

ABSTRACT

ABDRAHIM, NUR AIRA BINTI. Asian International Graduate Students' Experiences Adjusting to the U.S.: A Narrative Study. (Under the direction of Tuere Bowles.)

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of Asian international graduate students adjusting to life in the United States. Data were gathered from 10 purposefully selected Asian international graduate students at a southeastern university. Three research questions were formulated to guide the study: (a) What are the experiences encountered by the Asian international graduate students during their adjustment process to life in the U.S.? (b) How do the Asian international graduate students facilitate their adjustment process? (c) How do the Asian international graduate students construct their personal and interpersonal growth as the result of the adjustment process?

Narrative analysis was conducted on the data and findings were presented and elaborated according to the three research questions. The findings had shown that each of the participants has different adjustment experiences and that the experiences are impacted by varying factors such as motivation, personality, coping strategies, and social support. All the participants also reported having varying set of growth as a result of the adjustment process.

Three conclusions were drawn from the finding and include: (a) the adjustment process is dynamic in nature, (b) during the adjustment process, the participant are trying to find "fit" as a competent graduate students, and (c) the participants are looking at the adjustment process through the learning lens and becoming resiliency. The findings draw on multiple implications from theories, practices and learners perspectives. Among the recommendations include providing support that are more geared towards academic well

being, initiating awareness program on cultural differences to faculty and other students and other programs that can accommodate the needs of Asian international graduate students.

Asian International Graduate Students' Experiences
Adjusting to the U.S.: A Narrative Study

by
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this paper to those individuals who have made me believe that this journey is possible and worth pursuing for. The first tribute goes to my husband and best friend, Farihan Azizan, for without his constant support and unconditional love, there is no way I could move forward in this journey alone. Thank you for sharing my tears and doubling my joy. Thank you for staying put when I'm at my worst and for celebrating when I'm at my best. Thank you for teaching me patience and perseverance by your own exemplary. Thank you for the countless hours traveling back and forth between Raleigh and Malaysia. Thank you for showing me the kind of love that is immeasurable by time, distance or money. Thank you for making me want to move forward in life, knowing that I have a great future that awaits me, the one that infinitely and perpetually includes you.

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BIOGRAPHY

Aira comes from Malaysia and enrolled into the Department of Adult and Higher Education at North Carolina State University in 2008 in pursuit of an MS in Adult and Community College Education. Her position as tutor in the Department of Continuing Education at University Putra Malaysia sparked her interest in adult education. Her long range goals include a Ph.D. and she aspires to "contribute to the adult education field in her country and internationally by teaching and researching." She has a great desire to foster adult and higher education in Malaysia and she hopes this degree and experience will give her valuable insights into the adult education field.

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To all my friends here in Raleigh, everywhere else across the U.S. and those in Malaysia, thank you for your beautiful friendship that has helped me go through my loneliest period of being the farthest away from home.

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PROLOGUE

In Malaysia, during the month of Eid Fitr, a celebration widely celebrated by about 60% of the Muslim population in Malaysia, our national newspaper will be featuring a special section known as “Salam Perantauan”. This section displays greetings and wishes from Malaysian students and employees who are currently abroad, accompanied with pictures of them in their respective universities or cities. It’s a very popular section, especially meaningful for the family members of the students and employees and also fascinating to the eyes of the public. I too, among others, have been an enthusiastic follower of that section for as long as I can remember. I got positively influenced from reading that section for years and was hopeful to be featured in that section too. That is when I established my own dream of wanting to pursue my study abroad one day.

In August 2008, my wish was granted. I was all set to fly to the United States, leaving my family, a husband of two-months (at that time), and my comfortable home behind. This would be the farthest I had ever been from home. The feelings kept changing every single day, a mix of happiness, excitement, sadness, fear, and nervousness because of the many unknown factors that I was about to experience. On my departure day, all of my close family members were there to bid me goodbye. I remember distinctly how hard I cried as I walked through the boarding gate, knowing that I would be on my own from then on.

The journey took about 24 hours worth of total flight time. I traveled from east to west, passing through night time to day time. Los Angeles was my first U.S. entry point. Then I took a connecting flight from LA to Atlanta before finally heading to my final destination, Raleigh, North Carolina. I was very excited when I finally arrived in Raleigh, but when I walked into my

empty apartment, I started to feel homesick that very instant. I did not have any furniture or possessions except for my luggage. I walked around my village and could not find anyone whom I could ask for help or directions. I walked back into my apartment, lay down on the floor, and let my mind travel back to the home that I had just left. I was starting to miss my husband and family very much. I questioned whether or not I had made the right decision to come here.

Luckily, throughout my first few weeks in Raleigh, I had some help, attended some intervention programs as offered by the Office of International Students at NCSU, and made a few friends. I met my adviser who is very kind and enduring, and the rest of my instructors who are very welcoming. I had my husband come over occasionally to keep me company. Gradually, from time to time, I learned to adjust to my new life in Raleigh. I still faced challenges every now and then, but I realized it was best to treat this whole experience as part of my learning process. I don't know how best to describe what I have learned throughout the process, but deep inside I know that I have personally grown and changed into a better person.

I have illustrated my personal experience to serve as an opening vignette for this thesis. My experience is probably unique to my situation, considering where I came from, people whom I met and the community that I lived in. I mixed with many international students, and all of them have different stories and experiences to tell. I am curious to know in more detail how other international students perceived their experiences of adjustment and what shaped the differences. This is the standpoint from which I embarked on this journey to explore the experiences of other international students adjusting to the U.S.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Every year, many international students leave their home country to go abroad in pursuit of a formal education. Many seek this opportunity to gain degrees in prestigious higher education, to acquire what international students generally perceive as a better education (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) or possibly to increase their chances of professional prospects in their host country once they graduate (Trice & Yoo, 2007).

One of the top chosen countries for these purposes is the United States. The United States has the highest number of international students in the world. The number of international students enrolled in US higher institutions has steadily increased since 1960, except for a three-year decline from 2003 until 2006 due to the September 11 attack. However, the Institute of International Education (2008) reported that in the 2007-2008 academic year, there was a 7% rise in total enrolment to the sum of 623, 805 students studying across the United States. This is the highest rise ever recorded since the September 11 attack. This large increase in enrollment suggests that the total number of international students in the U.S. will continue to increase in the future (Bhandari & Chow, 2008).

International students provide important contributions to U.S. higher education in various aspects, including educational, cultural, and financial aspects (Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner & Nelson, 1999). The majority of international students are self-funded and support their studies through personal and family funds. In 2007/08, international students contributed over \$15.5 billion to the U.S. economy through living expenses for themselves and accompanying dependents, as well as through expenditures on out-of-state tuition fees,

books, fees, and other education-related expenses (Bhandari & Chow, 2008).

Considering their increasing number and large contribution to the host country, many educators, especially those in the higher education field, have been dedicating their interests and time to study this population. Reviews on literature reveal that the main body of research is mainly focused on the problems and issues of international students in their adjustment process (Tseng & Newton, 2002). Adjustment process, also referred to as transition or adaptation process interchangeably, is an integral stage for every international student who travels abroad for new educational experiences. However, adjustment to a new educational and social environment can be a stressful process. Considering the cultural differences and misunderstandings of the new and diverse experiences, it is likely that international students will experience feelings of estrangement, anxiety, and depression as a part of their adjustment process (Adler, 1975). According to Brown (2008), the stress would be most prominent during the initial stage of the adjustment process.

Tseng and Newton (2002), in their literature review, advance four major categories that pertain to the issues faced by international students during their adjustment process. The first one is related to general living adjustment, such as getting oneself acquainted to the new surrounding, acclimatizing to different weather, adjusting to the local food and settling in a new living/housing environment. This category, however, is the most common across all populations whenever a person encounters a new living environment.

The second category talks about personal psychological adjustments that include experiencing loneliness, depression, homesickness, frustration, depression, loss of confidence and feelings of alienation. A study conducted by Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland and

Ramia (2008) in Australian universities reports that more than half of international students experienced loneliness and alienation during the period of their academic life in Australia. Students who feel isolated tend to be less confident than their peers, and this will then exacerbated their problems in adjusting to a new environment (Sawir et al., 2008).

The third category is about a socio-cultural adjustment, which includes making new local friends, familiarizing with the new cultural norms and regulations, facing racial discrimination, adjusting to differences in intercultural contacts/social activities, and experiencing culture shock. Brown (2008) adapted the definition of culture shock as follows:

Culture shock is defined as anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse, which we do not carry at the level of conscious awareness (Oberg, 1960) and their substitution by other cues that are strange (Hall, 1959).

The last category is academic adjustment, which relates to things such as proficiency in English, the American educational system, higher education support systems, and effective learning skills. It is reported that lack of proficiency in English is a major stressor that hinders the effectiveness of many international students in their studies (Hills & Thom, 2005; Tatar, 2005; Brown, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

These four categories have highlighted the issues that were faced by most international students during their adjustment process. It is certainly crucial and important for these students to overcome all of these difficulties and adjust successfully to ensure the effectiveness of their academic capabilities. This is probably why most research about international students focuses

on problematic issues that relate to these four categories. However, what is largely being ignored is the exploration on how these international students experience their adjustment process in positive ways (Tseng & Newton, 2002). Wang (2009) asserts that international students differ greatly in adjusting to their circumstances and studies. Some adjust easily while others find it very difficult. Meanwhile, according to Berry (1997), there are varying factors that should be attended when carrying out studies on cross cultural adjustment. This is the stance upon which this study addresses the problem.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to understand the adjustment experience of Asian international graduate students to life in the United States. When we want to empower individuals to share their stories and hear the voices, conducting qualitative research will be the most appropriate method (Creswell, 2007). This study will employ a narrative research approach. Narrative, in its broadest sense, refers to any spoken or written presentation (Schwandt, 2007), or as prosaic discourse, that is, any text that consists of complete sentences linked into a coherent and integrated statement (Polkinghorne, 1995). However, more recently, qualitative researchers have attended to a more limited definition of narrative. In this definition, narrative refers to a particular type of discourse, organized in a story form, not simply to any prosaic discourse (Connelly & Clandini, 1990).

The researcher will be interviewing a selected group of Asian international graduate students and exploring their personal experiences on this process. This study aims to address these research questions:

1. What are the experiences encountered by the Asian international graduate students during their adjustment process to life in the U.S.?
2. How do the Asian international graduate students facilitate their adjustment process?
3. How do the Asian international graduate students construct their personal and interpersonal growth as the result of the adjustment process?

Significance of the Study

There are a few similar studies that have been done before, but the researchers were looking at the topic from a quantitative approach (Ladd & Ruby, 1999; Ong & Ward, 2005; Portella-Myers, 2006; Wang, 2009). Within the last twenty to thirty years, we have seen a shift, not only to the necessity of qualitative methodologies, but to ones that recognize the importance of narrative to understand the social worlds we wish to grasp (Harling Stalker, 2009). I employed a narrative study on this topic in order to provide a thorough understanding of the adjustment experiences of the Asian international graduate student from the ontological and epistemological narratives. Ontological narrative allows researchers to be able to present to their readers detailed case studies of some of the participants, where there is continuity from the beginning, middle and end of the story (Harling Stalker). Epistemological narrative, on the other hand, is a form of narrative in which the researcher sets out to answer question about “what we might regard as knowledge or evidence of things in the social world” (Mason, 2002 as cited by Harling Stalker).

It is crucial to increase awareness about international students’ problems and to recognize the students’ individual perspectives regarding the factors that are involved in the

adjustment process. In addition to the participants being international, they are also transitioning to graduate education, which offers different challenges altogether. Studies have shown that many students perceived difficulty in their transition to doctoral education, mainly due to the process of becoming an independent researcher (Gardner, 2008; Lovitts, 2005). Many U.S. universities desire to attract more international students to enroll in their institution. Thus, universities must focus on these students' needs and successes in their American university experience (Lacina, 2002). Because of the many cultural differences and norms that these international students have, understanding this specific group's experiences has important value-added implications to strategic planning in order to enhance the support and available resources to meet the specific need of Asian international graduate students. This study offers insights about them and may benefit the counseling services, international student affairs division and policy makers in their program planning.

Delimitations and Limitations

I also narrowed the scope of study to only look at Asian international students at a graduate level. This will exclude international students that are non-Asian and those that are in undergraduate programs. The main reason for this exclusion is because the profile, culture and experiences can be very different between Asian and non-Asian students and between these two academic levels (undergraduate and graduate). I decided to focus on the selected group based on the large percentage that these profiles constitute over their counterparts; 61% of the total number of international students are from the Asia region while 44% are currently studying at a graduate level compared to 39% studying in undergraduate programs (Bhandari & Chow, 2008).

Furthermore, the findings are based on data gathered from five Asian international graduate students at a selected Southeastern university. Thus, the conclusions made from this study might not be a good representation of other international student populations across the United States. However, the aim of qualitative research is not to generalize its findings, but to understand in more depth a certain phenomena of interest (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Definition of Terms

Adjustment. A gradual adaptation to the new culture and learning how to behave appropriately according to the cultural norms of the host country (Black & Mendenhall, 1991)

International student. Individual who is enrolled in courses at an accredited higher education institution in the United States on a temporary visa, and who is not an immigrant (permanent resident), a citizen, an illegal alien (undocumented immigrant), or a refugee (Bhandari & Chow, 2008)

Asian. People whose countries of origin are from the Asian continent (Campbell & Li, 2008)

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. The first one is to examine the cross cultural literature and present the theoretical framework used to guide this study. The second aim is to review studies related to international students' adjustment process in a new country. The third purpose is to present the characteristics of Asian students in their non Western ways of learning and related learning theories that can help to support the understanding of Asian international graduate students' process and growth in their respective adjustment process. Additionally, issues and challenges identified in regards to their learning process are also discussed.

Cross-cultural Adaptations

Cross-cultural adaptation is a long-term process of adjusting and finally feeling comfortable in a new environment (Hall, 2005). Cross-cultural literally means crossing cultures between two or more cultures. Every year, there are great numbers of groups and people who move across cultural boundaries (Kim, 2001). This includes long term migration groups such as immigrants and refugees. People also move on a temporary basis under various arrangements and purposes like employment opportunities, job attachments, and assuming roles such as diplomats and governmental agency employees, researchers, visiting professors, military personnel on foreign duties, missionaries carrying out religious service, summer study abroad students, and students seeking a degree in another country. *Sojourner* is another term commonly used in cross cultural adaptations literature. Sojourner refers to individuals who travel abroad to attain a particular goal within a specific period of time (Bocher, 2006). Foreign or international students are a prominent group that belong to the sojourners' category. Their

primary purpose is to study and obtain professional qualifications within a range of time from several months to several years if they attend a university.

Terms in the studies. Kim (2001) reports that the phenomenon of cross-cultural adaptations has been widely investigated since the beginning of 20th century, not only within the United States, but also in other countries such as Australia, Canada, English, Germany, Israel and Sweden. Previous studies have employed various terms to describe the same process, such as *acculturation*, *assimilation*, *transition*, *adjustment*, *integration*, and *adaptation*. Kim (2001) and Hall (2005) help to provide definitions for some these terms. *Assimilation* emphasizes the individual acceptance and internationalization to the host culture. It also refers to a process whereby individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant culture of society. *Adjustment* is mainly used to refer to the psychological aspects of the cross cultural process while *integration* looks at assessing the social participation in the host environment.

