

Conceptualizations of Friendship
between Chinese International Students and U.S. Nationals

by

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A Thesis

in

Communication Studies

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of Texas Tech University in
Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for
the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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December, 2008

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study is to add to the understanding of intercultural friendships between Chinese students and United States nationals. The following research questions are posed: 1) How do Chinese international students and U.S. nationals conceptualize friendship, 2) how do these conceptualizations of friendship impact intercultural relationships of Chinese international students and U.S. nationals, 3) what types of communicative challenges do Chinese students face in developing friendship with U.S. nationals, and vice versa, and 4) what other factors hinder Chinese international students from making friends with U.S. nationals, and vice versa? Twenty-two Chinese international students and U.S. nationals participated in in-depth interviews. The results revealed friendship conceptualizations in both Chinese and U.S. cultures from three main aspects: level of friendship, function of friendship, and quality of friendship. The study also explores future directions for research in the areas of intercultural friendship.

Chapter I

Introduction

This current study is significant for a number of reasons. First, with the growing number of Chinese international students in American universities, research is needed to investigate their interpersonal relationships with people in the host culture. Second, although intercultural friendship has been discussed in several disciplines, few studies have focused specifically on students who are originally from a Chinese culture and study in American universities. Therefore, this paper aims to specify this particular group of ethnic students. Third, considering the definition and experience of friendship vary from person to person, qualitative research provides the possibility to discover various meanings of friendships. Fourth, the current study takes both Chinese students and U.S. nationals' perspectives of developing friendships. Both Chinese and U.S. concepts of friendship are investigated.

With the increasing internationalization and globalization of the world, more and more international students choose to study at U.S. universities (Open Doors, 2007). Asian students are becoming one of the largest and fastest growing student groups in American universities (Open Doors, 2007). According to the Institute of International Education, during the 2006 academic year, the four leading places of origin of international students were 83,833 from India, 67,723 from China, 62,392 from South Korea, and 32,582 from Japan (Institute of International Education, 2007).

On the other hand, an abundance of past research has revealed that Asian students, especially Chinese students on American campuses, frequently confront more severe cultural difficulties in adjusting when compared to students of other nationalities

(Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Lin & Yi, 1997). Studying in the U.S. is considered to be a big challenge to Asian students, mainly due to their inadequate language and communication skills, academic concerns, cultural differences, social isolation, differences in educational systems, and a lack of understanding of American culture and society (Zhang & Rentz, 1996).

Several studies posit a connection between relationships with hosts and successful adjustment for international students (Furnham, 1988; Searle & Ward, 1990). It is generally believed that friendships with host country nationals provide international students with opportunities to learn more about the culture, to gain practical information, and to develop social skills. However, developing friendships with Americans can be difficult for most East Asian students. Research on intercultural interactions indicates that although Asian international students benefit socially and psychologically from host nationals and would like to make these encounters, the extent of host-sojourner interactions is very limited (Zhang, 2004; Zhang & Rentz, 1996). Most Asian students are more likely to have co-national friends, and on the whole, they find establishing friendships more difficult than their local counterparts (Yeh, 1976; Yeh, et al., 1979).

Despite the fact that international student organizations and university intercultural centers provide commendable opportunities for international students to interact with the host culture (e.g., integrated housing, international clubs), the reality is that it is still difficult for those students to make quality contacts with people in the host nation. Previous research suggested that contact per se does not necessarily result in positive attitudes (Hull, 1978). Contacts may increase tension, suspicion, and hostility or even lead to competition between people of unequal status (Bloom, 1972; Bochner, 1982).

Yum (1988) suggested that contact has a positive effect on intergroup attitudes only under certain conditions, for instance, equal status between the members of the contact, favorable social climate, and intimate rather than casual contact. Thus, further research is needed to investigate what makes quality contacts, and what makes intercultural friendship work between Chinese international students and U.S. nationals.

The topic of intercultural friendship has been studied in several different areas, such as communication studies, psychology, and education. A palpable problem in the field of communication studies is that U.S. communication research involves an abundance of friendship studies whereas friendship research in Chinese culture is seriously missing. Although through the years a large amount of communication literature has contributed to the interpersonal relationship development among Chinese sojourners in the United States (e.g., Bochner et al., 1977; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Gareis, 1995, 2000a), very few (e.g., Gareis, 1995; Chen, 2005) have been found to specify friendship conceptualizations and patterns in Chinese culture and its impact on their intercultural friendship.

Studies in the areas of psychology and education have focused on Chinese children and adolescents' friendship development in American schools (e.g., Rotenberg, 2006; Yu, 1995; Yeh, Zhou, Cohen, Hundley & Deptula, 2005). However, these studies are not necessarily applicable to the current study, because they focused on child and adolescent sojourners rather than adults. As opposed to older sojourners, children have not fully developed personality structures and communication patterns in their original culture, and therefore are less inhibited to learn and adapt to the new culture (Olaniran, 1996). Statistics have also shown that children tend to acquire a second language more quickly

and with a higher level of proficiency than adults (e.g., Furnham, 1988; Kim, 1976).

Therefore, research investigating friendship among children and adolescents may not be an appropriate research source to study friendship among university students, especially those at the graduate level.

Another feature of cross-cultural friendship is that the conceptualizations of friendship from different cultures and individuals can be culturally specific and subjective. Gudykunst (1983, 1985) indicated that friendship is characterized by each culture's own unique set of values and dimensions, and friendship patterns emerge as culturally specific, cultural norms that regulate and govern such a relationship. Therefore, qualitative research in which respondents are asked their individual understandings of friendship is an appropriate approach to discover the various conceptualizations of friendship represented by individuals from both cultures. Gareis (2000a) argued a qualitative research approach provides descriptive, foundational knowledge for intercultural friendship: "a qualitative research design to supply perspective, empirical assessment and context-bound information, and to create a critical data experience base" (Gareis, 2000a, p. 74). Thus, in order to gain a descriptive understanding of friendship from individuals of two cultures a qualitative research approach is adopted in the current study.

Last, one important aspect the previous research neglected is the U.S. nationals' perspectives of establishing friendship with Chinese international students. Kim (2001) identified three important environmental factors exerting the greatest potential influence on cross-cultural adaptation: 1) the host's receptivity, 2) the host's conformity pressure, and 3) the sojourner's ethnic group strength. Thus, it is important to investigate not only

Chinese students' but also U.S. nationals' concepts of friendship and how these concepts influence their cross-cultural friendships. The current study intends to explore the relationships between cultural environmental and individual factors from both sides and their impact on intercultural friendship.

Research Questions

The purpose of the current study is to gain a descriptive and profound understanding of intercultural friendship between Chinese students and U.S. nationals via the use of qualitative research methods. Along the lines of this focus, the following research questions are offered:

RQ 1: How do Chinese international students and U.S. nationals conceptualize friendship?

RQ 2: How do these conceptualizations of friendship impact intercultural relationships of Chinese international students and U.S. nationals?

RQ 3: What types of communicative challenges do Chinese students face in developing friendships with U.S. nationals, and vice versa?

RQ 4: What other factors hinder Chinese international students from making friends with U.S. nationals, and vice versa?

Terminology

Chinese international students in the present study refer to students who are Chinese citizens currently studying in U.S. universities. The Chinese respondents are limited to people who grew up and were educated in mainland China and Taiwan and are at least the age of 18. The reason for including Taiwan in this study is mainly due to two reasons: 1) Taiwan shares the same culture with Mainland China, although it is operated

by a different government¹. 2) The number of mainland Chinese students is limited, in order to assure that enough participants are involved in the study, a certain number of Taiwanese students will be considered as potential participants.

The term “U.S. nationals” or “Americans” used in this study is limited to a narrow sense of citizens of the United States of America, who were born in the U.S. and are naturalized citizens of the United States. Despite the common assumption in the U.S. that the word “American” only refers to United States citizens, “Americans” technically can be used to describe people from both North and South American countries (i.e. Canada, U.S.A., Central and South Americas). However, in current study the word “American” is used to describe U.S. citizens exclusively. Although the United States consists of a culturally diverse population, the subjects of the current study are limited to Caucasian Americans. Social minorities, such as African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans, are excluded from the study. To avoid terminology misunderstanding, in the current study the term “U.S. nationals” and “Americans” are only used to describe Caucasian U.S. citizens.

The word “friend” may be explained differently by individuals and vary in different cultures; therefore, it is necessary to define friendship from both Chinese and U.S. perspectives. American scholar Robert B. Hays (1988) concluded that although scholars used different perspectives to define friendship, it was often portrayed as “voluntary interdependence between two persons over time, that is intended to facilitate social-emotional goals of the participants, and may involve varying types and degrees of

¹ Taiwan (the Republic of China) was established in 1949 when the Nationalist Chinese government was expelled from mainland China (the People’s Republic of China) by the Communists (Chang, 1973). Taiwan’s current population consists of mostly Chinese and a small minority of Taiwanese; the official language is Mandarin Chinese (Brigham Young University, 1993c)

companionship, intimacy, affection, and mutual assistance” (p.395). The Modern Chinese Vocabulary Dictionary (2005) provides a similar definition of friendship as Hay’s. Friendship is defined as “an intimacy relationship existing among friends, usually established on mutual benefits and trust; People express their friendship mainly on emotion (e.g., mutual understanding, sympathy, etc) and behavior (e.g., support, assistance, etc)” (p.1038).

The term “friend” is used to describe a variety of relationships in U.S. culture, ranging from short-term, superficial contacts, to long-standing and deeply committed associations (Matthews, 1986). Researchers have divided friendship into four major categories; from the least to the most important are acquaintance, casual friends, close friends, and best friends (e.g., Gareis, 1995; Valentinsen, Cushman, & Schroder, 1981). On the other hand, friendships in Chinese culture also represent a wide range of relationships. Friends in China are categorized as *shu ren* (acquaintance), *wan ban* (hang-out friends), *pu tong pengyou* (casual friends), *hao you* (good friends), *zhi you* (friends who you can discuss anything with), and lastly, *zhi ji* (friends who know you as well as you know yourself) (Modern Chinese Vocabulary Dictionary, 2005). Chinese believe that the value of *wan ban* (hang-out friends) is not highly appreciated because hang-out friends in the Chinese culture are often portrayed as people with whom to socialize but not to trust. Their positions are just between acquaintances and causal friends. On the other hand, friends with whom one feels comfortable to speak with in a familiar manner are well appreciated in Chinese culture.

Some experts on friendships include romantic partners and family members among friends whereas other experts do not. For instance, while Fischer (1982)

considered friends as filling other roles such as spouses or relatives, Reisman (1979) saw friends as typically neither blood relations nor sexual partners. Regardless of the fact that a good number of people consider spouses or relatives to be their friends, in this study, the emphasis will only be on relationships that are exclusively friendships without romantic or familial affiliations.

