

# Chinese Students' Perceptions Of Life In The U.S.

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## ABSTRACT

*Fifty-six students studying at a Chinese college in a southern province were surveyed for this study and asked to describe their experiences if they were to wake up one day to find themselves in the United States as U.S. citizens. A content analysis was performed for the final analysis of the raw data. Chinese students' views on the U.S. varied but mainly focused on the positive aspects of life in America. This researcher therefore concluded that Chinese students surveyed through this study did not have realistic views of life in the U.S.*

**Keywords:** Chinese Education; Chinese Students; U.S. Higher Education; International Education

## INTRODUCTION

Look, a pet store," exclaimed my friend. She loved animals. It was a narrow street in Canton (Guangdong, China) with snakes, cats, chickens, dogs, rabbits, and many other animals. I said, "It is not a pet store, it is a restaurant!" It sure smells delicious and fresh, but it is perhaps too fresh for Western tastes. One day you see a restaurant and confuse it with a pet store. Another day you see a fish, but find out that it is not a fish. That is, even though it looks like fish, smells like fish, tastes like fish, it is a dish prepared with soy bean and vegetables at a vegetarian restaurant down the street from a Buddhist temple in an old part of Guangzhou. China can be deceptive and puzzling for Western minds. Westerners have attempted to solve this Chinese puzzle for hundreds of years. How come China is still preserving its traditions in the midst of a smaller and more connected world?

Westerners tried to understand why the Chinese would not buy their rubber from the Congo. Why did the Chinese not want anything from the West? China was "oriental" and "mysterious." Even though Westerners have finally found products that they could sell to the Chinese, they still cannot understand the rationale behind Chinese thinking. Their multiple attempts to understand the Chinese continue to fail. It is nevertheless a wish, alas a dream. Chinese are still unwilling to unveil their secrets to a seemingly prosperous life, especially in the southern provinces, and Westerners are consistently searching for the medicine that is keeping the Chinese standing strong in front of the whole world. However, China is as mysterious, confusing, and secretive as it has ever been. This research is another attempt to understand the Chinese by looking at its new generation Chinese college students. This is an exploratory study about how Chinese students see life in America. The research question was, "How do Chinese students see life in America?" The researcher conducted this research at a Chinese college in a southern province of China while teaching at the same college. This is an attempt to be "happy" while "learning", as Confucius would describe: "The one who likes learning is better than the one who only has knowledge; however, the best is the one who feels happy while learning - zhi zhi zhe bu ru hao zhi zhe, hao zhi zhe bu ru le zhi zhe" (Confucius, 1997, p. 69).

## Significance of the Study

During one of the earliest Chinese-Western conflicts – the Taiping movement—the Chinese defended themselves against Western powers by threatening to overthrow the ruling Qing Dynasty and establish a form of primitive Communism (Newsinger, 2001). During the Boxer Rebellion, they defended themselves from Imperialist ideas through a national liberation movement (Weisberger, 1997). Both the Taiping and Boxer movements were anti-foreign in nature (Weisberger, 1997) and there is no actual account of the number of people who died during these conflicts. Chinese nationalists were promising that "when the foreigners are wiped out, rain will fall" (Preston,

1999, p. 28), while Westerners believed that these movements were simply caused by the drought, famine and harsh rural conditions. After rain came, everything would go back to its normal flow (Preston, 1999). A combination of Western ignorance and the proud nature (see Commissioner Lin's letter to Queen Victoria) of the Chinese has continually caused conflicts between China and the West. Marchant (2002) explains that the British merchants and their government supporters failed to enter the vast markets of China in the early 1800s. British tried to introduce opium to the Chinese market so that the Chinese would buy the "English tea." China had a lot to offer but did not need anything from the West. Introduction of opium was the way for the British to find their way into a vast Chinese market. During this attempt, Commissioner Lin [President of the Board of War at the time] sent a notation to Queen Victoria:

*Our celestial empire rules over ten thousand kingdoms! Most surely do we possess a measure of godlike majesty which ye cannot fathom! Still we cannot bear to slay or exterminate without previous warning, and it is for this reason that we now clearly make known to you the fixed laws of our land. If the foreign merchants of your said honorable nation desire to continue their commercial intercourse, they then must tremblingly obey our recorded statutes, cut off forever the source from which the opium flows, and on no account make an experiment of our laws in their own persons!* (Halsall, 1998)

The reason for the failure of the British was that the British lacked a deep knowledge of China and were ignorant about the Confucian Renaissance. China did not need anything from the British.

