate students in North America have faced almost similar experiences in terms of language abilities, academic concerns and cultural differences. As a Chinese graduate student, my interest is to explore the themes of these areas.

I have a strong interest in investigating the lived experiences of Chinese graduate students in North America. So, recently, I contacted some of my relatives and friends in several cities of the USA who are graduate students. This strong interest also encouraged me to meet with some Chinese graduate students from a university in Northwestern Ontario in Canada.

Limitations

The first limitation is the small size of the sample. Under these circumstances, the findings can not be generalized, but might be reasonable and transferable in a limited way.

The second limitation is that the six participants are not drawn from a sufficiently large area to be representative of the whole of North America.

The third limitation is that the participants in this study were volunteers. It is possible that, given the nature of the study, those who chose to participate are generally more supportive of the goal of investigating the lived experiences of Chinese graduate students in North America. Thus, the results may not be representative of Chinese graduate students in North America as a whole.

The fourth limitation is that there was only one female among the six participants. Although other participants also present issues related to females' issues of this study, because they are not females, the results may not be representative of female Chinese graduate students in North America as a whole.

The fifth limitation is that some of these six participants were not very objective when they gave their responses to some of the interview questions, the findings and the interpretation of findings may not be very objective to some issues.

Significance of the Study

First, this study based on the lived experiences of six Chinese graduate students may increase awareness and understanding of the challenges Chinese graduate students face in North America, something not fully investigated in the past. Second, this study discovers some reasons why Chinese graduate students come to North America to study. Third, the study documents the experiences Chinese graduate students have been going through in universities and after

graduation from universities in order to explore their reactions to the educational system in North America. Fourth, it may provide useful information to other students as to why they should learn from Chinese graduate students in North America. Fifth, the study may provide strategies which educators can use to help Chinese graduate students adapt better in North America.

Definition of Terms

Some terms and abbreviations present in this study. These terms have been defined and these abbreviations have been explained as follows:

ABC

American Born Chinese

EE

Electrical Engineering

ESL

English as a Second Language Learner

GMAT

The Graduate Management Admission Test, is a standardized test designed to assess skills relevant to graduate studies in business and management.

GRE

Graduate Record Examinations

Lived meaning

Lived meaning refers to the way that a person experiences and understands his or her world as real and meaningful. Lived meanings describe those aspects of a situation as experienced by the person in it. For example, a teacher wants to understand how a child

meaningfully experiences or lives a certain situation even though the child is not explicitly aware of these lived meanings (van Manen, 1997, p. 183).

J-Visa

The J-visa is for the non-immigrants to come to the U.S. for: teaching, studying, researching, consulting, demonstrating special skills or receiving training.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the science of phenomena.

Phenomenology differs from the various human science approaches such as ethnography, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology in that phenomenology makes a distinction between appearance and essence. “Phenomenology is the study of essences,” as described by Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. vii). This means that phenomenology always asks the question of what is the nature or meaning of something (van Manen, 1997, p. 184).

PRC

It represents People’s Republic of China.

TOEFL

The Test of English as a Foreign Language

Organization of the Study

In chapter one I outline the purpose, research questions and conceptual framework for this study as well as my personal ground in pursuing a study of the lived experiences of six Chinese graduate students in North America. The second chapter presents a review of the literature. This is divided into three sections: language abilities; academic concerns; cultural differences. Chapter three presents the methodology, sample, participant selection, research process, ethical considerations and reliability and validity. The participants’ profiles and the findings of the study

are presented in chapter four while chapter five presents the interpretation of findings, the conclusions and the recommendations.

CHAPTER 2:

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

There are three strands of research contributing to our understanding of the lived experiences of Chinese graduate students in North America. The first strand presents the language abilities of Chinese graduate students in North America; the second discusses the performances and significance of academic concerns among Chinese graduate students in North America; and the third reviews research on cultural differences experienced by Chinese graduate students in North America. In fact, these three complementary strands are deeply influencing the lived experiences of Chinese graduate students in North America. For example, language ability can have a big impact on academic concerns whereas cultural differences are often used to explain language ability and academic performances.

Language Abilities

There is a consensus among Chinese people that language ability is the most important element for everyone who comes to a new country which has a different official language. Chinese graduate students speak and write in Chinese. In North America, they have to use English not only in oral but in written contexts. According to Feng (1991), in order to adapt successfully to American culture, like all other international students, PRC students must master both conversational and formal English, the former for daily communication and social life and the latter for academic achievement. Generally, PRC students in this study have serious initial language problems. They have difficulty understanding class and taking notes, understanding English idioms, southern accents, and jokes. In addition, Feng (1991) found that Chinese graduate students' language difficulty often kept them from participation in social activities. "A

cycle in language ability and social interaction may exist. PRC students are afraid of being embarrassed because of language problems, so they withdraw from social activities and form their own social community and interact within the community in their native language, Chinese. Their interaction within the Chinese community further hinders their language improvement” (pp. 14-15).

Chinese and English belong to quite different languages. Wan (1999) explains why Chinese graduate students have so much difficulty using English:

The English language belongs to an alphabetic system, in which there is a connection between sounds and symbols. Letters of the alphabet are used to represent words. Chinese language belongs to the ideographic system, in which there is no connection between sounds and symbols, but symbols are used to represent ideas. For example, the symbol 月 represents the idea moon; and the symbol 田 represents farm (p. 19).

Wan (1999) further indicates that Chinese students grew up speaking Chinese as their mother tongue, which is an entirely different language from English. Other European languages, such as French and German, are different languages from English but they at least belong to the same alphabetic system. So it is easier for French- and German- speaking people to learn English than Chinese-speaking people.

In addition, the ways of teaching English and learning English in China are unique.

Portin (1993) states that grammar translation, memorization, direct, and audio-lingual methods for learning are used by the majority who study English in China. Wan (1999) describes the situation of teaching and learning English in China as follows:

Although Chinese students started to learn English when they were in elementary schools, the way English is taught in China emphasizes more on the written form than the spoken form. English is taught mostly through the traditional grammar-translation method. As a result, students know the grammar and vocabulary of English, but they are still “deaf and mute” in English. This method of teaching rarely provides students with chances to speak and listen to English in authentic situations in China. Although they can get high scores in TOEFL, it does not necessarily mean that they have good oral and aural communication skills in English (p. 20).

Fu & Townsend (1998) also point out that “students in China read to memorize and write to imitate. When they revise their writing, they tend to spend more time polishing their language than working on the content” (p. 129). The way of writing English by Chinese graduate students is quite different from native English speakers. Wang, Martin and Martin (2002) describe the situation in the following way:

The purpose of Asian writing is to show the beauty of words and expressions. Asian students consider writing to be like painting. They spend most of their time selecting words and polishing structures rather than speculating, questioning, and exploring ideas (p. 99).

Generally speaking, native English speakers can not understand why Chinese graduate students have this unique writing method. There are significant differences in approaches compared with western writing styles. Wang et al. (2002) cite a Chinese student’s remark that American students have no appreciation of good writing. They read a lot and pick up some information from this paper and some from that paper and put them together and make a conclusion. Wang et al. (2002) explain further that doing a literature review for a paper in China is done very differently than in the United States. In China, the writer reviews the literature but does not necessarily cite the original sources. Wang et al. (2002) cite another Chinese student’s remark that if a student in China understand the material, he or she can slightly change the presentation of the information and the material belongs to his or her own work. They emphasize that such different perspectives on writing cause Asian students difficulty in producing good writings that fit western writing criteria (p. 99).

Writing is one of the main means of evaluating graduate students’ language abilities. Based on the above description, professors in North America would regard some papers written by Chinese graduate students as bad ones according to their own criteria.

Academic Concerns

General Performances

Academic concerns is the most important factor to examine. Most research dealing with international students' issues indicate that academic concerns is the most decisive factor for the well being of international students. Heavy academic pressure is commonly experienced by international students. Chinese graduate students are generally expected to perform well (Feng, 1991). Wan (1999) in an article about the learning experience of Chinese students in American universities identifies many approaches used to study Chinese graduate students. According to Wan's literature review, Chinese graduate students typically belong to the group of Asian and Pacific American students. They are quiet, hardworking, and docile. They are "relatively well educated and bilingual" (p. 185). Feng (1991) reflects on his investigation of Chinese graduate students from People's Republic of China studying in North America suggesting that Chinese graduate students were either supported by government or by their families and generally do quite well academically. They generally appreciate their opportunity to study in the United States, value education, study hard, and are very purposeful and successful (p. 11).

Zhong (1996) reports conclusions about Chinese graduate students similar to those identified by Wan. Zhong (1996) states that almost all Chinese graduate students are highly educated before they come to North America. College students are privileged in China, but not all students in China can come to study abroad. In order for them to come to the U.S., they must pass highly competitive exams in the English language as well as in their respective academic areas. Zhong (1996) further indicates that "on top of their intellectual abilities, this generation of Chinese have high regards and very positive attitudes towards the United States" (p. 25). Earlier, Feng (1991) reports that education is extremely competitive in China. In Feng's (1991) words,

“only those most outstanding, most capable young people can go for higher education. Those who can come to study in foreign countries are very capable, competent, and successful” (pp. 11-12). Zhang & Carrasquillo (1992) describe Chinese students as a model minority myth. With the help of the media, people generally regard Chinese graduate students as super-smart and widely successful (p. 8). The general ideas about the academic concerns of Chinese graduate students seem similar to the description provided by a Chinese graduate student interviewed by Feng (1991):

Many of us study very hard. Many of us go to library working on our assignment or any kind of work. We all are under great academic pressure. We are either sponsored by government or family to study here. If we can't do well in school, we will feel embarrassed or lose face (p. 11).

However, there are some Chinese graduate students who can not achieve their academic goals in North America. MacDougall & Corcoran (1989) report that Chinese graduate students' Test Anxiety (TA) scores were higher in comparison with students of European and Anglo ethnic backgrounds in Canada. Bellack, Wang & Faustmann (1992), on the other hand, compared Chinese graduate students in the People's Republic of China with Chinese graduate students in the United States on their analogical reasoning skills. They found that students in the PRC performed significantly better than those in the USA. Bellack et al. (1992) attribute the results to much more anxiety faced by Chinese students in the USA. Li (2003) in his study states that all the Chinese can not perform well in school and further explains that “this study shows the fallacy of the model minority myth. Like the Lius' (Liu is one of Chinese surnames) family, many children and families experience tremendous difficulties with schooling” (p. 199).

Factors Influencing Academic Performances

Why do Chinese graduate students generally perform well in their academic fields?

Several factors contribute to this phenomenon. In this respect, Li (2003) asserts that *seeking knowledge* has been one of the most important factors. “Chinese regard knowledge as something that is indispensable to their personal lives. Knowledge is not something that Chinese lives can do without but something that they must have” (p. 265). In China, people grow up in the atmosphere of encouraging study. In their childhood, Chinese graduate students were taught that if they don’t perform well in school and don’t learn enough knowledge, they would have no money, no wife, no happiness in their adulthood. Furthermore, Li (2003) gives a vivid description of these phenomena:

This need of knowledge and the seeking of it require that Chinese cultivate the desire to learn, engage in lifelong learning, remain humble, and adopt the action plan of diligence, endurance of hardship, perseverance, and concentration (p. 265).

Because of the deeply-rooted ideology of seeking knowledge, Chinese graduate students generally know their major purpose in North America: studying hard. They are hard-working and serious. They want to spend all time studying (Feng, 1991; Upton, 1989).Upton (1989) & Wan (1999) both indicate that Chinese students who end up at American universities are usually very diligent.

The second contributing factor is *seeking for material enjoyment* such as earning much more money and living quite a comfortable life. Bai (1998) states that Chinese students put *a good income* as the most important criterion to find jobs . As we all know, China is a developing country, while the United States and Canada are both developed countries. In particular, the United States is an economic superpower in some sense and as such, Chinese graduate students want to finish their schooling successfully so that they can easily find good jobs in North America, since good jobs bring good income. Consequently, Chinese students have to work hard to fulfill this goal.

The third and the strongest factor comes from *family's influences and pressures*. Based on specific cultural background, Zhang & Carrasquillo (1992) suggest that parents in China traditionally have the freedom to decide their children's future. In fact, some parents decide to send their sons or daughters to study in North America. In this connection, Zhang & Carrasquillo (1992) state that Chinese children, especially sons, not only have to follow their parents' instructions but also to try their best to meet their parents' wishes. Generally speaking, parents in China would like to see their children become successful academically. Zhang & Carrasquillo (1992) indicate that research shows that Chinese students' achievement is directly related to the academic expectation of their families. As such, several researchers report similar conclusions, namely that most Chinese graduate students concentrate on scientific and technological fields (Chen, 2001; Zhang & Carrasquillo, 1992; Feng, 1991). In particular, Zhang & Carrasquillo (1992) report that parents encourage their children to study in technical fields. They further state that parents believe that these fields will provide marketable skills and entry to secure, high-status, well-paying jobs.

Feng (1991) indicates that science students generally adapt better than social science students. Feng (1991) gives an explanation that students in science fields have less requirement regarding English than those in social sciences. Based on the above pragmatic views, parents encourage their children to follow scientific and technological routes.

The fourth factor for success in academic fields of Chinese graduate students in North America is the need to *bring benefits to China*. In this regard, Upton (1989) states:

For the Chinese, education does not aim at forming intellectual class, it is not an end in itself; education is seen as a means of making the students, the inheritors of the Communist Party's dream of a future Communist culture, more conscious of their roles in society (p. 15).

Several authors find that Chinese students come to North America to learn advanced technology and ideology in order to serve China better after they return. Zhao & Xie (1992) state that many Chinese intellectuals, including students themselves, are willing to absorb whatever they see as useful for China. Wan (1999) suggests that Chinese graduate students would be able to gain new perspectives from their studies to contribute to China.

There may be some other factors behind academic success of Chinese graduate students in North America. Seeking family reunion and fulfilling their personal dreams would be among other factors involved in the academic success of Chinese graduate students.

Cultural Differences

General Ideas

Culture is not only a complicated but also an interesting issue to talk about. There is a consensus among scholars that culture is a complex entity which comprises a set of symbolic systems, including knowledge, norms, values, beliefs, language, art and customs, as well as habits and skills learned by individuals as members of a given society. Different authors give different definitions of culture. In this respect, Marion (2002) states that “culture is not just ethnic or national, it is any stable order that emerges from interactive, social dynamics. When people interact, they influence one another’s beliefs, understandings, behaviors, and perceptions of reality” (p. 225). Kramsch (2000) defines culture as:

membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaging. Even when they have left that community, its members may retain, wherever they are, a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting. These standards are what is generally called their “culture” (p. 10).

O’Reilly and Chatman (1996) define culture as a “system of shared values (that define what is important) and norms that define appropriate attitudes and behaviors for organizational members

(how to feel and behave)” (p. 160). Schein (1992) on the other hand, defines culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration” (p. 12).

China has a very different culture compared with that of the United States and Canada. Many researchers (Yang, 2001; Ting, 2000; Wan, 1999; Shen, Sullivan, Igoe & Shen, 1996; Zhong, 1996; Chen, Ryan & Chen, 1992; Zhang & Carrasquillo, 1992; Feng, 1991; Upton, 1989) have already found several differences between the two different cultures. Chen, Ryan & Chen (1992) investigated the conceptual and functional meanings of the concept *conflict* from the perspectives of the United States culture (a low-context culture) and Chinese culture (a high-context culture). These researchers list other authors' views (Ting-Toomey, 1985; Hall, 1976) to explain the differences between the high-context and low-context culture:

Hall(1976) identified two types of cultural contexts influencing the way people handle conflict: high-context and low-context cultures. According to Ting-Toomey(1985), high-context cultures emphasize “we”, whereas low-context cultures emphasize “I”. Low-context cultures value “individual orientations, overt communication codes, and maintain a heterogeneous normative structure with low cultural demand/low cultural constraint characteristics.” High-context cultures value “group-identity orientation, covert communication codes, and maintain a homogenous normative structure with high cultural demand high cultural constraint characteristics” (pp. 3-4).