Organization of Chapters

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter offers the need for studying Asian, especially Chinese students, intercultural friendships with U.S. nationals. The first chapter explains the rationale to adopt a qualitative approach in discussing intercultural friendship. This chapter also raises the concern of the lack of intercultural friendship literature and the neglect of U.S. nationals' perspectives of developing friendship with Chinese international students.

Chapter two provides a review of literature and consists of four main parts. The first section investigates factors that affect intercultural friendship formation. The second section probes Chinese and American literature related to friendship patterns in the U.S. and China. The third section discusses cross-cultural variations in the function of friendships. And last, the fourth section examines the relationship between international students' ability to adjust to U.S. culture and their friendship with the host people.

Chapter three indicates that the current study adopts a qualitative approach to investigate intercultural friendship relations. The study employs a snowballing strategy along with a theoretical sampling strategy to assemble participants. The chapter further explains in detail the process of conducting interviews and analyzing collected data.

Chapter four provides the results of this study. This chapter articulates the three main themes of friendship conceptualizations that emerged from the interviews:

1) Level of friendship. Both Chinese and U.S. participants categorized friends into four major levels. From the most to the least important, they are “best friend,” “close friend,” “casual friend,” and “acquaintance.”

2) Function of friendship. Three major function of friendship were reported by the participants: “share,” “learn,” and “help/support.” Data revealed that while Chinese focus on physical help from friends, Americans look for emotional support.

3) Quality of friendship. Quality refers to the characteristics of individuals that manipulate the degree of satisfaction in the relationship. Five main dialectics of conceptualizations concerning quality of intercultural friendship emerged from data: social constrained vs. social mobile, long-term vs. short-term friendship, collectivism vs. individualism, indirect vs. direct, and remembrance vs. forgiveness.

Chapter four also investigates the communicative challenges Chinese students face in developing friendship with U.S. nationals, and vice versa.

The thesis concludes with chapter five which offers the discussions and implications of the research. This chapter provides suggestions to both Chinese international students and U.S. nationals for establishing cross-cultural friendship. Chapter five also discusses the limitations of the study and the suggestions for future research in the field of intercultural friendship studies.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Overview

Friendship is a universal human communication phenomenon that every culture in the world acknowledges and encourages. According to Nicotera (1993), cultures define the character, function, and form of friendship differently, and cultural systems “dictate the foundations upon which relationships are based, the particular processes through which relationships develop, and the appropriate manners for communicating these values” (Nicotera, 1993, p.10). Research (Gudykunst, 1983, 1985) has shown that friendship is characterized by each culture’s own unique set of values and dimensions, and friendship patterns emerge as culturally specific. Cultural norms regulate and govern such a relationship (Gudykunst, 1983, 1985). Therefore, it is crucial for the current study to examine friendships from both Chinese and American theoretical stances.

Literature reviewed in this chapter focuses on four main areas. First, the chapter probes factors that affect intercultural friendship formation. Second, friendship definitions and patterns in both American and Chinese cultures are examined. Next, Hofstede’s (1980, 1991) five cultural dimensions and Hall’s (1976) high- and low-context are adopted to discuss how cultural variations can influence the function of friendships. Lastly, the chapter investigates social difficulties among Chinese international students and their cross-cultural adjustments while residing on the U.S. campuses.

Friendship Formation

According to Gareis (1995), although through the years a large amount of literature has examined the status quo of American friendship, they focus mostly on middle-class European Americans. Very few studies (e.g., Gareis, 1995; Chen 2005) have been found to specify friendship patterns of other cultures and their impacts on intercultural friendship. Early U.S. friendship research (Pogrebin, 1987) listed the elements necessary for the formation of friendships. These elements include proximity, homophily, reciprocal liking, and self-disclosure (e.g., Pogrebin, 1987). According to Dodd (1991), the word *homophily* refers to similarities among persons with regard to appearance, age, education, residence, social class, economic situation, social status, personality traits, opinions, attitudes, and values. Earlier researchers included gender, race, marital status (Matthews, 1986) and interests and intelligence (Bell, 1981) as variables. Bell (1981) and Rubin (1985) also proved that similarity plays an essential role in the formation of friendship. Byrne's study (1970, 1971) confirmed that the greater the proportion of attitudes the strangers appeared to have in common, the more likely they were to be attracted to each other; on the other hand, the greater the proportion of dissimilar attitudes, the less chance they had of being accepted by the other person.

Proximity provides the opportunity to meet another person (Pogrebin, 1987). Proximity is considered a necessary factor for initial contact (Berscheid & Walster, 1991) and is important for friendship development in terms of psychological closeness – one feels the presence of the other in one's life. The effects of propinquity on friendship formation have been shown for location of one's residence (residential proximity) (e.g.,

Nahemow & Lawton, 1975), work place (Sykes, 1983), or university (e.g., Menne & Sinnett, 1971)—and existing friends (Parks & Eggert, 1991).

Reciprocity of liking also plays an important role in forming friendships. Early studies (Backman & Secord, 1959; Berscheid & Walster, 1978) confirmed that in most cases people are attracted to people who like them, at least where their initial judgment of liking is concerned. Curtis and Miller's study (1986) showed that individuals who believed they were liked actually ended up being liked more than individuals who thought they were disliked.

Infante, Rancer, & Womack (1997) defined self-disclosure as sharing information with others that they would not normally know or discover. Collins and Miller's study (1994) has shown that people may be attracted to those who reveal personal information to them because intimate disclosure sends a message of desire to develop closeness. However, revealing too much in the early stage of the relationship has negative effects. Studies (Cozby, 1972; Rubin, 1975) have found that too much self-disclosure may result in disliking for the discloser and a failure to reciprocate with equally intimate self-disclosure. Berg and Archer (1980) found that greater liking happens when self-disclosure is reciprocated during a first encounter. Many other studies also confirmed that it is important for disclosure to be reciprocal (Berg & Archer, 1980; Sprecher & Duck, 1994).

Gareis (1995, 2000a) made the major systematic attempt to understand the intercultural friendship experience of international students. Gareis (2000a) agreed that homophily and proximity are two factors that influence intercultural friendship formation.

She additionally indicated culture, personality, adjustment stage, and communicative competence as important factors.

According to Gareis (2000a), differences in cultural background have the potential to create many obstacles in the development of relationships. For instance, she stated that cultural components like value systems, social structure, sex roles, and status are influential in relationship formation. As for personality, Strom (1988) found that immigrants with a strong cultural identification, possibly because of a fear of losing their identities, tend not to interact with host nationals. The adjustment stage is another factor affecting intercultural friendship. Bennett (1986) listed six stages in the process of adjustment: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. People in the first three stages take an ethnocentric attitude, which is obviously not conducive to intercultural friendship formation. Gareis's last factor, communicative competence, is by nature integrally tied to the interaction process. Chen (1988) indicated that communication competence is indispensable for gathering information about the host culture and thereby facilitating the acquisition of cultural knowledge. Lack of language skills exacerbates fears of making mistakes and often leads non-native speakers to avoid seeking out and initiating contacts with host nationals.

Friendship Patterns

Friendship Patterns in the United States

According to Gareis (2000a), the topic of American friendship patterns has been gaining attention in recent years. She argues that this is mainly due to general family crisis and the concurrent societal void in emotional, social, and intellectual need fulfillment. Studies by Berscheid & Walster (1991) and Collins & Miller (1994)

examined American friendship patterns from an intra-cultural, non-comparative perspective. Their studies focused mostly on middle-class European Americans, explored friendship differences occurring during the various developmental stages of a lifetime, described the effects of marital status on friendship, and contrasted the typical friendship formations of men and women (Gareis, 1995).

An abundance of research in U.S. friendship studies indicated the personal traits that were valued in friendships. For instance, the qualities mentioned most frequently are trust, honesty, and loyalty, followed by mutuality, generosity, warmth, supportiveness, and acceptance (e.g., Bell, 1981; Matthew, 1986; Pogrebin, 1987). Besides these frequently mentioned values, other characteristics were also valued as important qualities in friendships, such as commitment and constancy (Rubin, 1985), flexibility (Matthews, 1986), and forgiveness (Rubin, 1985; Bell, 1981).

In his book *American ways: A guide for foreigners in the United States*, Althen (1988) pointed out that while most Americans are friendly and approachable during the initial encounter, they later come to seem to be remote and unreachable. Gareis (1995) indicated that U.S. friendships are generally considered to be high spread, low obligation, low duration, and high trust: “American friendships tend to be widespread and trusting, but lacking in a sense of obligation and permanence” (Gareis, 1995, p.23). Therefore, when people from high-obligation and high-duration cultures enter into American society, Americans’ openness and friendliness are often interpreted as promises of close involvement, and many foreigners feel betrayed when this perceived promise is not fulfilled (Althen, 1988).

It is frequently mentioned that Americans have difficulties in forming close friendships in general, not just across cultures. Althen (1988) indicated that when socializing, Americans prefer doing activities together rather than just chatting and they are perceived to keep personal feelings and thoughts to themselves. The Handbook of the University of Iowa Office of International Education and Services (1991) indicated that “they (American people) frequently compartmentalize their friends into friends at work, friends at school, tennis friends, etc.” (p.48). Some other noted characteristics include that Americans avoid commitment and obligation (Stewart, 1972), people emphasize material well-being more than relationships, and generally place a lower value on interpersonal relations than in some other cultures (Du Bois, 1956).

These qualities of American interpersonal relationships can be explained by American national traits that developed over time. Stewart (1972) explained that among Americans the high spread and compartmentalization of friendship can be considered a function of the wish to be popular. Friendships are “matters of social success and not the conditions for establishing warm, personal relationships” (Stewart, 1972, p.54). Stewart also stated that Americans in need of help or support frequently search for professional help rather than ask help from friends. This situation is probably a result of the American ideal of independence and self-reliance. Pollack (1984) stated in *The Connecticut Mutual Life Report on American Values* that when asked about values, Americans ranked freedom first, well ahead of friendship, which partially explains why people do not want to get closely involved (Althen, 1988). Another reason for their unwillingness to engage in close involvements and the perceived short duration of American friendships can be found in American mobility tendencies. As Bell (1981) explained,

Having grown up in families that might have changed their residence every few years, many Americans have either not had sufficient practice in forming close friendships or have developed self-protective habits of keeping relationships casual in order not to get hurt upon the repeated separations. (p.38)

American society seeks independence and self-reliance, and frequent movement is well-accepted by its people. As a result, these traits of American society don't encourage deep and long-lasting friendships. American people have to learn to "develop instant intimacy but also let go quickly and with ease" (Rubin, 1985, p196-197).

Friendship Patterns in China

Because most interpersonal communication theories related to friendship research were developed in the West and were based on the Western experience, these theories may not be applicable to an Eastern society, such as China. In recent years, researchers (e.g., Chang & Holt, 1991, Chen, 2005) have made efforts to examine the unique friendship patterns in Chinese culture. As mentioned earlier, different cultural systems determine how each culture defines the character, function, and form of friendship. Considering the immense cultural differences between China and the U.S., such as power distance and level of individualism, it is reasonable to assume that Chinese culture has its unique understanding of friendship.