Kim (2001), however, favors the term “adaptation”. According to Kim, adaptation employs the definition that follows the open-systems perspective of organisms or groups of organisms’ responsive change to environmental demand as advanced by Rappaport (1971). Kim grounded her theory in the open systems and posits three assumptions. The first assumption is that humans have an innate self-organizing drive and a capacity to adapt to environmental challenges. Secondly, adaptation of an individual to a given cultural environment occurs in and through communication. She perceives cross-cultural adaptation as a prolonged communication process that will continue to occur as long as the individuals remain in interaction with the host environment. Accordingly, communication is then defined

as a wide range of message exchange activities, which include all implicit, nonverbal, and unintentional messages between an individual and the host environment. The third assumption is that adaptation is a complex and dynamic process that brings about a qualitative transformation of the individual.

In this case, Kim defines *adaptation* as referring to a more inclusive overarching process of cross cultural change defined as the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments, establish (or re-establish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments. When used in reference to multicultural issues, *adaptation* implies the *social and psychological adjustment* of individuals or cultural groups to the new cultural environment in which they now reside (Adelman, 1988). Meanwhile, for Berry (1992) adaptation is the term used to refer to both the strategies used during acculturation and to its outcome. Adjustment is perceived as the strategy most often intended by the term adaptation, where changes in the individual are initiated in a direction which reduces conflict and increases the congruence or fit with the new environment.

The term *acculturation* is originated from the field of anthropology and has been regarded as synonymous with the term *assimilation* as used by sociologists (Sam, 2006). *Interculturation* is another related concept discovered in the French literature with a parallel meaning to acculturation. The concept is defined as “the set of processes by which individuals and groups interact when they identify themselves as culturally distinct” (Sam, 2006). Hall (2005) synthesizes the work of many authors and refers to *acculturation* as the cultural and psychological change brought about due to contact with peoples of different cultures.

Major usage of the term acculturation can be found in Berry's (1990, 1997) works. According to him, the concept of *acculturation* refers to the cultural changes resulting from new group encounters, while the concepts of *psychological acculturation* and *adaptation* are seen as referring to the psychological changes and eventual outcomes that occur as a result of individuals experiencing acculturation. The important distinction between acculturation and psychological acculturation is the level at which it occurs; the former is at group level while the latter is a change at individual level. At the same time, Ward and Nara-Deubra (1999) in their work, refer to *acculturation*, *adjustment* and *adaptation* interchangeably depending on the source of literature to which they are referring. For the purpose of reviewing the literature, I maintained the terms as used by the referred literature. For the purpose of my study, I chose to use the term adjustment to describe the process since the term is more commonly used in studies among international students.

Psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Searle and Ward (1990) assert that cross cultural adjustments can be divided into two main categories: psychological adjustment and sociocultural adjustment. They point out that psychological adjustment is best understood within stress and coping models, while in contrast, sociocultural adjustment draws upon social learning and social cognition models. Psychological adjustment refers to psychological and emotional well-being and is predicted by personality factors, life changes, and social support variables. Meanwhile, sociocultural adjustment focuses on the ability to "fit it", and the depending variables include length of residence and interaction with host nationals, language ability, cultural knowledge, cultural identity, and cultural distance. While psychological

adjustment aims to achieve a personal satisfaction in the new environment, sociocultural adjustment is geared toward linking individuals effectively into the new context.

In order to achieve a rewarding sociocultural adjustment, culture learning becomes a required process. Culture learning is the effort to gain insight into how cultural strangers live (Hess, 1994). It requires individuals to be familiar with the new cultural values that include differences in language, nonverbal cues, rules and conventions, and norms and values (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). Culture learning is an important determinant of intercultural competence. Intercultural competence, in a broad definition, encompasses a behavior of understanding, development of relationships, satisfaction, effectiveness, appropriateness and adaptation to function in a differing culture other than one's own (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Mastering the language is particularly emphasized in culture learning (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). However, it is argued that language, although necessary, does not sufficiently make one interculturally competent (Deardoff, 2009). There are also personal and situational factors that affect individuals in their language and culture learning. Among the personal factors discussed by Masgoret and Ward are motivational factors and expectations and personality and individual differences, while situational factors varied from previous experience and length of residence, intercultural contact and cultural distance. Intercultural contact involves interactions with host nationals and other indirect channels such as mass media and general living exposure. Meanwhile, cultural distance is defined as the perceived similarities and differences between the culture of origin and the culture of contact. Greater degree of social difficulty is associated with more sociocultural adjustment problems (Searle & Ward, 1990).

Culture shock. The notion of culture shock is first introduced by Oberg (1958) and has been widely discussed in cross cultural adjustment settings (Bocher, 2006; Pederson, 1995; Winkelman, 1994). Culture shock is the process of initial adjustment to an unfamiliar environment (Pederson, 1995). He outlines six indicators of culture shock adjustment. First, familiar cues about how the person is supposed to behave are missing, or the familiar cues now have different meaning. Second, there might be a clash in values among things that are considered good, valuable and respectable between a person and the host culture. Third, there is an emotional state of anxiety, depression, or hostility in various degrees as a result of the disorientation. Fourth, there is a feeling of discontent with how things work and ideas on how things “should” work. Fifth, the revival skills no longer seem to work in the new setting, and sixth, there is a prolonged emotion that these discrepancies are permanent and will not ease off.

The U-Curve Theory (UCT) of adjustment has been one of the most consistently used in cross-cultural research that incorporates the notion of culture shock (Black & Mendenhall, 1991). In their review, Black and Medenhall discussed a few basic descriptions about U-Curve theory (UCT) that were empirically advanced by Lysgaard (1955). The theory involves four stages of cross cultural adjustment. In the initial “honeymoon stage”, individuals are fascinated by the new culture and are excited about all the new and interesting “sights and sounds.” This initial cultural infatuation is then followed by the culture shock stage - a period of disillusionment and frustration as the individual must seriously cope with living in the new culture on a day-to-day basis. The “adjustment stage” is characterized by gradual adaptation to the new culture and learning how to behave appropriately according the cultural norms of the

host country. The fourth stage, “mastery stage,” is characterized by small incremental increases in the individual’s ability to function effectively in the new culture.

Despite being most consistently used, the authors question the UCT’s reliability based on the lack of consistent methodological rigor in many of the previous studies on UCT. Thus, this makes generalizing the theory problematic. But UCT’s biggest criticism is the fact that it is implied as a smooth linear adaptive process, which is not particularly consistent in reality when the actual process involves a lot on irregular and unpredictable movement of change (Pederson, 1995).

However, there is a shift in the culture shock paradigm where culture shock is explained as the “educational model” by describing the adjustment period as a state of growth and development which may start with disorienting feelings that eventually result in positive growth and newly transformed perspective (Pederson, 1995). This new balanced perspective defies the negative notion that is seemingly implied within the previous culture shock perspective. It is now perceived as a learning process that is complex and multifaceted in nature. The culture-shock model offers a promising approach that can be used to understand adjustment difficulties generally. At the same time, theories of acculturation are being used instead to conceptualize and study changes of people in a great variety of settings.

Acculturation framework. Berry’s (1997) framework for acculturation research serves as the conceptual framework on which acculturation and adaptation can be investigated under a cross-cultural setting. Cross-cultural research is the scientific study of human behavior and its transmission, taking into account the ways in which behaviors are shaped and influenced by social and cultural factors (Hall, 2005). Berry’s framework captures a wide-ranging aspect of

the acculturation process, where it covers both the structural and process features which include the acculturation process flow from group to individual level and factors affecting the process. According to Berry, the variables presented in this framework are necessary when conducting studies on humans' behavior in acculturation process.

The framework (Figure 1) is divided into two levels, group level and individual level variables. The group level variables are mainly situational variables, where Berry emphasizes the need for a fairly comprehensive review of two societal contexts: origin and settlement. In society of origin, it is important to examine where the person is coming from and what they bring along with them as a person. This includes investigating the migration motivation and previous political, economic, and demographic conditions of these individuals in their home country. In society of settlement, it is important to examine the openness and acceptance level of the receiving society toward these newcomers. Other key features include demography characteristics of the settlement society and immigration policies and perceptions towards immigrants. Group-level acculturation occurs as the change result of migrant groups living with these two sets of cultural influences, origin and settlement, and affect changes in their physical, biological, economic, social and cultural values.

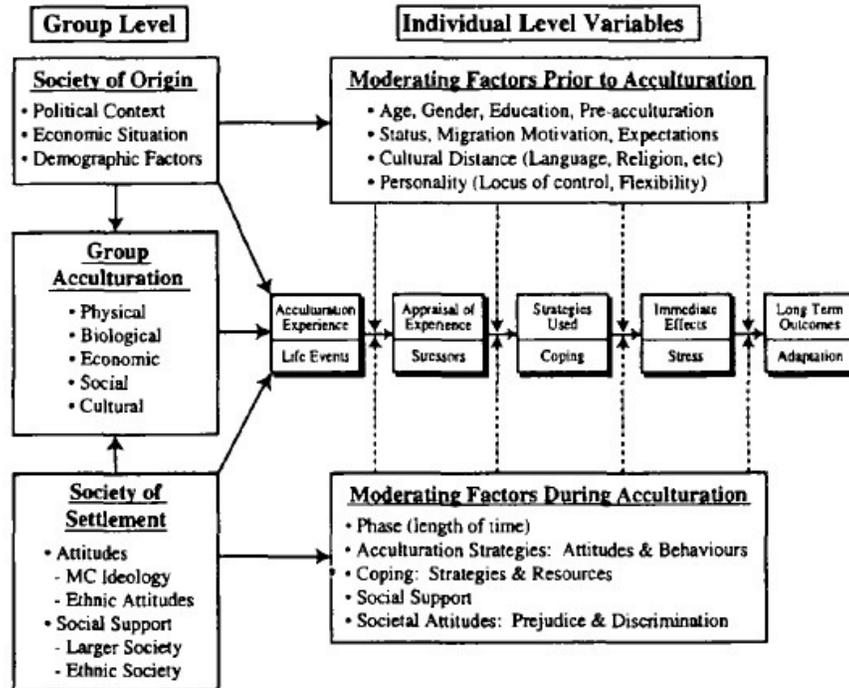


Figure 1. A framework for acculturation research. On the left are a group of cultural-level phenomena, which are mainly situational variables; while to the right are individual or psychological-level phenomena, which are predominantly person variables. Adapted from “Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation” by J. Berry, 1997, *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46, p. 15. Reprinted with permission.

The central flow of this framework shows psychological acculturation phenomena beginning with group acculturation and individual acculturation experience and ending with some long-term adaptation. There are five main features of psychological acculturation at the individual level. The first one is that the experiences stem from dealing with two cultures contact. The second feature is to consider the meaning of these experiences and evaluate and

appraise them as a course of difficulty or as opportunities. Third, when engaging with the experiences, whether it creates minimal issues or greater conflicts, individuals will respond and engage in various coping strategies to counter the situations. The fourth aspect involves a complex set of immediate effects, inclusive of physiological and emotional reactions known as a notion of stress, where different outcomes are expected depending whether this process is being managed negatively or positively. The last main feature is the long term adaptation process that may potentially be achieved. Adaptation does not necessarily improve the “fit” between individuals and their new environment, but may also involve resistance or attempts to change their environments, even as far as moving altogether.

Additionally, the framework shows that individuals’ acculturation is affected by two types of moderating factors. The first type is categorized as factors existing prior to acculturation. Basically, this is what the individuals bring within themselves when they move to a new place. The factors include age, gender, education, pre-acculturation, status, migration motivation, expectations, cultural distance, and personality. The second type covers factors occurring during acculturation that take into account factors such as length of time, attitudes and behaviors during the process, the coping strategies and resources that are available, social support and societal attitudes. All of these factors as a whole shape what each individual is experiencing during the acculturation process and have become the variables that I focus on in my research and findings.

International Students’ Adjustment

There are many issues that pertain to international students’ adjustment when they move to another country for educational pursuit. Andrade (2006) reviewed the studies

conducted on international students' experiences adjusting to English-speaking universities and concluded the issues into four areas: (1) comparisons of domestic and international student adjustment, (2) analyses of professors' and students' views of adjustment challenges, (3) student insights about their experiences, and (4) support services.

In the first area of discussion, Andrade asserts that international students face adjustment issues that are distinctly different from those of domestic students. The two discussed issues are academic and social adjustment issues. The various academic issues faced by international students are mainly related to language matter. Among the issues include difficulty in understanding lectures because of unfamiliar vocabulary and inconceivable speech because of the speed. Interestingly, it is also reported that international students respond constructively to both positive and negative learning incidents, but on a bigger picture, international students experienced more stress and anxiety than domestic students and required extra effort to help manage their challenges. However, it is also important to note that although poor language skills are likely to deter international students' academic adjustment, it is not the sole factor ensures their success either. In coping with these academic issues, Kingston & Forland (2008) assert that being culturally competent is as important as being linguistically competent.

In terms of social adjustments, international students faced greater difficulty obtaining support mainly because their family and close friends are geographically distant in comparison to domestic students. As a result, international students also experienced greater homesickness and loneliness. Other than personal loneliness and social loneliness, international students also experienced cultural loneliness, where feelings are triggered by the absence of the preferred

cultural and/or linguistic environment in the host country (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008).

The next section discusses the differing perceptions between international students and faculty members. According to Kingston and Forland (2008), academic cultural differences are among the major contributor of stress to international students. While it is important for international students to embrace culture learning and be adjusted to the cultural differences, it is also pertinent for faculty members to play a role in facilitating this process. Andrade reports that faculty members often misapprehend the behaviors of international students and need greater understanding of their academic, social, emotional and psychological challenges. Thus, providing faculty training on intercultural awareness is essential to addressing this issue so that pedagogical adjustments can be made to accommodate these differences. Additionally, Hellsten and Prescott (2004) point out the need to provide opportunities for teaching staff to communicate and reflect upon their practices in teaching international students.

Brown and Holloway (2008) provide some insights on international postgraduate students' adjustment journey at an English university. The researchers studied a total of one hundred and fifty international students on a 12-month period using an ethnographic study. Although the intent on the study is to establish a model of adjustment from the students' arrival stage to the end of their academic journey, the authors acknowledged that the process is not generalizable due to various factors that have shaped their individuals' experiences. However, from the findings, they concluded that problems associated with adjustment period are most intense upon arrival, yet positive outcomes were also reported as the end-product of the adjustment journey. International students also are reported to be academically successful in

spite of the issues as previously discussed, often due to compensating strategies related to academic skills, motivation and effort (Andrade, 2006).

In the same study, Brown and Holloway also call for universities' supports to be in place throughout all stages of the academic year. The type of supports that international students need are dependable upon various factors such as year in school, level of study (undergraduate or graduate), immigration statutes, age, gender, country of origin and educational background, and the needs can sometimes goes beyond their first year period (Andrade, 2006).

Graduate school transition. Graduate level programs call for different sets of skills and academic expectations than undergraduate programs. A PhD is alternatively regarded as a research degree, one that signifies that the recipient has acquired the capacity to make independent contributions to knowledge through original research and scholarship (Association of American Universities, 1998 in Lovitts, 2005). There is a crucial shift that graduate students must undergo during the course of their graduate program from being a course taker to independent scholar/researcher (Lovitts). Basically, there is a transition involved between the dependant and independent stages. Course taker is described as a consumer of knowledge that administers learning within structured learning plans, while being an independent researcher means one is able produce knowledge and perform in unstructured and self-managed contexts.