The West has never stopped attempting to influence the Chinese and the Chinese have never stopped blocking these attempts. However, the so-called "socialist market economy" that China adopted after 1979 has opened the door for Westerners to gain entrance into this vast market. Westerner brought their most sought-after products. They set up factories and shops. Most importantly, they brought their schools for the Chinese learners. However, what they did not bring was a strong understanding of the Chinese. While trying to sell their products to the Chinese, they failed to understand that the image of the West would be a handicap. Rapidly developing information technology had been creating an image of the West since the Open Door Policy [beginning of the Socialist Market Economy]. This image, which Westerners did not find significant when planning their new ventures in Asia, has been causing many joint venture businesses to fail. Moreover, with the increase in the Chinese students in the U.S. and the Sino-foreign joint ventures campuses in China, it has become imperative that we understand the Chinese learners and their perceptions of the West. Through this study, the researcher intends to shed some light on the formation of this image and further elaborate on the future implications. This research attempts to understand the Chinese learner by looking at the current generation of college students. The United States of America (U.S.) is chosen for this research as the representative of the Western world as it is the most well-known foreign country to the Chinese.

Chinese students are complex learners. Their needs and expectations are different than that of American students and Chinese students in the U.S. For example, Chinese students in China consider their teachers their parents. They expect similar attention and affection they would get from their parents. They expect their teachers to know everything and guide them through their lives. For Western teachers, it is rather difficult to understand and rationalize this difference. Furthermore, although "Chinese students constitute a major group of the world's learners, roughly 25%, as yet there is very little data-based research into their culture of learning" (Cortazzi & Li, 1996, p. 172). This lack of research makes the Chinese learner a mystery.

Bodycott and Walker (2000) argue that in Confucian societies, many locals are wary of foreigners (more specifically, the Western teachers) and are concerned with what they see as an invasion of Western cultural and educational ideologies and values. It is also worth noting that some foreign academics bring with them preconceived beliefs about their role. "Many see themselves as savior; that is, bringing the best of the West to a developing country" (p. 81), and such examples strengthen their (the Chinese) beliefs about Westerners.

This study explores the views of Chinese students on life in the U.S. The researcher asked them to describe their experiences if they were to wake up one day to find themselves in the United States as U.S. citizens. Their views on life in the U.S. are significant because the number of Chinese students in the United States increases daily. China is the leading place of origin for international students in the United States with 127,628 in 2009/10 (an

increase of 30% from the previous year) (Open Doors, 2010). This study's findings should therefore command the attention of scholars and international education officers in higher education institutions in the U.S. as well as the policy makers.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

It was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that Western educational ideas and models were introduced into China and began to replace the traditional Chinese model (Yunxiang, 2003). Chinese education, for an extended period of time, was designed to not only absorb the strong points (i.e., technology, material efficiency) of foreign education, but also to draw upon values found in Chinese traditional education (i.e., harmony, strong emphasis on family relationships, respect for elders, saving face) (Gang, 1996). The Chinese, after many years of revolutionary movements, felt that learning from the West was not a matter of copying and imitating the West in every detail, but rather of studying the true spirit of modern Western education. Chen (1984) describes the true spirit of modern Western education as perceived by the Chinese as *self moving rather than passive, using methods of discovery rather than inculcation, practical rather than idealistic, societal rather than private, intuitional rather than hallucinational, secular rather than religious, whole person oriented rather than purely cerebral, emphasizing reason rather than memory, scientific rather than historical* (p. 1214).