Chen (2005) suggested that the common contexts shared among individuals plays an important role for Chinese people in establishing and developing their friendships, due to the collectivist nature of Chinese culture. One can easily find people using the Chinese word *Tong* (translated as "same" or "common") to describe their intimate interpersonal relationships. For instance, *Tong xiang* (fellow hometown folks) are a common social tie for building friendship networks. Interpersonal relationships built with *Tong xue*

(schoolmates or classmates) are extremely important, especially in the Chinese societies of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China (Fried, 1969). *Tong shi* (colleague) is another important social bond. Whereas American co-workers share little time together outside of work, Chinese co-workers often do socialize in their free time (Chen, 2005).

Chen's study (2005) also called attention to both functional and expressive facets of friendship in Chinese and American contexts. According to Chen (2005), Western friendship pays more attention to expressive dimension and the relationship carries fewer obligations. On the other hand, Chinese friendship can be initiated from practical helpfulness and later become affective friendship or the other way around. Compared with Americans and other Westerners, Chinese make fewer casual, short-term acquaintanceships and their friendships tend to last longer and each party expects full support of resources, time, and loyalty from the other (Smart, 1999).

Moreover, the traditional Chinese religion, Buddhism, has its significant influences on the Chinese friendship pattern. Chang and Holt's study (1991) indicated that the Buddhist concept of *Yuan* plays a significant role in structuring how Chinese think about their interpersonal relationships. *Yuan* can be briefly defined as "secondary causation" and meaning approximately "positive fate," and is regarded as "the chief force that allows contextual factors to play a role in determining whether people will be associated with each other or not" (Chang & Holt, 1991, p.30). To say "I have *Yuan* with somebody" means conditions are right for them to be together. *Yuan* as a unique Chinese concept plays a significant role in structuring how Chinese think about their interpersonal relationships.

According to Cheung, Cheung, Leung, Ward, and Leong (2003), some unique characteristics developed in Chinese culture include *harmony* (measuring inner peace of mind and interpersonal harmony), *mutual responsibility* (relationship orientation; social favors/exchange), *face* (concern for maintaining personal dignity in interpersonal settings), and *thrift* (careful use of resources to avoid waste). Cheung, et al. (2003), using a combined “etic-emic” approach, noted that the above mentioned indigenous concepts did not appear to be assessed by Western personality inventories. Therefore, these concepts might not be readily understood and appreciated by people from Western cultures (e.g., Cheung, et al., 2003; Cheung & Leung, 1998; Cheung et al., 1996).

Cultural Variations

Many scholars have focused on cultural variations affecting the adjustment of international students. For example, Babiker et al. (1980) developed the concept of “culture distance,” which states that the more difference between the culture of an international student and his or her host country, the more adjustment problems the student will experience. Furnham and Bochner (1982, 1986) found support for the culture distance hypothesis from their studies of international students. They found in these studies that the degree of adjustment difficulties experienced by the students was directly related to the disparity between the sojourner’s culture and the host society.

Most research adopts Hofstede’s (1980, 1991) five cultural dimensions to examine cultural similarity or difference. Hofstede initially developed four culture dimensions based on data from 40 countries: 1) Low/high power distance, which is “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations accept that power is distributed unequally,” 2) Low/high uncertainty avoidance, which is “the extent

to which people feel threatened by ambiguous situations and have created beliefs,” 3) Individualism/collectivism, which refers to people’s behaviors in individualistic cultures by which they “are supposed to look after themselves and their family only,” while in collectivistic cultures, “people belong to in-groups or collectivities which are supposed to look after them in exchange for loyalty,” 4) masculinity/femininity, masculinity represent a cultural trait that “dominant values in society are success, money, and things” whereas femininity refers to a society that “in which dominant values are caring for others and quality of life”(Hofstede & Bond, 1984. p.419-420). Hofstede (1991) added a fifth Dimension (Long-/short-term orientation) after conducting an additional international study with a survey instrument developed with Chinese employees and managers. Hofstede (1991) described long-term orientation as characterized by persistence, ordering relationships by status and observing this order, thrift, and having a sense of shame. On the other hand, short-term orientation is characterized by personal steadiness and stability, protecting your “face”, respect for tradition and reciprocation of greetings, favors, and gifts. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 (Hofstede, 2003) demonstrate Hofstede’s five cultural dimensions in United States and China. Table 2.1 explains the cultural differences of China and the U.S.

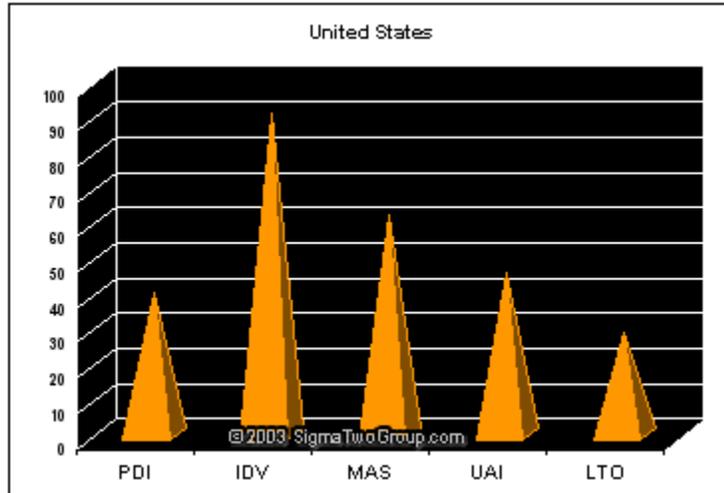


Figure 2.1 Hofstede's five cultural dimensions – United States

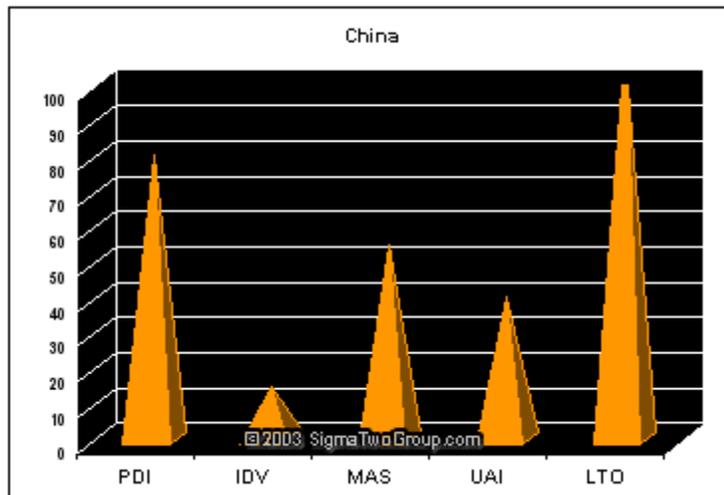


Figure 2.2 Hofstede's five cultural dimensions – China

Table 2.1 Hofstede's (1980, 1991) Five Cultural Dimensions

Cultural Variables	Chinese Culture	U.S. Culture
Power Distance	High power distance "The less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally."	Low power distance "Superior and subordinate are basically equal; both have rights as well as responsibilities that are spelled out in contractual terms."
Individualism	Collectivism "people belong to in-groups or collectivities which are supposed to look after them in exchange for loyalty"	Individualism people's in individualistic cultures "are supposed to look after themselves and their family only,"
Masculinity	Femininity A society that "in which dominant values are caring for others and quality of life"	Masculinity A cultural trait that "dominant values in society are success, money, and things"
Uncertainty avoidance	Low uncertainty avoidance People are open to unknown situations	High uncertainty avoidance people feel threatened by ambiguous situations and have created beliefs
Long-term orientation	Long-term orientation "Characterized by persistence, ordering relationships by status and observing this order, thrift, and having a sense of shame."	Short-term orientation "Characterized by personal steadiness and stability, protecting your "face", respect for tradition and reciprocation of greetings, favors, and gifts.

Research in intercultural communication (e.g., Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Mortenson, 2005; Triandis, 1994) indicated that there are important cultural differences in emotional experience and expression as a function of the collectivist-individualist value system. In collectivist societies, such as traditional China, the individual's situation and projects are deeply connected with the situation of other in-group members such as family members and close friends (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). In contrast, in

individualist societies, such as the United States, people separate their individual situations and projects from others and are perceived to focus on the pursuit of their own defined goals (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). Collectivist cultures value the group achievement and group harmony, whereas individualist cultures value the achievement of personal goals and the expression of a differentiated self (Triandis, 1994).

Previous work has shown that Asian culture doesn't encourage showing distress in front of friends and also that it places very little value on conflict management (Argyle, Henderson, Bond, Iizuka, & Contarello, 1986, Samter & Burleson, 2005). It is probably due to a cultural phenomenon that people in collectivist societies utilize a verbal code that is subtle, indirect, and dependent on contextual cues and adopt a relatively non-expressive communication style (Argyle, et al., 1986). In contrast, members of individualistic, Western cultures rely more on explicit and elaborated verbal utterances than people in collectivist, Eastern cultures (Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996; Hall, 1976). Given these trends, it is not surprising that conflict management skills, which necessarily involve discussion about negative emotions, were not highly regarded by members of collectivist cultures. Mortenson's (2005) findings also suggested that within collectivist cultures such as China, negative emotions within friendship appear to be understood in the way as possible sources of disruption in relational harmony. Thus, Chinese are more likely to avoid discussing issues like sadness or anxiety while at the same time valuing people who can skillfully help others manage such emotions and preserve in-group harmony (Burleson & Mortenson, 2003).

Other than Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Hall's (1976) theory of high- versus low-context has also been utilized as a way of understanding different cultures. The

concept of high-low context explains how people in a culture relate to one another, especially in social bonds, responsibility, commitment, social harmony, and communication. According to Hall (1976), a high-context communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. In a low-context message, "the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code" (Hall, 1976, p 79). According to Hall, most collectivism cultures are classified as high-context cultures (including much of the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and South America) and individualism cultures are classified as low-context cultures (including North America and much of Western Europe).

Considerable intercultural communication studies (e.g., Barnlund, 1989; Chen & Starosta, 1996) warranted the expectation that East Asians (high-context culture) would report substantially less self-disclosure than Anglo-Americans (low-context culture). Kim et al. (1998) offered some preliminary empirical evidence in support of the high- versus low-context culture concept with Korean, Chinese, and American subjects. The results showed that in a high-context culture (such as China and Korea), people appear to be more socially oriented, less confrontational, and more complacent with existing ways of living.