Gardner (2008) described the transition process in three phases: admission, integration, and candidacy. The first phase is inclusive of time from admission through the beginning of coursework experience. As these students transition from undergraduate experience to the more independent culture of graduate education, the most important part about this process is

learning about the expectations related to their field. Integration phase begins when doctoral students intensify in the program, not only on the matter of completing their coursework and passing qualifying exams, but also on the aspect of social integration with peers and faculty member, which includes processes like selecting an advisory committee and establishing an informal peer support network. In terms of the transition to independence, phase II is also about multitasking demands in graduate school. Phase III starts when the students have passed their candidacy and start to focus solely on their research work. The issue of independence is an integral part of phase III. The course of this phase is almost isolated because of the minimal contact with peers and faculty. During this phase, the students need to transition to fully independence work and take their own responsibilities in the research task. However, it is reported that students often find this phase difficult and would still need guidance from their respective advisors and support from peers. This is parallel to what Lovitts (2005) draws in her theoretical perspective on the transition of graduate students to independent research. Advisor, faculty members and peers are found to be the contributing factors which influence the degree completion of doctorate students. Lovitts also discusses factors at the individual level and institutional context as a whole. Intelligence, knowledge, thinking styles, personality and motivation are the important individual resources identified in this study. Meanwhile, the culture imbedded within the institutional context where these students live and work also play an essential part in this process. Gardner (2009) explores the conceptualization of success in doctoral education among faculty members and concludes that both disciplinary and institutional contexts do significantly influence how success is characterized.

Summary. During their first year, Asian international graduate students face multiple challenges that are typically faced by any first year student entering the university. However, it is asserted that the magnitude is greater for international students because of various factors as previously discussed. International graduate students must also manage the transition from being a course-taker to doing independent research, on top of being international. For Asian international graduate students, there is also a concern of cultural differences between Asian learning and Western ways of learning. This issue is discussed in the following section.

The Non-Western Ways of Learning

According to Merriam (2007), what is made well known about learning is written from mostly Western perspectives. In conceptualizing the idea between Western versus non-Western learning, Merriam suggests looking at the source of knowledge. As Merriam puts forward in her conceptualization, the important thing is to examine the knowledge from these three tinkering questions – what counts as legitimate knowledge, who constructs this knowledge about whom, and, how is this knowledge transmitted? (p. 4) Merriam implies the importance of educators to understand all of the different learning perspectives to avoid marginalization, oppression and misinterpretation.

The Asian perspective in learning. Salili (1996) examines the learning style and achievement orientation of the Asian people. Among the Far East Asian people especially, collectivism is highly valued, where the emphasis is placed more on the needs, interests and goals of the group over individual needs. Hence, one success in academia is a great source of pride to the entire family, while a failure can equally mean letting one's family down or causing the family to lose face. This also implies the importance of achievement where the

emphasis is geared toward working hard to achieve the desired success and meet the expectations. Doing well in school is treated as one's social responsibility. For this reason, Asian students feel more pressure to do well academically, and this shapes their primary focus and motivation in learning. In such context, Asian students develop a very strong will to achieve and assume more responsibility for their success and failure.

Kember (2000) argues on some of the misconceptions about learning approaches, motivation, and study practices of Asian students. It has been said that Asian students are passive, rely on rote-learning, show resistance to teaching innovations, are largely extrinsically motivated, have high levels of achievement motivation and are high achievers, good in project work and willing to invest in education. Kember, however, highlights different points to clarify some of these misconceptions. Rote-learning among Asian students is perceived negatively as a strategy that focus only on memorizing instead of understanding the knowledge. But according to Kember, the misconception arises because there is a failure to realize that memorization could be accompanied by an intention to seek understanding. In learning new materials, most Asian students strategize on memorizing without understanding first and then gradually move for strategic memorization and then seek comprehension. Being passive inside the classroom is a result of enculturation from Asian traditional classroom culture, but when Asians encounter new teaching approaches, they are willing to learn provided that enough time is given for them to adapt. As the rest of the traits, it ties to the Asian traditional value of collectivism where academic success is perceived as a source of pride that benefits the group. Asian students work well in groups because individually, they feel responsible as a member to ensure success of the group.

One of the limitations in Asian learning culture is the fact that most Asian studies are done among Chinese people who are largely influenced by the Confucian philosophy. In Confucianism, the aim is to become fully human and reach a state of highest excellence (Kee, 2007). This is why Asians are mostly achievement driven and deem education as an important investment. However, it is also important to examine the influence of other cultures among other Asian regions that are practicing other faiths and beliefs.

Chapter Summary

The literature review examines the process of cross-cultural adjustment, international students' adjustment issues and their Asian non-western ways of learning. The cross-cultural adjustment model provides the theoretical framework to understand the adjustment process of Asian international graduate students. Meanwhile, the international students' adjustment issues highlight the aspects of the adjustment process as previously studied by the literature. In addition, the Asian non-western ways of learning help to provide applicable insights on how learning culture significantly shapes Asian international graduate students in administrating their learning process in the U.S.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This research aims to understand the detailed and complex adjustment experience of international graduate students to life in the United States. When we want to empower individuals to share their stories and hear their voices, conducting qualitative research will be the most appropriate method (Creswell, 2007). The research questions that guided the design of this study are as follows:

1. What are the experiences encountered by the Asian international graduate students during their adjustment process to life in the U.S.?
2. How do the Asian international graduate students facilitate their adjustment process?
3. How do the Asian international graduate students construct their personal and interpersonal growth as the result of the adjustment process?

Design of the Study

Qualitative research is a type of inquiry that encompasses a number of philosophical orientations and approaches (Merriam, 2009). It stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shaped the inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Merriam presents Van Maanen's (1979) qualitative research definition as below

“An umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not

the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world.”

To understand the nature of qualitative research, Merriam suggests looking at four criteria: the focus on process, understanding and meaning; the researcher being the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process being inductive; and that the output or product is rich in description.

Within the last twenty to thirty years, we have seen a shift, not only to the necessity of qualitative methodologies, but to ones that recognize the importance of narrative to understand the social worlds we wish to grasp (Harling-Stalker, 2009). I employed a narrative study on this topic in order to gain an understanding of how Asian international graduate students socially construct their experience of cross-cultural adjustment and the strategies they employ in managing their transition. This approach was selected based on the argument that Clandinin and Connelly (2000) posit:

“narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience.

Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it” (p. 18).

By studying the events as they unfold through those who live the events, we can gain insight into what international students know and how what they know and believe is altered or shaped through their experience (Harris, 2003).

When viewing narrative from a psychological approach, individual stories are viewed as windows to inner life rather than social worlds. Polkinghorne (1988) describes the use of

narrative as a scheme used by human beings to give meaning to their experience of temporality and personal actions. He also refers to this as “narrative meaning”. Because it is a cognitive process, a mental operation, narrative meaning is not something that is tangibly observable. However, when it is being delivered through the individuals’ own voices and stories, these narratives become accessible for observation and investigation.

Additionally, this type of approach provides the participants with unique opportunities for reflection. McAdams (1993) puts forward, “If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know myself, to gain insights into the meaning of my own life, then I, too, must come to know my own story” (p. 11). The social construction of meaning not only gives people a sense of direction and purpose but also provides an integrative framework that individuals use to make sense of life experiences (Gergen, 1999).

Creswell (2007) offers a general procedural guide on conducting a narrative research based on the approach advanced by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). The first step is to determine if the research questions fit best with narrative research. The method is best used for capturing detailed stories or life experiences of small numbers of individuals. The second step is to spend considerable time gathering the data from multiple types of information. My primary data sources are research interviews and documents as field texts. The third step is to collect information about the context of these stories. I used a demographic questionnaire to collect background information about my participants. These data help me to situate my participants’ stories to their personal background, which includes various prospects like upbringing, early education experience, culture and their home country context. The fourth step

involves the “restorying process”, where stories are analyzed and then reconstructed into some general type of framework. I used thematic analysis as the analytic approach, identified the emerging themes and positioned my findings within the theoretical framework. The fifth step talks about collaborating with your participants. Upon recruiting, I provided all my participants with comprehensive information about my main study objective and interview procedures via email. I put emphasis on the interview process and positioned myself as “someone who is really interested to hear your stories in your own words”.

Participants Selection

I was in contact with the main gatekeepers of international students in a local Southeastern university for better access to the intended participants. On behalf of the researcher, an invitation to participate in the research was sent out via email to the mailing list by an international service officer. The email was linked to an electronic flyer that described the study, eligibility criteria for participation, compensation for participation and researcher’s contact information. Alternately, I also posted printed flyers at selected campus sites to invite interested participants. This is a voluntary type of non-probability sampling, and I have access to participants only among those who contacted me back.

Since generalization in a statistical sense is not a goal of qualitative research, non-probability sampling is the method of choice for most qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). In narrative research, all of the individuals selected need to have stories to tell about their lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). To meet this purpose, I employed a criterion sampling strategy (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The criteria selection includes being an Asian international graduate student who is at least completing his or her second semester in a current graduate

program. Nine participants volunteered their time to participate in the study, and only five participants were chosen based on maximum variation strategy (Miles & Huberman).

Maximum variation strategy calls for diverse participant selection in which I select based upon different countries of origin and program majors, and having both male and female and doctorate and master level participants in the selection. In addition, all the individuals selected are not known to the researcher prior to the interviews.

The study is focused only on international students at a graduate level, thus excluding international students from undergraduate programs. The main reason for this selection is because the students' profiles and experiences can be very different among these two academic levels. With 44% of international students studying at a graduate level in the US compared to 39% at the undergraduate level (Bhandari & Chow, 2008), I decided to focus only on this population.

Data Collection

Data were primarily collected via semi-structured interviews. In semi-structured format, although the questions are set beforehand, they are less structured, more flexibly worded and do not have to be asked in certain orders (Merriam, 2009). This allows room for the researcher to be responsive to the individual's responses during the interview.

The first step was to secure the participants' written consent by getting them to sign the provided consent form. I also explained and highlighted important phrases from the consent form in order to get the participants to be aware of their participation rights in the study. As part of the IRB requirement, all participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences or penalties.

Interview appointments were set together by giving priority to the participants to choose their most convenient time and place to be interviewed. Forty-eight hours prior to the interview, I sent a brief reminder and an interview protocol to the subject via email. During the interview day, the first request was to get the participant to fill in the demographic questionnaire. The recording started once the participant had no further questions and indicated their readiness. I begin by reading the informed consent aloud, and then proceeded with the interview, which was then digitally recorded for transcription. I conducted the interview using mainly open-ended questions. This means asking questions that will allow the researcher to listen to the participant's story and shape the next question after we explore the depth of that story (Creswell, 2007). I transcribed all of the interviews first-hand by myself.

The last protocol is to conduct what Merriam (2009) describes as “photo elicitation”. Photo elicitation is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview (Harper, 2002). Photo elicitation interview can enhance qualitative method and help address some pitfalls in conventional interviews, ease rapport between researcher and interview, provide structure for interviews, lessen some of the awkwardness of interviews and help researchers to interact better with people whom they are studying (Clark-Ibanez, 2004). Participants were shown a set of 12 cards which contain graphics and were asked to choose two cards that best represented them. Discussion followed on how the participants relate themselves to their selected cards.

Data Analysis

According to Merriam (2009), the goal of data analysis in qualitative research is to make sense of the data and is achieved through consolidating, reducing, and interpreting the

stories collected and what the researcher has seen and read. For this study, data analysis includes coding, categories construction and organization of the stories to interpret the larger meaning of the story. Merriam presents a comprehensive step-by-step process of data analysis as below.

Coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that it is easy to retrieve specific pieces of data (Merriam, 2009). The designation can be single words, letters, numbers, phrases colors or combinations of these. Assigning codes to pieces of data is the way to begin constructing categories. Categories are conceptual elements that “cover” or span many individual examples (or bits or units of the data you previously identified) of the category. It should be clear that categories are abstractions derived from the data, not the data themselves. Meanwhile, naming the category should come from at least three sources (or a mix of these sources); the researcher, the participants, and sources outside the study such as the literature.

Data analysis is the process used to answer the research questions (Merriam, 2009). The overarching findings of the study will focus on the experiences that were encountered by the international students in their adjustment process and a description of their voices of how they viewed their overall experiences.

Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, the researcher is considered the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). However, human instrument is subject to the researcher’s bias and subjectivity. Therefore, this might have an impact on how the study is viewed and interpreted. In order to overcome this, Merriam suggests that rather than trying to

eliminate these biases entirely, it is more effective to identify and monitor how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data.

To enhance the validity and reliability of this study, I performed a member's checks and went through a peer review process. In member's check, I asked my participants to review their interview transcription to ensure the accuracy of the captured interviews while my committee chair served as the expert in my peer review process. I also provided a rich thick description in my findings. Providing rich and thick descriptions will help to contextualize the study such that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situations match the research context and, hence, ensure a better possibility of transferability (Merriam, 2009). The demographic data that I collected from the participants will help to enhance the details of every individual experience so that readers will have options to determine whether findings can be transferred to their own settings because of the "shared characteristics" (Erlandson et al, 1993 in Creswell, 2007). Meanwhile, clarification of the researcher's bias is achieved by making a clear statement about the researcher's background, view and lens that might have impacted the way the study was explored (Merriam, 1988 in Creswell, 2007). I am an international student myself, and I am interested in exploring this study based on my hunch and similar experiences. I decided to explore this study through a constructivist lens, where I seek to understand the adjustment process of international graduate students with more individualized meaning (see Creswell, 2007, p. 20).

Chapter Summary

This chapter covers the research methodology and design of this study. I employed a qualitative narrative study approach to best capture the experiences of my participants in their

adjustment process. This study used a voluntary type of sampling and generated data primarily from interviews. Steps and procedures used for data analysis were also outlined in this chapter. The strategies employed to ensure reliability and validity of this study were also discussed. Data and findings that were solicited from the design of this study will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The aim of this study is to describe the experiences of Asian international graduate students adjusting to life in the United States. Berry's (1997) theoretical framework guides the study. This chapter presents the narratives provided by participants in response to the following three research questions:

1. What are the experiences encountered by Asian international graduate students during their adjustment process to life in the U.S.?
2. How do Asian international graduate students facilitate their adjustment process?
3. How do Asian international graduate students construct their personal and interpersonal growth as the result of the adjustment process?

The organization of this chapter is divided into two sections: profiles of the participants and the findings of the study. Narrative is a form of communication that shows how a person describes the experiences they encountered to inquirers (Polkinghorne, 1988). Thus it is important for me to present the participant profiles for the readers to understand who they are as individuals. In order to ensure the highest confidentiality of their real identities, each participant was asked to select a pseudonym during their individual interviews with me. The same pseudonyms are being used to represent them in the findings. The last section is where I present my findings which I grouped according to my research questions.

Participant Profiles

I interviewed a total of five participants from different Asian countries and various academic disciplines. They were all graduate students who have been in the U.S. for at least six

months and are currently pursuing a full time graduate degree program in a Southeastern U.S. university. All participants completed their first degree in their respective home country where their first language is not English, and with the exception of one participant, most of them never encountered the U.S. prior to entering their graduate program.

Table 4.1 summarizes the basic demographic information about all five participants. A detailed description of each participant is provided in the following section.

Table 4.1

Participants' Demographics

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Country of Origin	Major	Program Level	Year first arrived
Mary	Female	29	Korea	Science	PhD	June 2005
Michael	Male	30	Bangladesh	Engineering	PhD	Aug 2006
Shark	Male	27	India	Computer Science	Master	Aug 2008
Xiaoyu	Female	24	China	Engineering	PhD	Aug 2009
Yuki	Female	31	Japan	Science	PhD	Aug 2002

Mary. Mary is a cheerful 29-year-old female from Korea who is currently pursuing a PhD in a Science program. When she was a child, her father decided to come to America to study, and he brought all his family members with him, including Mary, who was one year old at that time. So Mary lived in America for about six years during her younger days, and her family members moved back to Korea once her father completed his study.

