

Acculturation of Chinese Students in the U.S.: Un-abandoned Chinese Identity and Intra-ethnic Communication

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Abstract: Two theoretical perspectives have been adopted by the scholarly exploration of acculturation. The first is the unidirectional perspective, which is represented by cross-cultural adaptation theory. The other is the non-unidirectional perspective which is reflected by cultural fusion theory. Focusing on Chinese students' acculturation in the United States, this research compared these two theoretical perspectives in general, and cross-cultural adaptation theory and cultural fusion theory in particular. Through conducting in-depth interviews with 25 Chinese students studying in an American public university, this research revealed that these migrating individuals from China were still attached to their Chinese identity and embraced interaction with other Chinese people to varying degrees during their acculturation. Their acculturation experiences supported cultural fusion theory, which argues that acculturation is an additive and integrated process rather than a zero-sum closed system.

Keywords: Cultural fusion, Chinese identity, intra-ethnic communication, acculturation

1. Introduction

The emergence of globalization has not only considerably boosted the transnational flow of information and commodities, but also enhanced personnel flow. In this context, the phenomenon termed *acculturation* has gained more and more attention, which describes cultural and psychological changes happening to individuals as they come into contact continuously with different cultures (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1936).

In the field of intercultural communication, two theoretical perspectives have been adopted to explore acculturation. One is the unidirectional perspective, which reduces immigrants' and sojourners' acculturation into different variables in a straightforward way. This perspective believes that immigrants and sojourners, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, religion, and motivation of migration, desire to cover the same path to achieve a universal goal through orienting themselves to new cultures. In contrast, the non-unidirectional perspective claims that acculturation is not a stable and gradual process leading to a universal goal in a unidirectional way (Hottola, 2004). Instead, the acculturation is endless because the hermeneutic horizon is never complete (Callahan, 2011). Kim's (1988, 1991, 2001, 2011, 2015) cross-cultural adaptation theory and Kramer's (2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2010, 2011) cultural fusion theory represent the unidirectional and non-unidirectional theoretical perspectives respectively. The former depicts a successful adaptation process which requires migrating individuals to "move along a path toward assimilation with the host or dominant culture" (Sandel & Liang, 2010, p. 250). The latter states that acculturation is a process combining elements of two or more cultures

in an unpredictable way to generate something new (Croucher & Kramer, 2016; Kramer, 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2010, 2011).

Against this backdrop, this research intends to examine the two theoretical perspectives mentioned above through exploring Chinese students' acculturation in the United States (the U.S. for short), and compare cross-cultural adaptation theory and cultural fusion theory in this context.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory

Holding the premise that a person is an open system that coevolves with the socio-cultural environment, cross-cultural adaptation theory argues that it is "the natural human tendency to struggle to regain an internal equilibrium in the face of adversarial environmental conditions" (Kim, 2001, p. 67). Placing adaptation at the interaction between the individuals and the environment, this theory states that any individual stranger who steps into a different culture will move along the unidirectional path of stress-adaptation-growth towards a universal end which targets the formation of intercultural personhood, improvement of individuals' psychological health and increase in their functional fitness in the host environment (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Kim, 1988; Kim, 2001; Kim, 2006).

To attain successful assimilation into the host culture, immigrants and sojourners have to involve themselves in the interplay of acculturation and deculturation. The former, which refers to migrating individuals' acquisition of new cultural patterns and practices, will inevitably lead to the latter, defined as unlearning of some of their old cultural habits (Kim, 1988, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2015). Acculturation and deculturation of immigrants and sojourners, according to cross-cultural adaptation theory, are enacted through their separation from their co-ethnic groups, mentally and physically (Kim, 1988, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2015). By doing so, migrating individuals are expected to actively conduct social engagement with the host culture at large, which is discouraged by their maintenance of home cultures and intra-ethnic communication in the long run (Kim, 2011, 2015).

Therefore, cross-cultural adaptation theory perceives migrating individuals' ties with their home cultures and communication with their co-ethnics as the hindrance to their successful assimilation into the host culture (Kim, 1988, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2015). To better fit into the host culture, immigrants and sojourners are suggested to maximize their acculturation into the host culture through unlearning some of their home cultural habits and staying away from their co-ethnics in the long run (Kim, 1988, 1991, 2001, 2011, 2015). As a consequence, acculturation and deculturation are placed in a zero-sum closed system, and the increase in one will necessarily result in the decrease in the other. Ultimately, migrating individuals are expected to move along the same path towards the successful assimilation which is characterized by "a state of a high degree of acculturation into the host milieu and a high degree of deculturation of the home culture" (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003, p.338). Hence, the aforementioned underlying assumptions reveal the unidirectional viewpoint adopted by cross-cultural adaptation theory to examine migrating individuals' acculturation in a zero-sum closed system (Sandel & Liang, 2010).