Intercultural Adaptation

Researchers argued that friendship patterns have a significant impact on successful cross-cultural adaptation (e.g., Furnham & Bochner, 1986, Kim 1988, Olaniran, 1996). Selltiz, Christ, Havel, and Cook (1963) found that international students in the U.S. who are more actively involved with people in the host culture (Americans)

are more satisfied toward the host country (the U.S.). The intercultural adaptation of international students is a complex phenomenon and often approached by communication scholars from a variety of perspectives. Some researchers have been focused on the stages or processes of cultural shock. For example, Lysgaard's (1955) U-curve assumption (honeymoon-hostility-critical-recovery) and Gullahorn's (1977) W-curve phenomenon (honeymoon-hostility-critical-recovery-reverse cultural shock) hypothesized that the process of adjustment to a different culture is characterized by a series of stages. Some researchers have examined the structure of cross-cultural communication. For instance, over the years Kim (1988, 1995, & 2001) has developed an integrative theory of cross cultural adaptation among sojourners. She argued that personal communication, social communication, environment, predisposition are the main variables effecting cultural adaptation. Some other researchers have examined psychological, social and cultural variables affecting the adjustment of sojourners. For example, Olaniran (1996, 1999) pointed out that factors influencing social difficulties among sojourners included language, age, academic classification, cultural similarity, and friendship communication network patterns.

Furnham and Bochner (1982, 1986) studied social interaction with host country people and its influence on cross-cultural adjustment and found that most sojourners belong to three distinct social networks: First, "a primary, mono-cultural network consisting of close friendships with other sojourning compatriots. The main function of the co-national network is to provide a scene in which ethnic and cultural values can be rehearsed and expressed." Second, "a secondary, bi-cultural network consisting of bonds between the international student and significant host nationals such as academics,

students, advisors, and government officials. The main function of this network is to facilitate instrumentally the academic and professional aspirations of the sojourner.” And last, “a third, multi-cultural network of friends and acquaintances. The main function of this network is to provide companionship for recreational, ‘non-cultural’ and non-task orientated activities” (p.173).

According to Bochner et al. (1977), the mono-cultural (co-national) bonds have vital importance to the adjustment of international students and should not be discouraged. In the meantime, the authors also conceded that international students should expand the bicultural bonds and the multicultural associations beyond the initial instrumental and recreational functions. Research has shown that many non-Western international students have only limited contact with people in their ethnic groups (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985).

Imahori and Lanigan’s (1989) model suggested that cognitive, motivational, and behavioral components (i.e., knowledge, attitude, and skills) are the three major components of intercultural communication competence. Cognitive components relate to “general and specific information about the new culture”; motivational components refer to “the degree of open mindedness to the host culture and motivation to engage with it”; and behavioral components include “language communication ability and empathy” (Ying, 2002, p.47). According to Imahori and Lanigan (1989), the presence of intercultural communication competence will be associated with cross-cultural interpersonal relationships.

Ying (2002) conducted a 14-month longitudinal study among 155 Taiwanese graduate students in the United States. The results indicated that students are more likely

to form cross-cultural relationships if they have an extraverted personality, a greater knowledge about the United States, better English communication skills, and attend a school where fewer Taiwanese co-ethnics are enrolled. These students were also reported to have a less positive attitude toward friendship with Taiwanese but a more favorable attitude toward friendship formation with Americans.

The relationship of extraversion and cross-cultural affiliation was supported in Furukawa et al.'s (1998) study on international high school exchange students. Furukawa (1998) reported that the more extraverted participants enjoy social interactions more and are more likely to affiliate with Americans than introverted international students who are more likely to withdraw from social contacts in general. Antler's study (1970) also found foreign medical residents who were more active and assertive in social relationships to be more interactive with Americans. Individuals with greater knowledge are more likely to develop intercultural relationships with Americans. Studies (e.g., Gudykunst & Hammer, 1984; Redmond & Bunyi, 1993) have showed knowledge about the new culture enhances the confidence to approach members of the host culture and reduces the potential for intercultural misunderstanding.

Conclusion

Literature reviewed in this chapter has focused on four main areas: friendship formation, the U.S. and Chinese friendship patterns, cross-cultural variables, and cross-cultural adaptation in relation to intercultural friendships. Research that focused on social difficulty (e.g., Olaniran, 1996, 1999) and cultural adaptation among international students (Kim, 1991, 1995, 2002; Ting-Toomey, 1993, 1998) indicated that friendship network patterns have a significant impact on successful cross-cultural adaptation.

Furnham and Bochner's functional model for international students' friendship development suggested that mono-cultural (co-cultural), bi-cultural, and multi-cultural networks are three distinctive friendship networks among most international students. They also indicated that international students should not limit themselves to a co-national network but should also form bicultural and multicultural associations. Therefore, intercultural friendship research is vital to help international students develop such networks.

One of the premises of intercultural friendship research is that the definition and pattern of friendship varies in different cultures. As stated in the literature reviewed earlier, the term "friendship" is interpreted and practiced differently in Chinese and American cultures. Unfortunately, literature about friendship definition and patterns of Chinese culture is much rarer than that about American friendships. Without clear understanding of how Chinese and Americans conceptualize friendship in their cultures, it is difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of intercultural friendships between them. The current study aims to explore friendship conceptualizations among Chinese international students and U.S. nationals. The first and second research questions explore:

RQ1: How do Chinese international students and U.S. nationals conceptualize friendship?

RQ 2: How do these conceptualizations of friendship impact their intercultural relationships?

Research has indicated that Hofstede's (1980, 1991) five cultural dimensions and Hall's theory of high- and low-context plays important roles on explaining the process of intercultural friendship formation (Gudykunst, 1983, Triandis, 1994). Numerous studies

have focused on cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 1991, 1995, 2002) and intercultural communication competence (Wiseman, 1993). Despite an impressive body of research have been done in the field of intercultural communication, very few studies (e.g., Gareis, 1995) have discussed communicative challenges and other factors Chinese international students and U.S. nationals facing hinder the development of their friendship. Therefore, the third and fourth research questions examine:

RQ 3: What types of communicative challenges do Chinese students face in developing friendships with U.S. nationals, and vice versa?

RQ 4: What other factors hinder Chinese international students from making friends with U.S. nationals, and vice versa?

To conclude, the current study aims to utilize a qualitative research method as a means of gaining a descriptive and holistic understanding of intercultural friendship between Chinese international students and U.S. nationals.

Chapter III

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach to investigate intercultural friendship between Chinese international students and U.S. nationals. Both a theoretical and a snowball sampling strategy were employed in the current study to assemble participants. All the participants engaged in a 45-60 minute in-depth interview, which intend to deeply explore the participant's standpoints and perspectives by asking open-ended questions. After all the data were collected, the open coding and thematic analysis were used to interpret the data set.

Participants

Participants in this study consisted of 11 Chinese students and 11 U.S. nationals residing in a mid-sized Southwestern city, which accommodates a large university. The age of the Chinese participants ranged from 21 to 32, with eight males and three females. Ten Chinese students are from mainland China, and one is from Taiwan. Only one Chinese participant claimed to be married; the other ten respondents reported to be single or dating. The majority of the Chinese students are enrolled in postgraduate degrees, with four master's students and six Ph.D. students. Only one Chinese participant is enrolled in an undergraduate program. Among U.S. participants, the wide age range was from 20 to 81. Of the U.S. participants, six are males and five are females. All 11 U.S. participants are *white-appearing* Anglo Americans² (Warren, 2003, p.20). As for the relational statuses, five respondents reported to be single, five are married, and one is widowed. Four

² Warren (2003) utilized the term *white-appearing* to describe people who are born in white skin. Meanwhile, he also quoted, "the fact that a person is born with 'white' skin does not necessarily mean that s/he will think, act, and write in the 'white' ways" (Keating, 1995, p.907). In the current study, the researcher employs the term to depict the appearance of the U.S. participants.

participants are college students (two Master's programs, and two undergraduate programs). The other seven participants are non-student. A more detailed description of participants can be found in Appendix F.

Sampling Strategy

The current study utilized both a theoretical and a purposive snowballing sampling strategy. According to Biernacki and Waldorf (1981), a purposive snowball sampling strategy “yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest” (p.141). This study is purposive in that it takes into consideration participants' demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, age, major, marital status, country of citizenship, and for Chinese students, the length of time in the U.S.) to determine whether these characteristics are salient to the development of friendships. The researcher started sampling by making conversations with Chinese students and U.S. nationals at the university and within the community. The researcher asked whether Chinese students have U.S. American friends and, conversely, whether U.S. Americans have Chinese friends. Once the presence of intercultural friendship was determined, the participants were asked to take part in the research study. The initial participants consisted of two Chinese and three U.S. nationals. At the end of the interview session, participants were asked to provide names and contact information of potential participants. Consequently, their friends and those they referred were also invited into the study to provide further viewpoints of their friendships with Chinese international students and U.S. nationals.

This study utilized theoretical data saturation techniques, which involves the continual collection and analysis of data until “theoretical saturation” is achieved

(Glasser & Strauss, 1967). According to Charmaz (2006), theoretical sampling means seeking pertinent data to develop emerging theories. The main purpose of theoretical sampling is to elaborate and refine the categories constituting the theory. The researcher should stop gathering data when the categories are “saturated,” that is to say, when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of these core theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2006). Glaser (2001) gives “saturation” a more sophisticated definition:

Saturation is not seeing the same pattern over and over again. It is the conceptualization of comparisons of these incidents which yield different properties of the pattern, until no new properties of the pattern emerge. This yields the conceptual density that when integrated into hypotheses make up the body of the generated grounded theory with theoretical completeness. (p. 191)

With theoretical saturation techniques, the researcher continued to collect data until the researcher identifies a saturation of the experiences and responses of participants. To ensure saturation, the researcher engaged in several interviews past the point of identified saturation. After interviewing 11 Chinese students and 11 U.S. nationals, the data were found to achieve theoretical saturation.

Procedures

Each participant was asked to sign a consent form to ask for their agreement of participating in the study (see Appendix A – consent form). All the participants were required to sign the consent form and choose pseudonyms as a means of maintaining confidentiality. All the participants were asked to complete a questionnaire and engage in an in-depth interview. The questionnaire asked the participants to provide the demographics information, which took approximately 10 minutes (see Appendix B, questionnaire – Chinese students, and Appendix C, questionnaire – U.S. nationals).

During the interview, the researcher asked in-depth questions about intercultural friendship, which took approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. Individual in-depth interviews were conducted in informal settings of the participants' choice, for example, a students' cafeteria, a coffee shop, or the participant's home. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed with the participant's consent. Two different versions of interviews were given: 1) to Chinese students (see Appendix D, interview guide – Chinese students) and 2) to U.S. nationals (see Appendix E– interview guide – U.S. nationals). Because the results are more accurate to interview participants in their native languages, the Chinese participants were interviewed in Mandarin Chinese in order to ensure open and free conversations, and later the interview transcripts were translated into English for research consistency.