During elementary school, Mary described herself as someone who was very shy. She became more outgoing in middle school, made a lot of friends and was not interested in studying. When she entered high school, however, she realized the necessity of working hard to earn a spot to enter college. In Korea it is very hard and competitive to get into college. She became very studious throughout her high school years, and she made it into a women's university where she earned her first degree. She described that experience as the best time of her life, where she had a lot of fun studying and socializing with her college friends.

Studying abroad is something Mary always wanted to do since she was a child, likely from the influence of her father. She started planning to come to the US while she was working on her first degree. The challenging part was for her to get an assistantship to do her Masters degree. Finally in June 2005, she arrived in her first American city. Mary completed her Masters degree in 2007, moved out to a second American city and is now working on her PhD. In terms of personality, she described herself as a very positive person who has no trouble making friends. At the same time, she sees herself as timid, and easily scared and nervous if people become upset at her. Nonetheless, I personally found Mary to be very easy-going and approachable; she loves to smile and laugh. Her command of English is also very good as a non-native speaker.

Michael. Michael is a 30-year-old PhD student in Engineering. He first arrived in the US in August 2006. He is originally from Bangladesh and came from Bangladesh's biggest and busiest city, Dhaka. He described his life growing up in Bangladesh as bountiful with many great learning opportunities, like when he attended a good school and learned things of his

interest like music and sports. He started learning English formally when he was only a three-year-old, along with his first language, Bengali.

Michael went to military high school from 7th to 12th grade. Although he disliked the rigorousness of his military school practice, he chose to attend because the academic performance of the students graduating from that school is top class. He secured outstanding grades during his high school time, which enabled him a huge opportunity to obtain entrance into Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology. This institution is regarded as the most premiere institute of higher education and the top engineering education provider in Bangladesh. Michael had to sit for the most competitive exam to get into that university. He described his first degree experience as great along with the opportunity to form very good friendships.

Michael sees himself as someone that always wanted to get to the apex. In terms of following up with his studies, he wanted to pursue a PhD because it is one of the highest degrees one can obtain. Thus, he chose to come to the U.S. because he believes the U.S. has the world's best schools with better job opportunities. He recently married and is now living with his wife in the U.S. He described his life as better ever since, both in terms of his research and personal life.

Shark. Shark is a 27-year-old graduate student from India who arrived in the US in August 2008. His major is in Computer Science, and at the time of the interview, he was expecting to graduate in Spring 2010. Both of his parents are well educated. Shark had the opportunity to attend a good school during high school. He decided to study computer science for his first degree without any particular reason but decided that he liked the field and chose to

remain in the profession. Upon graduating with his first degree in 2004, he worked for a communication system company for four years in Bangalore, which is about an eight-hour drive away from his hometown.

Bangalore is called the Silicon Valley of India. Hence, Shark had to transition from staying in a small town to a bigger city. He was not very comfortable there at first, probably because he is not used to that much crowd, intense traffic and different subcultures. But over time, he started to like staying in Bangalore and did not want to return to his hometown.

He said his undergraduate life was not so great because he was not very studious and did not learn as much as he would like. He, however, realized the need to bridge his technical knowledge while he was on the job. Recognizing that he desired a more quality education to fulfill the knowledge gap, he began to search for places to do his graduate degree. He chose to pursue it in the U.S. because he felt like America as a country is more open to foreigners and offers cheaper quality education in comparison to other developed countries such as the U.K. To prepare for the admission to graduate school, Shark had to take time off from work to focus on the prerequisite entry exams, GRE and TOEFL. Everything went well for him, and he is now in the stage of looking for a job here in the U.S.

I found Shark to be highly motivated in his learning endeavor here in the U.S. He is very academically driven and always relates his experiences to technical aspects of his graduate education. He is also very confident, open minded and expresses his opinions honestly. He thoroughly enjoyed his American educational experiences here in the U.S. and happily concludes that he has acquired what he wanted and is now ready to return to the industry.

Xiaoyu. Xiaoyu is a 24-year old petite-framed student from China. She is both the youngest participant in this study and has been in the US for the least amount of time in comparison to other participants. She first arrived in the U.S. in August 2008. Coming from a small village in China, it was certainly a huge step for Xiaoyu to move from her small hometown to a different country altogether. She described her childhood life as not easy because her parents are farmers and can only make a modest living to support her and three other siblings. Xiaoyu appreciates how her parents still sought to provide an education for her and her sisters with limited resources.

In China, having four children in one family is considered a big family. Xiaoyu began school around four years old because her parents could not look after her while they went off to work. So she followed her sisters to school and started her formal learning. Later in her life, she was accepted into college and began her higher education endeavors.

Beijing Institute of Technology is where she pursued both her Bachelors and Masters degrees in engineering. While in college, what she values the most is that she made two very good friends. Although she did very well in all her classes, she sees it more as her responsibility to do well instead of really enjoying the learning that occurred during the course of her study.

Xiaoyu desires to find a position in a university one day. This is the main reason why she pursues a PhD. She wanted to come to the US because she dislikes the PhD life in China. Furthermore, she wanted some changes and wishes to be different from other students in China. Xiaoyu knows her parents cannot support her tuition, so she has to look for financial assistantships to fund her study. Funding opportunity was also another reason why she chose to

come to the U.S. for her PhD. I found Xiaoyu to be an honest and a resolved person, despite her timid and humble outlook. She hopes to continue improving her English and research skills in order to become more adjusted to her new life in the U.S.

Yuki. Yuki, 31 years old, has been in the U.S. for the longest period of time, 8 years. She is the oldest of her siblings. She described her early school experience as being very busy because she went to private schools and had to learn many things. In Japan, formal English education only starts at the age of 13, that is, when the students enter junior high. Yuki said some students started earlier than that, but she did not. She also said that English is not required but only needed if one wishes to enter the university.

Yuki pursued her Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science at a university located about 30 minutes away from her home. She commuted to school via car. As she progressed in her degree, she realized that computer science is not her interest and tried to figure out what else she wanted to do. One of her English teachers in the same university recommended that she study abroad, specifically in the U.S. seeking a degree in another field. Based upon the guidance of her teacher, Yuki began preparing for entry exams and admission. Although she wanted to switch her major to a different field, she applied for Master in Computer Science in order to ensure a better prospect in getting accepted.

When Yuki arrived in the US, while pursuing her Masters in Computer Science, she then decided on her new field of interest and embarked upon taking prerequisite courses to enable a change in her major. As a result of the change in major, it took five years for Yuki to complete her Masters in Computer Science. She then moved to another university to pursue a second Masters degree. She completed her second Masters last year and is now working on her

PhD in another new U.S. higher institution. In my opinion, Yuki is a very goal-oriented person. Whenever she sets a goal that she wishes to achieve, she will work very hard to get what she wants.

Yuki still embraces her Japanese identity very closely. Despite her great command of English, she still speaks Japanese very well. I found her to be very pleasant and down to earth. She shared with me how much she values her Japanese culture and how it is an important part of her even when she has been in the U.S. for eight years.

Findings

This section is where I detail the findings of the study by providing the narratives of my participants in relation to the three research questions. Table 4.2 outlines the main categories that are an outcome from my data analysis, followed by a comprehensive data depiction that supports my categories and findings in this study.

Table 4.2

Summary of Findings

I. Describing the adjustment experience

A. Constructing the participants' adjustment narratives

1. Mary
 2. Michael
 3. Shark
 4. Xiaoyu
 5. Yuki
-

Table 4.2
(continued)

B. Experiencing culture differences in the classroom
1. Interactions with faculty
2. Interactions with classmates and peers
3. Differences in teaching and research practices
II: Identifying factors that affect the adjustment process
A. Moderating factors prior to adjustment
1. Participants' migration motivation
2. Participants' personality
3. Cultural distance between participants' culture and the new host culture
B. Moderating factors during the adjustment
1. Length of time being in the process
2. Coping strategies and resources
4. Role of social support
III: Constructing the personal and interpersonal growth of the participants
A. Personal growth
1. Growth in academic skills
2. Positive changes in perceptions
B. Interpersonal growth
1. Growth in social skills
2. Positive changes in personality

Describing the adjustment experience. The first data will display my participants' description on how they perceived their adjustment experiences here in the U.S. The first section illustrates my participants' individual stories on their adjustment experiences, starting

from their first impressions to their reactions during the process, whether it has been a positive or a negative encounter. Cultural differences were also explored as part of the process by mainly focusing on their experiences in American classrooms.

Constructing the participants' adjustment narratives. First and foremost, I asked my participants to share their first impressions upon arriving to the U.S. For most of them, this is the farthest they have ever been from home, and for some it was their first time being abroad. Subsequently, I evoked conversation from my participants regarding their overall adjustment experiences and how they reacted in the process. As expected, none of the experiences were alike because they are all different individuals with different backgrounds.

Mary. On her first impression, Mary only remembers that experiencing the transition process was a very good feeling. She put forward a simple expression, “Beautiful, relaxed. Very happy, like very happy.” Interestingly, Mary reported never initially feeling homesick at all. It was not until she moved from her first city where she did her Masters to her second city in the U.S. where she is currently working on her PhD that she felt slightly homesick. Despite experiencing any potentially negative events, Mary reported that her mindset was to always point toward the positive:

But I don't know, like the first two years, I was just so happy. Like no matter what happen, I will always like “omigosh”. It's nice and warm. I think my personality is to think of the very positive.

Given the positive outlook Mary maintained in the early years, it was a surprise to her that she would encounter any homesickness upon moving to a new place. Mary recounted:

Actually when I came here [new place in the US], I felt homesick. I felt homesick of, I miss [the old place] a lot, but also I missed my family a lot. It was almost like the first time...I was really like, feeling sick, like homesick. Yeah, after a couple of years, like I was surprise that it came to me after all those years. Like I never felt it before, but suddenly now.

Among her challenges included mastering the language and finding transportation to move around. However, she was laughing and smiling when she described all these to me.

Here it really felt like, I really feel like I came back to high school because there was just so much homework to do. And English it was hard, so for like American students it would take maybe two hours or so, it would take me like six hours, maybe couple days...the language, and oh, when I didn't have a car. So that was hard [laughed]. The public transportation wasn't very good, so. I would ask for rides but I was very shy about that. I didn't want to bother other people, so I would look up like public transportation to see where the bus goes here and there. And then sometimes, I get stuck and the bus, they only run like till 7pm, so I got stuck there. I ended up like walking back home. It wasn't so terrible.

It seems like she perceived all these as part and parcel of her past adjustment experience and her sharing does not necessarily connote a negative experience.

Michael. Michael experienced a more melancholy feeling upon his arrival. Michael described it this way:

Actually I arrived at night, so couldn't see around much, but I liked the way their airports were operated. Next morning, when I woke up, it was all empty, all over which was pretty unfamiliar to me, no pedestrian at all as opposed to Dhaka! Yes, like the streets, I felt very empty inside. I felt like why I came here, leaving my friends and family.

Michael admitted that he found the process to be frustrating and difficult at first. He felt homesick for at least the first four months or so. He also thinks school work helps to distract him from thinking about the difficulty so much. With deep reflection, he recalled:

I found it frustrating at times, but with so many homework to do, I barely got a chance to ponder over it. Actually more than frustration, it was the toughness of life here that at times got me weary. I always used to be homesick at least until after 4 months or so I guess.

However, at his current stage, he feels like that was a period that he has passed through over time with help from his friends and families. He reported doing very well right now in terms of his personal and academic life.

Shark. Shark reported a great first impression. He was definitely excited with all the things that he observed. He expressed it enthusiastically, "First impression, it was good. I mean, the climate was better, it was all green around, the roads were good, infrastructure was good, house was good." He only experienced a feeling of being homesick in the first two weeks:

For the first two weeks, I don't know..just the fact that I cannot get back to my parents in say five six hours, see from the place where I worked, it's just eight

hours drive, I can just go back whenever I wanted. But to travel from India to here was like 24 hours, so just the thought of thinking, I cannot go back in eight, ten hours, you need a lot of money to go back and come back, that was a little intimidating I think, yeah, that was there for one to three four weeks, I think, but then, but then it slowly, slowly..

But after two weeks, he decided that it was better to focus his attention on doing well in his classes. The support, comfort, and acceptance of fellow Indians around Shark also supported his adjustment process. With positive memories, he asserted:

I didn't feel overwhelmed because I didn't feel like it was totally a new country, because it was, my fellow country people all around....although it was new, the country, but I didn't feel totally new. I always felt I had some company...So, I don't think it is a big issue with the graduate students who are coming here, I think they should be fine with that because their world is more of a technical and challenge. Challenges in their coursework are so intense that they don't have time to sort of things about this and getting intimidated by this, you know.

Overall, Shark perceived the adjustment process as not a huge concern for him because he was so focused on his academic goals.

Xiaoyu. For Xiaoyu, she had her mind mostly on her parents and home when she first arrived. Hence, immediately upon arrival to the U.S. she called her parents. She fondly remembers:

I came here, it's August 24th in the evening, and my boyfriend came to the airport to pick me up. I called my parents using his phone. I really miss home at

that time because it's in the evening and I cannot see the beautiful environment outside the airport. I just see lots of lights and I just kind of begin to miss home.

During her adjustment period, Xiaoyu's main concerns were her English fluency and her capabilities to impress her adviser. In the following excerpt, she narrates her experiences and feelings:

I mean, right now it's kind of okay. But when I first came here, it's really not good because the second day I arrived to Raleigh, and I came to see my adviser, and she just pointed a lot of things I did wrong and I felt really terrible. At the first beginning, I mean, it took some time for me and my adviser to adjust to work together. So at the first beginning, it's not good...when I first came here, I find it's really hard for me to find some topic to talk to the American people. I don't know whether if they're interested in these topics or not, I just cannot find something to talk with them.

Acknowledging her feelings of loneliness, she stated, "I mean the life in U.S. is really not great, not as colorful as my life in China." Because her current life only circulates around her home and her lab, she thought it was a boring life. She seemed to miss her good friends back in China, too. With sadness, she observed:

I have lots of friends in China, we can have lots of fun, but here...maybe we can know some people but we're not very good friends...life here it's very different from China, we don't have many places like the restaurants, or some other places we can have some fun. It's really kind of a little bit boring in here and the, we have lots of pressure from classes and the research.

Considering all the concerns that she mentioned above, Xiaoyu's adjustment experiences seem more challenging than the rest of my participants.

Yuki. For Yuki, her adjustment process was several years ago, so her first impression seemed very vague to her. She only remembered feeling homesick when she first arrived in the U.S. because that was her first time being away from her parents. She noted that she felt homesick quite often, especially whenever she moved to a new place. She attributes this homesickness to growing up and attending local schools that were not far from her home. Because of that, she always felt like she knew everyone she met. However, she did not have similar experiences when she first arrived in the U.S. She told me what it was like:

I was, that was my first time to leave away from my parents. So, I was very homesick. It's not too homesick, but until I get used to life in [name of a state], I was so [emph], homesick. And that happened quite often whenever I moved to somewhere new. Since I grew up, the same place and I went to school, the local school, I felt like I know everybody I met in my home country, so I feel like, I feel more connect with the person, but when I came to the US first time, I felt like I don't know anybody.

Chief among her major challenges was the adjustment to the local food. She missed her Japanese food very much, which compounded her feelings of being homesick. Over the first three weeks of the adjustment process, Yuki strategically used her coursework as a coping strategy to steer from feelings of homesickness. In her own words, she explained:

But once I started class work, I forget. I'm not homesick at all, just busy, busy for getting adjust to the new life, so I would say, three weeks, to adjust. But still

have to learn many things, but, in terms of being homesick, I think I was okay in the three weeks.