Yang (2001) also points out that the first difference between the two cultures lies in the presentation of ideas: Chinese emphasize “we” while the people in western countries emphasize “I”. Other researchers give their explanations in detail. According to Shen, Sullivan, Igoe & Shen (1996), “American culture emphasizes individual effort and accomplishment, whereas the Chinese basically shun individualism in favor of collective effort. In contrast to the relatively liberal American culture, Chinese cultural and social systems are much more

conservative” (p. 53). Yang (2001) also points out that Chinese schooling focuses on conveying established knowledge instead of cultivating individuality or critical thinking abilities, while the American educational philosophy, promotes individuality and values personal opinions. Feng (1991) supports the above researchers’ views: “American culture values individuality, competition, and independence; in sharp contrast, Chinese culture values collectiveness and cooperation. American culture values self-expression, whereas Chinese emphasize self-control” (p. 9).

Other aspects between Chinese and American culture were highlighted. Zhang & Carrasquillo (1992) indicate that Chinese value family loyalty and unity and Chinese culture emphasizes honor and respect for the elderly. Feng (1991) points out that American culture respects various religions, whereas China shows no respect for religion.

Some researchers (Chen, 2001; Ting, 2000; Wan, 1999; Upton, 1989) have highlighted the basic root of Chinese culture—Confucianism. China is an ancient civilization, and for over 2,000 years, attitudes toward education were strongly influenced by Confucian philosophy (Chen, 2001). Upton (1989), quoting Rodzinski (1984), states that:

Confucius (351-479 B.C.) it has been a part of China’s culture. In Confucius’ day the perfection of society was seen to come through cultivation of proper moral and ethical principles. With this mind, Confucius presented the image of what the superior man should be like: “He was to be upright, righteous, loyal, forgiving and tolerant, cultured a follower of the rites, and , above all, humane” (p. 13).

Confucius establishes an immortal image of educated people. This image has influenced Chinese from generation to generation. In this connection, Zhang & Carrasquillo (1992) indicate that appropriate behaviors such as self-control and conformity are to be expected. Ting (2000) explains further that Confucianism, a powerful Asian cultural tradition, for example, bestows paternalistic authority and unconditional respect to teachers. In addition, Wan (1999)

cites other authors-Pan et al. (1994) stating that “traditional Chinese culture is built upon a value system crystallized in Confucianism that indicates a linear hierarchy. This hierarchy is characterized by various dominance-obedience relationships: men dominating women, old dominating young, and the emperor dominating everyone else” (p. 19).

Chinese Graduate Students' Specific Situations

PRC students find American culture quite different from their own, and it is difficult for them to adjust and socialize with Americans. Chinese graduate students often feel they do not have common topics, interest, and lack of mutual understanding. Americans talk about football, baseball, and so on, but PRC students know little of American sports. Americans tell jokes, but Chinese fellows have little understanding of American joking (Feng, 1991). Feng (1991) also gives a new approach of the two different cultures---holidays:

Like religion, holidays are also part of culture. Americans and Chinese have different holidays at different time and celebrate in different ways. For example, American celebrate Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, and so on, differently Chinese celebrate Spring Festivals, Moon Festival, and so on (p. 11).

For Feng (1991), Americans have many holidays through the year. They take off from work, and get together with family. But on Chinese holidays, Chinese graduate students are in the USA where they can't take days off. They have to go to class and do homework. Actually there is no atmosphere that they can gladly celebrate. Therefore, they feel lonely and homesick, especially since most of them do not have family in USA. Feng (1991) further states that “due to contrasting differences, Chinese students tend to form their own community, and isolate themselves from the host culture” (p. 11).

Teacher-Student Relationship

The literature suggests that in China, teachers are regarded as someone superior

who should be respected (Chen, 2001; Ting, 2000; Wan, 1999; Zhong, 1996; Upton, 1989).

Chen (2001) indicates that Confucian philosophy placed the scholar in a position of prominence and prestige while Upton (1989) suggests that in China a teacher should take responsibilities not only for a student's academic progress but for his or her development as a person. A teacher should offer advice to a student concerning his or her family, friends, diet, clothing, study, exercise habits even attitude toward life. Upton (1989) also gives the typical image of Chinese students: both traditional and modern China consider the quiet, passive person the ideal student. Chinese graduate students generally have no habits of challenging their professors. They used to listen to all kinds of guidance based on their professors. Ting (2000) offers the following vivid descriptions: "student learn best by obeying to their teachers; arguing with the teacher is considered rude and disrespectful" (p. 638). Further, Ting (2000), quoting Guo (1996), states that it is not surprising to find that Chinese students today show little initiative and are over-reliant on teachers (p. 638). While in North America, teachers and students are quite different. Li & West (1999) indicate that American teachers perceived student involvement, student influence and student personal attainment as more important issues than did the Chinese teachers. Upton (1989) points out that teachers in North America are probably just expecting the student to do a lot of the information-finding on his own outside of class and the teacher's only responsibility is to teach the class. In addition, Upton (1989) explains that compared with the Chinese, American college students in general have a much more casual relationship with their teachers, and it is not uncommon for a playful rapport to develop between the teacher and the class. American students argue with a professor, even accuse a teacher of being wrong, and most teachers encourage it. Leung, Maehr & Harnisch (1993) indicate that American students blamed teachers more than Chinese students did for their poor school performance.

Since there are big cultural differences between China and North America, Chinese graduate students sometimes can not accept the teacher- student relationship in North America. They feel that they can not obtain enough guidance from professors in North America. That's why they think that American teachers are not as resourceful and responsible as their teachers back in China (Upton, 1989). Fortunately, many Chinese graduate students have changed their views gradually based on American cultural background. As one of the Chinese graduate students said: " If you don't expect people to be in certain ways, then when they turn out to be nice to you, you would only appreciate it" (Zhong, 1996, p. 15). The close relationship between teacher and student in China does not exist in North America (Upton, 1989). Chinese graduate students realize that they must "learn to be independent" in order to adapt well into the different culture in North America (Zhong, 1996, p. 23).

Classrooms

According to Wan (1999), Chinese graduate students agree that teaching in the USA is more interactive, creative and flexible than in China. Sometimes it does not seem to have a structure or rule at all. Several researchers (Wan, 1999; Gardner, 1989; Upton, 1989) have focused at the typical model of Chinese classroom. They all agree that in Chinese classrooms, the teachers are considered to be the center of all activity. Teachers are seen as authorities in their fields and what they say is also accepted as truth. All knowledge has been established in the past, and the teacher's job is to transmit that knowledge faithfully. Students' behavior and words are directed toward teachers. The class will always be serious with little room for jokes or light-hearted discussion with students. Upton (1989) found that: "for both old and new China, the classroom is a serious place and students are expected to be attentive, which includes sitting up straight in their chairs, and being polite and respectful to both teachers and classmates" (p. 23).

Upton (1989) also describes classrooms in North America stating that:

Classrooms in America, in contrast to China, are not governed by rules of formality. The classroom itself often seems disorganized and even chaotic. Chairs are spread out around the classroom, students sit wherever they want to, and they even eat and drink during class (p. 25).

Within the two distinct different classrooms, students' behaviors are quite different. No Chinese students "would think of coming late to class and none would dare to get up and leave class early without prior permission, as this would be terribly disrespectful" (Upton, 1989, p. 23). While "many American students often did not adequately prepare for class, were terrible procrastinators, and spent too much time doing things other than school work" (Upton, 1989, p. 17). Chinese graduate students admit that their counterparts in North America are more creative and are braver than themselves in some sense, but criticize American and Canadian student "lack of respect" for their teachers: coming into class late, interrupting a teacher with questions, making a joke in class (Upton, 1989). These behaviors are considered to be terribly rude and disrespectful to teachers in China. Besides, Chinese graduate students regard their counterparts in North America as "self-centered":

They come to the classroom as individuals, study whatever subjects they are really interested in, and do not care much what other people think of them. After class, they would never mind what their fellow students are going to do. Students regard the knowledge they acquired as their own possession, as merchandise, they have paid for, and thus do not at all feel uneasy to sell it. The competition in class is reflection of the competitive nature of the American society (Upton, 1989, p. 24).

Some authors point out that "cultural difference may not have much effect on science students like mathematics, or physics, but it can be a problem for students in social science" (Feng, 1991). These authors think that social sciences need much more knowledge of culture in North America (Zhang & Carrasquillo, 1992; Feng, 1991).

Obviously, the different cultural backgrounds bring great influences to Chinese graduate students. MacDougall & Corcoran (1989) list other authors' views (Reinicke, 1986 ; Leong, 1984; Ward, 1962) to explain that "Cultural shock may be expected, but only experienced by the foreign students. Symptoms may include loneliness, depression, irritability, or rigidity, none of which are conducive to academic potential or success. Cultural shock often results in somatic anxiety and physical illness" (pp. 1-2). On the contrary, cultural differences will bring benefits to Chinese graduate students. Myburgh , Niehaus & Poggenpoel (2002) indicate that living in a foreign country with unique cultural traditions and customs and studying with learners from different cultures are clearly both rewarding and challenging and that international students gain a different perspective and often much better understanding of their own country. Chinese graduate students generally agree that after they come to North America, they love their homeland more deeply than before. They know they can learn useful knowledge in order to contribute to their homeland (Wan, 1999). At the same time, many Chinese graduate students have made great contributions to North America. On this aspect, Johnson (2001) states that Chinese graduate students "who earned an Science and Engineering doctorate (21,600) in the United States between 1986 and 1998 conducted basic and applied research in U.S. universities and helped teach students in science, mathematics, and engineering. After earning their degrees, Chinese postdoctorate- holders have contributed to research at U.S. universities and elsewhere. Chinese –born scientists and engineers are part of the U.S. technical labor force, particularly in business and industry" (pp. 3-4).

Everything has its merits and shortcomings. The fact that Chinese graduate students come to North America to study is no exception. Wan (1999) states that Chinese graduate students have likes and dislikes for living in both countries. In North America, they enjoy the

living conditions- the environment, the greenness and cleanness. They like the fair school enrollment policy and the law-governed society. Wan (1999) elaborates further:

It is not easy to be a cross-cultural learner. It requires courage, determination and persistence to succeed in doing so. The process of learning involves many efforts---“ blood and tears.” There are many cultural elements that the learners need to adjust to, get used to, learn or unlearn. But on the whole, it is a very rewarding and great learning experience (p. 20).

CHAPTER 3:

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Methodology

The primary method for data collection was the general interview guide (Patton, 2002).

Patton (2002) describes the strengths of this method in the following way:

The interview guide provides topics or subjects areas within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined (p. 343).

The instrument (Appendix A) was comprised of open-ended questions, accompanied by probes to bring greater description in responses. The methodology chosen employs qualitative interviews (the initial interviews, reflection follow-up, and telephone clarification) with six Chinese graduate students in North America (Appendix A). All the interviews were conducted in English and were held in places which were comfortable to both the interviewees and the interviewer. Each interview took approximately forty to forty-five minutes, and was audiotaped.

Sample

Six Chinese graduate students comprise the sample. Three of them, Luke, Wanda and Mark, are in the USA; and other three, Henry, Charles and Larry, are in Canada. Two of them, Henry and Charles, are current graduate students but Larry, Luke, Wanda and Mark, are working now. All of them come from mainland China. The length of their stay in the USA and in Canada varies from several months to many years. There are five males and one female (Wanda) for a total of six participants. Three participants, Henry, Charles and Larry, are studying or working in a city located in Ontario, Canada. Two participants, Luke and Wanda are living in a city of a Northwestern state of the U.S.A.. One participant, Mark, is living in a big city in the U.S.A..

Two participants, Henry and Charles, are in their twenties. One participant, Mark, is in his mid-thirties. Three participants, Larry, Luke and Wanda, are over forty years old.

Participant Selection

I found the three participants (Henry, Charles and Larry) in Canada by the following means: (1) I contacted the international student advisor of a university located in Ontario, Canada . She agreed to send my explanatory letter along with an invitation (Appendix B) to Chinese graduate students. The international student advisor did not disclose who received the letter. (2) I asked Chinese graduate students when I was walking on campus or studying in libraries and (3) compared the majors, ages, length of stay in North America and other factors to determine who were suitable to be the interview participants. The two participants (Luke and Wanda) in the U.S.A. are my relatives. I have a lot of related background information about them. One participant (Mark) in the U.S.A. is a friend of my elder sister.

Research Process

Entry (negotiation)

I made initial contacts through phone calls and made a decision about our first interviews. During the initial contacts, I explained the purpose and significance of this study, the ethical considerations, and invited interviewees to participate.

Data Collection

Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed carefully. I used three steps to fulfill my task: the initial interview, follow-up interview and telephone clarification. I also used open-ended interview questions (Appendix A) and strictly followed my interview schedules.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

I presented the participant profiles for preliminary data analysis. The participant profiles give clear background and some useful information which further help in the data analysis and interpretation.

After I transcribed each interview, I noted the emerging questions and patterns to help in conducting the subsequent interviews. Finally I analyzed all the transcripts. As suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2003), I used codes, categories and themes which emerged from the data. Five themes based on the research questions were identified from the analysis of the qualitative data.

Ethical Considerations

The purpose of the study and ethical considerations were explained to the six interviewees at the beginning of this research, after which they were invited to participate and were asked to sign a letter of consent (Appendix B).

Reliability and Validity

“Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated. In other words, if the study is repeated will it yield the same results”(Merriam, 1998, p. 205). This thesis documents a phenomenological study of the lived experiences of six Chinese graduate students in North America. Five themes based on the research questions were identified from the analysis of the qualitative data. Some research findings of this study support those findings of former researchers. Some research findings of this study show the opposite views to those findings of former researchers. Some research findings of this study provide new approaches. However, no measurement procedure is perfectly consistent and qualitative studies are not assessable to the same degree and in the same manner as quantitative studies.

“Internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality”

(Merriam, 1998, p. 201). The research findings of this study can provide practical functions in some fields. For example, some research findings of this study describe the experiences Chinese graduate students have been going through in universities and after graduation from universities in order to explore their reactions to the educational systems in North America; some research findings of this study may provide strategies which educators can use to help Chinese graduate students and even other international students adapt better in North America. External validity, on the other hand, is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Merriam, 1998). Though the size of the sample is small, the findings of this study can be a useful guide to researchers looking at the experiences of Chinese graduate students studying and living in North America.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents profiles of the participants and research findings. Five themes based on the research questions were identified from the analysis of the qualitative data: (a) the experiences of the Chinese graduate students with language; (b) the Chinese graduate students' academic concerns; (c) the experiences of the Chinese graduate students with cultural differences; (d) the job related experiences of the Chinese graduate students in North America; (e) the advantages of a North American education for China. The first section of this chapter presents profiles of the participants. The second section describes the findings of the study.

Participant Profiles

The sample is comprised of five males and one female. All six participants obtained a university education in China before they came to North America. Moreover, all of them thought it was very important for them to live and to study in North America and were all willing to share their experiences and perceptions as graduate students living in North America. Following is a profile of each of the six participants. Pseudonyms are used to ensure confidentiality.

Henry. Henry, a male, is in the first year of his Master's program in natural science in Canada. He graduated from Beijing Institute of Technology a year ago and spent a couple months in Beijing to prepare for his TOEFL and GRE examinations. He has been in Canada for four months and is very positive about living here to study. He doesn't think that he is discouraged by any aspect of education here. He expressed his wish to continue his mathematics major in Canada based on his research interest. He doesn't want to switch to computer science as other Chinese graduate students have done, although the latter makes it much easier to find decent jobs in North America. He thinks that in Canada he has much more opportunities to show

his skills: to do a lot of presentations, talk to the professors, and mark the assignments of the undergraduate students. He thinks that those things are very helpful especially to a person who is not good at English. He is trying his best to adapt to the circumstances and to life in Canada.