2.2. Cultural Fusion Theory

Holding the opposite opinion regarding the universal unidirectional model articulated by cross-cultural adaptation theory, Kramer (2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2010, 2011) argues that the home culture will not be unlearned and heritage cultural identity will not be abandoned during the process of an individual's learning of new cultures. He further elaborates that cross-cultural adaptation theory is hegemonic and ethnocentric in nature because the host culture is given supreme power over migrating individuals' home cultures, which will teach them self-hatred (Kramer, 2003a).

Based on these critiques, Kramer (2000) proposes cultural fusion theory, which describes acculturation as an additive and integrative process of combining elements of two or more cultures unpredictably to generate something new (Croucher & Kramer, 2016; Kramer, 2000, 2003a, 2003b). This theory applies the concept of *horizon* into intercultural communication, which is defined as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer, 1991, p. 301). As socialized human beings, migrating individuals have been endowed with specific horizons by their home cultures before their migration. During intercultural encounters, immigrants and sojourners will expand these horizons through fusing aspects of new cultures into their home cultures. Consequently, migrating individuals' home cultures and the host culture are combined to generate a fused cultural identity in an additive and integrative way.

The fused cultural identity is termed *cultural accent*, defined as "a fusional in-between of cultural interaction" (Kramer, 2000, p.203). Underlaid by cultural accent, the interaction among two or more cultures will not lead to a universal goal in a unidirectional way; instead the balance between migrating individuals and the host culture can be achieved through negotiating and celebrating these strangers' niches and differences towards different ends (Croucher & Kramer, 2016; Kramer, 2000; Sandel & Liang, 2010). Therefore, cultural fusion theory refutes the efficiency approach adopted by cross-cultural adaptation theory, which points to a universally desired result or outcome in the unidirectional and dualistic way (Callahan, 2004). From the perspective of cultural fusion theory, immigrants' and sojourners' acculturation is an endless process in which their past is continually integrated into their future to generate something in between (Callahan, 2004; Kramer, 2000).

2.3. Acculturation of International Students in General and Chinese Students in Particular

Constituting the most important personnel flow across the world, international students have exemplified the phenomenon of acculturation globally. In recent years, a large number of studies address the adjustment problems encountered by international students during their acculturation, such as general living adjustment, academic adjustment, social-cultural adjustment and personal psychological adjustment (Emiko & Evelyn, 2005; Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen & Van Horn, 2002; Perrucci & Hu, 1995; Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Trice, 2004; Tseng & Newton, 2002; Xue, Sang & Lei, 2004; Yeh, Arora & Inose et al., 2003). Among these studies on international students' adjustment problems, such variables as self-efficiency, social support, cultural novelty, contact with local students,

language skills, perceived discrimination, greater social ties with international, co-national and local people are identified to play key roles in facilitating international students' acculturation (Emiko & Evelyn, 2005; Hechanova-Alampay, et al., 2002; Perrucci & Hu, 1995).

Compared to other countries, the U.S. has more appeals for Chinese students who want to study abroad. According to the report released by the Institute of International Education (2017), nearly 114,000 students from China have come to the U.S. for education, occupying 32.5% of the total number of international students studying in this country. Being one of the biggest groups of international students in the U.S., Chinese students' acculturation has gained increased attention. Liu (2001) claims that silence patterns adopted by Chinese students, for the purpose of saving face and maintaining politeness, are attributed to intercultural misunderstanding and stereotyping occurring in the American classrooms. He suggests that face-saving and politeness strategies utilized by Chinese students should be respected and new face-saving concepts should be developed by Chinese students to conduct better interaction with other students and adaptation to the new community (as cited in Xiao & Petraki, 2007). Chen (2004) points out four dimensions of studies on Chinese students' acculturation in the U.S. The first dimension, conflicts between individualism and collectivism, depicts that the tensions encountered by Chinese students are caused by their emphasis on interdependence rather than independence when communicating with Americans around them. The second dimension is associated with the difficulty in making friends. Lack of understanding of American social norms and inadequate English proficiency account for Chinese students' struggles in making friends with Americans. The third dimension constitutes challenges to Chinese students' self-esteem. Coming from a society that lays more emphasis on the hierarchy than the U.S., Chinese students show more sensitivity to judgments made by Americans, which might hurt their self-esteem. The last dimension involves changes in terms of values and behaviors. The modesty long held by Chinese students sometimes is interpreted by Americans as incompetence or shyness. In order to better get along with the host culture, Chinese students have to adjust their values or behaviors accordingly.