From the aforementioned narratives, it is clear that the experiences of participants were diverse with varying forms of emotions activated. This is an important point to start, and I further explored their perceived cultural differences in the classroom.

Experiencing culture differences in the classroom. For all my participants, their primary objective is to acquire a graduate degree. Most of them chose to pursue higher education in the U.S. with the goal of obtaining a quality education and refreshing academic experiences. As Michael stated, “U.S. has the world’s best schools, so it was the most logical choice.” Clearly, like most other graduate students, the lives of participants in this study revolve mostly around their schools and classes. Because academic life is such a huge part in their lives, these experiences are also deemed important to help us understand the dynamic of their adjustment process as a whole and how their classroom experiences affect their adjustment process.

Interactions with faculty. This aspect includes both my participants’ interactions with their course instructors and academic advisers. Few participants reported positive impressions of their course instructors. Michael’s thoughts exemplify a positive sentiment:

The faculties here are very welcoming, whenever I wanted to get in touch with any professor, I have gotten immediate response. After the first semester, I already started working with my PhD supervisor who is an assistant professor and has been very friendly.

Similarly, Mary also recalled a positive reaction: “It’s very different from Korea. It feels more relaxed, and seems like they’re more approachable, like I can go and talk to them if I have any questions.” However, Mary also shared her concern on what she described as surprising:

But also, I don’t know what it is but I feel like they are more offended easily by certain things than in Korea, they wouldn’t have been offended by. Like for example like, in Korea, if we have an exam, we get our grades back and we don’t like it, like we will just go and ask them, we just want more points..That’s what it was in Korea, but here if I go to a professor and ask the question, I had an experience back in [name of a state] where the professor got offended “are you saying my grading is not fair because I took my time to read everything, and I had my own, like rubric for grading”. So that was kind surprising for me because I never thought of a professor would be offended by me asking that.

The above probably resulted from a clash between two different learning cultures, which I later explore under a different sub-topic. Mary also experienced some difficulty when she wanted to take vacation time to go back to Korea. Since she arrived in 2005, she only returned to Korea for the first time in December 2009. Below, she recounted what happened:

My adviser weren’t very supportive, like when I was doing my Master, he didn’t let me go home. And when I came here, I had to really fight to go home. And like even now my adviser’s give me a hard time about it. She’s like, because you went home for so long, now you’re behind and so, yeah.

As for Shark, he described his faculty interactions as purely class and project-based, not extending beyond the classroom:

Not much [of faculty interactions]. I don't think I'm that very interactive with faculty, but I was talking with a professor regarding my thesis [that he intends to do but it did not work out], my first and second semester, so I also did my course project, I had to work with him for the course project, so I, it was purely technical. So, that is pretty much it.

For Yuki, she made a comparison between her advisers in three different institutions. She reported mixed feelings in regards to her experience engaging with three different advisers.

She explained:

The first time, in the Computer Science, [name of an institution], an Korean adviser, they are young, they are just like, like one year after, they became a faculty, so they are young, still young. So I feel like I still not sure how to interact with them, I think they also think that they did not know how to interact with me, because I'm international.

Following that, she described her relationship with her adviser at the institution where she did her second Masters degree:

And the previous adviser, in [name of institution], she is very, very nice. In terms of, she encourages me a lot, and she knows how to deal with international students, she never say any negative things, and she is very old, like fifty, late fifty years.. So I feel more comfortable working with her.

She described the least positive interactions with her new adviser at her current university. She expressed her feelings:

My current adviser told me “well Japanese culture has this kind of thing, or this kind of a culture, or I’m not, she, she said I’m quiet person, and that kind of part of a Japanese culture, and she also told me that I’m not speak up in the class and she told me that, that could be also one of my culture. I don’t know. Well, since I’ve been here 8 years, I don’t think I’m that not. She, she shouldn’t say that that’s my culture, because if I have a question, I speak up. I just, just did not have a chance to ask in the class. So I feel like she misunderstood some point.

Xiaoyu reported a discrepancy regarding her adviser’s expectations of her. In describing the different expectations, Xiaoyu reported the following observation:

I mean, although I got my Master’s degree in China but when I was starting the Master’s degree, I basically just took some classes. I didn’t do some research, yes, so my adviser came to think, she thought I should already know how to do the research, so I worked very hard and she kind of still not very satisfied about my progress at the first beginning I cannot. We’re already depressed about my research.

As a result, she struggled to meet the expectations, and at some point, it caused her many fears while working with her adviser. She expressed her fear:

Once a week we had a meeting and before the meeting, I just feel very afraid to meet my adviser and after that, I feel terrible because she just told me you did not do very well, this, this, this, and so...

The aforesaid typify various instances on one aspect of the lives of participants as a result of their faculty interactions. Whether or not it has an impact on their adjustment experiences, the

experiences above are treated as a dynamic process that they have to go through as part of their adjustment process as Asian international graduate students.

Interactions with classmates and peers. Many participants in this study described very minimal interactions among the local students. In some of the programs, because the majority of other students are also from the same country, their interactions with classmates have not been described as being as diverse as they would like. When Xiaoyu responded to my inquiry about her interactions with American classmates, she exclaimed:

Not really, because my adviser is a Chinese, so, most of the students in our lab is, are from China. [emph], I don't have too much interaction with the American peers.

Shark also asserted the same scenario. As a result, he views his internship experience as very rewarding, because of his chance to meet and work with the local people. This is how he described it:

That was really very different to what I've been doing here because if you go to engineering department especially computer science, it's all Indians there also you know. But internship, I went to [name of a company], I had another intern who was from [name of a university] He was a local in here and, there I got to mix with lots of local people, so.

However, most of the participants in this study reported a very positive experience with classmates and peers that are non locals, like other internationals or students from their home country. Shark for example, described his interaction with students from his fellow country as always available. He is also very intentional in making connections with many of his peers

from India and working with them in class projects. Meanwhile, Xiaoyu expressed that having many Chinese student colleagues as her lab partners eases her anxiety because of the similarities and language commonality that they share. Brimming with a smile, she replied to my question:

Its good [smile], it feels we are from the, we are from China so we have the same experience like the college or something, and also we can interaction using Chinese.

For Mary, even when she did not have many Korean classmates in her first institution, she befriended many other international students from places like China, Thailand and Japan. Hence, her first institution was a great experience for her. Currently, she has one lab partner that is also from Korea. She reported that they are good friends, although at times, the relationship creates an awkward competition between the two of them. Interestingly, she describes the situation as follows:

There is one Korean in our lab at the same program...and I get along very well with her. But at some point, like, I feel like there is also like, an unseen competition kind of thing going on because we started the same program at the same time, so, I don't know, sometimes it feels uncomfortable telling her certain things. In general, I feel like we're good friends and we shared a lot of, we agreed on lots of thing.

Yuki was more neutral in her description. In general, she commented that her many friends stimulate her academically and intellectually. In comparing her classmates between each institution she attended, she noted:

I thought it's interesting because when I was pursuing [emph] computer science degree, there are not so many American students there. But, nutrition field is quite a lot of American majority. And majority, most of them are actually, almost all, are women. So it's a different, it's really different.

Only Michael reported having a great interaction with both his American classmates and students from other nationalities, with whom he also socializes outside the classroom. He expressed the following sentiment:

First of all, I made some good friends, American, other internationals in school who I also hung out with outside. Then there were Bangladeshi students already here, who were very kind-hearted and was always concerned about my well being. There is also a large Bangladeshi professionals living here, who have also embraced me as their very own.

Overall, classmates and peers play a significant role in my participants' experiences adjusting to their academic life. Most of them have limited opportunities to interact with American peers because of the student composition in their program. Thus, most of the participants in this study socialize with other international students instead, including those who are from their respective countries.

Differences in teaching and research practices. Adjusting to a new place makes one become observant to the differences between his/her home country and new host culture. Such learning cultural differences are something participants in this study take into account in order to function effectively as a graduate student in the US. My participants do not necessarily perceive the differences as negative, but as noticeable factors in their learning process.

Mary pointed out that in Korea the focus is more on grades than learning. She said that is one of the values she carried when she first did her Master. She recalled the experience in her interview with me:

Yeah, like, I think, like here they seems more serious about learning, it's more about learning, like the grades, it's good if you get a good grade, but that's not the main focus. You have to get at least a B to pass but, as long as you get a B, it doesn't really matter, I mean it matters, but for them it's more like "did you learn something?". That was the main focus. But in Korea, like "did you get an A?", "did you get A+?" so. That's kind of refreshing, it was more relaxing.

The differences in value of learning initially caused her some difficulty in her first semester.

Mary continued:

I remember like I was really stressed out towards the end [of a chemistry class] because I thought I wasn't going to make an A. At that point, that was the most important thing for me, like getting an A. I was still little kind of more worried about all the grades

Meanwhile, Shark noted the differences in the way exams were held. He initially prepared himself in a different way to take an exam, and it did not turn out as he expected. Because of that, he missed an opportunity to work with a potential adviser for a Master's thesis option. He explained to me why he deemed it as different:

It was more to do about the way you prepared for the exams here and how we did back then home in India was, is a lot different. Here it's more about what they teach, that what was asked in the exams. But in India, they teach a little bit and then scope of the

questions can be large, you have to look at all other aspects maybe, and it's more theoretical and it's, the scope is not limited, you may have to look at lots of things. But not really in depth, but you have to look at a lot of things. That what it was there but here it was like, more of going in depth of the portions that are covered in class. I didn't know that.

For Xiaoyu, she viewed the cultural differences from both course and research perspectives. She placed more emphasis on the role of teachers and how they organized the class and research. In describing the differences between Chinese and American classrooms, Xiaoyu reported the following observation:

The education in China kind of they told you, they tell you what to do, and they just listen, and you just follow their rules, you don't, kind of very active. When we came to, when we come to US, we kind of used to that comfortable zone in our life and we just okay, in the class, it's very obvious, in the class, the Chinese students kind of just, will listen and okay, professors, what professors said we'll learn, okay, that's all.

Additionally, she also drew a distinction from a research perspective. She commented:

And also, I mean, the research perspective is very different. In China, as I know, the PhD students....it's really kind of, we're working on others people's work, you kind of make some improvement, but you don't find your topic, you don't find a new problem using the research area. But in the US I feel like my adviser always told me, we don't do research like we add something on other's people research, we want to find some new topic, we want to find new problem by

ourselves. When I was starting the Master, my Master degree, I basically just took the class. And my adviser [in China] is really busy, she doesn't have time to, to instruct you, to tell you how to do research, just they don't have time.

Both Mary and Xiaoyu also shared the same perspectives on how they are assigned more homework and assignments here in the U.S. compared to their previous home country education. However, they perceived it as a good practice because they realized how these homework and assignments helped them to better their learning.

Summary. The first research question aims to discover how Asian international graduate students describe their adjustment experience after coming to the U.S. The narratives provided are varied and differ from one story to another. Most of their concerns are on academic adjustments while striving for a good contact with faculty and classmates. Meanwhile, some of the conflicts arise as a result of different cultural values, especially in teaching and researching practices between their education in the U.S. and that of their home country.

Identifying factors that affect the adjustment process. In the first findings, we noticed how all five participants reported different adjustment experiences from one another. Some illustrated a more difficult situation than another participant. According to Berry (1997), there are moderating factors that affect this process and directly shape the experiences of participants in this study. Under Berry's framework, this is referred to as "the moderating factors".

Moderating factors prior to adjustment. My participants begin their adjustment process with different characteristics and background. As asserted by Berry, this affected the different outcomes for how each individual responded to the adjustment process.

Participants' migration and motivation. This factor is shared by all of my participants. Their migration intention is to get a graduate degree from the U.S. It is similar to Yuki's assertion, "My academic goal is to get a PhD. That's it. I don't care what kind of a job I want to do after that, I just want to do, I just want to get a PhD, that's it." Xiaoyu's motivation to get her PhD is driven by her career goal. She hopes that once she acquires her PhD, she will be able to find a position in a university. As for Michael, he aims to reach the apex in whatever he does, so acquiring a PhD will give him the satisfaction that he is seeking.

As for Mary, she wants to do a post-doctorate study before she starts looking for a job that recognizes her credentials. Clearly, all of them are very motivated in their academic endeavor and what the credentials can bring to them. As quoted from Shark:

For most people, who are coming here, graduate students, only those people's mentality I know, so they're highly motivated, so I don't think new surrounding, new environment, is going to pull them down or something.

Because adjustment is part of the process, participants in this study reported that they motivate themselves to move forward in spite of their different experiences and difficulties that they encounter in order to achieve what they wish for in the first place.

Participants' personality. Who they are and what they perceive as a person also has a significant role in their own adjustment process. Berry (1997) argues that having a good locus of control and flexibility is pertinent to this matter. Michael points out that it is important to

have these traits of “patience, adaptability and having the ability to learn fast” in one’s adjustment process. Being open minded is agreeably deemed as important among most of my participants. Shark is among the participants who advocate the value of such traits:

But one thing that I can say is that people should be open. When they come here, they should, they should be open to how things are done here, they should be open to change the way they’re used to doing things, if they see some particular things done in some way here, they should be open to change in the matter of how they approach things.

Cultural distance between participants’ culture and the new host culture. Cultural distance lies in the dissimilarity between the two cultures in contact. Many of them illustrated cultural distance in the classroom, but not extensively on general living practice like religion or language. Shark is the only exception. He informed me that adjusting to the U.S. was much easier for him compared to certain parts of his home country (North India) because of the different languages that the South Indian and North Indian people use. Furthermore, Shark reported a good experience in his adjustment experience because he felt connected with people around him, especially his fellow countrymen. He commented:

I didn’t feel overwhelmed because I didn’t feel like it was totally a new country, because it was, my fellow country people all around....although it was new, the country, but I didn’t feel totally new.

Yuki had a different perspective. For Yuki, she thought that maintaining one’s own culture is important to embracing the process in a more positive way while staying true to one’s original roots. She shared her thoughts:

Be an original. When I took some class, there two words about a culture...The one is like destroy our culture and leave here and get culture from here. The other is possess our own culture but still get our culture here. So don't destroy our own culture. So I try to be a Japanese and try to be, and try to [maintain?] Yeah, maintain good things about good things for Japanese, like from my perception, I felt like Japanese are very humble and responsible, so I try to maintain that culture and be myself, even though I stayed long here.

Summary. All of my participants shared similarities in their migration motivation to the U.S. Personality and cultural differences are also evident in some of my participants' stories, but not all. Other moderating factors like gender and level of education did not surface in the discussion.

Moderating factors during adjustment. This factor mostly concerns the strategies and behaviors employed by my participants during their adjusting process. Berry further adds, although termed as “moderating”, these factors can sometimes serve as “mediating” variables that help students in their adjustment process.

Length of time being in the process. Many of the participants perceived time served as a gradual factor that helped them to ease into the new surroundings. According to Michael, “Time is a big factor that can take care of the issues in life.” In addition to that, Yuki also provides a point that factors in the length of time she was here, “As I live here longer, I'm getting better, in terms of getting used to life, interactions with other people, and food of course.”

Coping strategies and resources. These strategies are combined with the changing of their own self perceptions of how they view this process. In the adjustment process, many of them seek to alleviate the stress that they encountered. For many of them, it is very important for them to achieve a balance in their life in the U.S. Michael told me what he did:

Well, I have to balance my personal life with professional, balance emotions to facts, balance strength with weakness. To release the work pressure, I try to enjoy the weekends as much, go out, hang out with friends, watch movies, read a novel.