Data Analysis

The current study adopts an open coding technique along with a thematic analysis to analyze the collected data. First of all, the open coding technique was adopted to help the researcher familiarize herself with the data set and generate initial codes. Open coding is the initial unrestricted coding of data (Strauss, 1987). In this stage, researchers go through the texts line by line and mark those chunks of text that suggest a category (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This stage of coding is “unrestricted” because the analyst has not yet decided the range of categories or how the categories are defined, and has also not yet unitized the coding procedure. Therefore, the researcher can feel free to consider the meanings of words, phrases, sentences, and larger expressive or dialogical units on an equal basis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The goal of opening coding, noted by Strauss (1987), “is to open up the inquiry, Every interpretation at this point is tentative...

whatever is wrong in interpreting those lines and words will eventually be cancelled out through later steps of the inquiry” (p.29).

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns and themes within data. It focuses on identifiable patterns and themes of living or behavior (Aronson, 1994). One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility. As Braun and Clarke (2006) noted, the method minimally organizes and describes the data set in rich detail:

Thematic analysis is not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework, and therefore it can be used within different theoretical frameworks, and can be used to do different things within them... Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data. (p.78)

The process of thematic analysis involves several major stages: familiarizing the data, generating initial codes, search for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

When all data were initially coded, the researcher focused on the broader level of themes, which involving sorting the different codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes. In this stage, the researcher started to analyze the codes and consider how different codes may combine to form an “overarching theme” (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After a set of candidate themes were devised, they were reviewed in order to make sure form a coherent pattern. In this phase, the researcher read all the collated extracts for each theme, and considered whether they appeared to form a cohesive form, the researcher also need to take into consideration the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set (Boyatzis, 1998).

When the researcher decided on the thematic map, the themes were defined and refined in order to be presented in the analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), “define” and “refine” means identifying the essence of what each theme is about, and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures. In the end, the researcher should be able to provide “a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell – within and across themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.93). Therefore, thematic analysis was considered to be the most appropriate method to examine intercultural friendship between Chinese international students and U.S. nationals.

Chapter IV

Friendship Conceptualization

The purpose of the current study is to examine how Chinese international students and U.S. nationals conceptualize friendship and how these conceptualizations impact their intercultural relationships. This study focuses specifically on Chinese international students as a unique social group, hears the voice from both Chinese students and U.S. nationals, and also takes into consideration that individuals' definition and experience of friendship can vary from person to person. This chapter articulates the three main themes of friendship conceptualizations that emerged from the interviews: level of friendship, functions of friendship, and quality of friendship.

As for level of friendship, both Chinese and U.S. participants categorized friends into four major levels. From the most to the least important, they are "best friend," "close friend," "casual friend," and "acquaintance." As far as functions of friendship concerned, three major functions of friendship were reported by the participants: "share," "learn," and "help/support." Data revealed that while Chinese focus on physical help from friends, Americans look for emotional support. Last, quality of friendship refers to the characteristics of individuals that manipulate the degree of satisfaction in the relationship. Five main dialectics of conceptualizations concerning quality of intercultural friendship emerged from data: social constrained vs. social mobile, long-term vs. short-term friendship, collectivism vs. individualism, indirect vs. direct, and remember vs. forgive and forget.

Chapter four also investigates the communicative challenges Chinese students face in developing friendship with U.S. nationals, and vice versa. Chinese respondents

reported that language barrier, lack of confidence, lack of access to Americans, and reluctant to adjust to the new culture are the major obstacles of Chinese international students, while lack of tolerance to cultural difference and being critical of other cultures are the main challenges of Americans. American participants pointed out that group effect and lack of familiarity with China hinder their communication with the Chinese, while neglecting of the importance of merging into American society, group effect, and cultural and language barriers are the main challenges Chinese students face in developing friendships with the Americans.

Level of Friendship

Both Chinese and U.S. participants reported that when they use the term “friends,” it can refer to a wide variety of relationships. When asked what kind of person they call a friend, Jason, a 51- year-old American, responded, “You have different levels of friendship: for instance, close friends, casual friends, and acquaintances.” Amanda, a 37-year-old American female, agreed that one can have all kinds of different friends: “(You can have) friends you talk about your personal life and friends you work with or go to club with, and do you share culture information or believe system or ideas.” Kai Wen, a Ph.D. student in Chemistry, believes our definitions of friendship nowadays are becoming wider: “People have all kinds of friends, friends who grew up together, friends who known not long ago, even friends you never see, for example, network friends.” A 25-year-old Chinese student, Li Hua, indicated in her interview that she would “like to divide my friends into two major types, one is those people who I just say ‘Hello, how are you?’ when I see them. The other one is those who I have real deep relationships with.” In the current study, both Chinese and U.S. participants divided friends into four

major levels. From the most to the least important, these levels are “best friend,” “close friend,” “casual friend,” and “acquaintance.” This scheme is consistent with Valentinsen, Cushman, and Schroder’s study (1981), which confirmed these four categories of friendship among American friends. Besides these four categories, Chinese participants also introduced a unique Chinese term, *zhi ji*, which can be translated in English word “soul mate,” in describing friends who reached a high level of understanding to each other. *Zhi ji* are considered as important as best friends in Chinese culture.

Best friends

During the interviews, best friends are described by both Chinese and U.S. participants as people they have known for a long time and with whom they share common purposes, experiences, interests, and beliefs. Additionally, best friends are individuals with a high level of familiarity and understanding; people they trust and tell anything with. For instance, Todd, an American university professor, described his best friend Jack as “someone I share a lot of personal concerns with without fear of negative judgments.” Later in the interview, he went on to say: “... we can both be trusted with potentially embarrassing information. I don’t think he even shares some of that with his wife.” Man Ting, a 22-year-old Chinese woman, described her best friend: “I trust her so much as she trust me so much that we believe each other can be one of very few people in the world we can depend on in the rest of our lives.” The results of this study are consistent with these earlier studies. For instance, Du Bois (1974) indicated that best friends are marked by their inclusive intimacy and assumed permanence. Best friends were characterized by offering greater help, support, and being closer than any other categories of friends (Hardy, et al., 1991).

Chinese conceptualizations of best friends. Although both Chinese and American participants described similar experiences with their best friends, there are some unique characteristics in both cultures. For instance, family-like relationships seem very common among best friends in Chinese culture. Weiwei, a 25-year-old Ph.D. student, described her relationship with her best friend as follows: “My parents treat her like another daughter, and, for me, she is just my sister.” Interestingly, Chinese people even introduce their best friends to other people as “my brother” or “my sister.” As a person from outside of the Chinese culture, Todd was surprised by this practice: “I hear Chinese males saying ‘He is my brother.’ The first time when I heard that and I looked at them and I was like: ‘He couldn’t be.’” Later Todd started to understand the concept that friends are like family as he heard it over and over from the Chinese: “There is something to that. Maybe having a friend is like having a brother or a sister.”

Chinese participants also introduced a cultural specific term *zhi ji*. The closest translation in English is “soul mate.” *Zhi ji* is literally translated as “someone who knows you better than you know yourself,” and the term is used to describe friendships with a high level of understanding. When asked the difference between best friend (*zui hao pengyou* in Chinese) and *zhi ji*, Chinese participants commented that *zui hao pengyou* is the person you have the most interaction with emotionally and physically. In contrast, *zhi ji* is more like a friend who knows who you are on a spiritual level. Respondents believe that *zui hao pengyou* is as important as *zhi ji*. Man Ting explained to me:

They are both important to me, but I don’t think one is more important than the other. The difference between the two words depends on the perspective you take to describe a friend. *Zui hao pengyou* has more interaction with you. *Zhi ji* is a person you share a pure relationship with, and your communication focuses on a spiritual level.

Kai Wen, a Ph.D. student in chemistry, clarified the word in this way:

A *zhi ji* is less involved in your daily life, but when you think about him, you are happy to have someone who really knows you. However, I think *zui hao pengyou* and *zhi ji* can be the same person. It just depends how you see this person.

The word *zhi ji* was first mentioned by Laozhu. He used the word to describe a wise man cannot only know himself, but understand other people as well. The word later has been adopted to describe a relationship with a high level of understanding. However, no studies have been found that discussed *zhi ji*, though the term is considered to be a common word in the Chinese language. Therefore, as one of the important aspect of this study, efforts are made to expand people's understanding of Chinese specific concepts of friendship.

U.S. conceptualizations of best friends. U.S. participants reported some unique features of the relationship among best friends as well. The most noticeable feature discussed is that of the “unconditional love” existing between best friends. “Best friends are the people who can accept your imperfection, and who love you no matter what,” said Sally, a 20-year-old American student. She described her best friend in this way: “I feel like I can share anything to her, and she can accept me like who I am, and I love that about her.” 24-year-old Elsie has a similar understanding of best friends: “... they will still love you, and they will still be there for you, even though they may not necessarily agree with you really.”

U.S. respondents also differ from the Chinese respondents concerning the number of best friends they have. When Americans described the term “best friend,” they referred

to a greater number of people. Sally told me that she has had four best friends throughout her life:

My best friends are Samantha, Amanda, Laura, and Lee...Samantha Davis, I know her in elementary and junior high. We were the junior high best friends. Amanda Love, I knew her in high school, became very good friends playing basketball. She is in Texas. Laura played basketball with us as well in high school, and she is in Denton Texas. And then Lee, I met her in college, in the church at the Trinity Youth program on Thursday nights. And we live together.

It is clear that among American respondents, a best friend is the one person who is or was their most intimate friend during a certain time period of their life. Yet, this individual is not necessarily their only best friend throughout their life. In contrast, the term “best friend” is depicted in Chinese culture as the ultimate relationship among friends, and it is often used to describe their relationship with only one person throughout an entire life. When asked the question: “who is or was your best friend?” the majority of Chinese students reported that they have only had one best friend over their entire life. Only Kai Wen and Wang Shuo indicated that they consider more than one person as their best friends. However, in comparison to the American participants, their best friends are people from the same group, who share common relationships. “My best friends are three classmates in the high school,” said Kai Wen. For Chinese participants, once the best friend relationship has been determined, people tend to make their efforts to maintain such a relationship. Therefore, while new friends may come and go, the best friend will not be replaced.

Best friends are considered by both Chinese and U.S. respondents as people who reach the highest level of friendship. Although best friend relationship was the most discussed relationship by the respondents, among all 22 participants involved in the

current study, only one respondent (Li Hua) claimed that she has best friend relationship with an American. As Olaniran (1996) pointed out, while international students maintain interpersonal relationship with people from the host culture, few of these develop into a best friend relationship.

Close Friends

In the current study, the participants in both cultures indicated that close friends have some similar qualities to best friends. However, participants noted that close friends do not know an individual as well as best friends. Kai Wen's answer makes this clear: "As for close friends, all my close friends have known me for quite a few years, but we don't know each other as well as my best friends, maybe just 50% or 60% of me, while my best friends know probably 80-90% of me." Therefore, although close friends have similar qualities as best friends, they haven't reached the same intimacy level as best friends. Previous research suggested that compared to best friends, "close friends" tends to refer to the friends people reported having a less intimate relationship with (Davis & Todd, 1982). According to Du Bois (1974), close friendship is featured as "multiple dyads with selective intimacy" (p.70). In addition, Davis and Todd's study (1982) also indicated that close friends received lower ratings on exclusiveness and enjoyment scales.