Current studies on the acculturation of international students in general, and Chinese students in particular attend predominantly to examining what strategies facilitate these migrating individuals' acculturation and what impedes their adjustment to the host culture. What and why international students cannot adapt themselves to the host culture are less explored. In order to fill this gap, this study focused on Chinese students' acculturation in the U.S. and explored what the acculturation meant to them. In this context, cross-cultural adaptation theory and cultural fusion theory were compared to provide a better understanding of unidirectional and non-unidirectional theoretical perspectives on migrating individuals' acculturation in a new culture.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Participants

The participants for this study are 25 graduate students from China who were currently studying in a public university located in the southwestern U.S. at the time of research. They were recruited through the researcher's social network at the university. Among these participants, 13

of them are female and 12 male; 11 Master students and 14 Ph.D students; 13 majoring in social sciences and 12 science and engineering; 21 coming to this university with either a teaching assistantship or research assistantship and four on their own expenses. Eleven participants had been studying in the U.S. for nearly three years and fourteen for almost two years.

All of the participants were recruited because they had already been in the U.S. for an extended period. Therefore, their experiences of studying and living in this country could provide rich insights into Chinese students' acculturation in the U.S. The pseudonyms were adopted in the research to protect these participants' privacy.

3.2. Data Collection

All participants were interviewed about their experiences of studying and living in the U.S. Considering the diversity of these participants' experiences, the semi-structured interviews were conducted. On the one hand, the researcher can ask planned questions based on an interview guide; on the other, the participants are allowed more freedom to provide different descriptions of their experiences from which the researcher can ask unplanned questions to explore different feelings and thoughts (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Regarding this research, the planned interview questions were developed based on two discrepancies between cross-cultural adaptation theory and cultural fusion theory. One is whether migrating individuals should keep away from their co-ethnic groups for successful intercultural adaptation and the other whether their home cultures will be unlearned during the acculturation. These questions include what their initial impression of the U.S. was before they came; what differences or challenges they have encountered since they came to this university; how they perceived and responded to these differences; whether they ever considered adapting themselves to American culture; if they did, how they conducted the adaptation; whether they preferred to interact with Americans or other Chinese people and why.

All of these interviews were conducted in the participants' desired location and their mother language, Mandarin. All participants signed the informed consent before interviews. Upon the approval of each participant, a digital audio-recording device was used to record each interview. Each interview lasted for 60 to 90 minutes, which generated 28 hours of interviews. Also, the researcher utilized note taking to write down such information as changes to the participants' volume, pauses, body language and facial expression. Some participants did not leave the interview location immediately when the interview was over and continued to talk to the researcher. Upon their approval, notes were taken on these descriptions as well.

3.3. Data Analysis

Audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher who is also a native speaker of Mandarin. Then all transcripts, which are in Mandarin, were imported into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software. Excerpts displayed in the subsequent sections were translated by the researcher from Mandarin into English, and double checked by the relevant participants. Guided by the constant comparison analysis, the researcher analyzed the data in three steps. First, each transcript was read carefully and examined incident-by-incident

and theme-by-theme. Consistent with the purpose of this research, two themes emerged from all participants' responses. Second, incidents provided by the participants were contrasted and compared under the same theme. From the contrast and comparison, sub-themes emerged. Third, excerpts under each sub-theme were analyzed combined with their contexts in the original transcripts. These themes were displayed as follows:

- The dimension of intra-ethnic and interethnic communication: was composed of three sub-themes, namely *communication with Americans*, *communication with other Chinese people*, and *communication with international students from other countries*.
- The dimension of un-abandoned home culture: was composed of two sub-themes, namely *the preference for Chinese culture* and *patriotism*.