Charles. Charles, a male, is a graduate student in social science in Canada. He is going to complete his Master degree in May, 2004. His undergraduate major was international trade and he worked in a company for a year and a half as a business assistant after he got his Bachelor degree in China. He is somewhat unhappy with living and studying in Canada. He thinks that it is pretty tough to study here. He spends a lot of time studying and does a lot of things here which he didn't do in China. He doesn't think that he has gained a lot of opportunities to show his strengths at a Canadian university. He indicates that if students have enough money, they would have better opportunities to do whatever they want. He thinks that it is kind of hard to get involved in the real students' life in Canada.

Larry. Larry, a male, is a professor in natural science in Canada. He got his Master degrees in Chemical Engineering not only at Qinghua University in China but also at a university in Canada . He got his PhD degree in Chemical Engineering at University of Toronto in 2000. After that, he worked in a company for more than two years before getting an offer as an assistant professor in Chemical Engineering at a Canadian University. He became a landed immigrant in Canada in 1995 and feels very confident with living, studying and working in Canada. The most interesting thing is that he has no real Canadian friends although he has lived in Canada for ten years. He thinks that he feels uncomfortable making Canadian friends. He indicates that due to the cultural differences both he himself and Canadians don't want to spend a lot time trying to understand each other. He enjoys the freedom in Canada. He thinks that he has

gained much freedom in language, culture and academic pursuits. That's why he wants to stay in Canada.

Luke. Luke, a male, is working in a company in the United States of America now. He got his Bachelor degree in Electrical Engineering at Qinghua University in 1983. After three years' work in a geographical institute in China, he pursued his Master degree in geography at Kansas State University. He studied for his PhD program for couple years in agriculture department at University of Arizona. At the same time, he learned the GIS-Geographic Information System until he found a related job. He has moved to a Northwestern state of the U.S.A. and has been working in a company for over nine years. He likes to stay in the United States of America and thinks that after studying and working in the United States of America for many years, people don't need to feel afraid since if he or she really works hard, he or she will have fair treatment in his or her work. He thinks that in China if you are somewhat outstanding or something like that, people around you really want to hold you back.

Wanda. Wanda, a female, is Luke's wife. She got her Bachelor degree in English Language and Literature in China. She had been teaching English for about two years before she came to the United States of America. Her husband, Luke, held a J-1 visa when he came to the United States of America . Wanda accompanied her husband and she held J-2 visa which allowed her to work both on- and off-campus. She got her master degree in public administration and has worked for about 6 years in the U.S.A.. She is very positive about studying and living in the United States of America. She said that her strategies are to study hard, never give up, be persistent, and pursue her goals. The most important thing is that she had almost no language problem at the beginning when she came to the United States of America. She wants to keep her permanent job and stay in the United States of America. She has indicated that her current

motivation for working is to support her family. She wants to support her children so that they can go to university and finish their education and get a good job in the United States of America.

Mark. Mark, a male, is waiting to find a decent job in the United States of America. He came to U.S.A. in 2000. He was a visiting scholar at the beginning and after one year he transferred his status to a student's visa. He was attending the exchange program for studying international relations in a big city of the U.S.A.. After one year he switched to computer science and ended up with a Master of Science degree in Computer Science. His case is very special because he switched his major from a non-science field to a science field- from international relations to computer science. He thinks that the United States of America is the most advanced country in the world. Studying, working and living there is very beneficial. He has indicated that he can learn something from the United States of America but he can't learn from China. He can broaden his vision, can try to communicate with different people and can acquire some kinds of the latest and most advanced things from the United States of America.

Research Findings

This section presents five themes emerging from the analysis of the qualitative data: (a) the experiences of the Chinese graduate students with language; (b) the Chinese graduate students' academic concerns; (c) the experiences of the Chinese graduate students with cultural differences; (d) the job related experiences of the Chinese graduate students in North America; (e) the advantages of North American education for China. Each theme is discussed below.

The Experiences of the Chinese Graduate Students with Language

These six participants all obtained their higher education in China. Before they came to North America, all of them had studied English for several years. They shared some linguistic similarities in the areas of: (1) the concerns before they arrived in North America; (2) the

experiences after they arrived in North America; (3) strategies to increase their English levels.

The Concerns before They Arrived in North America The participants expressed the concerns about language before they arrived in North America. When responding to the question of what concerns in terms of language did you have about studying in North America before you arrived, Henry replied:

I think in China, it is very difficult to learn foreign languages and practice English. Because people around you all speak Chinese. So even if you know a lot of English words and you know the grammars very well, when you speak English, people can not really understand English. But I think that if you come to Canada, people around you are all speaking English. So your English listening and speaking abilities are easily improved. And after that, you will really know the culture of Canada. You will really learn English (Henry).

Charles' description of his language concerns before he came to North America proved interesting:

Actually, before I came here, I was over confident. I thought studying in North America was a piece of cake to me. Because I thought that I prepared well with language in China. But now I think that the thing is quite different. I mean quite different from the way I imagined. The most outstanding obstacle is the language limit. So if I were studying in Chinese, the situation would be much better (Charles).

Larry got his master degree in China. He expressed his concerns about language before he arrived in North America as follows:

The main concern before I came to Canada is how to adapt well into the English language environment, such as how to take notes in classes, how to communicate with professors, how to write thesis etc. (Larry).

Luke expressed similar views to Charles about language concerns before he arrived in North America.

For language, I didn't afraid of anything, because I was pretty young at that time. Firstly, I took some kinds of general exams of English because I was sent to U.S.A. by the government. In fact, there was not so many people can reach that grade of English tests and I passed them. Secondly, the government sent me to Xian Foreign Language Institute to study English for half a year. During that period of time, I took TOEFL and

applied for universities in the U.S.A.. I didn't feel afraid of English before I arrived. Of course, when I came to the States, the situation was different (Luke).

Wanda has a Bachelor degree in English Language and Literature and showed her self-confidence of language concerns before she arrived in North America.

Well, as I mentioned before, I have a degree in English. So I didn't have so many concerns about my language. I didn't worry about so much about my language before I arrived. Because I am English major (Wanda).

Mark had been working at Chinese Academy of Science for almost eight years in the international scientific center which is an organization responsible for international academic exchange, international academic conferences, conventions and some joint expectations in China. Since he used English a lot in his daily life in China, he provided more vivid descriptions:

I didn't worry about too much about language. Because I used a lot of English in China. Because in my work I had to use a lot of English to communicate with people. So I didn't worry too much about English. But I still concerned, you know, for example, If I use English here, apparently I am a foreigner. O.K. I still have accents. I still don't know how to say something in appropriate ways. So that was my concern. But I also hope that I can improve my language through study and living here. I think that I made it (Mark).

The Experiences after They Arrived in North America

The six participants have been in North America from several months to many years. When they described the experiences with language after they arrived in North America, they all were willing to recall their experiences. Henry is one who has been in Canada for a short period of time-only several months. He tried his best to explain his experiences:

When I first came to Canada, people couldn't understand me. Because the English are different .Accent? I mean? But after a while, when I learned some habits of Canadian English, it is easier for me be understood by others. People can not easily understand me. But I can easily understand them, not very easily, but it is much better than they understand what I said to them. Because the English is different. Besides, my spoken English is not good. So? It has not improved very quickly. I mean my English level . But for life, it is O.K. (Henry).

Charles put great emphasis on his English language level after he arrived in Canada:

My reading in English is O.K.. But my listening is not good. So when I first came here, I couldn't understand what people around me talking about. I was almost "deaf". But I try to improve it. Anyway, it is O.K. for me now. Of course, you know, if I read books in Chinese, my efficiency would be much more higher. Here, it took me more time to read books in English. Sometimes I met some tricky grammar, it took me some times to figure out what is the real point. As to my spoken English, I think that my English is not very good, I can not say what exactly I want to say in class, which makes me kind of less involvement in classes' discussions (Charles)

Larry's experience in Canada was similar to those of Henry and Charles:

When I came to Canada, in terms of language, at the beginning, I almost didn't understand when people were talking. I thought I had difficulties by communicating with Canadians. I remembered when the professors asked us to write reports, it took me a lot time to prepare that. Although I got very high marks in TOEFL and GRE, I still thought I needed time to improve my written English (Larry).

Luke is the one who stayed in the United States of America the longest -18 years. He also experienced language difficulties when he first came to the United States of America:

When I first came to the States, I didn't understand anything that people were talking around me. It took me three or four months to get adjust to the English language environment. During these three or four months, I almost couldn't understand any words in the classrooms. So I just read the textbooks and studied very hard. Besides, I changed my major to geography. I studied EE in China but I studied geography in the U.S.A.. Like I said, it was not as hard. So I finally passed. Actually, language was a kind of problem when I first came here. After first half year, everything was becoming smooth about language. There was almost no problem (Luke).

Wanda and Mark had very positive experiences of English after they arrived in the United States of America. Wanda said, "Since I majored in English and also taught English for several years before I came to America, so I didn't have so much trouble with language" (Wanda). When she was asked whether she really hadn't experienced any language problems, she responded:

Well, there was a little bit problem. But, you know, it was not a big problem. I think when you talk about communication, I had no problems to communicate. But when you talk about academic terminology, because I switched major. There

were maybe some challenges over there. You had to learn the new terms as a different major. That was my challenge. But I did believe if you studied hard, you would be successful (Wanda).

Mark is the only participant who lived in a big city-New York. He seemed very comfortable:

Even I didn't worry about my language. I still took ESL (English as a Second Language Learner) classes in the summer when I just came here. And I studied how to write a thesis, you know, something like that. I found that it was very easy for me. Because they only had ESL classes as the undergraduate level. Right? I took some classes and I did pretty well. I thought that was not a problem for me. And later I took some classes for international economy, international laws and relations something like that. At the beginning, I quite concerned about if I can understand what the professors speak during the classes. Right? But later I found that it was not a problem either. Gradually, I think that I get used to the educational system, the classes here (Mark).

Strategies to Increase their English Levels

The six participants took English exams in China in order to help themselves apply to universities in North America and improve their English skills. Henry and Larry attended the seminar courses of TOEFL and GRE at New Oriental University. Henry described his strategy:

There is an English school named New Oriental University. They gave us a lot of examples and I did a lot of practice in grammar and reading. So I got high marks in the exams. But for listening, it is very difficult for us foreign people to practice in China. Because the exercises of reading and grammar, I got good marks. The marks are good enough to apply to the universities in North America (Henry).

Larry left China ten years ago. At that time, New Oriental University was called Oriental University. Larry said, "I took some seminar courses such as Oriental University to prepare my exams and got high marks in TOEFL and GRE" (Larry).

Luke is the only participant who was sent to the U.S.A. by the Chinese government. He was very confident about his English exams:

Firstly, I took some kinds of general exams of English because I was sent to U.S.A. by the government. In fact, there was not so many people can reach that

grade of English tests and I passed them. Secondly, the government sent me to Xian Foreign Language Institute to study English for half a year. During that period of time, I took TOEFL and applied for universities in the U.S.A.. I didn't feel afraid of English before I arrived. Of course, when I came to the States, the situation was different (Luke).

Wanda, Mark and Charles prepared for those exams by themselves. Wanda took

GMAT instead of GRE:

Well, basically for TOEFL, I just bought books and followed the books and tapes and then took the exams. I didn't take GRE. I took GMAT and I did the same thing. I just bought the books and just studied and then went to tests (Wanda).

Mark didn't take GRE because his master program only required TOEFL:

I prepared for TOEFL a little bit before I came here. And in my first year in the States, I also prepared for TOEFL. I took TOEFL in 2000. And then I just transferred the credit to my school. I just bought books in China and took some practice. I only spent one month or three weeks to prepare TOEFL, not too long. I only took TOEFL, because my university program only required for TOEFL (Mark).

All six participants described very vivid strategies for overcoming language limits.

Among them, two participants-Henry and Charles -chose to live with native English speakers.

Henry mentioned:

I think that because I am mathematics major. I think that the most difficulty for Chinese students is the language. I am now living with some foreign students. We talk in English and I could practice English. Actually, at beginning, I was also a little bit afraid of living with Canadian students. But what I am thinking is that English is very important for me to practice. So I pushed myself. I think that talking with people in English is very important. And the roommates are very nice. We helped a lot among each other. So I am not afraid at all. So sometimes I suggest my Chinese friends to make friends with foreign people. I think that foreign students are very nice, and you can learn from each other a lot. At the beginning, I am afraid that Canadian can not understand. I felt embarrassed. But now even they can not understand me, I try to use different ways to express myself in English (Henry).

Charles had the same idea of living with Canadians as Henry did:

My roommates are all Canadians. I am living with Canadians, because I want to practice my English. I want to learn from them. My choice were really based on some purposes. Because if I was living with Chinese people, I would always speak in Chinese. So there is no difference by staying in China. I don't want to waste my time. Actually, the worry is true. Because there is a "culture shock". China to them is a pretty strange. Those people here know so little about China. They are curious. Actually, if you live with Chinese, it will be pretty easy. It depends on your personal values (Charles).

Mark didn't mention living with Americans as a strategy. But he indicated the importance of making American friends:

I mean I also have American friends here. But it is not easy to make American friends as before I came here. Actually, people are busy in their lives. They have to face their different things. If there is no good opportunity for you to make friends, it is difficult for you to make friends from different cultural backgrounds. My American friends and I still keep in touch, but they are not in New York. This year, one of my friends-the whole family came to New York to visit me. That's a very good experience. But in New York, I haven't made any American friends. You know, the pure American friends, whether White, Black, or Hispanic, only a ABC (American Born Chinese). I think that making American friends and communicating with them can really help me to increase my English level (Mark).

Henry, Charles, Larry and Luke indicated that they increased their English levels by watching TV, listening to the radios and communicating with native English speakers. Here is what they stated about their own strategies:

I am watching TV. I am also listening to radio. I practice my English listening. I think that they are very helpful (Henry).

Actually, I spent a lot of time to expose myself to the language environment. Listening to people's talking around you, talking with people, watching a lot of TV, listening to the radios and imitating the way they pronounce properly. I am not a three year little kid any more. It is very hard for me to learn a new language-English. But anyway, I try very hard to practice it (Charles).

To watch TV, a lot of TV and went outsides to spend some times with your classmates. I mean tried my best to communicate with native speakers (Larry)

For listening and speaking English, I watch a lot of TV improving my English listening. I didn't improve my English speaking until I got the job. Few years ago, I got a chance to teach some classes. My American colleagues said to me: "Can you really do that?" I said that: "It should be O.K., because I am pretty strong on that academic sides . I could overcome language problems." Actually the results are pretty good. I didn't really push much about myself (Luke).

Henry and Larry improved English through academic activities:

I think I can easily get satisfactory results by doing a lot of presentations. Because Mathematics has a lot of symbols and formulas which are the same as that in China. After you wrote the formulas and information on the blackboard, they will understand you. After you did some presentations, you will get much more confidence. I think that it is the good way to practice English and it helps people a lot (Henry).

As a graduate student, you have to write a lot of papers, to do a lot of presentations. I remember to each presentation when I was a graduate student, I usually spent a lot of time to prepare. My language capability was limited, right? I had to spend a lot of time, almost four and five times than native Canadian students. But through those activities, my English did improve (Larry).

Charles attended the activities held by church to practice his English:

If you go to church, you can enjoy all kinds of ceremonies and some meetings on Sunday. Actually, why I go to church, it is not for understanding Canadian culture. It is not for the religion. I do not believe in religion. I just want to get a chance to improve my spoken English. That's my point. My listening has improved a lot. But my oral English is still a kind of stuck. I don't know why. Because it is hard for me to put my thoughts into a new language. I really don't know why. I did improve. But I don't think that I improve too much. Maybe it depends on my personal standards. Maybe I am kind of strict to myself .But actually I really can not satisfy (Charles).

It seems that Wanda had no language difficulty when she arrived in the United States of America. So she didn't provide a specific strategy.