However, adopting the Western traditions in education should not mean abandoning the cultural traditions of China, but simply balancing the traditional and modern education. Chen further explains:

*Just because we oppose traditional education does not mean that Western education is all good and Chinese traditional education is all bad...No matter what kind of education it is, when we study it, we should take into account whether its method and spirit, not its content, are new or not.* (p. 490)

Chinese children were being educated with anti-Western ideas through Communist party-reviewed curricula. Gross (1996) reports an example of anti-Western curricula in a high school political economics text:

*We can firmly believe that the system of socialism possesses an incomparable superiority over the system of capitalism. The Western world is not a heaven, neither is the United States a land of hope and opportunity. In the final analysis, socialism is a better social system than capitalism, and the socialist new China is the most lovable place to live on the earth.* (p. 137)

Didactic teaching methods, combined with anti-Western ideas, form the basis of a Communist education. Chinese teachers, as Ng and Tang (1997) explain, see their primary goal as teachers is to prepare students for the National University entrance examination. Students are not encouraged to speak out, to question and to criticize, and are unwilling to commit themselves for fear of being wrong (Tsui, 1996). Chu (1990) explains learning through recitation according to the traditional Chinese education. He says that "If we recite it then think it over, think it over then recite it, naturally it'll become meaningful to us" (p. 38). Traditional teaching methods in China have always been a way to maintain harmony and protect students from outside influences and unconventional ways of learning new knowledge that might harm the present system.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The main purpose of this research was to explore the Chinese thinking about the U.S. Chinese students studying Business English at a Vocational Chinese college in southern China were asked to describe their experiences if they were one day to wake up in America. It was an open-ended English language questionnaire asking to explain what they thought of life in the U.S. Fifty-six out of 114 students chose to participate in this study (ages 18-23, mean age: 20.1). All the students studying English as their major were asked to participate in this study because of their relatively higher English language proficiency.

## Data Analysis

Once the raw data were gathered, the researcher underlined the words and phrases that he thought to be significant. These terms (e.g., house, family) helped summarize what was said. Some were more analytical, not merely describing something that happened or was said. After underlining the words and phrases, the researcher searched for patterns in the data while constantly comparing the data in the surveys. Emerging themes were color-coded and the data were broken down into relevant parts.

Multi-colored pens were used to assign different colors to words and phrases. For example, blue was assigned to such words as “big,” “large,” “tall,” and “beautiful.” “Father,” “mother,” “clean,” and “warm” were assigned the color yellow. This designation system made it easier to identify emerging themes. The first group of color-coded data (blue) was initially assigned the “living space” category but then developed into the category of “house.” The second group of color-coded data (yellow) was initially assigned the category of “parents” then later developed into the category of “family.” This coding process enabled the researcher to quickly retrieve and collect all the text and data that he has associated with some thematic ideas.

As the researcher collected and gathered the words and phrases, the data suggested more general patterns of order and the constant comparison of the color-coded data in the surveys strengthened the choice of categories; for example, “living space” into “house” and “parents” into “family”. Aronson (1994) explains that the patterns within the codes develop into themes and these themes help organize the data and tell the story. The researcher was also aware of the fact that a refinement or change of emergent themes was a possibility as he dug further into the data. Codes were markers and pointers to rationalize and help dig further into deeper realities. Then, the themes started emerging through reading and sorting the data. For example, one student said:

*My parents are more open than in China,” and I have underlined “parents” and “open.” Another student explained: “open, not conservative.” One student described: “Mother and father always stay with me, lead a happy life.” Therefore, “open” and “happy” were included under the category of “family”.*

One student said: “In the American school, students were free to do everything,” and another one said: “Life in the American school is free.” Some participants responded: “lots of activities and freedom in American university. Teachers are very nice and close with the students.” These responses also helped group the words “freedom,” “more activities,” and “nice teachers,” under the category of “education.”