4. Results

Following the purpose of this research, the results were organized in the following way. First, the intra-ethnic communication and interethnic communication conducted by the participants in the U.S. were analyzed. Cross-cultural adaptation theory claims that co-ethnic group ties are initially helpful but eventually harmful for migrating individuals over the long term (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Kim, 2001, 2011, 2015). Kramer (2000) argues that co-ethnic group ties "should be celebrated as they lead to and welcome diversity" (as cited in Sandel & Liang, 2010, p. 259). Second, the possibility of unlearning Chinese culture and Chinese cultural identity was explored. Kim (2001) states that it is natural for immigrants and sojourners to enculturate what is new and deculturate or unlearn what is old. In contrast, Kramer (2000) argues that acculturation is not a zero-sum process; what is old does not have to be abandoned while learning something new.

4.1. Intra-ethnic Communication: Beneficial or Harmful?

The impact of intra-ethnic communication on migrating individuals' acculturation is one of the discrepancies between cross-cultural adaptation theory and cultural fusion theory. Kim (2001, 2011, 2015) argues that intra-ethnic communication may be helpful when a migrating individual first enters a new culture but in the long run the interaction within his or her co-ethnic group will not benefit this person's acculturation. To better fit into the host culture, migrating individuals should stay away from their co-ethnic groups (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). Holding the opposite view, Kramer (2000) claims that ethnic differences "add to the spices of life" (as cited in Sandel & Liang, 2010, p. 262). The participants' responses showed more support for cultural fusion theory. All of them agreed that they engaged in both intra-ethnic communication and interethnic communication at the same time, rather than staying away from other Chinese people during the acculturation. Thirteen out of 25 participants admitted that they laid more emphasis on social interaction with other Chinese friends; six paying more attention to interethnic communication with Americans, five paying basically equal attention to both intra-ethnic communication with other Chinese friends and interethnic communication with international students from other countries, and one more interacting with international

students from other countries.

Although Yue, Ying, Nan, Yi, Yun, and Qian paid more attention to making friendships with Americans than other participants, none of them developed the interethnic friendship for successful adaptation to American culture. Ying said:

My first roommate is a lovely American girl. She learns Mandarin and is interested in China. She has a good personality and is very nice to me. I felt so close to her. We can share our innermost thoughts and feelings with each other. I knew nobody on campus but her. So she took me to meet her friends who are very nice to me as well. Everything just happened by accident. In this way, the majority of my friends are Americans. I did not choose them on purpose. I just like their personalities.

Like Ying, the other five participants chose personality rather than ethnicity or nationality as the sole criterion in making friends. For example, Yue, Nan, and Qian were the only Chinese students in their departments when they were admitted. They both mentioned that they made friends with Americans around them because these people had good personalities and were very nice to them. Although the interethnic communications with Americans were positive for these participants, none of them had ever thought of avoiding other Chinese people on campus. They still had Chinese friends. As their stories exemplified, personality rather than ethnicity or nationality was the sole criterion in making friends.

The rest of the participants had not established close interethnic communication with Americans around them. According to their responses on why they did not spend a lot of time hanging out with Americans, four reasons were summarized. First, these Chinese students' spoken English was not good enough. None of them majored in English when they came to the U.S. The regular English courses provided by the Chinese education system for students in non-English majors lay more emphasis on grammar, reading, and writing. Listening and speaking are usually the weakest sections of many Chinese students' English proficiency. Therefore, these participants had problems in speaking English fluently and precisely, especially during their first semester. Low proficiency in spoken English sometimes thwarted their desire to further communicate with Americans. For example, Wei said that he felt uncomfortable when he spoke in English with his American lab-mates sometimes.

When you communicate with Americans, as long as you have a problem with your expression, no matter how small it is, they definitely will ask you to repeat it. Therefore, I hang out a lot with other international students. The reason is quite simple. Even if my English is horrible, they still can understand what I am saying.

Wei stressed that Americans around him were not smarter than him. However, his oral English made him look more stupid than his American lab-mates. It was the gap between Wei and Americans regarding spoken English that made him feel uncomfortable. Due to his less fluent oral English, Wei felt that his smartness could not be recognized during his communication with Americans. And the absence of recognition had an impact on Wei's self-esteem. Consequently, Wei spent more time with Turkish students working in the same lab. Since both of them were

on the same level of English proficiency, Wei gained more recognition from his interethnic communication with his Turkish lab-mates. Spoken English for Wei was more associated with his self-esteem and recognition, which could not be gained from his communication with Americans.