The Chinese Graduate Students' Academic Concerns

The second theme describes the academic concerns of Chinese Graduate Students. The six participants all obtained their Bachelor degree in China before coming to North America. Among them, three (Henry, Larry and Luke) had majored in Science and three (Charles, Wanda and Mark) had majored in non-science fields in China. When they came to North America,

Charles and Wanda continued to pursue a non-science major. Mark switched to a science major: from international relations to computer science. Luke switched his major from Electrical Engineering to Geography. Wanda also switched her major, from English Language and Literature to public administration. They provided many academic concerns in the following areas: (1) motivations for studying in North America; (2) the concerns before they arrived in North America; (3) the experiences after they arrived in North America; (4) strategies to deal with their academic fields; (5) the perception of differences between science and non-science majors.

Motivations for Studying in North America

The six participants gave the following motivations for studying in North America:

The main reason is to enhance my personal adaptability and ability. As to academic concern, I want to learn more advanced knowledge in my major-Mathematics. In addition, I want to improve my English (Henry).

Actually, it was pretty private. You know, because my girlfriend, she is working in the States. I want to get close to her. Because it is a little bit hard to go to the States. So I came to Canada instead. Besides, my work in China makes me boring, so I got to change my life. I think that taking an education abroad is a chance to change my life. No matter it would be good or bad, my life would be changed (Charles).

My expectation to study in Canada is to obtain more advanced science and technology. That's the main motivation. And also I have been trying to seek the opportunities in North America (Larry).

I really didn't have a good motivation. It was the same as everyone else. People just rushed outside to go to other countries, to go abroad. I just got a chance. So I went to the States. It was the Chinese government that paid me to come to U.S.A. to study the master degree. The first two years, I was not a self-supported student. Initially, I would go back to China after I got my master degree. But there was unhappy thing happened (1989 Tiananmen Square Event), I had to stay in the States (Luke).

Well, my initial motivation was to come here to study for my advanced degree. But after several years, the motivation has been changed. I like to get a permanent job and stay in the States (Wanda).

First, the United States is the most advanced country in this world. If I can find a place

to study, that is the best choice. And also in my life I like to try new things, such as new places something like this. And also it is quite good opportunity for me, because I worked for Chinese Academy of Sciences and it is a kind of agreement between my organization and the university here. I think that after I complete my study, whether I come back to China or stay here, you know, for me, there are more choices, more opportunities (Mark).

The Concerns before They Arrived in North America

Five of the six participants, Mark excluded, didn't worry too much about their academic fields before they arrived in North America:

I think I majored in Mathematics. Mathematics is one of the most important majors in China. Even in elementary school, it is very important for students to learn well in Mathematics. Because in China, if you wanted to study well in Mathematics, you were being through a very strict process. So I think that it is not very difficult for me to study Mathematics in Canada. But in North America, I can easily get more latest information about Mathematics, so it is easier for me to do research here. I think that it is good and important for me to study here (Henry).

Sure. In China, I took some course in Economics. And actually, I think that those courses which I took in China gave me a lot of basic knowledge towards my current study. After I came here, sometimes I forgot what I had learned in China. I have to pick them up. And you know, it takes a lot of time. Actually, I think that my education in China helps me to go to further study of master's program here. My education in China is my basic education (Charles).

I didn't have so much worry in terms of academic concerns. I was going to learn the same major –Chemical Engineering as I took in China. I knew there was no big difference. So I didn't think very much towards this issue (Larry).

At that time, I was young. I always thought that I could do everything. I knew that there was a five-day working schedule at that time while there was a six-working day schedule in China. If I had problems, I could use the extra two days of weekend to catch up. I was pretty confident about myself. I wasn't afraid of my academic fields before I arrived. I remembered when I was a undergraduate student at Qinghua University, there was almost no Sundays. Because I had to prepare all kinds of exams . I thought that I could be much more relaxed when I came to the States (Luke).

Well, before I arrived, basically, I didn't have any concerns about my academic fields. I knew that I had to change my major eventually (Wanda).

Mark thought about switching major before he arrived in the U.S.A.. Because he wanted to switch from international relations to computer science, it seemed that there would be a big challenge:

Before I came here, my exchange program was international relations. Right? I think that this field was really useful in the future. I thought about transferring to computer science. Because computer science was very hot at that time. And you know, some of my colleagues without scientific background, when they came here, you know, after several years, they also transferred to computer science although they majored economics or something like that. And they were very successful, actually. Once I thought about transferring to computer science before I came here. But I had many concerns, because international relations and computer science were totally different areas. Actually, I didn't know what the difficulties were. But the experiences of my friends and my colleagues, you know, told me that this was impossible. But I thought that at least I could try (Mark).

The Experiences after They Arrived in North America

Henry and Charles had different views about their academic experiences after they arrived in Canada:

First, I am not sure that they are differences between China and Canada. Because I took my undergraduate degree in China, but I am taking my graduate degree here. It is hard to compare. I compare the bachelor degree in China and master degree here, here I have more opportunities to show myself. To do a lot of presentations, talk to the professors, and mark the assignment of the undergraduate students (Henry).

In China, we only learn the theories of western economics. But here, we can learn the most updated knowledge. Right ? So it is pretty convenient here. If you got money, you could show whatever you want. Actually, as a foreign student, it is kind of hard to get involved in the real student's life. If you can speak perfect English, if you can, I mean , it depends on some material matter. I don't think that you can show yourself. That's my opinion, anyway (Charles).

Larry described a very common experience with academic fields after he arrived in Canada:

The main concerns of academic fields was how to get high marks and how to write good proposals for thesis. We had to work hard in each course in order to get good marks. We had to spend a lot time in the libraries to do a literature search to write the proposal.

Luke, Wanda and Mark switched majors when they arrived in the U.S.A.:

Academic fields: It was a little bit different than that in China. In China, students need to take the whole classes. As a group, maybe 30 or 40 people took the same class, got up and went to bed at the same time. Here, graduate students need to do everything by themselves. They need to select those courses by themselves and arrange everything by themselves. Professors here are pretty helpful all the time. If you have questions to ask them, they are always trying to help you. I didn't have so much worried about my academic concerns after I came to the U.S.A. When I was at Qinghua University, I had couple friends at Beijing University majored in Geography. EE is a high-pressured major on academic fields. Students in EE have heavy load of works. My friends were in Geography Department at Beijing University. They didn't have much homework. They always had free time. If they had homework, it was kinds of going to field trips. I really liked that. That's how I was thinking about changing my major. Secondly, I really hated to enter into the clean labs as EE major. I liked the sunshine instead of staying in the labs all day and all night. Besides, I was not really good at Mathematics. But as an EE major, there was a high requirement to Mathematics. When I first came to the States, I thought that studying in Geography was O.K.. I thought that after that I could find jobs related to Geography in the universities . I knew that in the real life, geography was not an important thing. So that's why I thought that it was O.K. to learn the techniques again. So I learned remote sensing. After two years, I got my Geography degree and learned some techniques of remote sensing. I have found that both Geography and remote sensing are not new fields in the States. So that's why I have been devoted to the study of GIS- Geography Information System. Because this field is pretty new in the States . After that, I found job in GIS field. Of Course, if I looked for a job as an EE major, I could get better pay and also it is easy to find jobs. Maybe I earn less than an EE major student. But I like my job. I like it anyway. So I don't have any regrets (Luke).

As for academic concerns, I did switch my major from English to accounting. And then ended up in public administration . It was a big change. But I didn't worry about it too much. Because my language background, I could easily grasp whatever I learned from the classes and caught up with others (Wanda).

Academic concerns: Actually, I don't have many backgrounds in science. But I was switching from international relations to computer science. It was hard. It was very difficult at the beginning. Because I had to go back to some undergraduate classes in mathematics or information something like that. At the beginning, it was very hard. But later, gradually I got used to it. The situation just came better. I have already finished my master programs (Mark).

Henry, Larry and Luke indicated that their experiences with Canadian or American professors were different from those with professors in China:

Professors are always encouraged us to discuss with them. And sometimes we can freely discuss with the issues related to the classes during the courses. And sometimes professors help us to solve the problems. In China, there are so many students. The universities are not so many enough for students. Professors can not pay attention to all the students esp. during the lectures. Students have few opportunities to exchange ideas with their professors. Students can not easily get enough information from professors in China (Henry).

I think that professors in Canada give students more freedom: let them to do what they want to. As to supervisor, they just give guidance. In China, the professors I mean the supervisors assign projects to each student. And students are trying to finish their projects. In Canada, students have the freedom to select what areas they want to develop. I like this way. I like the freedom-academic freedom. Professors in Canada encourage students to be more creative. They set no limitations to students to develop their interested projects (Larry).

Professors here are pretty helpful all the time. If you have questions to ask them, they are always trying to help you (Luke).

Since Larry had experienced the academic difference in small and large universities, he said:

In terms of the styles of lectures, in the smaller size university, you could get more attention from professors. But in larger university, you were just one of the numbers of those students. For example, in one of the graduate courses which I attended in University of Toronto, there was 100 graduate students in class. So the professors didn't know individual student very much. They only knew the number. Another thing, let me think, for example, University of Toronto has a very large library, the third large university's library in North America. So you can get many useful information. It is very easy for you to get latest information. But in a smaller university, it is difficult. I think that as to PhD level the situation might be different. In each group, right? There are only few PhD students. Graduate students could get a lot of attention. As to PhD students, in your group, your thesis supervisor maybe have only 2 or 3 PhD students at the same time, or sometimes only 1 PhD student, 2 master students. Each student would get enough attention. But if graduate students attend some courses which contain over 100 students. It is impossible to get enough guidance (Larry).

Strategies to Deal with their Academic Fields

When responding to the question of a typical day as a student in the United States of America or in Canada, or their feelings of being a student in the United States of America or in

Canada, the six participants emphasized that they were studying hard to fulfill the degree requirements in their academic fields:

Generally speaking, I get up and then take courses. I have no classes in the afternoon and I usually go to the library. Sometimes I finish the assignments as a teaching assistant. I usually go to exercises twice a week, such as playing basket balls, go to swimming etc.. Generally speaking, I go to the library or stay at home during the evening. I think that I feel pretty good till now. The university pays attention to individual student's ideas (Henry).

Actually it is pretty tough in studying here. I spent a lot of time studying. And I do a lot of stuff here. I didn't do them in China. Because my parents or whatever did them for me. I didn't do it by myself. Besides my studying, I watch TV, talk to my roommates to practice my English. Actually, I talk to my roommates a lot. Actually, I only take two courses this term-my last two courses in my master degree. But anyway, I still keep busy. I spend a lot of time studying. When I go home, I watch TV. Sometimes I go to church talking with people around. Sometimes I go to clubs with my friends (Charles).

It is not easy to be a graduate student in Canada, especially you want to be a top one. During a typical study day, I spent most time studying, for instance, taking classes, studying at home on my own, doing homework at lab, asking questions (Larry).

No time. Even I had no daytime and nighttime. I just worked till so tired then slept maybe the whole daytime and then went to labs again. I usually got up. If there were some classes on the schedules, I must went to classes. Maybe I spent some times working in the restaurant too. Then I did some homework depending on when I finished. I usually worked in a restaurant or in the labs. I usually watched TV while I was eating. I lived in a house which had six students from China. We were all single by living there. We were happy. Sometimes we traveled to outside together (Luke).

It was a very long time ago. I still remember it was a kind of boring. It was hard. You just went to schools. We usually had classes in the morning. And it depended on how many classes you registered. Basically, I had classes all day long. Also, sometimes you had to support yourself. You had to work between the classes' breaks or in the evening. For me the typical day is that: I usually got up in the morning at 8:00 O'clock, then went to classes at 8:30 am , probably had class to 10:00 O'clock. Then I worked for a school cafeteria for about two hours between 11:00 am to 1:00 pm. Maybe another class was in the afternoon 2:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m. or 2:00 pm to 4:00 p.m.. Then I went home to work in a restaurant as a waitress in the evening. That was my typical day. I had been doing about that for two or three years. It depend on visa type you held. My husband's visa was J-1 in America. I was J-2. J-2 was allowed to work. Some visa allowed to work on campus. Some allowed to work off campus. So I could work either on and off campus. So I had been working to support myself when I was a student. You had to support yourself. When I got here, we almost had nothing. My husband

was here, but he worked in a school too. So that's why we made our tuition and made our living as we worked as night time or during classes' break time (Wanda).

O.K. I think that most of the time are O.K.. I think that it is pleasant. And also the student life was very busy, some pressure, you know, O.K. usually, for Chinese students, they take a lot of courses, as many as they can. Because in my school, if you take more than four classes, you just pay the tuition for four. If you take five courses, you get one course for free. Right? It was very hard, I think. Take five courses or even six courses in one semester, so a student day was very busy here. For the whole day, you go to this class and that class, then you go to the library for one hour or half an hour you go to other class. The courses for graduate students usually operated at night. You know, most of the students have jobs. We had courses from the afternoon till the night. Even we don't have classes in the morning, we usually go to the libraries. We meet with classmates. We discuss about topics and homework. In the afternoon, we just go to the classes and those courses can last until 9:00 pm in the evening. I did some part-time jobs at the same time. Most of the students got part-time jobs here. I have been teaching English in our Chinese community school: to Chinese immigrants. And also, I worked in some restaurants for the weekends (Mark).

The Perception of Differences between Science and Non-science Majors

In China, there are a lot of differences between science and non-science majors and Chinese pay much more attention to science majors than non-science majors. The six participants didn't see many differences between science and non-science majors in North America. Henry even thinks that to learn mathematics equals to learn a foreign language:

Since I am taking some courses in Economics. I think that some principles told in Economics department are based on Mathematics. Because before I learned a lot of theories of Mathematics. But here I need to prove those theories. Because Mathematics contains a lot of information . It has modified very quickly. Sometimes I think that to learn mathematics equals to learn a foreign language. I mean if the students do not use the knowledge everyday, they will forget them easily. If you want to become very professional, you have to study almost everyday. Otherwise you will forget some part of your knowledge. Mathematics also contains a lot of definitions. Maybe after four or five years, I will forget the definitions. I need to get over the definitions (Henry).

Charles, Larry and Wanda indicated that they couldn't see the differences between science and non-science majors:

I couldn't tell the differences between science and non-science majors. I majored in Economics in Canada. But Economics also contains knowledge of Mathematics. Sorry, I can't tell the differences (Charles).

As a science major student, Chemical Engineering, the principles and basic knowledge as we told in China are the same as those in Canada. The academic areas are no big differences as a science major in North America. In addition, I can't see the differences between science and non-science majors in Canada (Larry).

I am a non-science major student. I don't think the difference. I don't have to use any science in my graduate study. Because the major limit the study: public administration, truly arts, a lot of administration management classes. I don't have to study any science classes. A lot of factors I select my major:(1) personal interests; (2) which major is easy to get scholarship; (3) after you graduate, which major is easy to find a job and you have to do a lot of research to find out how the job market goes. When I selected the major, I did think about the above elements (Wanda).

Luke and Mark had different points of view. Luke thought that a science major was easier for him in the U.S.A.. Mark, however, indicated that a non-science major was easier for him in the U.S.A.:

As a science major, it was very easy in the States. You just worked a little bit hard, you could get good marks. As a science major, even I needed to submit papers, they were more straightforward. If you can write, you can take a non-science major, even you don't know what you have learned , you could pass. But as a science major, you must know what you were talking or doing. It depends on people's personal abilities (Luke).

I was a non-science major for only a short time-only one semester. I took several classes, not too much. Because my school, you know, is an engineering school. But there are also some non-science majors such as international relations or liberal arts. I think that the classes in non-science majors were very free according to the classes which I had taken. You know, they were easy. For science major, some of them were O.K.. But most of them were difficult. They were different from non-science majors. For me, the classes in science major are difficult than non-science major. It is hard to compare. It is more difficult for the science majors. I think that my experiences for the non-science major, for example: international relations and international economics are easier to me. For the non-science major, you have to read a lot, a lot of essays, books. You have to do a lot of readings. But for the science major, you also have to do a lot of readings. But the more you have to do is the practice (Mark).

The Experiences of the Chinese Graduate Students with Cultural Differences

The third theme focuses on cultural differences. All six participants came to North America after they became adults (at least over 22 years old). They described their experiences of culture in North America and provided many similar features in the areas of: (1) the concerns

before they arrived in North America; (2) the experiences after they arrived in North America; (3) cultural conflicts; (4) strategies to solve cultural conflicts.