As noted in the previous research, participants also pointed out that they have different levels of intimacy with close friends compared to best friends. Amanda, an IRIS operations manager in the Health Science Center, claims "close friends are just people that you share certain aspects of your life." Similarly, Todd compares the best friend to the close friend relationship:

I guess it is just the level of intimacy that whatever we have been... I can only share up to a certain point (with them)... That's as much as what I am going to tell you. That's as much as I like you.

Thus, although participants reported that close friends have similar qualities to best friends (i.e. common personalities and interests, long time relationship, trustworthy, etc.), people have less intimate relationships with them as opposed to best friends.

Chinese conceptualizations of close friends. While describing their close friends, Chinese participants noted a distinguishing Chinese concept, *yi qi*, which means to “sacrifice self benefits for the goodness of others.” Weiwei believes that the Chinese consider *yi qi* as one of the most important elements of a person. “That’s how close friends suppose to be,” she said: “If a person willing to sacrifice for you when you need him, whether it is his time, energy, money, I will appreciate him later in my life and regard him as my real friend.” She told me that, when SARS was widespread in China, her close friend started to have fever, which was a typical symptom of the illness. After hearing this, Weiwei flew to the city her close friend lived in to take care of her. Although she knew the disease was highly contagious, she still felt it was the right thing to do. As Kai Wen notes, “*Yi qi* is only for close friends and best friends. I don’t really care to sacrifice myself just for a casual friend,” *yi qi* is only expected among close or best friends.

Another phrase that Chinese participants mentioned when describing close friendship was *zhi tong dao he*, which can be translated as “similar life goal and similar value system.” The phrase is used to describe close friends who have a lot in common and get along very well. Chinese participants seem to value friends who are *zhi tong dao*

he with them. Ye Chao, a Ph.D. student in physics, believes that *zhi tong dao he* is an important criterion of friendship in Chinese culture. In explaining it, he said: “If two people are *zhi tong dao he*, their value systems are similar. They probably treat people in a similar way, and probably have the same opinion on certain issues. These for me, are very important criteria of making friends.” Studies have (Bell, 1981; Rubin, 1985) proved that similarity plays an essential role in the formation of friendship. According to Woolsey and McBain (1987), similarity is not only a necessary starting point, but also the basis on which friendships become close. Thus, *zhi tong dao he* is considered as one of the most important criteria for close friendships. However, *zhi tong dao he* doesn’t describe a similar belief system among friends. Belief system is not seen as important as life goal and value system in close friend relationships. Among all 11 Chinese participants, only one (Li Hua) stated that similar belief system is one of her criteria on selecting close friends.

U.S. conceptualization of close friends. On the other hand, when describing close friends, U.S. participants put belief system in a more important position than life goal and value system. Helen, who is a Protestant, admitted that she tends to make friends with people who follow the same religion: “A lot of my friendships are based on people who have the same feeling of Christianity. I tend to stay with the people who have the same belief system.” Brehm (1985) indicated that similarity on religion plays an important role on interpersonal relationship in the U.S., because religions provide spiritual guidance for the believers. For instance, Christian religion helps people to follow the tenets of brotherly love, forgiveness, charity, and humility (Althen, 1988).

Casual friends

Casual friends are portrayed by the participants (e.g., Jason, Ning Yuan, and Amanda) as people you interact with only once in a while. Compared to close friends, casual friends have limited knowledge of the other person. Jason describes the relationship as “I don’t know much about their lives. What’s going on with them, they don’t share deeper things with me, just how is going, pretty good...wasn’t real deep like you are having problem with your girlfriend.” These findings are consistent with the previous research pointing out casual friends differ from the close and best friends in terms of degree. Du Bois (1974) described casual friendships as relationships that are “polyadic, with incidental intimacy, and an unstressed attitude toward durability” (p. 20). Hays (1985) investigated university students’ interaction with a close and a casual friend and found that causal friends interacted less frequently than close friends and that their interactions were less likely to be deliberately initiated.

Jia Ming, a Chinese participant, commented that in some cases even people who see each other all the time may still be limited to the casual friend level:

These people who hang out with you all the time are not necessarily your real friends. They often go to bars with you, play games with you, but if they don’t know you on a deep level, they don’t understand you as a true friend... Just like two ropes are placed very close to each other, but they don’t have any twists. They may look close to each other, but if anything happens, they will separate immediately. These people can only be called *casual friends* for the most.

Chen Hui used a Chinese specific term *jiu rou pengyou* to describe such a relationship:

“The relationship is based only on enjoyment. Once you are in trouble, those so called “friends” will disappear in no time.”

The term *jiu rou pengyou* is not unique to Chinese culture. The English word “drinking buddy” is a very similar term to describe such a relationship. The term was explained by Chen’s article (2005). In his article “Friendship Dialectics among Chinese,” Chen named these people “wine-meat” friends (*jiu rou pengyou*), referring to individuals “who one hangs out with just for a good time and enjoy activities together” (p.13). Chen indicated that a “wine-meat” friend has a negative connotation in Chinese culture and is usually differentiated from a “group of friends who would pour hearts out to each other and understand each other” (p10). The term *jiu rou pengyou* usually has a negative connotation while friends of mutual understanding are highly appreciated in Chinese culture.

Acquaintances

According to Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary (www.merriam-webster.com), an acquaintance is “a person whom one knows but who is not a particularly close friend.” Some participants’ description of acquaintances is very close to this definition. For example, Helen and Ye Chao described acquaintances as people who they know and exchange greetings with. Despite the fact that the majority of participants agreed that acquaintances can be considered one type of friend, some Chinese respondents separated acquaintances from the domain of friends. Weiwei commented, “A lot of people know each other for seven or eight years, but never become friends, just acquaintances to each other. They never had communication on a deep level.” Likewise, when answering the question: “what kind of people you will not call friends?” Chen Hui said:

People with whom I share nothing in common, I would not consider friends. For instance, I know the Texas Tech Chancellor... He also says hello to me when he sees me. I would not say he is my friend, because we don’t have anything in

common. I don't hang out with him. I don't have lunch with him. I can just say, "I know him." He is an *acquaintance*, but he is not my friend.

Some scholars also agreed that acquaintance should be differentiated from friends. For instance, studies showed that greater positivity was associated with friends than acquaintances (e.g., Berndt & Perry, 1986; Howes, 1983); friends are usually more successful at eliciting sharing from one another than are acquaintances (e.g., Birch & Billman, 1986). In addition, friends are better able to coordinate and synchronize their efforts to achieve desired goals (e.g., Lederberg et al., 1987; Newcomb & Brady, 1982).

In this study among all friend relationships between Chinese students and U.S. nationals, participants reported one best friend relationship (Li Hua). All 11 U.S. participants and 8 Chinese stated close friend relationships with people from the other culture and two Chinese (Ye Chao and Ning Yuan) reported that they have casual friendships with their U.S. friends. The level of friendship was perceived to be similar in both Chinese and U.S. cultures. The participants also reported similar understanding of friendship of best friends and close friends. However, some significant cultural differences were observed regarding conceptualizations of friendship in specific levels. Best friend relationships in Chinese culture are described as family-like, interdependent relationships, while Americans respect personal space in this most intimate level of friendship. When the Chinese talk about their best friends, they refer to exclusively just one person or, in some cases, several people who share a group relationship. Americans, on the other hand, can have a number of best friends. Even those with whom one does not maintain contact can be labeled as "best friends."

Functions of Friendship

Every participant was clear about what a friend can do in their lives. For the participants, friends are people who “share personal information and concerns, and other various subjects,” and “share each others’ happiness and difficulties.” A friend can also be a good teacher. As Ye Chao notes, “He has the qualities I appreciate or I can learn from, that inspire me.” Other than sharing and learning as the main functions of friendship, the data indicates that all the Chinese participants pay great attention to whether a friend is willing to provide “help.” For instance, when asked what kind of people the participants consider as friends, Jun Yong pointed out: “I think to be able to, and willing to help is the key word in friendship.” Qin Yue agreed with this, saying, “Friendship exists between people who can help each other,” Ye Chao also had a similar answer: “A real friend should try his best to help his friend,.” On the contrary, only a couple of American participants tackled the subject. They noted that “a friend is someone to be there for me when I need them,” and “if you need someone to talk or you need help with something, they are always there.” Compared to the Chinese, it seems that American participants look for emotional rather than physical support.

“Help” in Chinese Friendship

The valuing of helpfulness among Chinese can be explained by their collectivism nature. According to Hofstede (1980), individuals in a collectivist society have a high degree of integration into groups. Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) indicated that in collectivist societies the individual’s situation and projects are deeply enmeshed with the situation and projects of in-group others such as family members and close friends.

Therefore, Chinese people feel obligated to help their friends through difficult periods, even though they run the risk of sacrificing time, energy, and other personal resources.

On the other hand, Americans who grew up in an individualistic culture respect personal resources. They would like to stick to their own schedules. Darren, an American respondent, had a conflict with one of his Chinese friends:

She had some trouble with her Visa, she wanted me to go down to New York City with her and help her with her visa. It was like in the middle of the day, she called me and was like: "well, you know, I need to go down to New York city, can you go there with me?" and I was like: "I am at work." It would take 3 or 4 hours to get down there. So I was like: "well, I cannot really go down there now. But I can probably introduce some of my friends there, so you can probably go there and stay overnight, and take care of business the next day." So this is what happened. She just kind of expected me to drop off whatever I was doing in the middle of the day. I tried to help her out, but I think it is more than what I need to do.

Interdependence is a distinguishing feature of the relationship among close friends in a collectivist culture (Gareis, 1995). In many situations, it is appropriate for close or best friends to interfere in each other's private affairs, and often people appreciate their friends' intervention. Weiwei shared such an experience with her best friend:

When I decided to apply for graduate school in America, the application deadline was approaching. Both of us worked day and night to try to get my application package done. Zhen helped me to search for schools, and helped revise my personal statement. She even drove to my university, which is far from where she lives, because I was not in China and I needed my academic statement from the university. I can tell she put more time and energy than me in the application process. She did all these for me just because I am her best friend and she knew that studying in America was my dream.

Now, I am not at home with my parents. She goes to visit my parents all the time. She treats them just like a real daughter would. She gave flowers to my mom on Mother's Day, went to have meals with them on almost every holiday. Who is willing to do all of these for you? Only your best friend.

During the interview, Weiwei repeatedly described her understanding of the relationship among friends: "Her business is my business, and her problem is my problem. If there is

something bothering her, I must solve the problem for her, or I cannot feel the peace, either.”