Meanwhile, Mary and Xiaoyu created schedules and self-regulations, which they tried to follow as much as they could. It was one of their strategy to help them achieve life balance.

Below are their thoughts:

For the starting, I kind of want to make some schedule, every day I give several things I want to do and after I finish that, I will go outside maybe to, to some exercise and shopping [laugh], it's really important, shopping and.. (Xiaoyu)
I'm just like setting some rules, trying to balance...like go to bed at 11pm, no matter what, even if you have homework, just submit tomorrow at 8am, go to bed at 11pm. Watch TV for only three hours. I used to watch more TV for a while [laughed], and then, yeah, so having those rules set up, it kind of help me get back and, I think it's important. (Mary)

Yuki on the other hand, made extra efforts to help better her English. She perceived this as important to help her feel more accepted and welcomed by the local people. She asserted:

I did a lot of efforts to adjust to this culture and [emph] and I took a lot of English class, and I also took pronunciation class because I heard that speaking is very important and speaking clearly is very important to communicate and I feel like if my pronunciation is poor, somebody who I talk with, they may judge me.

Additionally, Mary and Yuki made use of the counseling center provided by their university to help them cope with the adjustment process and the difficulty that they were having.

Role of social support. All of my participants regarded the interactions and socializing as the key aspect that helped them go through the adjustment process. Some described how they dealt with their previous challenges with help from a strong social support system.

Michael and Xiaoyu were among them. Michael contended:

Well I had a friend who came here a year before me from Bangladesh, he was very caring, and gave me these little tips like managing time. If I were to name one, I would name him.

Xiaoyu also provided her story:

My boyfriend and also, a friend I met here [helped me]... she's from China, but, she's starting her Master in our Department...And she invite me at home, and she cooked for me, and then, we become very good friends until now. She's very kind and makes me very comfortable and makes me feel, yeah, I have a friend here.

As for Shark, although he acknowledged that having his fellow countrymen helped him in the process, he also thought that having more interaction with the local people will help him adjust even faster. He argued:

I don't know, if in class, if I would have seen more of local people, maybe it could have been faster, my setting, I mean, adjusting to this environment. But for the first two or three days, the first one week that you're here, you're more comfortable with your country people you know. But after one month or so, I think. I think more of interactions with the local people in school might have improved my time I get adjusted to the local things.

Yuki deemed the friends she had as important in her adjustment process. She felt stimulated with people around her, especially her classmates because they gave her positive influence, especially on the matter of her study. She narrated:

Surround yourself with high-energy people...I'm surrounded by many friends who stimulate me, like study more, or so, [emph], surrounded myself with high energy people is very important because it focus on my study and focus on my purpose and so, I think through the transition, it's very important to be friends like that person.

Summary. Overall, social support plays a big role in mediating the adjustment process of Asian international graduate students. Many of them also employed different coping strategies to help facilitate their adjustment process. Some initiated their own extra efforts, while some also opted for help in professional counseling services. Furthermore, length of time

was an important aspect of the adjustment process. For those who had experienced the process longer, they deemed it as more manageable than how it was perceived before.

Constructing the personal and interpersonal growth of the participants. All of my participants had reported some, if not in all aspects, of learning growth experiences. I explored this matter under my third research question and divided it into two aspects of growth: personal and interpersonal.

Personal growth. This aspect of growth is looking at skills that my participants have acquired in the adjustment process. Among those reported in the interviews are growth in academic knowledge, study skills and positive changes in perceptions.

Growth in academic skills. Shark constantly emphasized the technical knowledge that he has acquired. This is perhaps the most significant growth that he has experienced as a result of the adjustment process. According to him, that is his most important learning moment.

Putting it in his own words, he said:

The first thing that all comes to my mind is the technical thing. I have never done so much coding, I have never done so much, never dig deep into the technical stuff as I've done in the few of the courses here. And the course also required intense discussion with teammates you know, if I were to do that alone, I don't think I would have completed that, because three people discussing it together and trying to solve the problem. I felt education, the matters of education here was very good.

Although knowledge growth is a primary part of learning enacted by enrolling into graduate school, Shark sees it as a more holistic learning experience. Shark's reflections best exemplify

the holistic understandings: “I think overall, all the aspects of me have changed for good.” For Mary, she realized that her writing skills have also improved as the result of her hard work. As for Michael, he discovered a more effective way to manage his time that has improved his study management skills and increased his effectiveness in his study. He asserted:

Most importantly I learned the value of time. I learned that I have to be very careful about planning out my schedule for a smooth survival.

For all of the participants, being effective in their studies is regarded as the important aspect of their adjustment process. At the same time, the culture and language differences in the U.S. education system have provided them with opportunities to foster this growth more intensely.

Positive changes in perceptions. This adjustment process, although not impossible, certainly was not easy for many of my participants. For the kind of experiences that my participants had to go through, the process apparently invoked some emotions and resulted in an effective growth of their perceptions. Moving from one U.S. city to another, Mary realized that she cannot assume that everywhere in the U.S. is the same. As she went through the adjustment process in two different places, she told me how she changed her perceptions:

I feel like it's, how I change, I become more careful, I guess when I was in [name of a state] I were just [emph], I wasn't really afraid of anything but coming here I realized, oh, people are different, like different areas, people can be different, and they have, even if it's in America, it seems like they have slightly different cultures. So [emph], yeah, I realized just because it's America it's not all the same. I need to adjust to that or find, if I like some place, maybe I need to stick around there.

Meanwhile, Shark changed his perception in a different way. He told me that he had this fear of failure, and how he had to counter that first in order for him to move forward in the process.

He then remarked:

I think this fear of failure, I had a lot of this fear of failure. I don't remember the instance where I have this fear in my first two semesters, but one thing I remembered is I told myself that I should not have this fear of failure. So, that's one important thing I think, this stops you from focusing. You just don't worry about the result, you just do your best, and the best thing will happen. That I learned, I mean, I used to tell myself during the course of my study.

Xiaoyu also had a similar experience. She told me how she used to be afraid of many things. She realized this fear deterred her in her learning process, so she tried to grow out of that fear.

She illustrated that:

So now I feel a little bit better to, I mean, I'm not, I tell myself if you're not afraid of anything, you can do it, so I just want to like this "destroy your fear" and to do anything you want to do. Yes, even now, maybe sometimes I feel not very good because the problem in the research or some, some problem in my life but I know I can do it, I can just to, I'm not very afraid of things anymore.

Summary. Shifts in their perceptions are the way my participants' managed their adjustment process in order to function better in the primary role as a graduate student. Furthermore, when dealing with many challenges, like English competency and stresses, my participants learned to enhance their skills in this manner, which resulted in their overall personal growth.

Interpersonal growth. There are many evidences of their interpersonal growth as noted by my participants. The two main growths are their improvement in social skills and improved personality.

Growth in social skills. Many of them reported a rise in their confidence in interacting with new people. Yuki commented, “I feel like I know how to interact with people.” Shark also implied the same understanding:

I’m confident and I think my soft skills have also improved, I’m not afraid of public talks not as much as when I was in India, and I’m just, it’s easy for me now to go and meet people and talk, you know.

Meanwhile, Xiaoyu saw a tremendous growth in her social skills with other people. She also started to get along very well with her adviser, and she started to smile a lot to more people in order to make friends. She informed me:

Another professor in a class that I took this semester, she, she teach me a lot of the communication skills. That makes me feel much more confident to speak to American people.

Positive change in personality. In addition, Xiaoyu also described to me the changes that she noticed in her own personality. She is no longer too afraid to make friends and is more willing to initiate first conversation with strangers. She explained:

I think that I’m much more, a little bit more aggressive than I was in China, I kind of want to know more people, to make more friends, when I’m in the class, if I don’t know the student who sits beside me, I just talk to them but if I was in

China, maybe I didn't, I don't want to do that, maybe yes, when I first came here, I didn't do that.

Additionally, both Shark and Yuki reported a rise in their confidence level. This can also be perceived as a change in a more confident personality. They felt like they had gained a lot and were ready to move forward in their lives here in the U.S. Each of them provided their own expression as such:

I feel good, I feel confident, I feel I got what I wanted. I'm fresh to go back to the industry now (Shark)

I feel more positive and I feel like I can accomplish more challenging things because I went through many things. So I felt more confident being here and live here. (Yuki)

Summary. As the participants learned their ways to comfortably adjust to their new surroundings, the process was inevitably shaped into a learning process as a whole. It is evidenced that the adjustment process has significantly provided important learning experiences to the participants, resulting in their growth from various aspects from academic knowledge to improved social skills.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides the participants' profiles and presents the findings of the study. Five participants were interviewed to talk about their experiences adjusting to the U.S. Findings were sorted according to the research questions and discussed under each category and subcategory. Participants' narratives were weaved into the findings to support the

arguments elicited from the analysis. The discussions and implications of the findings will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

This chapter consists of four sections. The first section summarizes the entire study and provides an outline of the findings. The next section discusses the three main conclusions drawn from the findings. The third section presents the implications of the study for theory, practice and learners' perspectives of the adjustment process. The last section puts forward recommendations for future study.

Summary of the Study

This study is conducted to explore the experiences of Asian international graduate students adjusting to life in the United States. I explored the study to understand how Asian international graduate students constructed their various adjustment experiences, what impacted the experiences and how they approached and aided the process. Additionally, I am interested to know what kind of learning was fostered and formed during the process. Three research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the experiences encountered by the Asian international graduate students during their adjustment process to life in the U.S.?
2. How do the Asian international graduate students facilitate their adjustment process?
3. How do the Asian international graduate students construct their personal and interpersonal growth as the result of the adjustment process?

Understanding cross-cultural adjustment of international students required real and sustained discourse and deep reflection of the researcher and participants (Harris, 2003).

Qualitative inquiry was employed in order to capture the lived experiences of the participants and record the stories of their journeys. Interviews are the primary data for this study. Additionally, I also incorporated a photo elicitation activity (Harper, 2002) during the interview session to further stimulate the narratives drawn from the interview. Narrative analysis was used as the procedure for interpreting the narratives and stories generated in the interviews (Riessman, 2008). Nine participants volunteered their time to participate in the study, but five participants were chosen based on maximum variation strategy (Creswell, 2007). All five participants selected were from different countries of origin, including two men and three women. They were all current graduate students attending a Southeastern university from different majors. Their ages ranged from 24 to 31 years old and have been in the U.S. from 9 months to 8 years.

The findings yield insights that help to understand the purpose of the study. The data illuminated the various ways Asian international graduate students experienced their adjustment process and the coping strategies they used to aid themselves in the process. Their learning growth in the process was also uncovered in the findings. Categories and subcategories were outlined and sorted according to the relevant research questions.

Under the first research question, findings evolved into two categories. The first category draws upon the individual adjustment experience for each of the participants. The second category relates to the classroom experiences and has three subcategories (a) interactions with faculty, (b) interactions with classmates and peers and, (c) differences in teaching and research practices.

Two primary categories and six sub categories emerged under the second research question. The first category is referring to moderating factors prior to adjustment and the three subcategories are (a) participants' migration motivation, (b) participants' personality and, (c) cultural distance between participants' culture and the new host culture. The second category covers moderating factors during the adjustment and involves three other subcategories of (a) length of time being in the process, (b) coping strategies and resources and, (c) role of social support.

The final research question has two categories with two subcategories each. The first category is on the participants' personal growth, with (a) growth in academic skills and (b) positive changes in perceptions as the subcategories. The second category is participants' interpersonal growth and the two subcategories are (a) growth in social skills and (b) positive changes in personality.

Conclusions and Discussion

According to Miles and Huberman (1984), conclusion-drawing is a component of data analysis. From the beginning of data collection, the qualitative analyst is beginning to draw conclusions to decide what things mean and to note regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows, and propositions. Conclusion verification is closely tied to internal validity issues which were addressed in this study as discussed in Chapter 3 using member's check, peer review process, and clarification of the researcher's bias (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

There are three major conclusions that were derived from the findings of this study. The first conclusion is that the adjustment process is a dynamic process that is multifaceted with

many layers of factors and phases. The second conclusion implies that Asian international graduate students view the adjustment process as a process of finding “fit” to be functional as a competent graduate student. The third conclusion imposes that Asian graduate students perceive the adjustment process through a learning lens that makes them very resilient in spite of various personal challenges.

A dynamic process. The findings imply a dynamic nature of the adjustment process, that is, not bounded only on a process that aims on changing oneself to fit the environment but also offers opportunities for new learning and growth (Kim, 2001). The experiences shared by the participants are not only stipulated on whether or not they have adjusted, but also constantly looking at it as an overarching process that involves a lot of actions, communication, reflections and learning. My participants constantly reported on their communication with their new cultural context, provided reflection on personal stories and communicated their learning growth. Their responses are consistent with what Kim posits as a life-changing journey, where it is a process of “becoming” through personal reinvention, transformation, growth, and reaching out beyond the boundaries of one’s own existence. Their chosen acculturation strategy is what Berry (1997) describes as integration, where there is an interest in both maintaining one’s original culture while also maintaining frequent interactions with host culture.

When asked to describe their adjustment experiences, each of the participants chose to highlight many different events that they deemed important and memorable. All of the narratives exhibited in the findings are not characterized by rigidly fixed uniformity; instead, it interestingly varies across individuals. Drawing from the example of homesickness, there is no

consistent pattern reported by my participants in terms of experiencing and recovering from that feeling. The findings affirm Berry's (1997) argument on how variables affect the experiences. Additionally, Furham and Bocher (1986) also imply that different persons begin at different levels of original adjustment capability and progress at a different time and rate.

Finding "fit" as a competent graduate student. International students' primary purpose for migrating is to engage in formal education at the chosen host country. Acquiring a degree from abroad is perceived as a sense of establishment and high credentials among Asian students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Furthermore, because the cost to study internationally is relatively more expensive than pursuing a local education in their home country, international students fly abroad with high expectations and expect to be academically successful by their sponsoring parties, including family members. Most of the participants are high-achievers in their home countries too, thus imposing superior expectations on themselves as well. This is why the focus of the adjustment process is to find "fit" in the academic setting so that they can be effective as graduate students.

This is especially evidenced when the participants diligently observed the classroom cultures and compared the differences in American practices and their countries' practices. By observing these classroom cultures, the participants are engaging themselves with the process of cultural learning. Cultural learning is the effort to gain insight into how culturally different people live by examining their different values and practices (Hess, 1994). Hess considers cultural learning as part of the process of cross-cultural adjustment that people experience when they go abroad to live. The process calls for cognitive, affective, and behavioral knowledge. Cognitive learning is associated with traditional knowledge acquisition inside the

classroom. Affective learning is leaning more toward accepting divergent culture values more positively while behavioral learning ultimately aims for the learner to behave in ways that are considered effective in the new culture. Ideally, the process of cultural learning points toward developing intercultural competence. Intercultural competence, in a broad definition, encompasses a behavior of understanding, developing relationship, satisfaction, effectiveness, appropriateness and adaptation to function in a differing culture other than oneself (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). By observing their classroom differences and engaging in cultural learning, Asian international graduate students seek to gain competency and meet their academic expectations. For them, this is the utmost important adjustment aspect because achieving academic goals are their primary intention of being in the U.S. To them, academic success yields personal well-being.