Second, these participants lacked understanding of both verbal and non-verbal cues of American culture and various aspects of American society. As Nan described, immigrants and sojourners were like babies when they relocated to a new culture. Since these migrating individuals were not born and raised in the U.S., there inevitably existed a gap between them and Americans regarding the shared semantic fields. Therefore, these participants felt it challenging to fit into Americans' conversations and understand the punchlines of their jokes. Dong said:

For most of the time, I do not know why they feel a particular topic is so funny. For me, I cannot tell why that topic is so funny. And they always jump from one topic to another during the discussion session. Most of those topics are not relevant to the lecture. They just keep chatting and chatting.

Other participants echoed Dong's feeling. For example, Ru revealed that:

American students jump from one topic to another one too fast. I still think what examples I should give on the first topic; all of a sudden, I find they have already moved to the second topic. And their topics cover different areas, such as sports and politics. I noticed Americans like to talk about sports and politics. But I have no interest in these topics. Moreover, the topic which makes them feel funny, in my eyes, is not that funny. We have the different punchlines.

Chen compared his small talk with Americans to the repeated population census.

They always ask me the same questions. "What is your name? What is your major? How long have you been to the U.S.?" Just like population census. When all of these questions are over, we have nothing to say and walk away from each other. Then another American will come close to you and ask you the same questions. I feel bored. I would like to introduce some Chinese philosophies to them, but my oral English is not that good.

Some participants mentioned that Americans around them loved to talk about politics and sports. However, they had no interest in politics and sports. They had no idea of what Americans were discussing. Both Jun and Xin were big fans of sports, but they were only familiar with soccer, which was also popular in China. When American students around them talked about American football, they had no idea what should be said. The incapability of fitting into Americans' conversations made the participants feel like outsiders. The sense of being an outsider, to some extent, dissociated these participants from the mainstream society in the U.S. Chen (2004) elaborates that the dissociation caused by the sense of being an outsider in the U.S. aggravated Chinese students' loneliness and their social isolation from home and family

members. To relieve the loneliness and social isolation, Chinese students tend to form their small circles outside of the host culture. For the participants in this research, the communication within the Chinese community could provide them a stronger sense of security and reduce their loneliness and social isolation brought by studying and living in a foreign country.

Third, the empathy between the participants and Americans is limited. Empathy is the capability of recognizing emotions that are being experienced by others. The recognition is based on similar or shared experiences. However, it was difficult for the participants to find similar or shared experiences with Americans, especially regarding the struggles they experienced as international students in the U.S. For example, Dong said that international students in his department could not get sufficient support and attention. Therefore, he always left quickly after class. Moreover, Dong did not want to discuss his stress and frustration with American students because he did not think that these locals could completely understand what an international student was going through in this country. When he was in a bad mood, Dong usually complained to other Chinese students or his Indonesian cohort because they went through the similar or even the same difficulties. For Dong, the communication with other sojourners in the U.S. could provide him more emotional resonance. However, the absence of similar or shared experiences between Chinese students and Americans made the former feel hard to establish the emotional resonance with the latter. As a consequence, these Chinese students preferred to gain emotional support from other Chinese students or international students from other countries.

Fourth, friendship has the different meaning for Chinese and Americans. Friendship, from the Chinese cultural perspective, means a collective identity which places more emphasis on co-dependence and pays less attention to the independence and privacy of individuals (Chen, 2004). Chinese culture usually puts sentiment over rationality during the friendship, but in the U.S. the reverse is true (Chen, 2004). Moreover, Americans distinguish friendship from friendly behaviors. They can behave friendly to other people, but it does not necessarily mean the friendship has been established. However, in the Chinese culture, the friendly behaviors are based on the establishment of friendship (Chen, 2004). Different perceptions of friendship accounted for the participants' uncomfortable experiences in the U.S. Several participants in this research claimed that Americans sometimes were emotionally close to them but sometimes walked away from them. For example, Mei once considered two of her lab-mates as friends, because they took care of her so well when she first came to the U.S.

They took me to a lot of places for grocery, cell phone, and many other things. So I once considered them as my friends. For me, friends mean mutual help as long as you need. But for them, sometimes they do not want to help me even if they have the time and the capability. If you ask them for help, but they do not want to do that, they will say "No" directly. For Chinese, we will help each other as long as we turn a finger to help. Maybe that is how they treat friends. I do not know. It is hard for me to make friends with them.

For Ru, she said she was a little bit uncomfortable about the different meaning of friendship in the U.S.