However, a person from an individualistic culture might feel uncomfortable when people interfere in his private life. Jason shared his experience with me:

If I'm fixing something, I want fix my bag or my bicycle, we want do it by ourselves. That's the way we think. This is my bike, my bag, my car, I can fix it. The Chinese always do group, team things together. I had them come over, take my hands and put them away, and said: "I will fix that for you," and push me away. They are trying to be nice...I don't like it at all. I tried to get used to it, but took me 15 years and not get used to it.

Weiwei and Jason's different reactions to help from friends confirmed the findings of Triandis's study (1994). Triandis (1994) found that individuals in individualist societies see their situations and projects as more independent of others and tend to focus on the pursuit of their own defined goals. On the other hand, however, individuals in collectivist cultures value the achievement of group goals and the maintenance of group harmony.

Cultural differences play an important role on expectation of the function of friendship. Because of the collectivism nature of Chinese society, Chinese value *Yi qi* (sacrifice one's own benefit for the goodness of others) and are comfortable with accepting help from others. For the Chinese, offering help during a difficult time is crucial to developing a close friendship. On the other hand, because of their individualistic culture and self-reliance nature, Americans tend to stick to their own schedule and are unwilling to adjust it for the needs of others. As a result, the Chinese might be disappointed when they expect to get help from their U.S. friends.

Quality of friendship

Quality of friendship in the current study refers to the characteristics of individuals that manipulate the degree of satisfaction in the relationship. Individual characteristics such as personal value and communication style largely influence the quality of friendship. As Ye Chao put it, “your good friends must be someone who has the similar world view and values. If you two have completely different attitudes towards many things, it is not likely you can become friends.” Five main dialectics of conceptualizations concerning quality of intercultural friendship emerged from data: social constrained vs. social mobile, long-term vs. short-term friendship, collectivism vs. individualism, indirect vs. direct, and remember vs. forgive and forget.

Socially Constrained vs. Socially Mobile

Chinese participants reported that Chinese people consider objective factors such as social status and education level as important criteria to determine whether someone has the potential to be a friend. Qin Yue says,

We (Chinese people) pay so much attention to the social status of a person. If I am a well-educated person, I probably will not make friends with a factory worker. My friends must be well-educated as well, because only in that way can we have good communication. I think Westerners might be less limited by social constraints. They are more subjective as far as making friends, whereas Chinese people might consider more objective factors. For instance, I might consider whether this person is suitable for a friend based on his social status and educational level. Americans might pay more attention to whether they are happy with this relationship, or whether they are comfortable with this person.

Jun Yong, a Chinese business major, has the same opinion as Qin Yue: “We do have higher criteria on what kind of people we would like to make friends with. Social status, education, even personal benefits, all these we take into consideration.”

The existence of such “social constraints” among the Chinese can be explained by the high power distance cultural characteristic of the Chinese. According to Hofstede & Bond (1984), power distance is “the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally” (p.419). Therefore, in a high power distance culture, social hierarchy is more accepted by its people (Mooij, 1998). As a result, friendships that are based on similar social status and education levels are more easily accepted, and people from different social hierarchies are less likely to develop friendships. In contrast, American culture has a low power distance, in which equality is valued and emphasized (Mooij, 1998). As a matter of fact, Americans are firm believers of equality, as stated in the Declaration of Independence, that “all men are created equal.” Consequently, friendships across different social hierarchies are more accepted by the society.

The high level of social constraint certainly makes it difficult for the Chinese to accept new friends. Weiwei feels that Chinese people are usually more wary of strangers than Americans: “I think Chinese are very sensitive of friendliness from strangers. ‘What’s his purpose? Why did he choose to talk to me not others? Is he a swindler?’” In contrast, Americans are more willing to accept new friends. When asked about the difference between Chinese and American friendships, Weiwei claimed:

I think Americans are more relaxed to accept strangers. Now we are in Starbucks, maybe a stranger will come over and have a short conversation with us. He might even leave his phone number. But if this happens in China, normally my first reaction is that “what does he want from me?” It is completely normal in American society...a lot of western people don’t talk to you for a specific purpose. They have that sort of relaxed relationship between strangers. I met you and I would like to chat with you, that simple. He doesn’t care about your social status or anything else. He will... I mean some Americans, not all Americans will

chat with you without any purpose. He will just simply be friendly to you. I guess that's why they have so many casual friends.

Other Chinese participants tend to agree that Americans have more relaxed and casual relationships. Wang Shuo described his experience with his American friends: "If they know each other for a long time, often seeing each other, and enjoy each other as company, they will regard each other as friends...they treat me like a good friend, just because we enjoy being together." Jun Yong also shared his sense of American friendship: "I think American friendship may be more casual. If two people share some common interests, enjoy each other as company, they are friends. So I think their friendship is more casual, open, and simpler. In other words, they don't have such as high criteria on friends." These findings might be explained by Stewart's (1972) study that defined friendships among Americans as "matters of social success and not the conditions for establishing warm, personal relationships" (p.54). Thus, the high spread of friendship can be considered a function of the wish to be popular.

Long-term vs. Short-term Friendship

Because of the relaxed, casual relationship among Americans, it seems to be easier for them to establish friendships. Qin Yue made a comment: "Americans can easily make different varieties of friends. They have less social constraints as far as making friends." Weiwei noticed that Americans are warm-hearted to their new friends:

When they (Americans) meet their friends, they hug each other and talk for a long time. I admire that they have such a good relationship: "you really have a good relationship!" They would say: "oh, we met each other couple days ago in Rec center." I was surprised that they gave hug to each other although they met each other not a long time ago... They don't build a wall between each other, especially strangers. I think it is one of the most remarkable characteristics of Americans.

On the other hand, both Chinese and American respondents indicated that Americans often have superficial, short-term relationships. For instance, Alice, a 24-year-old American college student, mentioned: “I think in American culture, (friend is) just someone you can hang out on daily basis and talk to, have their phone number in your phone.” She also commented: “I can be a friend with someone while we are in school, and probably never talk again.” Weiwei gave her opinion about Americans’ temporary relationships:

Friendship of Westerns seems more like a temporarily relationship. When they move to another city, they won’t intentionally keep contact with their old friends, because I think they enjoy the present, this moment, than the past. They will be sad to separate from old friends. I have seen people cry at farewell parties. But after that, they probably will try to enjoy their next stage of life.

The relatively superficial, short-term relationships among American friends can be explained by the American mobility tendency. According to Bell (1981), since many Americans have grown up in families that move every few years, they “either have not had sufficient practice in forming close friendships or have developed self-protective habits of keeping relationships casual in order not to get hurt upon the repeated separations.” (p.38)

Several American participants indicated that the Chinese, compared to the Americans, have “deeper and longer relationships” and “fewer but closer friends.” Jason explained that the Chinese take time to develop deep relationships: “We are more shallow, and they go deeper over time. It takes time for them to go deeper in their friendships.” His observation is supported by the Chinese. When Kai Wen talked about the length of a friendship, he said:

Chinese people have a lot of friends they have known for ten years or decades, right? We will still contact each other when we are old or retired. Americans like to continuously make new friends. But speaking about the depth, I don't think their friendships can be as deep as ours.

Chinese student Qin Yue also emphasized that Chinese friendships tend to last a life time, while American friendships vanish when people move to another place, for the Chinese:

... once established friendship with someone, will keep contact with this person. At least you have to make a phone call to your friends during the New Year, if you cannot meet them. You will give greetings to your friends on major holidays. If he is your friend, it is your responsibility to keep contact with him. We would like to know what happened recently to your friends: Have you gotten married? Do you have kids, etc. Western people might have good friends in one place, but when they move to another city, their relationships with old friends will naturally vanish, except for very good friends.

The comments from the participants confirmed Gareis (1995) conclusion of U.S. friendships. She concluded that American friendships are considered to be high spread, low obligation, low duration, and high trust: "American friendships tend to be widespread and trusting, but lacking in a sense of obligation and permanence" (Gareis, 1995, p.23). Althen (1988) commented that when people from high-obligation and high-duration cultures enter into American society, Americans' openness and friendliness are often interpreted as promises of close involvement, in a result, many foreigners feel betrayed when this perceived promise is not fulfilled.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

One of the Chinese international students, Man Ting, explained that Chinese people value spending all of their time with their friends, while Americans only like to spend part of their time with friends. She noted that: "Maybe because Americans are very independent, they like to do things alone, but when they have parties on birthdays or holidays, they like to invite their friends to celebrate with them." She claimed that she

does value the time spent with her friends: “Friends are not necessarily only be with each other on the special occasion when someone decides to hold a party or play basketball or something like that.”

When asked about the difference between friends from two cultures, Jia Ming shared his feelings on the issue of privacy: “I think Americans are very sensitive about protecting their privacy, for example, age, income. These are the topics we can even ask to an acquaintance...” Americans also detected a difference in the level of privacy between the two cultures. Darren, a mechanical engineering professor noted: “Chinese are very direct about how much you earn, how much you pay for the house, things like that. It is part of the cultural, the normal aspects kind of thing. Americans find that kind direct.”

Self-sacrifice also emerges from the collectivist culture in Chinese society. Both Elsie and Wang Shuo agreed that the Chinese are more willing to sacrifice themselves for friends, but Americans are more self-centered. Elsie said: “I grew up in a family that I am like used to having my own area, stuff like that. But Sharon is used to making sacrifices for her friends... guess it is more of a give and take relationship of her.” During the interview with Wang Shuo, I asked him to compare communication styles between his Chinese and American friends. He explained:

Let’s assume that I broke up with my girlfriend. If I talked to my Chinese friends, they would talk about their own experience, they would talk about how my girlfriend made a mistake and she did not deserve me, they also would talk about the future to encourage me. They would spend long time to try to cheer me up. American friends are very nice as well, they will spend time to comfort me, but they will not take such a long time.

The reluctance of the Americans to share personal topics, spaces, and resources can definitely be explained by the country's individualistic trend. According to Mooij (1998), in collectivist cultures "people belong to in-groups or collectivities which are supposed to look after them in exchange for loyalty" (p.76), while people in individualistic cultures "are supposed to look after themselves and their family only" (p.75). In an individualistic culture like America, one's identity is in the person. People are "I" conscious and individual values are assessed more highly than group values. Therefore, privacy, personal spaces, and personal resources are important in American culture. When the Chinese, who have a strong "we" conscious, come to an individualist society, they inevitably feel uncomfortable with the concept of "self" held by most Americans.

Direct vs. Indirect

During her interview, Man Ting offered some insights into the different communication styles of the Chinese and the Americans:

When you are with American friends, the communication is much more efficient and direct. But when you are with Chinese, it might not be appropriate to be too straightforward. A lot of times people believe that we don't have to explain anything to our close friends or family, because they know us enough to tell what exactly we are thinking. I don't think it is necessarily the truth.

Another Chinese participant, 21 year old Wang Shuo agreed: "I think Americans are simpler, because I feel Americans are more direct when I communicate with them, and they are more honest to their feelings."