The Concerns before They Arrived in North America All six participants indicated their concerns about culture before they arrived in North America. Henry, Charles, Larry and Wanda didn't have too many concerns or didn't know the exact cultural differences before they arrived in North America:

I didn't think so much about this aspect. My friends told me that people in Canada are very acceptable. If you met a stranger in the road, they would say "Hi" to you and maybe talk to you. Because compared with China, there are few people in Canada. So they are more acceptable. So I didn't think too much about this aspect. I didn't worry about this aspect too much (Henry).

O.K. Culture. I didn't think about this before I came to Canada. Just like. I think that because I am a foreign student. I will spend a lot of money studying, and also a lot of time (Charles).

In terms of cultural concerns, at that time, I didn't know what was the difference between the oriental culture and the western culture. At that time I really did not know the difference. I thought that I had to try to adapt well into the Canadian culture after I came to Canada. It was a new culture, new country, new environment. Different culture and different society would come to me (Larry).

Before I arrived, I didn't have any concerns regarding culture (Wanda).

Luke and Mark provided their concerns about culture before they arrived in United States of America in detail based on the situation at the time when they left China. Luke came to the U.S.A. about 18 years ago. Mark had to deal with a lot of Americans in his daily work at Chinese Academy of Sciences in China:

It was about 16, 17 or 18 years ago. At that time, China had a very good relationship with U.S.A.. China was just opening to outside world. The media always said good words about the situations in U.S.A.. There were almost no bad comments. So people only thought that U.S.A. was a good place at that time. It was as a kind of perfect place. You needn't to worry about anything. So I didn't have anything to worry about before I came to the States (Luke).

There were too many concerns. Actually, the western and eastern cultures are totally different. Not totally, but very different. I got to know something about the western culture before I came here through my work, you know, through the movies something like that. I think that I just come here, I can find more real culture here. Americans culture, something are the same as what I thought. But something are very different (Mark).

The Experiences after They Arrived in North America

All six participants had a lot of actual cultural experiences in North America. They provided those experiences from different angles. Each of the six participants gave some indications of the custom, life styles, values:

In China, people mainly use cash. But here, people use credit cards. I applied one and it is very useful. Because here a lot of coins, it is not easier for carry. But in China, you know, the money are paper (Henry).

My roommates, they just want to have funs. It depends on different life and attitudes. Right? Now I want to go on to the future. But to them, it is different. They just want to enjoy, enjoy whenever they want. So that's different. Actually, I just know that local people like to drink too much. Most of them are big drinkers. That made me shocked. And their life styles are more blind. The people are not working as busy as those in China. You know, because they have sound welfare system. They do not worry about their future too much. So that is maybe the reason (Charles).

It's hard to say. I still don't get so deep into American culture. For example, Americans like to go bars. I still don't like it. Sometimes I have no choices just go outside for social purposes with Americans. I still can not adapt well into American culture. Even before I came to U.S.A., I have different value concepts like the time. I remember in China if you helped somebody, we spent a lot of time to do meaningless thing, Chinese didn't think that it was a big issue, right? You really care about money, material, foods. That means help. Now I think that time is most important thing. This is an American way. Time is time. Even if I enjoy sleep, I have nothing to do, it is my time. That is quite different from the Chinese way. I like the U.S. way (Luke).

As to the life styles, Americans like to spend more money than they earned. For example, they made 10 dollars, they spent 20 dollars. But Chinese try to save money. They don't like to spend if they don't think that it is necessary. Chinese don't spend money easily. They try to save money. I think that it is the big difference. Americans borrow money. You know, credit cards, they use credit cards and end up in debt. They live on borrowing money from either people or bank. You know the credit cards, you can still spend, you don't have to pay for it. Americans end up in debt. I think that's the way they usually do it. Chinese don't do that. If Chinese made 10 dollars, they only spent 5 or 8 dollars. values? Different people have different ideas to values. I think that

the first thing for Americans probably is freedom. Maybe they think that freedom is very important in their lives. Maybe it is different from Chinese. If you look at nowadays' China, they just want the money. Right? People in China just want to make money (Wanda).

All participants but Charles mentioned that Americans and Canadians are very nice and kind:

People in Canada are very nice. My Canadian roommates are very nice. We helped a lot among each other. So I am not afraid at all. Sometimes I suggest my Chinese friends to make friends with foreign people. I think that foreign students are very nice, and you can learn from each other a lot (Henry).

People in Canada are friendly. I enjoy the freedom and good quality of life in Canada. Friendly people, better social benefits and working environment are the other reasons that I settle down here (Larry).

Americans are kind. I remember when I was a master student, my colleagues were all very kind to help me. It reminds me of one of my classmates in my group, he was very kind to me. When I learned how to drive, he used his car to take me to the countryside to drive around (Luke).

Americans are nice. American students, American teachers or professors usually invited us to their homes. I remember when I was a student here about 14 years ago, one of my professors invited my husband and I to his house for Thanksgiving dinner (Wanda)

People are very polite among each other here especially in the public areas. Right? For example, in the subway, not like in China, because in China there are too many people there. I think that in China the population is huge. Right? In China, people they are friendly in a small group: friends' groups, family groups. You know, that's different. Right? I have found that here people are very polite to the strangers. Right? I think that this aspect Chinese culture should improve. In China, people are very friendly to the people you know. Right? Maybe before the Cultural Revolution, before the culture was destroyed by Mao Zedong (The founder of People's Republic of China and he was the first president of People's Republic of China). The situation was different. But we don't have such experiences. Right? So we are the generations after the Cultural Revolution. So that is different. Actually, I think that American values are going into our Chinese values. You know, after China opened the door to the outside world, after the reform. I think that the values for your life, you know, right? Everybody wants to make a better life (Mark).

Henry and Larry seemed to have opposite views to the Canadians:

I think that the most obvious characteristics is the people here do not like to compete among each other. I think that they believe in natural development (Henry).

I think that most people in Canada are very aggressive. They are friendly. They like to develop professional relationship with colleagues (Larry).

Larry, Luke and Charles all used “straight-forward” to describe Canadians and

Americans:

Canadians are more straight-forward. Even when they talk about something, they are more straight- forward than Asian people. When Chinese people said to you about something, sometimes you have to think about what they mean. Most Canadians are very positive and more straight-forward. I like this way. I remember another thing now. When I was in New Brunswick, I was invited to a family. And the next day I dropped a book in their mailbox for thanks. But when they received it, they were not very happy. They told me why didn't you come to inside to send that book. But I didn't want to disturb them. They might thought that I didn't respect them very much (Larry).

At least, I think that Americans are straight-forward. I didn't worry about what they were going to say. There is no need to worry about personal relationships. If people liked to be friends, they could be friends. If you didn't like to be friends, that was O.K.. Even in China, I liked it I would say I liked it. I didn't like it. I would say that I didn't like it. I just didn't know how to pretend to say something I really didn't feel that way. That's why what I mean in the States is much easier to live than in China. If I asked some helps from others, they said to me “ No, I am busy.” or something like that: they can't do that. I feel it understandable (Luke).

Canadians are straight-forward. Some of Chinese people are not very straight-forward. In my point, I don't like Chinese style. Because it lacks of efficiency. But I can't change them in China even here when I communicate with Chinese. Maybe I could change my life circles here. So the situations might be different. Right? Because there are different people in this circle. I hope so (Charles).

Larry, Luke, Wanda emphasized that freedom was an obvious characteristic of culture in North America:

I think that professors in Canada give students more freedom: let them to do what they want to. As to supervisor, they just give guidance. In China, the professors I mean the supervisors assign projects to each student. And students are trying to finish their projects. In North America, students have the freedom to select what areas they want to develop. I like this way. I like the freedom-academic freedom. Professors in North America encourage students to be more creative. They set no limitations to students to develop their interested projects. I think that freedom is an important aspect of Canadian culture (Larry).

I still think that in the States, you can enjoy freedom. You don't need to feel afraid of saying something to hurt others. Here, Americans respect personal values. Students have

much freedom. Even people have the freedom to make troubles to the government. But I guess in China, the government didn't like this way. One thing I like here is a kind of project from elementary schools to universities. That means you need independent. You need to make something. You need to do something. In China, students were just strictly followed by the courses' outline. You followed all the directions by the teachers (Luke).

I think that the first thing for Americans probably is freedom. Maybe they think that freedom is very important in their lives (Wanda).

Luke indicated that his experiences of life in the United States of America were different from the way the media in China portrayed it:

Before I came to the States, I heard that "U.S.A. is a heaven for kids and young people; but U.S.A. is a hell for old people." So after I came to the States, I asked Americans about the situations of senior citizens. I thought that media in China didn't describe the truth on this issue. But through my observation, I think that senior citizens enjoy their lives in the States. They have a lot fun and very happy. When I was in China, I thought that government didn't pay much attention to protect senior citizens. But the media tried to force the kids to respect old people based on Chinese traditional culture. Actually, I didn't see a lot of young people really respect old people. I have to say that the situation was even worse than that in the States. I thought that the reason was that the media pushed the younger generations to do things. Sometimes the results were not good (Luke).

Luke and Mark had different views about family-one of the cultural aspects in the United States of America:

Besides, the culture emphasized family oriented when I was in China. But in the States, I think that the culture has been not so focused on family. Personally, I prefer the American way (Luke).

Before I came to the States, I thought that family was not important to Americans. I mean the family relationships. After I came here, I changed my mind through my experiences. I think that family relationships and friendships are also very important here. People here pay a lot attention to their families and build up friend relationships. I think that this is different from what I thought (Mark).

Charles described an important issue of cultural experiences in Canada:

My life here tells me to see the world from a different perspective. Because when I was in China, I thought the study looked like this in my mind. I am a kind of by-standers here. Because my life here is much worse than that in China. So I can experience different tastes of life. I can understand some poor people. I want to know what they

think about things. When I was in China, I couldn't understand them. I just looked at them. When I lived here for some times, I can understand people on tight budgets. I think that it is useful cultural experience (Charles).

Henry, Larry and Luke all indicated that not only Americans but also Canadians prefer respect for people's personal privacy:

In China, people are more social, but in Canada, people are more personal. No one really want to know what is going on towards others' personal world. In China, it seems that everyone know what is going on about other people's personal world (Henry).

In Canada, although people are more friendly, they are more individuals. They don't want others to interfere their personal affairs. My supervisor was my supervisor. He invited me to attend parties as my supervisor but not as a friend. I mean he was only my supervisor (Larry).

Another thing, I don't have any interest in knowing others' private things unless they like to tell me after I came to the States. When you do something, you must keep social distance. When you need something or touch something, you must slowly ask first and get permission and then you can use them. But when I was in China at least with friends, we could do something without asking for permission. In the States, even so close, Americans even very close friends, even a small thing, you must ask "Can I, Could I, Do you mind....." Gradually, I am used to this way. At the beginning, I thought it was a kind of wasting time by this politeness (Luke).

Charles, Larry, Luke pointed out that the working relationship in China was more complicated than that in Canada and the U.S.A.:

The working relationship in China is more complicated than that of Canada due to the Chinese culture. Some of Chinese people are not very straightforward (Charles).

Because I get used to the culture and environment here. I like here. If I went back to China, it would be take me a lot of time. It would be very frustrated. I have to establish the relationship, establish the research, everything. I have been out of the system in China for too long time. The working relationships in China are more complicated than that in Canada. I do not want to waste time. I want to focus on my academic career (Larry).

I think that it is much easier for me to work in the States. Because before when I worked in China, I guess I had a lot of problems such as personal relationships among people, social relationships. It seemed that both colleagues and leaders were always having problems among each other. I really had no ability to deal with that. I mean there are more complicated personal relationships in China than that in the U.S.A. (Luke).

Luke and Wanda saw food as one of the aspects of culture in the United States of America:

Culture is not easy to adapt like the food, Hamburger, Pizza. They were good at the beginning. But now I can't eat any of them unless I am really hungry. I don't like them (Luke).

Well, I have been living in America for at least ten years. The big difference regarding culture is the food, I think. It takes a lot of time to cook our Asian food. Americans like fast food. I think that's the big cultural difference. So I think that kids who grown up here like American fast food better than Chinese traditional food (Wanda).

Wanda noted some cultural differences in her job:

Let me think, you know, in my work place, sometimes, you may have some cultural conflicts with your manager regarding maybe some job related to issues or items. Yeah. It does have. You know, you have different opinions regarding work issues. We do have conflicts. We try to solve them. One of the example is that when I worked in a company before, we worked as a team. It was a software company. We had developers, testers, and project manager. Sometimes the tester couldn't get along with the developer. Because the tester's job was to find the bugs in the program they wrote. So sometimes when you found bugs, you reported them to the team esp. to the project manager. The developer sometimes was very upset. So there was always some conflicts between the developer and the tester. Because tester like checking the job, check the work. If they did good jobs, there should be no bugs. Sometimes the developer, I don't know, was very upset. So once I had the problems with one of the developers. I had to talk to the project manager in order to tell the developer what I was thinking and tried to solve the issue. So even we solved the issue, I still felt uncomfortable working with that developer. So I requested to transfer to other different section like different teams. So I went to different team working with different people. That is one of the examples happened in my job related situation. Maybe because I am not ABC (American Born Chinese). Maybe because the combination of my background, I am not sure. And also maybe because of this kind of job, I am not quite sure (Wanda).

Larry attributed the fact that he has no real Canadian friends, although he has lived in Canada for at least ten years, to cultural differences:

Cultural differences. I feel uncomfortable by making with Canadian friends. We don't want to spend a lot of time trying to understand each other. Maybe due to the different personalities, I am not sure. For example, the rate of divorce is much higher in Canada than that in China. I think that it is difficult to make sincere friends in Canada. Even I have lived in Canada for ten years, I still have no Canadian friends. I don't want to spend time. I still think that it is difficult for us to understand each other due to the cultural differences. No one want to spend time on this issue (Larry).

All six participants provided insights into how they spend the American or Canadian holidays:

To be honest with you, I haven't enjoyed Canadian holidays quite well. When I met Canadian holidays, I usually had a good rest (Henry).

I attended Thanksgiving last year. I think that it is kind of family meeting to celebrate . It has the same essence as Chinese holidays. I think that holidays have the same essences. People just get around, they celebrate, they communicate, so just like that. Actually I am not local. So that's not my things. That's not my holidays. So I am just like a by- stander. I just like to watch- to see what is going on. So I am not that involved, actually. When I meet Chinese holidays, actually, I just call home. I have nothing special to do on Chinese New Year. Because I don't have families around . So on holidays I am alone. That is kind of meaningless. Actually, I am used to this kind of situation. Because it depend on those people around you are celebrating. So that's not the case. But I am easy- going. I am not kind of hard and so serious to those holidays. So I am used to this kind of situation (Charles).

When we celebrate holidays like Christmas, we Chinese celebrate like Chinese Christmas. I am still pretty Chinese (Larry).

I didn't think I have many holidays at that time. The first two years, I was here as single. My family was in China. The first two years was pretty tough. I had to catch up the classes to transfer my major. Besides, I tired to make some money for one hour or one day per week something like that. I didn't have much fun except the people of school and church organized some activities. So I went with them. I just spent my time studying and working (Luke).

Well, when I was in America for the first couple years, we didn't celebrate much about American holidays. American students, American teachers or professors usually invited us to their homes. I remember when I was a student here about 14 years ago, one of my professors invited my husband and I to his house for Thanksgiving dinner. We Chinese didn't celebrate this kind of holidays. But things have been changed. Right now, after many years, we have families and kids here. We have been adapted into American culture. We start celebrations such as Thanksgiving, Halloween, and especially Christmas. We celebrate not exactly the same way as Americans do. It is a little bit different. For example, Thanksgiving, Americans usually eat Turkeys. We Chinese usually do not eat. We made some Chinese food. For Christmas, we also cook Chinese food. We don't cook American food. We also buy presents for people who open them up as Christmas eve. There are different ways we Chinese celebrate the American holidays (Wanda).