For example, yesterday we chatted very happily, and I thought we were friends. But the next day, when we run into each other, it seems that nothing has ever happened. The closeness I had yesterday did not exist. In China, we should behave like yesterday, so close. Maybe Chinese people more mutually rely on each other. American people prefer more freedom and independence in the friendship. I do not know. But I felt a little bit uncomfortable.

In Tao's case, he said that he once considered some American students in his office as friends and considered that it was his duty to offer suggestions before he was asked actively. To Tao, this was taken for granted by Chinese students. However, American students did not take suggestions given by Tao. Similar to Tao, Chen mentioned that he would seldom hang out with his American lab-mates because they were indifferent to other people and always wanted to be alone. Under these circumstances, these participants conducted either intra-ethnic communication with other Chinese people or interethnic communication with international students from other countries. By doing so, they could gain understanding and recognition from people who had the similar or shared experiences with them. And they did not have to worry about their incapability of expressing themselves entirely and precisely. As Chen said:

I hang out a lot with other Chinese people. I did not fit into American culture. It is true. But I am not frustrated. I feel so good. I enjoy my life. If I am the only Chinese and all other people around me are Americans, I will feel stressed and desperate.

If cross-cultural adaptation theory's claims on intra-ethnic communication and interethnic communication are true, the participants in this research should turn to Americans for successful intercultural adaptation. However, none of them did that. They shifted their attention to ethnic groups which could better help them relieve the loneliness and social isolation, and provide them emotional support and company. These migrating individuals' differences in the process of acculturation were maintained rather than being eliminated. Even for Ying, Yue, and Nan, none of them interacted with Americans for successful adaptation to American culture. The most prominent reason for their choice rested upon the excellent personality possessed by their American friends. When these participants made friends, they did not consider ethnicity or nationality. For Ying and Yue, the friendship pattern they had formed was by accident. Exploration of immigrants' and sojourners' acculturation should go beyond their behaviors and tap what these behaviors mean to them (Kramer, Callahan & Zuckerman, 2012). Since the participants could not gain what they needed from their communication with Americans, they turned to non-Americans for emotional needs. As Kramer (2000) argues, ethnic differences should be allowed rather than being eliminated.

4.2. Home Culture: Unlearned or Maintained?

The second discrepancy between cross-cultural adaptation theory and cultural fusion theory resides in the possibility of migrating individuals to unlearn their home cultures. Kim (2001) states that what is new will be learned or enculturated, meanwhile the original cultural habits

deculturated and unlearned. Objecting to the zero-sum view depicted by cross-cultural adaptation theory, Kramer (2000) argues that learning is an additive process, in which new experiences will be learned, and the home cultures still can be maintained. All participants in this research denied the possibility of unlearning Chinese culture during their acculturation in the U.S. All of them, directly or indirectly, claimed that *being a Chinese* would never be erased no matter how long they stayed in the U.S. Their attachment to their Chinese cultural identity, according to their interviews, can be categorized into the preference for Chinese culture and patriotism.

Preference for Chinese Culture. Several participants displayed their preference for Chinese culture during the interviews. Although they had already studied and lived in the U.S., the new experiences did not exclude Chinese culture from their daily life. The researcher got to know Wei through an oral-English training workshop. Different from other Chinese students attending the workshop, Wei always wore T-shirts which had a lot of Chinese characters. He said jokingly that he was like a walking writing board which was full of Chinese characters. When he was asked why he chose those unique T-shirts, Wei said:

I am so afraid of being considered as ABC (American-born Chinese). I am a native of Beijing. If I am mistaken for an ABC, I would feel that I lost my fan'er (范儿 in Mandarin, which refers to swag). I spent my childhood and adolescence in hutongs (胡同 in Mandarin, which refer to Chinese alleys in Beijing) and grew up there. I got my fan'er there! I chose those T-shirts on purpose. I purchased them before I came to the U.S. I wanted to emphasize my own cultural identity.