Some responses included: “The friends are always close, nice, friendly,” and another said: “My friends are very nice and friendly,” “the Americans are very friendly, very open-minded,” “Friends are very important in my life”, therefore “open minded,” “friendly,” and “important” were included under the category of “friendship.” In summation, the analysis process was as follows:

Raw Data → Underline the important words and phrases → Break down and color code for emerging themes → Assign initial categories → Compare and contrast the data → Determine final categories

Raw data were then organized, classified and edited into manageable and accessible categories. For this research, the following categories were identified: House, Family, Education, Friendship, and Food.

## FINDINGS

The student responses were edited for grammar and anonymity concerns. However, because of the cultural elements that can be found in the responses, editing for grammar was minimal. As long as the meaning was clear, responses were reported as written by the students. There was a purposeful emphasis on the excitement of the Chinese students when they were talking about their friends and also how they constructed sentences. That is, Chinese students are extremely emotional and how they word their feelings is significant. For example, they use many punctuation marks to express their feelings rather than trying to find the exact word for their feelings. Or they do not feel that their excitement can be explained by words. Also, as an example to a grammar point, “Chinese hasn’t the garden” is significant in the sense that Chinese students have challenges with the auxiliary verbs.

Table 1 explains the categories and the keywords associated with these categories.

**Table 1: Categories Identified from Student Responses**

House	Family	Education	Friendship	Food
big	free	freedom	open mind	fast food
large	open	high efficiency	sincere	bread
tall	happy	much better	warm	milk
modern	not conservative	nice teachers	respecting	ice cream
beautiful	father: professional	more personal	trustworthy	chocolate
warm	mother: housewife	more interesting	kind	oily
comfortable	clean house	more activities	important	unhealthy
contemporary	important	independent	golden hair	Big Mac
garden	friendly	free	tall	delicious food

### Narrative Data

Student responses varied. Narrative data will help draw a clear picture so that the readers can better understand how Chinese students perceive life in the U.S. This part of the study is organized in five different themes - House, Family, Education, Friendship, and Food.

#### House

Participants in this study explained their American houses as “big,” “large,” “beautiful,” “high tech decoration,” “tall,” “modern,” “separate from each other,” “contemporary,” “luxurious,” “tidy” and have more “space to have fun” with “plants” and “flowers” surrounding it. They can “play games” and “feel comfortable” living in their houses where they also can “feel warm.” While describing their American houses, they compared their houses in China to these “dream” homes. Chinese houses were usually described as being “small” and “very close to each other.” Their choices for the location of their houses varied. “California,” “New York,” “Manhattan,” and “Chinatown” were specific locations given. Other responses included:

*I get down the bed, go out the bedroom, and look around. Oh, how beautiful and big house! Look out of the window, there is a little garden, too. The house in China hasn't the garden.*

*So many houses and so beauty. I am live in a like garden house. In there grows beautiful flowers, grass, and so on.*

*My house is located in the eastern of Chinatown, a beautiful scenery could seen there. Besides my house, there is a lake. Just a small one, but excellent. I admire I were born in such a place.*

*When you look at houses in the street all the design of the houses are orderliness.*

#### Family

A significant portion of their responses focused on their families. Other than two students, 54 students explained that they were living with their parents even though children of their ages in the U.S. were free to choose whether to live with their parents or not. Two students reported that their parents were in China and “I miss them.” Children in America are “free” and “have much freedom.” Parents “never pamper their children and allow children on their own when children are 18.” They allow “private time to their children” and they are more “open” and not “conservative.” Parents “let them be free” and children sometimes “do some work” for them. They “get on well” with their parents and “lead a happy life.”