American holidays, sometimes I go to the Time Square. I go to different ceremonies. In New York, if you want to try different food, you can find them immediately. Right? If you want to go to parties, there are a lot of parties everyday. If you want to see a

movie, you want to see a opera, it is very easy for you to spend your time, to kill your time (Mark).

Charles, Larry and Luke took part in the activities held by church but for different

reasons:

If you go to church, you can enjoy all kinds of ceremonies and some meetings on Sunday. Actually, why I go to church, it is not for understanding Canadian culture. It is not for the religion. I do not believe in religion. I just want to get a chance to improve my spoken English. That's my point (Charles).

When I was in New Brunswick, I spent some times in church. The people in church were very nice. They invited us to church and gave us ride to send us back home. They prepared food. They were very nice. I attended those activities just for fun. I was curious at that time. Because in China people thought religion was not a good thing. So I just wanted to know what was going on there. I didn't believe in any religion (Larry).

I do not believe in any religion. I don't care about that. I felt pretty good to attend activities held by church. I attended Bible study. I think that those principles from Bible are the same as those ones advocated by the Chinese government: such as trying to help each other etc.. I haven't believed in any religion till now. Because the people of church always asked me to go, if I didn't go, it seemed that I was not very polite (Luke).

Larry and Wanda described their cultural experiences from an academic point of view:

It reminds me that in my PhD study, my supervisor put a very high standard and requirements towards me. He was very special, unique person. He had a very strange personality. I had to learn how to become more aggressive to deal with him. I even argued with him a lot to write my PhD thesis. I have to say I fight with him to my PhD thesis. I am not sure that this due to the cultural differences. I don't like aggressive personality. But I have to learn how to be more aggressive in order to get used to Canadian culture. If you were not very aggressive, you would not be easily adapted into the Canadian culture (Larry).

The American students are more active in classes than Asian students. The students from China are trained just to listen, not express themselves as American students do. But I learned, you know, and tried to be used to this custom, so I became very active too (Wanda).

Cultural Conflicts

The six participants indicated some cultural conflicts in detail. It seems that no one had met big cultural conflicts:

There is no big conflict. But I remember once when I was walking on the street, several kids threw snow balls to me. I have some conflicts among people surrounded me due to the cultural differences (Henry).

Most Canadian guys they almost know nothing about China. So their attitudes towards China always make me uncomfortable. That's the conflict. As to the living habits, there is no big deal. We can comprise. So? Because people in North America are self-centered. They do not care about the rest of the world. They know almost nothing about the current China. They know something happened in the past. And some of them are curious about China. China is mysterious in their minds. They have all kinds of questions. And some of them just do not respect China so well. But their understanding of China is so limited. When I explain to them the real situation China is, sometimes they all get confused. You know what, when I say China like this, etc., they don't believe in me or they believe it, but they got confused. Because they don't like China, something like that. They think that if China catches up, they will lose the feeling of superiority. So that's why I don't like them (Charles).

I did meet some cultural conflicts. It reminds me that in my PhD study, my supervisor put a very high standards and requirements towards me. He was very special, unique person. He had a very strange personality. I had to learn how to become more aggressive to deal with him. I even argued with him a lot to write my PhD thesis. I have to say I fight with him to my PhD thesis. I am not sure that this due to the cultural differences. I don't like aggressive personality. But I have to learn how to be more aggressive in order to get used to Canadian culture. If you were not very aggressive, you would not be easily adapted into the Canadian culture (Larry).

Yeah. I thought about one thing. It was about the traffic. The walking people should press the button to wait for going across the street. But when I was in China, there were the vehicles waiting for walking people. At the beginning, I was not so used to the American way. Then I thought that because there was more walking people than the vehicles on the street when I was in China. But in the States, there has been much more vehicles than the walking people on the street. Based on the cultural difference and the different situations, the majority was to be considered firstly. Because this way can increase the efficiency (Luke).

Well, I have already forgotten all the conflicts, since I have been here for so long. Let me think, you know, in my work place, sometimes, you may have some conflicts with your manager regarding maybe some job related to issues or items. Yeah. It does have. You know, you have different opinions regarding work issues. We do have conflicts. We try to solve them. One of the example is that when I worked in a company before, we worked as a team. It was a software company. We had developers, testers, and project manager. Sometimes the tester couldn't get along with the developer. Because the tester's job was to find the bugs in the program they wrote. So sometimes when you found bugs, you reported them to the team esp. to the project manager. The developer sometimes was very upset. So there was always some conflicts between the developer and the tester. Because tester like checking the

job, check the work. If they did good jobs, there should be no bugs. Sometimes the developer, I don't know, was very upset. So once I had the problems with one of the developers. I had to talk to the project manager in order to tell the developer what I was thinking and tried to solve the issue. So even we solved the issue, I still felt uncomfortable working with that developer. So I requested to transfer to other different section like different teams. So I went to different team working with different people. That is one of the examples happened in my job related situation. Maybe because I am not ABC (American Born Chinese). Maybe because the combination of my background, I am not sure. And also maybe because of this kind of job, I am not quite sure (Wanda).

You know, I have found that the Chinese are very rash especially in some public areas. You know, they don't care about the others too much. Americans are different. But actually, those Chinese are not pure Chinese. They come from Guangdong Province. They come from small fish villages. They are immigrants. They are decedents of the first groups of Chinese who came to America to build the railroads, railways. Those Chinese are different from people coming from big cities. In New York, in China town, there are many this kind of people. They always speak Cantonese. They don't speak English. They don't speak Mandarin. Their culture is a kind of Chinese culture. They just don't pay too much attention to others. The main reason is the cultural differences. They are different Chinese from us. Right ? It's not discrimination. Actually, those people are not well-educated people. They are not intellectuals. Their fathers' fathers came here. So they can immigrant to America. But from appearance, Americans see no differences between us and them (Mark).

Strategies to Solve Cultural Conflicts

The six participants met cultural conflicts more or less when studying and working in North America. It seems that everyone resolved their cultural conflicts in an appropriate way:

Sometimes some misunderstanding occurred. But when we talked to each other, there would be no problem (Henry).

Actually, Canadians and we Chinese respect our differences. Because we have different cultural backgrounds. When the conflicts come up, maybe we talk. So we try to understand the differences. So if you don't mean to offend, so everything is O.K.. If misunderstanding occurs, we do respect the differences between cultures (Charles).

I had to learn how to become more aggressive to deal with him. I even argued with him a lot to write my PhD thesis. I have to say I fight with him to my PhD thesis. I am not sure that this due to the cultural differences. I don't like aggressive personality. But I have to learn how to be more aggressive in order to get used to Canadian culture. If you were not very aggressive, you would not be easily adapted into the Canadian culture (Larry).

I just tried to stand in Americans' points of view and tried to understand them. I tried to

avoid by meeting these conflicts. I mean I didn't fit into American culture although I have been lived here for 18 years (Luke).

I had to talk to the project manager in order to tell the developer what I was thinking and tried to solve the issue. So even we solved the issue, I still felt uncomfortable working with that developer. So I requested to transfer to other different section like different teams. So I went to different team working with different people. That is one of the examples happened in my job related situation. Maybe because I am not ABC (American Born Chinese). Maybe because the combination of my background, I am not sure. And also maybe because of this kind of job, I am not quite sure. Whenever we had meetings, whenever I bought the issues the bugs we found during our testing, he was very defensive. You know what I mean, he was very defensive. He said: "well, maybe they are not real bugs." or whatever. He was very defensive and took it personally. So that made me uncomfortable. So that's why I requested to transfer to different section (Wanda).

Till now, I didn't have big conflicts with Americans. Because I didn't make a lot of American friends in New York. And I have been living by myself. Even when I go outside to work, I have no further communications with Americans. My former American friends are not living in New York. I think that if I met conflict, I just tried to communicate with each other and tried to understand each other (Mark).

The Job Related Experiences of Chinese Graduate Students in North America

The fourth theme centers on the job related experiences of Chinese graduate students in North America. Among the six participants, Larry, Luke, Wanda and Mark all have many years of work experience while Henry as a new graduate student, and Charles because he hasn't yet obtained his Master degree, couldn't find jobs in Canada. Larry, Luke, Wanda and Mark talking about their job related experiences focused on: (1) motivations for working in North America; (2) approaches of how to find jobs; (3) actual experiences of finding jobs.

Motivations for Working in North America

Larry, Luke, Wanda and Mark were very clear in their minds about their motivation for working in North America. They spoke freely about this:

The motivation for working in Canada is that I enjoy the freedom and good quality of life in Canada. Friendly people, better social benefits and working environment are the other reasons that I settle down here (Larry).

It is a kind of hard to go back to China. I need to survive. I need to make a living. I need to find a job. That's why I started to find a job in the States instead of going back to China. But now I think that it is much easier for me to work in the States. Because before when I worked in China, I guess I had a lot of problems such as personal relationships among people, social relationships. It seemed that both colleagues and leaders were always having problems among each other. I really had no ability to deal with that. I mean there are more complicated personal relationships in China than that in the U.S.A. (Luke).

At present, my motivation is to support my family. Eventually, support my children so that they can go to college and finish their education and get a good job (Wanda).

First, you know, working in another country is not an easy thing. But many friends told me that it was possible. Right ? I think it is very challenging. And also, I think that if I can take a job here, you know, it is different from the situation in China. In China, you must be on the top level, you can live a better life, you can live a good life. But here, I mean in the States, if you can find a job, you can have a roof to cover you. You know, everything. You don't need to worry too much about life, or something like that. Even if I go back to China, the study and working experience can enforce my background, anyway (Mark).

Approaches of Finding Jobs

Larry, Luke and Wanda have lived in North America for many years and provided the following approaches to finding jobs:

I think that the important thing is to establish the working relationship. The working relationship is very important. For example, if a student get his or her master degree, he or she wants to work in a job market. The couple ways he or she can find jobs. Read the job posting there, think that he or she could fit the most suitable position. For any jobs, there are a lot of people who are qualified. So I think that the working relationship is very important. Chinese graduate students have to get to know their classmates, their professors and those people from industry. If a student's supervisor or some other professors have good connections with industry, then they will give the student good advices and recommend him or her. That's a good way. In addition, Chinese graduate students establish your own relationship. For example, the classmates, they graduated earlier. They have already got the jobs. If there are some openings there, they can tell you. They can say good words for you. Then maybe it is a good chance for you to get a job (Larry).

It was very slow of economy in the States when I tried to find jobs. Then I asked my lab manager to help me to revise the resume. I didn't get any relationship from people who can introduce me to find jobs. It was really pure by myself. I looked for the job listing and then I sent my resume and then I got the interview offer (Luke).

Well, I think that finding a job is difficult. But you must get yourself be ready. When you are ready, actually the job is there. When I graduated from the university, it was not so difficult for me to find jobs. I simply applied for a job based on my background in accounting. I found my job only by myself (Wanda).

Mark has just started to look for a decent job in the United States of America. He gave a new approach:

Here, if you want to find jobs, sometimes, you have to do something as volunteers. I think that volunteers here are quite different from China. They are very complicated. I mean I tried to do some volunteer jobs. But, later, I think the volunteer jobs are good opportunities for you to learn something firstly. Second, to build some working relationships. For example, if you can make a very good relationship there, right? Some people like you or some supervisors like you, once there are vacancies, you can be filled, you can replace that. You know, you can be filled in those vacancies. As volunteers, we get no pay. So this is difficult, I think , you know, because at the beginning, you never know if you can be selected later. Maybe you can work there for two or three months without any payment. But I think you need to be very skillful. You need to pay much attention when you do this kind of job, volunteer jobs. Maybe you will get kind of opportunity for this kind of job (Mark).

Actual Experience of Finding Jobs

Larry and Wanda switched several jobs. Luke had been working at his first job; Mark was working as a part-time employee and Henry and Charles had been working as teaching assistants in Canada:

Sometimes I finish the assignments as a teaching assistant and mark the assignments of the undergraduate students in Canada (Henry).

The reason why I come to the professors for help is that I have to finish my master graduation paper and ask the questions towards my courses. I have to work as a teaching assistant with them. That's true they give me guidance. I mean they give me help about my academic fields and my working related issues. That's all I got from those professors. (Charles).

As the first job, I knew the vice-president of that company. We met before in a conference. We knew each other a little bit. When I graduated, I wrote him a letter. He said that it was O.K. It was a opening. Why not come to an interview? Then I went to interview, then I got the offer. The second job, there were job postings there. So I applied. I think that possibly I was the best candidate among others. So I got the job. I didn't get any assistance from others this time (Larry).

My first job is my current job. I have been working for this job since I got the offer. They gave me a call: “Do you like coming for interview?” It was a common interview. We just talked freely such as “what kinds of job I am interested in?” It was a really informal talk. I thought it was very easy (Luke).

When I graduated from the university, it was not so difficult for me to find jobs. I simply applied for a job based on my background in accounting. Then I got my first job in Washington State. After I got the job, I worked for two years. Then I applied for different jobs also working in Washington State. It was easy for you to find the first job. Then you could keep move on the second job, the third job..... So I switched to another job-my current job which is my third job in the States. My experiences overall is you have to be qualified firstly. For each job, they have requirements such as degree and certain years’ working experiences. If you are qualified, you can get the job. So overall experience is also depending on economy, on what you study. And I think that timing is very important. (Wanda).

I did some volunteers’ jobs. But I don’t like them. I think that if I do this kind of jobs, I rather go back to China. I did some part-time jobs at the same time. Most of the students got part-time jobs here. I have been teaching English in our Chinese community school: to Chinese immigrants. And also, I worked in some restaurants for the weekends (Mark).

The Advantages of a North American Education for China

The fifth theme encapsulates the advantages of a North American education for China.

All six participants shared their experiences on this aspect through the following: (1) rewarding aspects of education in North America; (2) frustrating aspects of education in North America; (3) the adaptable or useful aspects of education in North America to a Chinese setting.

Rewarding Aspects of Education in North America

All six participants seem to think that the higher education in North America is a little bit better than that in China. They described their experiences of the rewarding aspects of education in North America:

When I took the Bachelor degree in China as a undergraduate, I couldn’t take other courses of other majors. But here, as a graduate student, I also can take other courses of other departments. Actually, I am taking some courses in Economics. It is easy for me to learn the relationship between Mathematics and Economics. And it is rewarding (Henry).

Rewarding? Maybe I think, based on my study in Economics, I train the way of my brain works. I mean I can think things in a different way which I used to in China . So I can compare both ways, both eastern ways and western ways. So I think that's the point. And of course I improve my English through my study here .That's very important why I am studying here. That's it (Charles).

Critical and creative thinking, I mean more freedom to do critical and creative thinking. Due to the Canadian culture, professors here are more open-minded. They set no limitation for students to do critical and creative thinking. The educational system in Canada advocates individual's progress (Larry).

It is much easier to get a degree in the States. Actually, after I got Bachelor Degree from Qinghua University, I applied master degree at Beijing University in Geography department. I didn't get it. I could easily get offers in the States. I think that it is pretty easier to get degrees here. There are good labs in the States. When I learned remote sensing, there were very good labs at the university. I found that each graduate student had the key. All the equipments were there. So you just self-checked in and checked out, no clerk, or anyone to look after you. Also the libraries were open. I think that libraries really helped us a lot. When I was in China, the machine in the labs, you even could not touch them. The people in the university were scared of broken or something like that. Here, maybe in the midnight, you were in the lab by yourself. You felt free to use anything in the labs (Luke).

My education in public administration does help me to get my job and also helped me through several promotions. It did help me to compete among other candidates when we have job openings. Basically, I think that all the graduate schools, they usually give lectures. During the lectures, professors give you assignments, homework. I think that the university I went to they emphasized team work. So we had teams. I mean we were always working on different projects. I think this way helped me a lot. All the team members had to contribute some parts of the projects. For one project, each of the team members had to be responsible for a certain part. It combined independent work and team work. I like this way (Wanda).