During the interview, Wei emphasized his *fan'er* several times, which is a dialect term in North China, especially in Beijing. It is used to describe a person's style, manner, bearing, and demeanor. According to one of the largest and authoritative online dictionaries in China, *Iciba*, the semantic meaning of having *fan'er* is similar to *getting swag on* in colloquial American English. For Wei, his swag is closely related to his hometown, Beijing, which was the capital city of six dynasties in Chinese history and is the political center of the People's Republic of China. *Hutong* mentioned by Wei is one of the sources from which he gained his swag. As a Chinese cultural symbol, *hutong* is usually composed of a narrow laneway and street. "Each *hutong* is like a novel, a long historical story. When I walk through them, I feel a thousand years of history, of the accumulated wisdom of Beijing people, falling upon me like gentle drops of rain" (as cited in Hilary du, Bauer, Lo & Rui, 2005, pp.175-176). The other source for Wei to gain his swag is Chinese cuisine. When he was asked whether he cooked western food during his spare time, Wei said in an exaggerated way:

Western food?! It is too easy. Everyone can fry steak. There are no skills at all in Western cuisines.

Then Wei showed the researcher a lot of photos which he took of food he made by himself. All of the food was typical Chinese cuisine, which usually required many steps and longer cooking times. From Wei's point of view, Chinese cuisine was much more complicated than Western

cuisine. He associated Chinese cuisine's complexity with Chinese culture's superiority over American culture.

Similar to Wei, Ying showed her pride in Chinese cuisine. When she talked about her impression of the U.S. and Americans around her, she said:

I feel that many Americans are living a very pitiful life, especially those living in this small town. The food they eat is too unhealthy! They cannot afford the food of high quality, so they go to Wal-Mart and buy a lot of junk food, such as chips, cheese, bread, and drinks. Children grow up with the unhealthy food and many adults suffer from obesity. All of these can be attributed to the fact that there is no way for them to eat the healthy food like Chinese. I personally still like Chinese food.

Different from Western cuisine, Chinese diet pays attention to balancing *yin* and *yang* in people's consumption of food (Kirkendall, 2010). Therefore, the traditional Chinese diet is famous for being "well-balanced, high in fiber and low in saturated fats" (Lv & Brown, 2010, p. 1). On the contrary, the typical American fast food and semi-manufactured food sold in supermarkets like Wal-mart contain too many fats and sugar, which can lead to obesity and other illnesses. Moreover, eating in China is more than consuming food; it is also a social occasion. Kirkendall (2010) points out that "food is enjoyed not only for its taste, appearance, rarity, cost, and complexity, but for the fact that its consumption can be discussed, evaluated, criticized, and enjoyed for its social meanings" (p.2). Ying said *hot pot* could provide a comfortable social occasion for her to chat with friends.

I love hot pot. It gives me a feeling of warmth. Just imagine. A big group of friends sit together and wait for the pot in the center. We wait together and chat with each other at the same time. You know? That feeling makes me very warm. But the eating habits here (the U.S.) are not as warm as our Chinese way.

For Ru, she not only wanted to keep Chinese culture to herself but also expected to pass it on to her children in the future. Ru hoped that she could find a job in the U.S. after her graduation. She tried very hard to improve her oral English and wished that one day she could completely understand each sentence spoken by Americans and thoroughly know about American culture. However, she still admitted that she still had cultural superiority when facing American culture.

I am so proud of Chinese culture. In my eyes, we do have the culture which is superior to American culture. Yes, I want to stay in this country with my boyfriend. It is highly possible that my children will be born and raised here. But I do hope my children can learn Mandarin and Chinese traditional culture. I cannot imagine what I will do if my children have no idea of how to speak Mandarin.

Ying expressed the similar concern as Ru. She just broke up with her American boyfriend because she decided to go back to China after her graduation. She said:

I really cannot imagine that one day I am married to an American boy who cannot speak Mandarin and have a baby who is born and raised in this country. How can my husband communicate with my parents who cannot speak English? How can I raise my children in the country where English is the dominant language? What if my children refuse to learn Mandarin in the future?

For both Ying and Ru, Mandarin was more associated with their Chinese identity, which they wanted to pass on to their children.

Patriotism. Being different from participants mentioned above, other participants displayed their Chinese identity in another way. For example, Yue used to have an American girlfriend, but they quarreled a lot. Yue said he could not stand for the criticism made by his ex-girlfriend on China. He described her criticism as *blind arrogance and rudeness*.

There was one time that she told me “I will never go to China. I do not like that poor and messy country”. I was so pissed off by what she said! If she does not like China, fine, she does not have to go there. I will not invite her there. But does she know how big our house is in China? What kind of car my dad is driving? Our house is bigger than her family’s, and my dad’s car is better than her dad’s. No matter how many problems China has, it is my motherland, my country, and my home. She cannot criticize my country in such an arrogant and rude way”.