Regarding the professions of their parents, all of the students reported that their fathers had professional jobs (lawyer, doctor, president, manager, government official, golf coach, business executive, driver, businessman,

waiter, gardener, cook, and worker) and 52 students reported that their mothers worked as “housewives,” “keeping the house clean,” “cooking delicious food,” and “keeping the family tradition.” Four out of 56 students reported that their mothers had professional jobs - “scientist, ballet instructor, teacher, and businesswoman.” Additional responses regarding parental presence in their U.S. home include:

*I believe that the family is very important for everybody because I believe my family can give me some warmth and can let me be often happy. I very much love my family. At home, I feel very free and can do my love thing. Sometimes I play with my family, so I am very happy. Now I know my family is very important for me.*

*The American parents cultivate their children in a different way from Chinese parents. The American parents let their children be independent, communicate with each other, and listen to their thinking.*

*They won't be in charge of the kids' life but feel happy according to the kids' feelings.*

*My mother has already woken up. Mom is preparing breakfast and Dad is reading newspapers.*

*In America, the parents think when their children become adults, they must do lots of things by themselves; for example, take care of themselves and live alone.*

*With parents, communication is very close. All the affairs are told to the parents. Parents are like best friends for the children.*

*They allow their children to do some activities and teach their children by examples.*

*My mother makes breakfast for me and my father goes to his company.*

#### *Education*

“We are free to talk and have our own opinion” was repeatedly emphasized by the students regarding their schools in the U.S. They expressed that they were “free,” “very happy at our school,” and “there is no limit what I want to do.” Classes in America were “more interesting” and had “more activities for us.” Teachers respected the students and students studied with “high efficiency” because “the teachers are very nice.” They did not need to go to school every day and “a few hours a day” was enough for them. Other times, “they were free to do whatever they wanted to do” because “being here is free.” Teaching methods were “much better” and students “learn by themselves and they do more research in class.” They could also “go to the library” and “read books” after school” or “talk with the teachers.” American education is “more personal” and “everybody talks in English.” Their school choices varied - “Cambridge, Harvard, New York University, Oxbridge University and Duke University.” Other responses included:

*Every morning I go to school. I needn't read English books loudly any more. I can go to the library to find the things I need any time. The teachers have the class lively. I can have the class not only indoor, but also outdoor.*

*We don't go to school every day, but we also can learn knowledge, and the teachers don't scold us. Teachers love me very much.*

*All kinds of students needn't dress in school clothes. There aren't many students in a classroom.*

*The school building looks more artistic.*

*It won't be like Chinese education system and use “stuff duck” [filling students with information, but not enforcing their critical thinking skills without considering their needs and expectations] methods. It will be more fair and more activities will be held.*

*Friendship*

Friendship was another category that was emphasized by the Chinese students. They explained that they “get along very well with each other” and “many friends are very friendly.” They [friends] have “open mind” and are very “sincere and warm.” Some students expressed that they have friends from “all around the world”, such as “Chinese, Japanese, and Francian.” Their “hair is gold and they are strong.” Friends in America will help them when they need help and they will “play, sing together, sleep together, and read together, and so on.” “Open,” “friendly,” “warm,” “respecting,” “funny,” “trustworthy,” “nice,” “kind,” and “relaxed” were the other terms used to describe their friends. Other responses included:

*Friends are very important in my life, so I will use my heart toward them. I trust that they do.*

*Many friends are very friendly. They often invited me to their home to have meals.*

*I have so many friends.*

*I will get many, many friends in it. I will play with them, talk with them, go to parties with them.*

*Making friends in China I think is easier than America because Chinese people are warm and kind.*

*The friends always say truth to me so that we will get along much better with each other.*

*I might have many friends there. We meet every day and do our homework together.*

*After I have my breakfast, my friend comes to my house and waits for me to go to school.*

*We need to sometimes talk to each other fact to fact and go shopping.*

*We always laugh together, angry together, crazy together, even cry together. We go to library after class.*

*Food*

The 56 students explained that even though “fast food” was popular in America, they would choose to eat “Chinese food.” On occasion, they would eat “pizza.” They explained that Americans eat “fast food,” “bread,” “sandwiches,” “ice cream,” chocolate,” “Big Mac,” beefsteak,” “hamburgers,” “sweets,” and “sausage”; they drink “milk” and “coffee.” Instead of the “traditional American food,” they would eat “Chinese food” because it is “healthy” and “nutritious.” Their daily diet included “porridge,” “bread,” “milk,” “noodles,” “egg,” “rice,” “Coke,” and “fried chicken.” Even though American food is “rich and tasty,” it is “oily” and has “less vegetables” and is “not as healthy as Chinese food.” Other responses included:

*I must get up at once. There is no breakfast at my home. I hurry to pick up a piece of bread. Oh, there is no drink in the ice box! I am eager to drink some orange juice and a bottle of milk. I miss my parents and I miss the food at parents’ home.*

*I would continue eating the Chinese food. I know Chinese food is popular with foreigners in foreign country, but the Chinese food is very delicious and healthy.*

*The food is different from Chinese. Americans eat Western style food. They are likely to eat sweets, ice cream and chocolate, but the Chinese eat healthy food.*

*In America we have breakfast of bread and milk. If I have a breakfast day after day, I will hate the breakfast food. But in China, we can eat rice, porridge, dough sticks, and so on. Every morning we can change the different food to eat.*

*I think I will eat rice. I will drink much milk every day.*

*In China, rice was the main food. In America, hamburger.*

*Many eat meat and butter, few vegetables.*

*During dinners we always go together to have Chinese food.*

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the views of Chinese students in China are somewhat inaccurate regarding life in the U.S. None of the students who participated in this study had traveled abroad. Having family members in the U.S. was not relevant as such family members would hardly present the life in America as a negative experience. Presenting life in America as negative would mean that they have not been successful in America, thus causing them to lose face. Sun, Vandenberghe, and Creemers (2003) confirm that face for a Chinese person is very important. It is even more important than dignity for a Westerner because dignity is only associated with an individual person, but face is associated with the dignity of the individual's family, relatives, and a group of people.

It should be noted that students were not asked what they thought about the U.S. in general, but this research focused on their descriptions of their lives if one day they were to wake up in the U.S. as American citizens. Almost all of the responses toward their perceptions of the U.S. were positive, except one student who mentioned that the people in the U.S. carry guns. As noted above, a small group of students described the food in the U.S. as not as healthy as the food in China.

With the World Wide Web and access to American TV shows and movies, America still keeps its image fresh. For example, the U.S. promises picturesque suburban houses (as seen in the TV show "Desperate Housewives"), always friendly friends (as seen on the TV show "Friends"), convenient and tasty fast food (as found in McDonalds), possibly violent (as seen in the movie "Crash"), and most importantly, the freedom it promises through various means (freedom of speech, free market economy, freedom to travel, etc.). One student responded:

*I get down the bed, out the bedroom, and look around. Oh, how beautiful and big house! Look out of the window, there is a little garden, too. The house in Chinese hasn't the garden.*

It is sometimes the "big" and "beautiful" house and sometimes, the emotional description of their views on friendship:

*They are friendly. They will help me when I need. We play together, sing together, read together, sleep together, and so on. Friends are very important in my life. So I will use my heart to toward them. I trust that they do.*

It is sometimes the "ice cream," "bread," and "milk," but sometimes, the violence:

*In America, I think there is a lot of freedom. Not like China, America is an open country. You can do many things if you want. I always yearn for American life. One day, if I live in America, at first I will get a handgun. It only cost you little money, the America law allow you do that.*

However, it is always freedom that the Chinese students expect from a life in the U.S. Regarding the houses and food, the truth is that not everybody lives in suburban houses and not everybody eats hamburgers, ice cream, and bread.

These responses did not surprise the researcher for he has been living and working in China for an extended period of time and conducting research in various topics related to Chinese education. These responses confirmed his observations that the Chinese students are rather limited with the information they can receive and America has been successful in presenting itself to China as a perfect place to live. The results are significant in the sense that when instructors and staff members know the pre-constructed ideas of Chinese students, they would be able to form



more informed relationships with them, in which they can respond the Chinese students' pre-constructed perceptions more constructively. This will further reflect in academic success and ease the cultural adaptation of these students.