In education aspect, I think I did learn some American culture and science work. That could be kind of rewarding to myself. I open my eyes. I acquire more knowledge in culture and science which can benefit myself in the future (Mark).

Frustrating Aspects of Education in North America

Since the six participants came from China which has quite a different educational

system from that in North America, they have encountered some frustration. However, two participants, Henry and Luke, indicated that they hadn't experienced the frustrating aspects of education in North America:

I think that I show very positive attitudes towards education in Canada. I do not think that I am discouraged by any aspect of education here. I think that the most frustrating thing is that English. Because sometimes I can not understand people and people can not understand me. As to the education, I think that education here is good. I haven't been frustrated (Henry).

Frustrating. Yeah. Because my native language is not English. So I can't get any involvement which I used to in China. The frustrating I think that is the language limit (Charles).

Language. As a graduate student, you have to write a lot of papers, to do a lot of presentations. I remember to each presentation when I was a graduate student, I usually spent a lot of time to prepare. My language capability was limited, right? I had to spend a lot of time, almost four and five times than native Canadian students (Larry).

Not much. I don't think I have any problems. I think that I have got much respect here compared with the respect I got in China. At least in China, I didn't think that people really respect each other. Many people wished that others were not better than them (Luke).

The most frustrating for me is too many papers: you know, we have term papers, everything. I think that graduate study is mainly focused on, you know, essays, papers. I think that there are too many papers. I can't remember how many papers I wrote for my graduate study. But I would say about 20 or 30 including small papers, essays. We usually had to turn in within one or two days. The professors usually set the deadlines. I think that it is the most frustrating aspect for me. Because in graduate study, you took a lot of classes, right? For example, if you took five classes, you had to turn in at least five papers, sometimes in one or two days. So that's a lot of work. Sometimes I don't think that you can judge people by you know, if they can turn in the projects. So I think that there are maybe cultural differences. In China, we didn't write so many papers as we did here. But here, we did too many papers (Wanda).

Some professors don't take students seriously. For example, they were late for classes. They didn't pay much attention to the students. This is not like China. In China, the professors, the teachers are more responsible. But of course, there are many very good professors. They are very responsible. But there are still some professors who are not qualified, I think. They were late for classes. For two hours' class, they could be late for 40 minutes. Or some professors, they didn't

teach you real things in the classes. You know, they just talked to you, made jokes or something like that. They just taught you little. For example, in my school Java was a very important class for students in computer science. This professor is a very famous professor in my university. But I think that he is famous for getting money from the market. The university relies on him. But when he teaches, he teaches nothing to the students. He just came late for classes and made jokes. He doesn't take the students seriously. In the whole semester, he just teaches us a little thing about Java programs. In most times, he just gives us projects and let us do them. He even doesn't answer questions to students (Mark).

Aspects of Education in North America Adaptable or Useful to a Chinese Setting

China is an ancient civilization, and for over 2,000 years, attitudes toward education were strongly influenced by Confucian philosophy (Chen, 2001). Today, however, many people regard higher education in North America as the most advanced one. The participants provided their ideas about this:

I think that in the future, Chinese government should try to establish more and more high schools and universities. If the number of high schools and universities were enough to hold so many students, there would be much more chances to students to show themselves. And there would be much more opportunities to provide to exchange ideas among students to students and professors to students. It can improve the understanding of students' majors very quickly. They are doing that thing now. Yeah. Yeah. In China, one class in high school contains even more than 80 students. But here I think that the maximum is 30. I am not so sure. I am interested in this kind of issue. I discussed with some of my foreign friends . So I learn from them. Normally, it contains more than 50, 60, two times of 50 or 60. Because my high school are the best high school in Hei Longjiang. All the students want to study in this high school in order to pass the examinations to enter to university (Henry).

I think that most of them are adaptable to a Chinese setting. Because in China, we also learn the theories from the west . So I think there are no barriers between us. Actually, we can pick up everything here and put them into China. And they will work well in my opinion (Charles).

I think that way that they tell the students to think freely. I think that it can work in China. I think that it needs some times. The professors in China should be more open-minded. They should try to encourage students to do more creative thinking. They should give students more freedom. I think that for younger professors in China , they are willing to accept new ideas and they are more open- minded. But for senior professors, they are senior. They are more authoritative. It is not very easy (Larry).

It is really different situation. The major concern is natural resources. U.S.A. has so rich land and it is full of natural resources. Of course, China also has a lot of natural resources. But there are a lot of people, very crowded. That means much more competitions in China. So we blamed that kids lack freedom and insisted that they should have fun and joy. But because there are so many people. People have to “fight” to survive. So that’s why kids must study very hard. There is almost no requirement to judge which students are better. The only way is exams. Even the government said that there were some ways could be put into China, it was hard to carry out in some sense. I think that at least higher education, I mean American higher education is better than that in China. I got my Bachelor degree in China. It was really like American high school. Maybe it was even less freedom than American high school. I see my kids. They have options to select different courses. But in China, it was trained like military units: do whatever the same time and the same thing. That was maybe some purposes. Here, Americans respect personal values. Students have much freedom. Even people have the freedom to make troubles to the government. But I guess in China, the government didn’t like this way. One thing I like here is a kind of project from elementary schools to universities. That means you need independent. You need to make something. You need to do something. In China, students were just strictly followed by the courses’ outline. You followed all the directions by the teachers. I think that China can adopt some parts of this aspect of American education to foster students to be more creative. Maybe the government has already done that (Luke).

I think that in America, the atmosphere of the class is free, very free. People can ask and answer questions any time. In China, we had to raise our hands and waited or let the professors finish their lectures. Here, you can challenge professors and ask them all kinds of questions. I think this aspect is good to Chinese setting. And also is probably the freedom to transfer from university to university, from major to major. It is very easy. In the States, I can change my major ten times. I can transfer among different universities. It is very easy and we have a lot of freedom which we didn’t have in China (Wanda).

There are many things in the States useful or adaptable to a Chinese setting. For example, the way of examination, you know, test or verify the students whether they are qualified or not. There are different ways. Actually, the combination, I mean not only through the examinations, but also through the quiz, the homework, and your performances in the classes. So I think that this is a very good way to test the students whether they are qualified or not. You know, the various ways are to give a student a test. I mean , it is not like that in China. The examination is the most important thing, right? I mean the final and mid-term examinations are very important. Here, the final and mid-term examinations are also important. But there are still many other ways. Just like what I said, the quiz, the homework and the performances and everything, so it is more interesting (Mark).

This chapter presented profiles of the participants and the research findings of the study.

Chapter five presents the interpretation of findings, the conclusions and the recommendations.

Chapter Five:

Interpretation of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

The first section of this chapter discusses the interpretation of findings; the second section draws conclusions for the whole study; the third section presents the recommendations which grow out of the findings of this study.

Interpretation of Findings

This study investigated the lived experiences of six Chinese graduate students in North America. Five themes emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data: (a) the experiences of the Chinese graduate students with language; (b) the Chinese graduate students' academic concerns; (c) the experiences of the Chinese graduate students with cultural differences; (d) the job related experiences of the Chinese graduate students in North America; (e) the advantages of a North American education for China. The following is an analysis of the findings in relation to these five themes.

The Experiences of the Chinese Graduate Students with Language

Analysis of the data revealed that Chinese graduate students have experienced language difficulties in North America. Four participants couldn't understand what people around them were talking about when they arrived in North America during the first couple of months. It seems that they had difficulties communicating with Canadians and Americans. Henry indicated that when he first came to Canada, people couldn't understand him because of his accent. Charles could not say what exactly he wanted to say in class and became less involved in discussions in class. Larry remembered that when professors asked him to write reports, it took him a lot of time to prepare the reports. Luke said that during the first three or four months after

he arrived in the United States of America, he almost couldn't understand any words in the classrooms. This finding is consistent with Feng's finding (1991) that PRC students had serious initial language problems in North America. They have difficulty coping in class, taking notes, understanding English idioms, southern accents, and jokes (p. 14).

The six participants mentioned that they tried their best to improve their English by studying and working in North America. Henry and Charles chose to live with native English speakers. Mark indicated that he improved his English by making American friends while Larry spent a lot of time exposing himself to the English language environment such as communicating with native English speakers. It seems that these participants didn't hesitate to immerse themselves into the English environment. This finding is inconsistent with Feng (1991): "A cycle in language ability and social interaction may exist. PRC students are afraid of being embarrassed because of language problems, so they withdraw from social activities and form their own social community and interact within the community in their native language, Chinese. Their interaction within the Chinese community further hinders their language improvement" (pp. 14-15).

One important finding in this study is that Wanda as an English major student when she came to the U.S.A., had almost no problems communicating with Americans. This was also the case for Mark, who had used a lot of English in his daily work in China. He had worked at the Chinese Academy of Sciences for almost eight years in the international scientific center, an organization responsible for international academic exchange, international academic conferences, conventions and some joint expectations in China. He had no problems with English when he arrived in the U.S.A..

Since the purpose of Asian writing is to show the beauty of words and expressions, Asian students consider writing to be like painting. They spend most of their time selecting words and polishing structures rather than speculating, questioning, and exploring ideas (Wang, Martin and Martin, 2002). American students, on the other hand, have no appreciation of good writing. They read a lot and pick up some information from this paper and some from that paper and put them together and make a conclusion (Wang et al., 2002). Two participants, Larry and Wanda, talked about their concerns about writing English. They noted that as graduate students in North America, they had to write a lot of papers and essays. They had to spend four or five times more than native English speakers to prepare those papers and sometimes became frustrated. This finding is consistent with Wang, Martin and Martin (2002): “such different perspectives on writing cause Asian students difficulty in producing good writings that fit western writing criteria” (p. 99).

Larry said that although he got very high marks in TOEFL and GRE, he still thought that he needed more time to improve his written English. When he first came to Canada, he hardly understood what people were saying. This finding is consistent with the Wan (1999)’s description that although Chinese students can get high scores in TOEFL, it does not necessarily mean that they have good oral and aural communication skills in English (p. 20).

Henry pointed out that in China it is very difficult to learn foreign languages and practice English because people all around speak Chinese. So even if Chinese graduate students know a lot of English words and they know the grammar very well, still when they speak English, people in China can not really understand what’s being said. This is similar to what Wan (1999) indicated, namely, that Chinese students grew up speaking Chinese as their mother tongue, an entirely different language from English (p. 16). Students in China know the grammar and

vocabulary of English, but they are still “deaf and mute” in English. The method of teaching English in China rarely provides students with chances to speak and listen to English in authentic situations (Wan, 1999).

The Chinese Graduate Students’ Academic Concerns

All six participants mentioned that they spent a lot of time studying. Charles said that it was pretty tough studying in Canada while Larry mentioned that it was not easy to be a graduate student in Canada, especially if a Chinese student wanted to be a top student. Larry emphasized that the main concerns of academic fields were how to get high marks and how to write good proposals for a thesis. Chinese graduate students had to work hard in each course in order to get good marks. Luke even had no free time when he was a graduate student in the U.S.A.. He just studied till he became so tired that he slept through the day and then went to labs again. Wanda indicated that studying in the U.S.A. was hard. Mark pointed out that a student’s life was very busy and filled with pressure. The above finding is similar to the descriptions of Feng (1991): “Heavy academic pressure is commonly experienced by international students” (p. 11). The general ideas about the academic concerns of Chinese graduate students seem similar to the description provided by a Chinese graduate student interviewed by Feng (1991): “Many of us study very hard. Many of us go to library working on our assignment or any kind of work. We all are under great academic pressure. We are either sponsored by government or family to study here. If we can’t do well in school, we will feel embarrassed or lose face” (p. 11). The six participants spent time in libraries besides taking classes. This confirmed the conclusions of Upton(1989) and Wan (1999) that Chinese graduate students who end up at American universities are usually very diligent.

Among the participants, Luke was sponsored by the Chinese government. It was the Chinese government that paid him to come to U.S.A. to do the Master degree. The other five participants were self-supported. This finding is the same as Feng (1991):“Chinese graduate students were either supported by government or by their families and generally do quite well academically”(p. 11).

Five participants, Charles excluded, showed favorable attitudes towards education in North America. Henry indicated that, as a mathematics major student in Canada, he could easily get the latest information about mathematics and that it was easier for him to do research here. Larry preferred the academic freedom in Canada. He liked the Canadian professors’ way of teaching and pointed out that professors in Canada encourage students to be more creative and set no limitations on students to develop projects of their own interests. Luke also like American professors and found them pretty helpful all the time. This finding is consistent with Zhong (1996): “on top of their intellectual abilities, this generation of Chinese has high regards and very positive attitudes towards the United States” (p. 25).

As to the factors influencing academic performances, three participants, Henry, Larry and Wanda, mentioned that they wanted to gain more advanced knowledge in North America. Two participants, Henry and Luke, expressed that they selected their majors based on their research interests rather than on seeking for material enjoyment like, for example, finding good salaried jobs. Although it would be very easy for Henry to switch from mathematics to computer science, he had no wish to switch to computer science. As a computer science major graduate student, it is very easy to find decent jobs in North America. Henry stated that Mathematics is what he wants to pursue and thinks that mathematics is very interesting. Luke majored in Electrical Engineering when he was an undergraduate student in China. Based on his own

interest, he switched to geography when he came to the U.S.A.. He mentioned that he knew that in real life, geography was not an important thing to many people and that if he looked for a job as an Electrical Engineering major graduate student, it would be easy to find jobs and also to get a better salary . But he likes his major and also likes his job. He doesn't have any regrets about switching majors. This finding is inconsistent with Bai's (1998) statement that Chinese students put a good income as the most important criterion to find jobs (p. 528).

All the participants selected majors by themselves when they arrived in North America. No one mentioned their parents' influence. Mark switched major from international relations to computer science mainly because computer science was very popular at that time and because some of his colleagues without any scientific background had become successful after switching to computer science several years after their arrival in the U.S.A.. This shows an independence which some Chinese students adopt towards career choices when they arrive in North America but is inconsistent with the view that because Chinese society is a traditional one, parents can influence their children throughout their lives (Zhang & Carrasquillo, 1992).

Non-science major students, Wanda and Mark, had almost no language problems when they arrived in the U.S.A.. Wanda indicated that she had only a minor language problem. She thought that she had no problems communicating. She switched her major from English language and literature to public administration. She had to learn the terms for the new major. She thought that was her challenge, but she did believe that if she studied hard she would be successful. Because of her language background, she could easily grasp whatever she learned from the classes and catch up with others. Mark didn't have a background in science, but he switched from international relations to computer science. He had to go back to some

undergraduate classes in mathematics and information technology. At the beginning, it was very hard for him, but he gradually got used to it and the situation became better. He has already finished his masters program. Larry, Henry, Luke and Charles didn't report any academic problems but were a little frustrated by their English language limits. Luke even said that it was very easy for science majors in the U.S.A.. Students just worked a little harder so they could get good marks. Mark thought that a non-science major such as international relations and international economics were easier for him. This is inconsistent with Feng's (1991) findings that science students generally adapt better than social science students because students in science fields have less requirement regarding English than those in social sciences (p. 12).

The Experiences of the Chinese Graduate Students with Cultural Differences

Analysis of the data revealed that Chinese graduate students have experienced cultural differences in North America. The six participants all indicated that they realized that American and Canadian cultures were different from Chinese culture. Larry, due to the cultural differences, has no real Canadian friends although he has lived in Canada for at least ten years. He mentioned that he felt uncomfortable trying to make Canadian friends.

Henry, Larry and Luke indicated that not only Americans but also Canadians prefer respect for people's personal privacy. They pointed out that Americans and Canadians really don't want to know what is going on in others' personal world. Both Americans and Canadians don't want others to interfere in their personal affairs. Luke noted that in the United States of America, even very close friends, must ask "Can I, Could I, Do you mind" to get the permission before they using their friends' belongings. Gradually, he got used to this. Larry, Luke and Charles all emphasized that both Americans and Canadians are straight-forward. When Americans and Canadians talk about something, people needn't worry about what they were

going to say. But when Chinese people talk to others about something, sometimes other people have to think about what they mean. Larry, Luke and Wanda pointed out that freedom was one obvious characteristic of culture in North America. Larry indicated that professors in Canada give students more freedom and let them do what they want. They encourage students to be more creative. They set no limits on students developing projects in which they are interested. Supervisor just gives guidance whereas in China, the supervisors assign projects to each student who then tries to finish their projects. He likes the Canadian way with its academic freedom.