According to cultural-adaptation theory, Nan and Lu might rank the best two among all participants regarding their success in adapting to American culture. First, both of them could speak perfect English. Second, their behaviors, compared to other Chinese students, were much more Americanized. Nan told the researcher that even his American friends mistook him for American-born Chinese when they first met. Even though Nan and Lu adapted themselves well to American culture, they still rose up to refute some Americans’ biased judgments of China. For example, Nan mentioned that:

I love my country. It is true that we did something wrong on some issues. But if we did not do anything wrong and the critique was based on bias and unilateral information, I definitely would argue with them. For example, I would do a lot of cross-checking on the Tibet issue, and I will let them know you cannot criticize my country based on one-sided argument regardless of the truth.

The patriotism displayed by these participants was linked to their national identity, which not only reflected individuals’ sense of belonging to a particular place but also enabled them to symbolize themselves by certain qualities of that place (Osborne, 2006; Rose, 1995). Due to this association between these migrating individuals and their home countries, the biased judgment on China aroused the aforementioned responses of Yue, Nan and Lu, which were deeply rooted in their national identity that was “filtered through social structures and fostered through socialization” (Hague & Jenkins, 2004, as cited in Zhou, 2008, p. 4). Even if they relocated to a new culture, the unique perspective fostered by their national identity continued

to exist. As Ying said, the Chinese perspective was inescapable for Chinese people.

Cross-cultural adaptation theory argues that successful acculturation in the host culture requires migrating individuals to keep a distance from their home cultures through deculturating and even unlearning them in the long run (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Kim, 2001, 2011, 2015). However, this argument underestimates immigrants' and sojourners' attachment to their home cultures, especially the attachment to their original cultural identity. Migrating individuals might feel so proud of their home cultures and home cultural identity that it is impossible for them to abandon their cultural pride in order to fit into the host culture, especially when their national identity is under attack from biased judgments made on their motherlands. Being born and raised in a culture does not only mean that individuals learn such skills as speaking, thinking and behaving. More importantly, this culture provides individuals with a perspective to explore this world. This built-in perspective will never be unlearned when new perspectives are acquired, according to cultural fusion theory (Kramer, 2000). It is just like riding a bicycle. As long as you learn how to ride a bicycle, you will never unlearn it after you learn how to drive a car.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

Compared to previous research on international students' acculturation, this research focused on what Chinese students couldn't do rather than what they could do regarding their adaptation to the host culture, and what "cannot" meant to them. Through comparing the unidirectional theoretical perspective and non-unidirectional theoretical perspective in the context of Chinese students' acculturation in the U.S., this research supported cultural fusion theory, which states that migrating individuals' niches and differences should be celebrated and embraced rather than being erased toward the formation of a uniform streamlined model (Kramer, 2000; Sandel & Liang, 2010). Acculturation is not a zero-sum game. The participants in this study admitted that they maintained communication with their co-ethnics for emotional support, which was less accessible during their interaction with Americans. Although these participants in this study maintained their home culture, they still made great efforts to improve their English proficiency and learn about American culture and society. For example, Ying forced herself to participate in the lunch talk with Americans with the hope of improving her oral English. Qian, Hong, and Guo worked as volunteers in a campus community to gain access to opportunities of learning about American culture. If a unidirectional and zero-sum relationship is established between these participants' behaviors and their willingness to adapt themselves to American culture, their closeness to their co-ethnics, their attachment to Chinese culture, and their pride of being a Chinese will be entirely excluded from intercultural communication research.

Owing to time constraint and financial pressure, this research was restricted to Chinese students' acculturation in the U.S. All of the participants came to the U.S. in their early 20's, and their primary goal was to gain a degree in this country, which possesses the leading position in education globally. The majority of participants mentioned that they also chose the U.S. for the freedom and better academic atmosphere nourished by this country. But not every participant insisted on staying in the U.S. after graduation. Some of them planned to go to other countries, and some hoped to go back to China after their graduation. For those who wanted

to find a job in the U.S. after graduation, they never thought of becoming Americans one day. As Ru and Cui expressed, as long as they could settle down in this country, it was enough for them. Therefore, studies in the future are suggested to compare cross-cultural adaptation theory and cultural fusion theory embedded in the exploration of different sojourning groups' (e.g., refugees) acculturation. It would be worthwhile to examine how changes in migratory patterns affect different sojourning groups' acculturation.

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