Looking through a learning lens and resiliency. Kim (2001) posits that cross-cultural adjustment produces both problems and growth to all individuals experiencing the process. Thus, the process is perceived as a double-edged process, one that is simultaneously challenging yet enriching. My participants exhibited a very positive outlook on their adjustment process in spite of the difficulty they encountered along the process. In fact, they regarded the process as a learning process altogether, where incidents happened and lessons were learned as they progressed towards an improved quality of their new life. According to study conducted by Wang (2009) on international graduate students' resiliency characteristics, positive selves and being in focus are the personality variables that are significantly associated with resiliency. Resilience is defined as the capacity to absorb high levels of change while displaying minimal dysfunctional behavior (Connor, 1993 as cited in Wang, 2009). The

participants indeed displayed positive self dispositions and were very goal oriented. Additionally, in the same study, Wang found that resilience characteristics are influenced by country of origin, where in her study, 60% of the respondents are from Asian countries. Thus, it is safe to conclude that Asian international graduate students are resilient in their adjustment process and positively view it as a learning process rather than a challenging task.

Implications

Implication for theory. Berry (1997) asserts that the variables included in his acculturation framework are indispensable for any studies on humans' behavior in acculturation and adjustment process. The framework covers a broad target for any acculturation group including permanent migrants and temporary sojourners. My research focused on Asian international graduate students who are studying in a Southeastern University in the U.S. The framework has provided applicable findings that are rather consistent with the rest of the findings in other geographical areas such as New Zealand and Australia. Considering that the cross-cultural adaptation is a complex process to generalize, this framework provides reliable elements and factors to guide the study.

When the process involves growth (Kim, 2001) and efforts in cultural learning (Hess, 1994), the adjustment process can fairly be deemed as a learning process in perspective. The impact of social learning theory, self directed learning and transformative learning in the adjustment process are evidenced among the participants. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) explains that people are capable of making decisions on how they will react in various future situations based on consequences of their actions and observations of others' behavior. In discussing Bandura's theory, Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007) assert that there

is a connection between the adult learning process for both the learner and the environment in which a person operates. Socializing is identified as one of the important elements that the participants were involved with during their adjustment process, which provided opportunities for observations and modeling of behaviors.

Participants also report how they navigate their adjustment process independently without any formal or planned assistance from the institution or formal organization. In cases where they need to have some assistance, they would seek it out themselves within their own community. The participants took initiatives for their own learning. Additionally, most of their learning happened as a result of informal learning. There is a practicality of self directed learning theory implied in this study, where the participants took responsibilities as adult learners and initiated efforts in order to foster their living needs in the current environment.

Mezirow (2000) asserts that transformative learning occurs when there is a transformation in one of our beliefs or attitudes (a meaning scheme), or a transformation of our entire perspective (habit of mind) (as cited in Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). Meanwhile, Ritz (2006), in her research on international students from transformative learning perspective, asserts that international students studying abroad have ample opportunity to critically reflect on their context, but it did not occurred as she expected. Interestingly, when discussing their learning growth over the adjustment process, my participants did make frequent references of their change in perceptions and habits of mind that resulted in their learning. Mezirow recognizes that not all learning is transformative, but adding knowledge and learning new meaning schemes adds significance to the learner's experience. The gradual

changes that occurred among my participants in the adjustment process can be deemed as transformative and has relevant implication to the theory.

Implication for practice. The findings impart a conclusion that Asian international graduate students privilege their academic needs over other needs during their adjustment process. Academic success yields personal well-being to them. Thus it is important for international student advocates to be aware of this attribute. Traditionally, assistance has been provided in a sense that supports international students being physically and socially sound, like offering resources for housing and finding roommates or organizing social events for international students to gather. Without trying to decry these traditional efforts, it is also imperative that future supports to graduate international students are geared toward helping them adjust successfully in their studies and academic well-being. Among the suggestions include providing a tutorial center for speaking and writing for non-native speakers, offering programs and activities or highlighting resources offered by other organizations in the university that are academic oriented, and initiating support groups for academic related problems among international students. Pederson (1991) provides a perspective on how international students differ from local students. Because faculty and classmates play significant roles in the academic life of these students, it is also important for faculty members and local classmates especially, to be sensitive and supportive to Asian international students' needs and differences. To increase awareness of cultural differences, programs for faculty and local students should be developed on post-secondary campuses. Another valuable resource is the development of dialogue sessions to increase the effectiveness in the communication process.

Implications for learners. Adjustment process is a complex process that involves many factors and interactions with unfamiliar surroundings (Berry, 1997; Pederson, 1991). It is pertinent for the learners to treat the process as a learning process and know that they will grow as a result of the process. The learners also have to keep gauging their capabilities and continue to enhance their skills in order to be effective in their adjustment process. Dispositions and motivations are also important factors in the process. Furthermore, having to form informal communities will also be valuable to help learners adjust better.

Implications for researchers. One of the challenges in working with Asian students is primarily related to English language proficiency (Watson, 1998). Watson's research revealed that Asian students generally had a better understanding of written English in comparison to spoken English. During my interview, I inserted an additional methodology into my data collection approach. The approach is known as "photo elicitation" and is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview (Harper, 2002). I found this approach to be very effective in soliciting richer data from my participants. This method also served as a good conversation catalyst and has helped me uncover many stories from my participants beyond my conventional interview with them. Considering its potential, researchers would want to consider incorporating the photo elicitation method into their studies, particularly when working with Asian learners where language proficiency can be a challenge.

Recommendations for future research

This study involves only five participants studying in the same institution. Thus, generalization is problematic in this case. However, the insights gained from this study are useful in recommending future research. The first recommendation is for this study to be

investigated in an extended period of time. A longitudinal study should be conducted to examine the changes that took place during adjustment process in a span of time. Future studies in this area also need to be carried out in larger scale and greater background variations in order to validate the findings for generalization purposes.

Additionally, there are factors such as participants' gender and age, marital status, type of institution, and duration being in the U.S. that were not critically explored in this study. Future research can be conducted to investigate all or part of these elements in order to determine how these elements account for the differences in individuals' adjustment experiences. Another recommendation is to explore this process through the eyes of the students' spouses, family members or mentors and provide different perspectives to the study.

Another important perspective is to look at how culture shapes and influences one's adjustment experience. For example, in working across cultures, Hooker (2003) observes how India has more similar cultural ties with the West compared to China. According to him, the difference permeates every aspect of life and can become a frustrating and confusing process for those who do not understand its origins. By looking at this study from cultural perspective, we can further expand our insights on the process.

Furthermore, as previously discussed, I also noticed some characteristics and elements of adult learning that occurred among my participants. It would be salient to explore the adjustment process through the lens of adult learning theories, especially in andragogy, self directed learning and transformative learning theories.

Chapter Summary

Adjustment process is a vital process for every international student. It is a compulsory stage that they have to go through once they have made the decision to migrate to a new country in pursuit of their education. It is a complex process by itself, with a lot of factors that make the process challenging (Berry, 1997; Searle & Ward, 1990), but at the same time, many factors are malleable towards a better, more manageable adjustment process. This study highlights all of the important factors that are deemed significant in the process, and also provides various examples of adjustment experiences from different students from multiple backgrounds. It is my hope that this study will provide a useful insight in understanding the experiences of Asian international graduate students during the start of their academic journeys in the U.S.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Participant Demographic Form

Directions: The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather your demographic information that might be utilized in relation to the study. For all the information that you'll be providing, the researcher will ensure that it will be protected at the highest confidential level.

Please know to answer every question is optional and please put your selected pseudonym instead of your real name. It should take you less than 10 minutes to complete this form.

Pseudonym: _____

What year were you born? _____

What is your gender? _____

What is your marital status? _____

Do you have children at home? _____

What is your country of origin? _____

What is your first language? _____

What is your second language? _____

How would you rate your English proficiency?

- Weak
- Fair
- Good
- Fluent

Do you have any close family members here with you? (Please specify)

What degrees have you previously earned?

- Bachelor of Arts Year: _____ School: _____
- Bachelor of Science Year: _____ School: _____
- Master's Year: _____ School: _____
- Other Year: _____ School: _____

When (in month/year) did you first arrive in the United States?

What is the degree that you are currently pursuing?

- Master
- PhD

What is your program major? _____

In what semester are you currently in? _____

Which of the following best describes your current employment status in the US?

- Employed full-time (i.e. university assistantship). Please specify

- Employed part-time (i.e. campus job). Please specify

- Unemployed, seeking job
- Unemployed, under other financial assistance (i.e. family fund, home government scholarship). Please specify

- Other (please specify) _____

THANK YOU

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

Participant's Pseudonym: _____

Researcher/Interview: Aira Abdrahim

Date: _____

Place: _____

Scheduled time: _____

Start time _____ End time _____

Note: Please feel free to seek clarification from me should any of these interview questions seem unclear to you. Throughout the interview, in addition to these questions, I may ask you to elaborate on or clarify your answers or statements. Questions will not necessarily be asked in the same order as they appear below.

Please remember that your participation in this interview is strictly voluntary and you may stop participating or decline to answer any question should you not wish to answer it. To protect the privacy of others, please refrain from using full, identifiable names when answering the interview questions. In any response where you may need to mention other people, you may use a general description like “my friend” or “my instructor” rather than the name of that particular person.

To begin the inquiry phase of the interview, I will ask questions that will help me understand your personal history, your academic foundations, your main academic intentions and your initial social adjustment experience.

Opening Background Questions:

1. Tell me about your life growing up.
 - a. Family background
 - b. Early school experience
2. Tell me about your academic choices since high school.
 - a. Where did you go to college?
 - b. Described your previous college experience
3. Why did you want to pursue a post-graduate degree?
4. Why did you decide to do it abroad, in the United States?
5. What did you do to prepare for postgraduate admission?
 - a. Describe the requirement and application process for your current program.
 - b. What was your experience with standardized tests, such as TOEFL and GRE?
6. How would you describe yourself as a graduate student?
7. What are your expectations towards your academic experience here in the United States?

8. Once enrolled, how would you describe your academic experiences?
 - a. Tell me about your interactions with faculty
 - b. Tell me about your interactions with administrators
 - c. Tell me about your interactions with other students

We will now move to a new topic. These questions will help me learn about your experiences during your adjustment process to the United States.

RQ 1: What are the experiences of Asian international graduate students during their adjustment process to academic life in the US?

9. Describe your first experiences when you came to the United States.
10. Describe to me the timeline of your adjustment period, from the beginning of your program to your current status.
11. Walk me through the process you used to adjust to your new surroundings in the U.S.
12. Please describe one of your important learning moments.
13. What are the main challenges that you previously faced?
14. How have you dealt with those challenges?

Now, I wish to explore your feelings toward the adjustment process, and how do you see the process impacting you.

RQ 2: How do the Asian international graduate students describe their emotions during the adjustment process?

15. How do you describe your adjustment experience? Was it positive or negative?
16. Describe your emotional engagement during the adjustment process.
17. How do you feel about yourself right now? Do you already feel adjusted?
18. How did you change as a result of this adjustment process?

In these set of questions, I wish to learn about the steps and strategies that you employed to cope with your adjustment process.

RQ 3: How do Asian international graduate students facilitate their adjustment process?

19. Please share with me how you familiarized yourself with your surroundings.
20. Describe to me the most important factor in helping you go through your transition process.
21. What are the traits and characteristics that you believe it takes to successfully survive the adjustment process?
22. What university services helped you facilitate the adjustment process?

The following are probes that will be employed as suggested by Bodgan and Biklen (2003):

What do you mean?

I'm not sure that I am following you.

Would you explain that?

What did you say then?

What were you thinking at the time?

Give me an example.

Tell me about it.

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

North Carolina State University

Title of Study

Asian International Graduate Students' Experiences Adjusting to the US: A Narrative Study

Principal Investigator

Nur Aira binti Abd Rahim

Faculty Sponsor (if applicable)

Dr Tuere Bowles

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

The main purpose of this study is to understand the detailed adaptation and learning experience of Asian international graduate students to academic life in the United States.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to

- 1. Review and sign this consent form which will take up to 10 minutes**
- 2. Complete a basic demographic form which should not take more than 10 minutes**
- 3. Participate in one in-depth recorded interview (up to 60 minutes) in person. Time and place of this interview will be decided mutually between the researcher and you. The interview place must be a public place (non-residential, i.e. meeting room, library discussion room, coffee shop).**
- 4. Participate in one "photo elicitation" activity right after the interview, where you choose two out of fifteen pictures provided by the researcher and then engage in a discussion with the researcher on how you relate yourself to the chosen pictures. This activity should not take more than 30 minutes**
- 5. Review your interview transcript which will be sent to you via email no more than two months following the interview. This review should not take more than 60 minutes.**
- 6. Brief follow up on transcription accuracy via telephone of not more than 20 minutes.**
7. Provide pseudonym to be used as identifier during the course of the study
8. Consent to audio taping of initial interview.

Risks

There should only be minimal discomfort or stress due to participation in this research project. This risk is recognized as very minimal. Minimal risk here refers to risks that are no greater than those you ordinarily encountered in daily life (Code of Federal Regulations, 1995). However, please know that your participation is strictly voluntary. **This means you may request to withdraw participation in this study at any time or skip any question you do not want to answer.**

Benefits

You will not directly benefit from this research. However, by participating in this research, you will have a chance to reflect and voice your experience and contribute to the research. As the result of this research can potentially help international students in the future, this also means your participation indirectly contribute to the well being of international students in the future.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely in the researcher's private studio residence in which she's the only resident with the only key. Digital data will be stored in researcher's personal computer and external hard drive that are password protected and only known to the researcher. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. **You will be asked to write your name on the consent form only. All other study materials will be de-identified so that no one can match your identity to the answers you provide. Any mention of identifying names or information discussed in the interviews will be de-identified (masked or replaced by pseudonyms) when the audio interviews are transcribed. Any mention of another person's name will be de-identified and transcribed as well (masked).** Pseudonyms will be self-selected by each participant and all of your data will be de-identified using your selected pseudonyms. Consent forms, and a master listing your name to your pseudonym, will be stored in a pass code protected computer. All identifiable study materials will be kept separate from list of pseudonyms.

Compensation

For participating in this study you will receive a US \$10.00 worth of Food Lion Gift Card. If you completed the interview but withdraw before the interview transcription review is being done, you will get to keep the compensation. If you withdraw from the study prior the interview session, you will not be receiving any compensation.

Professional Service Treatment-

Should you need to seek professional service as a result of this study, kindly refer to the professional services list as attached.

What if you are a NCSU student?