Charles, Larry and Luke pointed out that working relationships in China were more complicated than in Canada and the U.S.A.. Larry said that he preferred to stay in Canada. If he went back to China, it would be take him a lot of time to adjust. It would be very frustrating. He would have to establish the relationship, establish the research, everything. He doesn't want to waste time. He wants to focus on his academic career. Luke mentioned that he didn't have to deal with the working relationships among people in China. He also thinks that it is much easier for him to work in the United States of America.

Luke indicated that Chinese culture emphasized family orientation. Mark revealed that before he came to the U.S.A., he thought that family was not important to Americans. After he came to the United States of America, he changed his opinion because of his experiences. He has found that family relationships and friendships are also very important in the U.S.A.. People in the United States of America pay a lot of attention to their families and build up friendly relationships. This is different from Zhang and Carrasquillo (1992) who indicated that the Chinese value family loyalty and unity while Americans don't (p. 14).

Luke provided his views about senior citizens in the United States of America. Before he went to the U.S.A., he had heard that U.S.A. was heaven for kids and young people but hell for

old people. So after he came to the United States of America, he asked Americans about the situations of senior citizens. He thought that media in China didn't describe the truth on this issue. But through his observation, he found that senior citizens enjoy their lives in the U.S.A.. They have a lot fun and are very happy. When he was in China, he thought that the government didn't pay much attention to protect senior citizens and that the media tried to force the kids to respect old people based on Chinese traditional culture. Actually, he indicated that he didn't see a lot of young people really respecting old people and that the situation was even worse than that in the U.S.A.. He thought that the reason was that in China the media pushed the younger generations to do things. Sometimes the results were not good.

All the participants indicated that they didn't believe in any religion. Although Charles, Larry, Luke and Mark attended those activities held by church, they didn't believe in any religion. Charles went to church to practice English; Larry was curious about church and wanted to look at what was going on there; Luke went to church only because he wanted to be polite to those people in church who invited him to join them many times. This is consistent with Feng's (1991) statement that American culture respects various religions, whereas China shows no respect for religion (p. 8).

All six participants provided evidence of American culture such as the customs, life styles and values in North America. Henry pointed out that people use credit cards in Canada. In China, people use a lot of cash. Charles thinks that his Canadians roommates only want to enjoy themselves now while he is thinking about his future. He thinks that people in Canada do not work as assiduously as those in China. Luke doesn't like to go to bars, but Americans do. He cares about time very much now that he has got used to American culture and thinks that time is

the most important thing. But when he was in China, he didn't realize the importance of time due to his Chinese cultural background. Wanda thinks that Americans like to spend money, while Chinese like to save money.

All six participants described their experiences in celebrating American and Canadian holidays. All of them have little or no time to celebrate those holidays. They have to focus on their studies. When it's time to celebrate Chinese holidays, they also have to study and get no chance to celebrate. This is consistent with Feng (1991): "Chinese students have to go to class and do homework. Actually there is no atmosphere that they can gladly celebrate" (p. 11). But Wanda indicated that after several years, Chinese have families and kids in the United States of America and start celebrations such as Thanksgiving, Halloween, and especially Christmas. They do not celebrate in exactly the same way as Americans do. For example, at Thanksgiving, Americans usually eat turkey; as Chinese usually do not eat, they make some Chinese food such as jiaozi and chunjuan. For Christmas, they also cook Chinese food. They don't cook American food. They also buy presents for people who open them on Christmas eve.

Wanda said that American students are more active in classes than Asian students. The students from China are trained just to listen, not express themselves as American students do. She further indicated that Chinese graduate students in China had to raise their hands and waited or let the professors finish their lecturing but that in the U.S.A. graduate students can challenge professors and ask them all kinds of questions. This is consistent with Gardner (1989), Upton (1989) and Wan (1999) that in Chinese classrooms, the teachers are seen as authorities in their fields and what they say is also accepted as truth. It is also consistent with Ting (2000) that in China student learn best by obeying their teachers and that arguing with the teacher is considered rude and disrespectful (p. 638).

The Job Related Experiences of Chinese Graduate Students in North America

Larry, Luke, Wanda and Mark all have many years of working experience while Henry as a new graduate student, and Charles because he hasn't obtained his Master degree, can't find permanent jobs in Canada. Henry and Charles are working as teaching assistants in Canada now. No one mentioned that they had put a good income as the first criterion to find jobs. Larry is working in Canada to enjoy the freedom and good quality of life; Luke likes working in the U.S.A. because he doesn't have to deal with the complicated working relationships in China. This is different from Bai's (1998) statement that Chinese students put a good income as the most important criterion to find jobs (p. 528).

Larry, Luke and Wanda provided their views of approaches to find jobs in North America. Larry indicated that the important thing in finding jobs is to establish the working relationship. For example, if a student gets his or her master degree, he or she wants to work in the job market. He suggested a couple ways to find jobs. "Read the job postings there, think that he or she could fit the most suitable position". For any job, there are a lot of people who are qualified. He therefore thinks that the working relationship is very important. Chinese graduate students have to get to know their classmates, their professors and those people from industry. If a student's supervisor or some other professors have good connections with industry, then they will give the student good advice and recommend him or her. In addition, the Chinese graduate students establish their own relationship. For example, they use the classmates who graduated earlier; they have already got jobs and if there are some openings there, they can tell the Chinese graduate students. They can say a good word for them and maybe there is a good chance for Chinese graduate students to get the jobs. Luke and Wanda found jobs through their own efforts such as reading through the job postings and sending their Curriculum Vitae. Wanda also

suggested that finding jobs mainly depends on: (a) whether or not Chinese graduate students are qualified; (b) the situation of the economy; (c) their areas of study; (d) the timing of the job market.

In China, there is a lot of gender discrimination against female graduate students when they go searching for decent jobs. In North America, Larry, Luke, Wanda and Mark indicated that there was no gender discrimination against female graduate students. In some sense, the policies in North America are favorable to female graduate students. Larry said that at least in Canada, female students have some advantages. For example, in science and engineering, the percentage of female professors is small. Universities' faculties want to promote female professors. If a Chinese graduate student is a female and gets a PhD in science and technology, she can apply for a faculty position easily. Luke mentioned that for his current job, the company preferred females. Because there was a low percentage of females, every year the company was asked by the U.S.A. government why they have so many more males than females. Wanda as a female hasn't experienced any gender discrimination finding a job in the U.S.A.. She concluded that if she applied for a job, people in charge normally said O.K. and that there was equal job opportunity, regardless of race, gender or disability. They all treat the Chinese graduate students equally. Mark mentioned that in the U.S.A., females are very strong and women are respected everywhere.

The Advantages of a North American Education for China

Analysis of the data revealed that Chinese graduate students enjoy higher education in North America. The six participants indicated that they had many rewarding experiences in education in North America. Henry indicated that he could take courses in other departments

freely in Canada; Charles said that he trained himself to think like westerners. He thought that he could use different thought patterns than he used to in China and that he could compare the Eastern and Western ways of thinking. He also improved his English and that was why he was studying in Canada. Larry liked the critical and creative thinking strategies in Canadian education. He thought that the Canadian professors were more open-minded and set no limitation on students to do critical and creative thinking. He believed that the educational system in Canada advocated individual progress. Luke indicated that it was very easy to get a degree in the United States of America. He thought that American universities had very good labs which could be used freely by all the graduate students. He also indicated that the libraries in American universities were very helpful. Wanda pointed out that her education in public administration did help her to get jobs and also helped her through several promotions. In addition, she indicated that she liked the way of American graduate programs-team work. She explained that all the team members had to contribute some things to the project and that each of the team members had to be responsible for a certain part. She thought that team work provided opportunities to do independent and cooperative work. She liked this way. Mark thought that he did learn some American culture and science which could benefit himself in the future. In addition, it opened his eyes to new horizons.

It seemed that the frustrating aspect of education in North America is probably the language limitations for four participants, Henry, Charles, Larry and Luke. However, two participants, Henry and Luke, indicated that they hadn't experienced any frustrating aspects of education in North America beyond the language limitations.

All six participants provided their views of aspects of education in North America that could be used or adapted to a Chinese setting. Henry thought that in the future, the Chinese

government should try to establish more high schools and universities. He noted that there are many universities in Canada and that if in China the number of high schools and universities were enough to hold the large number of students, there would be many more chances for students to improve themselves and there would be many more opportunities for ideas to be exchanged among students and between professors and students. Charles indicated that most of Canadian education is adaptable to a Chinese setting and that in China, he also learned theories from the West. He therefore thought there were no barriers between Canada and China and that the Chinese government could use many things from Canadian education. Larry indicated that the way Canadian professors urged students to think freely could be used in China and that professors in China should be more open-minded and should try to encourage students to do more creative thinking. They should also give students more freedom. He pointed out that younger professors in China are willing to accept new ideas and are more open-minded, but that senior professors are more authoritative and would not readily accept western teaching ways. Luke believed that American higher education is better than that in China. One thing he liked in education in the United States of America is a kind of project from elementary schools to universities that allows students to be independent, to make something or to do something. He hoped that China would adopt such an idea to help foster creativity in students. Mark indicated that there are many things in education in the United States of America useful or adaptable to a Chinese setting. For example, the way of testing or verifying whether students are qualified or not, is very interesting. American education system uses quizzes, homework, performances in school and other aspects besides mid-term and the final examinations to evaluate students while China simply uses mid-term and final examinations.

Conclusions

This study has highlighted some factors influencing six Chinese graduate students to come to North America to study. Among these are: (a) to gain advanced knowledge related to their fields of study; (b) to expand their cultural and educational horizons; (c) to fulfill their personal dreams; (d) to get rid of inhibitions related to dealing with complicated working relationships in China; (e) to enjoy the academic freedom and the good quality of life in North America. This study also has depicted the experiences of six Chinese graduate students going through universities and after graduation for the purpose of exploring their reactions to the educational system in North America. All six participants like the educational system in North America. Two participants didn't think that they had experienced any frustrating aspects of education in North America apart from their language limitations. All six participants suggested aspects of education in North America that could be useful in a Chinese setting. Henry thought that in the future, the Chinese government should try to establish more high schools and universities. He noted that there are many universities in Canada and that if in China the number of high schools and universities were enough to hold the large number of students, there would be many more chances for students to improve themselves and there would be many more opportunities for ideas to be exchanged among students and between professors and students. Charles indicated that most of Canadian education is adaptable to a Chinese setting and that in China, he also learned theories from the West. He therefore thought there were no barriers between Canada and China and that the Chinese government could use many things from Canadian education. Larry indicated that the way Canadian professors urged students to think freely could be used in China and that professors in China should be more open-minded and should try to encourage students to do more creative thinking. They should also give students

more freedom. He pointed out that younger professors in China are willing to accept new ideas and are more open-minded, but that senior professors are more authoritative and would not readily accept western teaching ways. Luke believed that American higher education is better than that in China. One thing he liked in education in the United States of America is a kind of creative project that allows students to be independent, to make something or to do something. He hoped that China would adopt such an idea to help foster creativity in students. Mark indicated that there are many things in education in the United States of America useful or adaptable to a Chinese setting including the evaluation system. This study found that based on the participants' working experience in North America, there were no big gender differences in finding decent jobs by Chinese graduate students. Larry, Luke, Wanda and Mark indicated that there was no gender discrimination though in some sense, the policies in North America seemed favorable to female graduate students. Larry noted that at least in Canada, female students have some advantages. Wanda as a female hasn't experienced any gender discrimination finding a job in the U.S.A and concluded that there was equal job opportunity, regardless of race, gender or disability. Mark mentioned that in the U.S.A., females are very strong and women are respected everywhere. This study also found that there were no big differences between science and non-science major Chinese graduate students when studying or working in North America.

Recommendations for Future Research

The study was based on a framework focused on language ability as an important element for Chinese graduate students coming to a North America which has a different official language, on academic concerns and factors affecting performance such as material enjoyment, family pressure and on cultural differences as embodied in low-context versus high-context cultures. It generated a number of findings regarding such things as the students' experience with language

in North America, their motivation for selecting majors and findings jobs in North America whether based on their research interests or not, and their adaptability to American society. In the light of this, the following recommendations for research are being suggested:

1. Investigating how culture affects working relationships and study in China and in North America.
2. Exploring what impact celebrating holidays has on Chinese students studying in North America.
3. Examining the differences male and female Chinese graduate students experience in seeking employment in North America.
4. Studying the coping strategies of Chinese graduate students majoring in science and non-science areas.
5. Exploring the difference in performance of students exhibiting low-context or high-context cultures.

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APPENDIX A GENERAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Could you give me some background information about yourself?
2. What is your motivation for studying in United States of America/in Canada?
3. What is your motivation for working in the United States of America/in Canada?
4. What concerns in terms of language did you have about studying in North America before you arrived?
5. You must prepare your exams such as: TOEFL and GRE before you came to the States/ Canada, could you give some information in details?
6. What concerns in terms of culture did you have about studying in North America before you arrived?
7. What concerns in terms of academic fields did you have about studying in North America before you arrived?
8. What were your actual experiences? Describe examples from each category: language, culture, academic concerns.
9. What are your strategies to overcome your difficulties?
10. What are some of the characteristics of English culture that you have observed? For example, their life styles, their values, their customs etc..
11. How do you feel about your capability to adapt to a new culture in the United States of America/ in Canada?
12. Tell me about any situations where you feel there was a conflict between your culture and the English language culture?
13. Tell me about the most beneficial experiences in the States/ Canada.
14. Which aspects of education in North America have been most rewarding?

15. Which aspects of education in North America have been most frustrating?
16. Which aspects of education in North America are adaptable/useful to a Chinese setting?
17. What were your specific experiences as a science/non-science major student in North America?
18. What about your social events in the States/ Canada?
19. Tell me about your social relationship with ethnic groups in the States/Canada?
20. Do you think that living here is the only way for you to study? Because in current world, people could obtain same degree by taking on-line courses without going abroad.
21. What were your actual experiences when you were trying to find decent jobs as a male/female Chinese graduate student in North America?
22. How does it feel to be a student in United States of America/ in Canada? Tell me about a typical day as a student in the States/Canada.

Appendix B Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant:

I am a graduate student at Lakehead University in the Master of Education program. I am conducting a study for my thesis, “ The Lived Experiences of Six Chinese Graduate Students in North America”. The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of six Chinese graduate students in North America. As a part of this study, you are being asked to participate in one in-depth interview which will take about forty to forty-five minutes. Each interview will be audiotaped and later transcribed by myself.

There are no risks involved in the study. The potential benefit is that this study based on your experiences as Chinese graduate students in North America might increase awareness and understanding of the challenges Chinese graduate students face in North America.

The study follows the ethics guidelines of the Research Ethics Board of Lakehead University.

The data I collect will be confidential and the written report will not include your names. You may withdraw from the study at any time. Data will be stored securely at Lakehead University for seven years.

If you have any questions concerning this study, please contact me by phone (1-807-343-8837) or email (angelagaoyuesheng@yahoo.com) or contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Fentey Scott at 1-807-343-8050.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Yuesheng (Angela) Gao

CONSENT FORM

My signature on this sheet indicates that I agree to participate in a study by Yuesheng (Angela) Gao, on THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SIX CHINESE GRADUATE STUDENTS IN NORTH AMERICA. I have received an explanation about the nature of the study, its purpose, and procedures. I understand the following:

1. I am a volunteer and can withdraw at any time from the study.
2. There are no risks involved in participating in this study.
3. The data I provide will be confidential and my identity will remain anonymous.
4. The data will be stored securely at Lakehead University for seven years.
5. I will receive a summary of the study, upon request, after its completion.

Name (Print)

Signature of Participant

Date