It is imperative that the higher education institutions understand their international student population and are prepared to help them when they arrive in America - where (for the Chinese students) the houses are "big and beautiful" and "golden hair" friends are eating hamburgers in their cars with their guns in their back pockets. As for America, it looks like fish, smells like fish, but it is not necessarily a healthy vegetarian dish. With their rather distant views on America, Chinese students will face a disappointment when they arrive in their host institutions in the U.S. It is therefore the responsibility (and the job in most cases) of the U.S. institutions to accommodate their Chinese student population that are arriving in the U.S. with very strong traditional backgrounds and rather naïve perceptions of other cultures. Through these findings, they can plan their orientation sessions with a better understanding of Chinese students' social, cultural, and academic expectations. And such planning will help ease the transition period for Chinese students. They can further inform and/or train the faculty and staff regarding these expectations so that the Chinese students will not be perceived as "awkward" and "oriental" by the faculty and staff. Last but not the least, as a source for student potential, The People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) presents an almost limitless opportunity. China is home to 25 percent of the world's population. This makes it potentially the biggest market for goods and services (i.e., education) in the world. It is not surprising, therefore, that following the economic reforms which started in 1979, China has been seen as a major growth area for those seeking global market opportunities. Understanding the Chinese is more significant now than it has ever been.

In short, we should not be judging their misperceptions, but understand that these misperceptions occur due to misrepresentation of the U.S. outside its borders. Western media and other sources of information present the U.S. as a dream place where you can have the "ideal life", whereas the life in the U.S. might not be ideal as they expect. If we know that they have such perceptions, we would be able to better help them with necessary changes in the curricula, instructional strategies, and orientation in addition to the support they are provided the first weeks and months after their arrival in the U.S. Easing their transitions into a totally foreign culture can be planned through to-the-point orientation programs, informing and training the faculty and staff (through intercultural and multicultural communication programs, through hiring staff that are not only qualified but also well-suited for the positions in International Student Offices. This could include hiring staff with overseas living experience, knowledge of a second language, and offering an extensive probationary training period), curricula changes (through offering courses that would encourage students to learn about different cultures, through offering ESL support for Chinese [international] students throughout their entire program of study), and listening to them without trying to load the necessities and expectations of American culture onto them once they arrive.

We need to listen to these students more than they need to listen to us as they have more options regarding their study abroad choices - England, Australia, and Canada being just a few of them. We need to keep in mind that they do not only contribute culturally and socially, but they have a significant economic contribution to the U.S.

One might argue that upon arrival, Chinese students would realize that they had inaccurate impressions regarding life in the U.S. and make the necessary adjustments. However, with a strong historical and traditional background, the Chinese would have significant difficulties adjusting to a new environment. This is also apparent when we look at their newly formed relationships in a foreign country. As soon as they arrive, they cling to their Chinese fellow students and rarely attempt to foster relationships outside this comfortable and "safe" community. This type of situation can make their transition into American culture and society rather challenging. They maintain their traditions, presuppositions, and language skills by staying close to their fellow countrymen. Another point is that they come to America with all their false, though exciting, expectations and it would be hard for them to tell their friends and family that America is not as exciting as they had expected, as they would lose face and be perceived as they cannot actually see all the beauty of America. That is, they have to present America to their friends and family back in China as their friends and family would expect: *Mei Guo*, the beautiful country, as the United States of America literally translated from Chinese to English language.

The purpose of this research was not to generalize the findings, but to provide examples of how Chinese students think, which then will help international education professionals in the U.S. to better accommodate their Chinese student population. However, further qualitative research on the views, expectations, and needs of Chinese

students is needed. The Chinese learner is still a mystery and few quantitative studies will not suffice to solve this mystery (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Pederson, 1991; Ward & Kennedy, 1992; Ward & Searle, 1991). The first step of internationalization of higher education campuses in the U.S. is to understand the international student populations on their campuses, even before they arrive, so that a more strategic and efficient plan can be initiated.

#### **AUTHOR INFORMATION**

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