Participation in this study is not a course requirement and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your class standing or grades at NC State.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Aira Abdrahim, at 3820 Jackson St. P212, Raleigh, NC 27607, or 919-633-5384.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

Consent To Participate

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject's signature _____ **Date** _____

Investigator's signature _____ **Date** _____

List of Professional Services Available

North Carolina State University

Counseling Center

2815 Cates Avenue
Campus Box 7312
Raleigh, NC 27695-7312
(919)515-2423

Office of International Students

OIS, NC State University,
320 Daniels Hall,
111 Lampe Drive (corner of Stinson Dr)
Raleigh, NC 27695-7222
(919) 515-2961
ois@ncsu.edu

APPENDIX D

Photo Elicitation Discussion Questions

Directions: This is an activity described by Merriam (2009) and Denzin & Lincoln (1994) as “photo elicitation.” You will be shown a set of fifteen cards (as attached) which contain graphics and empowerment messages, and will be asked to choose the two cards that relate to you the most in connection to the adjustment process that you went through. Discussion will follow after and will consist of these questions:

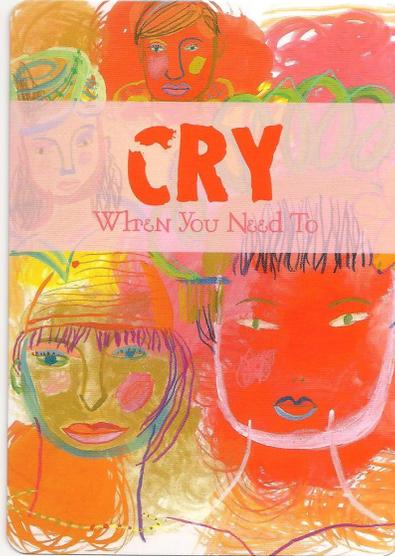
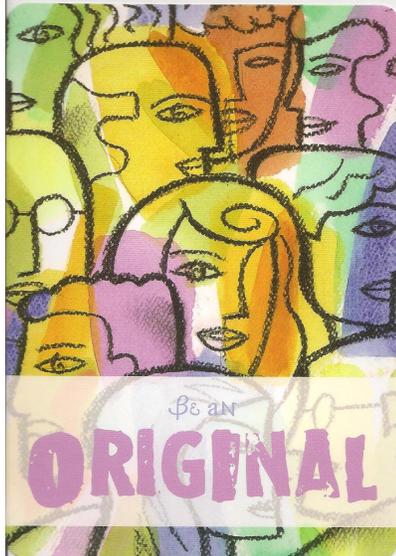
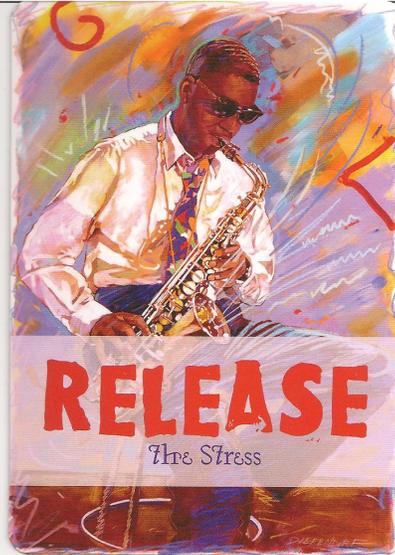
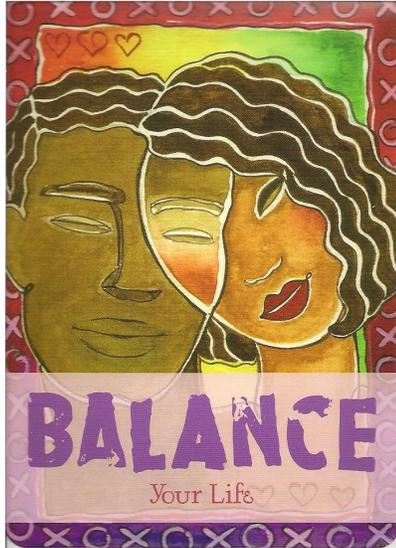
1. Describe to me the first card that you chose.
2. Describe to me the second card that you selected.
3. Why did you choose these two cards?
4. Do you have any stories to share with me in relations to these cards?

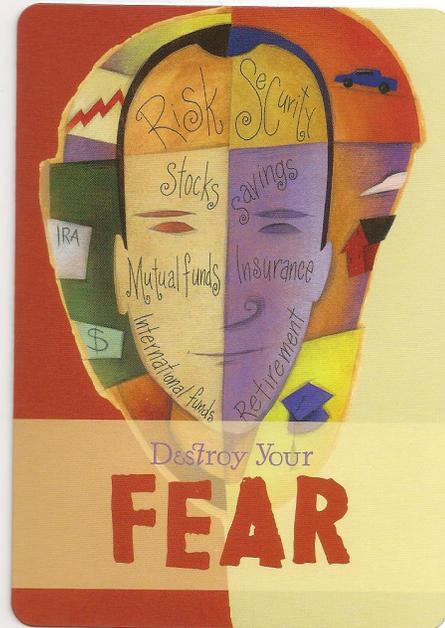
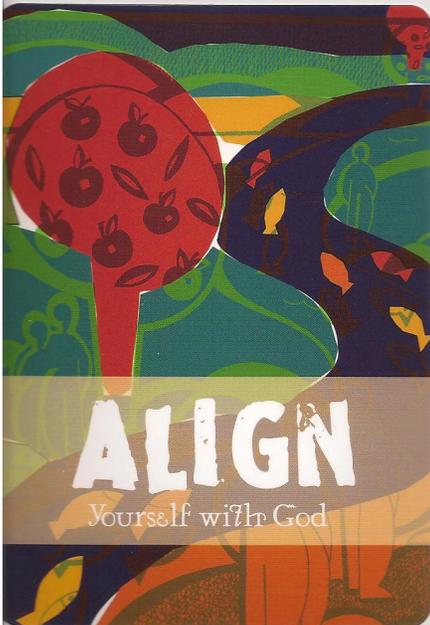
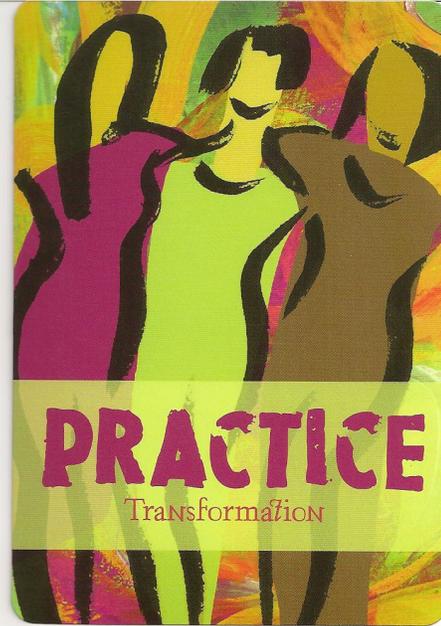
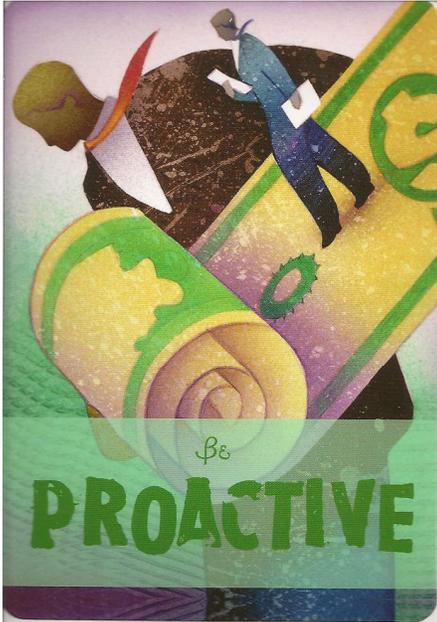
Thank you for sharing your stories.

I hope this reflection process will also be as beneficial to you as it is to me.

APPENDIX E

Cards for Photo Elicitation Activity







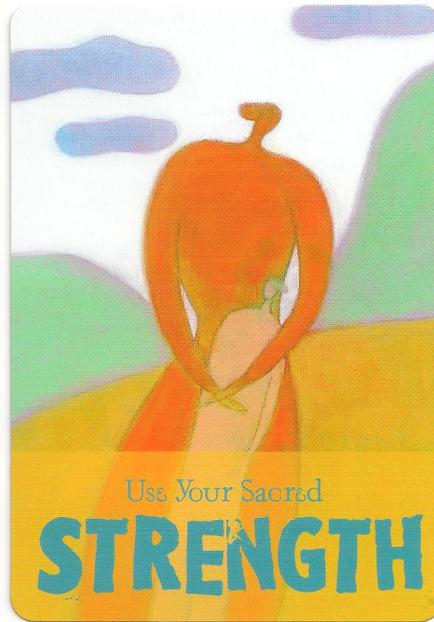
Feel
Good

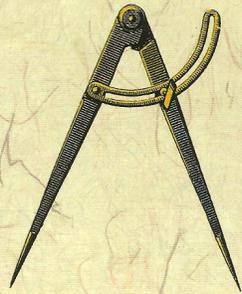


Be
Receptive



Meditate
Regularly

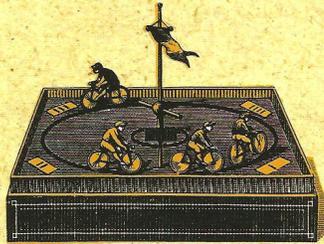




Change
Your
Perception



Find
Your
Purpose



Surround
Yourself with
High-Energy
People

APPENDIX F

Recruitment Materials

In this appendix, I include examples of documentations that will be used to identify and recruit participants for this study. The materials include the following: an e-mail announcement to the international students' email distribution list; a letter to international student organizations; and a flyer for wide distribution.

A. EMAIL TEXT FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EMAIL DISTRIBUTION LIST

Subject: Asian International Graduate Students Needed as a Research Participant!

Asian international graduate students are needed to share their stories about and experiences with adjusting to academic life in the U.S. Aira Abdrahim, as part of her Master program at North Carolina State University, is conducting a study to explore and understand the detailed and complex adaptation experience of Asian international graduate students to academic life in the United States.

Participation eligibility includes:

1. **Asian international students that are currently enrolled in a graduate program (Master or PhD) AND**
2. **Are in the process of completing at least his or her second semester AND**
3. **Must not have any prior experience studying abroad before this current enrollment AND**
4. **Must not know the researcher personally as a friend or classmates prior to the interview**

The time commitment will consist of the following:

1. Completing required paperwork that will take **15 minutes** or less.
2. Filling out a demographic questionnaire. This should not take more than **10 minutes**.
3. One face-to-face, in-depth interview up to **60 minutes**. Time and place will be determined by the researcher and participant.
4. One photo elicitation activity to be conducted subsequently after the interview. The participant will be asked to choose two out of fifteen pictures provided by the researcher and engage in a discussion with the researcher on how they relate themselves to the chosen pictures. This activity should not take more than **30 minutes**.
5. Up to **20 minutes** for a follow-up, phone interview to check for the transcript's accuracy and give any needed clarification. In addition, it may take up to **60 minutes** to read over the transcript prior to the follow-up interview. The transcript will be delivered to the participant by hand or via US post office services.

Compensation:

Each participant will receive a Food Lion gift card worth \$10.00 upon completion of the interview session.

Please read the attached flyer for a more detailed explanation of the study.

For any further inquiries, kindly direct your question to

Aira Abdrahim
Email: aira_abdrahim@yahoo.com
Telephone: (919)-633-5384

B. LETTER OF REQUEST FOR ACCESS TO STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Organization
Attn: First Name, Last Name
Street Address, City,
State Zip code

RE: Request for access to and nomination of Asian international Graduate Students to participate in a research study on the Adjustment Experience to Academic Life in the United States.

Dear Sir or Madam:

Warmest greetings! As part of my Master program at North Carolina State University, I am currently conducting a research study on understanding and exploring the adjustment experience of Asian international graduate students to academic life in the United States. As an organization that is a strong advocate to the well-being of international students, I hope you will find the study as beneficial as I do.

Therefore, I'm seeking your assistance to help me reach the intended participants by disseminating this information through any electronic medium, such as e-mail on my behalf. For your kind information, this study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of North Carolina State University on [DATE]. Please note that all participation in this study is strictly voluntarily and I will only have access to those students who voluntarily contact me.

Specifically, I am looking for Asian international students, both men and women, who meet the following criteria:

- 1. Asian international students that are currently enrolled in a graduate program (Master or PhD) AND**
- 2. Are in the process of completing at least his or her second semester AND**
- 3. Must not have any prior experience studying abroad before this current enrollment AND**
- 4. Must not know the researcher personally as a friend or classmates prior to the interview**

The attached flyer contains further information about the study. The expected time commitment for this study is briefly described as below:

1. Completing required paperwork that will take **15 minutes** or less.
2. Filling out a demographic questionnaire. This should not take more than **10 minutes**.
3. One face-to-face, in-depth interview up to **60 minutes**. Time and place will be determined by the researcher and participant.
4. One photo elicitation activity to be conducted subsequently after the interview. The participant will be asked to choose two out of fifteen pictures provided by the researcher and engage in a discussion with the researcher on how they relate themselves to the chosen pictures. This activity should not take more than **30 minutes**.
5. Up to **20 minutes** for a follow-up, phone interview to check for the transcript's accuracy and give any needed clarification. In addition, it may take up to **60 minutes** to read over the transcript prior to the follow-up interview. The transcript will be delivered to the participant by hand or via US post office services.

Additionally, I'm also attaching a nomination form for participants, should you find anyone that meets the following criteria and would possibly be interested in participating in this research. Based on your recommendations, I will send a corresponding e-mail to the nominated student to provide them with more details about the study, and will follow-up with a phone call.

For any further information or clarification, kindly contact me via telephone at 919-633-5384 or by e-mail at aira_abdrahim@yahoo.com.

Thank you so much for your kind attention to this research project.

Sincerely,
Aira Abdrahim,
NCSU Master Student
Department of Adult and Higher Education

Asian International Graduate Students Adjustment Experience to Academic Life in the United States

Here is a chance to be part of research on international students and contribute to the body of literature on this subject. You will also be helping a fellow international graduate student earn her Master degree!

About the Study

The main purpose of this study is to understand the adjustment and learning experiences of Asian international graduate students as they transition to academic life in the United States.

Criteria for Participation

- 1. Asian international students that are currently enrolled in a graduate program (Master or PhD) AND**
- 2. Are in the process of completing at least his or her second semester AND**
- 3. Must not have any prior experience studying abroad before this current enrollment AND**
- 4. Must not know the researcher personally as a friend or classmates prior to the interview**

Time Commitment (s)

1. Completing required paperwork that will take **15 minutes** or less.
2. Filling out a demographic questionnaire. This should not take more than **10 minutes**.
3. One face-to-face, in-depth interview up to **60 minutes**. Time and place will be determined by the researcher and participant.
4. One photo elicitation activity to be conducted subsequently after the interview. The participant will be asked to choose two out of fifteen pictures provided by the researcher and engage in a discussion with the researcher on how they relate themselves to the chosen pictures. This activity should not take more than **30 minutes**.
5. Up to **20 minutes** for a follow-up, phone interview to check for the transcript's accuracy and give any needed clarification. In addition, it may take up to **60 minutes** to read over the transcript prior to the follow-up interview. The transcript will be delivered to the participant by hand or via US post office services.

About the Researcher

Aira Abdrahim is an international graduate student at North Carolina State University. She came from Malaysia to pursue her graduate education in the U.S. Her research interests include:

- Cross-cultural learning
- Instructional strategies
- International adult education

For More Information, please contact me, **Aira Abdrahim** at

aira_abdrahim@yahoo.com or

(919)633-5384

APPENDIX G

IRB Approval

**Office of Research and Graduate Studies
Division of Research Administration**

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

Compliance

7514

Drive

27695-7514

(fax)

Sponsored
Programs and
Regulatory

Campus Box

2701 Sullivan

Raleigh, NC

919.515.2444

919.515.7721

From: Carol Mickelson, IRB Coordinator
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board

Date: February 23, 2010

Project Title: The adjustment learning experience of Asian International graduate
students to academic life in the United States

IRB#: 1252-10

Dear Nur Aira b Abdrahim:

The project listed above has been reviewed by the NC State Institutional Review Board
for the Use of Human Subjects in Research, and is approved for one year. **This
protocol will expire on January 8, 2011, and will need continuing review before
that date.**

NOTE:

1. You must use the attached consent forms which have the approval and expiration dates of your study.
2. This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.
3. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
4. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website.
5. Your approval for this study lasts for one year from the review date. If your study extends beyond that time, including data analysis, you must obtain continuing review from the IRB.

Sincerely,

Carol Mickelson
NC State IRB