American participants also detected the indirectness of Chinese people. Veronica, a stay at home wife, commented: "Americans would be more likely to tell what it is, whereas Chinese will beat around the bush a little bit, and take a little long, and say it a little nicer, and so..."

Hall (1976)'s concept of high- versus low-context becomes important when considering the cultural differences between the Chinese and Americans. China, classified as a high-context culture, relies on an indirect communication style where explicit words are less involved. On the other hand, American society, featured as typically low-context, tend to send messages that "vested in the explicit code" (p. 79). Therefore, the Chinese are perceived to be indirect while Americans are considered to be direct.

Forgiveness vs. Remembrance

Li Hua is a 25 year old Chinese international student. Unlike many other Chinese students who claimed to be Atheists or Buddhists, when Li Hua was in China, she was largely influenced by Christianity and became a loyal Christian. When we discussed the meaning of forgiveness in Christianity, it was clear how religion shaped her relationship with her friends:

If I sincerely apologize to my friends, they will understand and accept my apology...God taught us that if your friend hurt you, you should let them know about it, and you should forgive, forget, and move on. Jesus Christ died for your sins, and he never bears a grudge. He forgets and forgives all your sins. Why can't we forgive our friends for such a little misunderstanding? Someone asked Jesus "how many times should I forgive my friend?" Jesus said "seven times seven" and by saying that he meant as many as you can. We can talk about our unhappiness and then let it go. So our friendships don't represent all intercultural friends, because we are Christians.

Although from China, Li Hua admitted that she is having hard time to make Chinese friends, mainly because of her personality. "I have always been a very direct person," she said, "Sometimes I hurt people's feeling without knowing it." And once it happens, unlike her American friends, "Chinese people will not let it go so easily, they will still

remember it.” Similarly, Kai Wen also reported that once the relationship with Chinese broke, it is difficult to recovery the bond with them:

I am surprised that Americans will forgive people so easily, even for people who said something very harsh to you. For Chinese, it is never the case. How can you forgive someone who hurt your feelings? It is never as easy as “sorry, I realize I did wrong. Please forgive me.” Well, how about don’t hurt your friends’ feelings in the first place?

Chinese long-term orientation culture might provide an explanation for this phenomenon. According to Hofstede (1991), long-term orientation culture is characterized by its persistent and sense of shame. Therefore, once the relationship was damaged, the feeling of “losing face” might last for a long time, and it would be not easy to forget. On the other hand, other than the Christianity tenet “forgive and forget,” short-term orientation culture also makes people less concerned about the history. As a result, it is easier for Americans than Chinese to forget the mistakes of their friends.

Friendship conceptualizations shaped by cultural values have largely influenced the quality of intercultural friendship. The findings indicate that the Chinese are wary of making new friends, but once the relationships have developed they expect life-long friendships. In contrast, Americans easily establish friendships, but the relationships might last for a short period of time. As a result, the Chinese who like to build a long-term relationship get disappointed easily. Other cultural variations also have a large impact on Chinese and U.S. friendships, such as the Chinese indirect versus the American direct communication style, and Chinese collectivist culture versus American individualistic culture.

Communicative Challenges

The current study also aims to find the communicative challenges faced by Chinese students and U.S. nationals. This eventually explores the elements that hinder intercultural friendship between Chinese students and U.S. nationals. Two research questions asked participants

RQ 3: What types of communicative challenges do Chinese students face in developing friendships with U.S. Americans, and vice versa?

RQ 4: What factors hinder Chinese international students from making friends with U.S. nationals, and vice versa?

By asking both Chinese students and U.S. nationals what challenges they think hinder their intercultural friendships, the researcher gained some insights from both perspectives.

Communicative Challenges of Chinese students

In the current study, the perceived communicative challenges from Chinese respondents are: language barrier, lack of confidence, lack of access to Americans, and reluctant to adjust to the new culture. In contrast, the perceived communicative challenges from U.S. participants are: neglect of the importance of merging into American society, group effect, and cultural and language barriers.

Language barrier is considered by many communication scholars as a major source of social difficulty in intercultural communication (e.g., Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Kim, 1988; Olaniran, 1999). In this study, it is not surprising that language is perceived by the Chinese students as the primary obstacle existing between the international students and people from the host culture. Qin Yue admitted that language

and culture are the biggest obstacles to Chinese students adjusting themselves to American society: “The majority of Chinese international students don’t speak good English. And of course Americans are not willing to talk to someone who can’t speak the language well. I don’t know for sure if he doesn’t want to listen to the broken English or he feels sorry for the Chinese.” Because of poor English skills, “it is difficult for us to understand the new culture, the customs, and their value systems.”

The inefficiency of language leads to another communication problem in that Chinese students often do not feel confident enough to communicate with Americans. As Man Ting notes, “Some Chinese don’t speak good English. They are very self-conscious and unwilling to speak English to Americans. It made impossible for these people to improve their English skills.” Qin Yue agrees when he states, “If it is difficult for the Chinese to speak the language, he will not feel comfortable while communicating with the Americans. After all, you want to be relaxed with your friends.” Therefore, people choose to go out with friends from the same ethnic group. Kai Wen theorized that the reason Chinese people do not like to go out with Americans is that “people are afraid to face those awkward moments when sometimes you cannot catch other’s conversations. If you go out with a Chinese, it is not going to be a problem.” Thus, language barrier not only hinders Chinese students from communicating with Americans, but also limited them in their ethnic group where such a problem does not exist.

Another communicative challenge mentioned by the Chinese participants is that they do not have enough access to the Americans. Ning Yuan, a mechanical engineering student told me:

We are in America, but to be honest, I am not exposed to an environment full of American people. My department is composed of people from all over the world.

I don't have many chances to meet and communicate with Americans.

Even Man Ting, who is studying in a business department that has a high population of U.S. students, commented that she doesn't get many opportunities to talk with Americans, either. "We do have a lot of American classmates, but we just simply study in the same classroom together, we hardly have any chance to talk about anything other than study."

However, both Ning Yuan and Man Ting admitted that they are partially responsible for the situation. Ning Yuan told me:

It is partly my fault. I don't go to participate in events held by international organizations. I don't go out and seek such opportunities to communicate with American people...I have a lot of pressure from my study, and I think I ought to spend the majority of my time studying.

Man Ting stated: "I think if you really, really want to make friends with Americans, you can still find a lot of opportunities. The problem is, whether you are willing to be somebody you are not, or take part in activities you don't like." When asked to provide an example, Man Ting said:

I don't like to attend parties held by those American undergraduates. I like to be in the parties where I can comfortably chat with my close friends, not doing crazy things with a bunch of strangers that I don't even know. But occasions like that might be good opportunities to chat with American students and possibly make some friends.

Ning Yuan and Man Ting brought up an interesting phenomenon of foreign students: Although they are physically in the host country, due to both situational and personal factors, their chances to communicate with host people are still rare. One possible

explanation is that Chinese students, as many other sojourners, see people from the host culture having higher social statuses than themselves. According to Hofstede (1980), most collectivist cultures also scored high on power distance. As a result, it is understandable that a person from a collectivistic culture is reluctant to seek out friendship with someone on a higher social status than himself. Therefore, it is not surprising that Chinese students see American society behind a glass wall; one can see through it but can never go to the other side of the wall.

A few respondents indicated that some Chinese people are not willing to accept American culture, which further explains the reason of lacking accesses to Americans. Ye Chao claims, “Chinese people are very proud of our culture, and they don’t like indulge to adjust to other cultures. That of course includes myself.” Chen Hui has a similar observation:

Chinese people try too hard to ask other people to accept our culture: “this is our rice, this is our Chinese cuisine.” But have we tried to accept their hamburgers? Have we tried to accept their pizza? ... There are so many restaurants that serve American food. How many times have you tried? Very rarely.

Kai Wen also noticed the Chinese reluctance of accepting the host culture: “we don’t watch TV. We don’t know what American Idol is. We don’t know what’s on in the theatre.” As a result, the reluctance of accepting both immediate and media culture keep Chinese students detached from the host culture.

On the other hand, while the Chinese agree that inefficiency of language and lack of confidence are the biggest barriers to developing intercultural friendships, the majority of American participants reported that neglect of the importance of merging into American culture is the key. Joe, a retired American man, was shocked by one of the

Chinese students. The student recently purchased a used car in bad condition and just drove it without a license or insurance. Joe said:

They don't seem to care about the legal aspect of driving, for example, car insurance or driver's license, or the condition of the car. These are the things I see among the Chinese students, but they don't seem to realize the importance of fitting into the American culture.

Darren has the same opinion as Joe: "They act like they are still living in their home country, but the fact is a lot of changes need to be made, and they just don't realize it."

The study reveals that not attempt to adjust to the host culture is the major complain from American participants.

Darren pointed out that group effect of international students largely impedes their communication with the host people: "You see a lot of international students come and there is a large group of them. But they kind of hanging out together and it's hard to interacting, mix different groups." Todd also voiced his concern of the group effect of Chinese students when he commented:

I think it is wonderful that Chinese students here do have a community. Just like the same way like India students do. I sometimes see it as an unfortunate that many of them don't reveal themselves the opportunity to meet people from other cultures.

Although group effect is considered as a general rule of human being, participants suggest that Chinese students get out of the comfort zone and make extra effort to interact with the Americans.

Like the Chinese respondents, American participants also see the language barrier Chinese students are facing. They reported that the inefficiency of English does make communication a lot harder. Jason told me: "Sometimes they can't understand, they can't say what they mean. They don't understand our language. You say something like

direction, it takes long time to explain things if they are beginners of English.” Matt pointed out that Chinese people don’t proactively seek opportunities to speak English: “...a lot of time we see Chinese people just speak Chinese. It will definitely be easier for Americans to make friends with them if they speak English more often.” Most participants agreed that not being afraid of making mistakes is the key to improve foreign language skills.

Communicative Challenges of U.S. nationals

Participants were also asked what the communicative challenges might be for U.S. nationals developing friendships with Chinese international students. The perceived communicative challenges from Chinese participants are lack of tolerance to cultural difference and being critical of other cultures. The perceived communicative challenges from American participants are the group effect and lack of familiarity with China.

Qin Yue told me that he thinks some Americans have little tolerance to other cultures. It is not easy for them to accept the cultural differences. He claims that their logic is “this is the way to do things, this is the way to say. If you are different from me, you must be wrong.” In order to explain his opinion, Qin Yue told a story:

When I left Oklahoma last year, I had dinner with one of my good friends. He is a manager in a fashion chain. We started to chat after dinner and he told me that a lot of Asian people he met in the shop are very rude. So I asked: “what’s the matter? Can you give me an example?” He told me a simple one. Once an old couple just often simply picked up a product and asked him: “how much?” And he thought it was so rude. I felt odd: “so what?” He was like: “Don’t you think it is rude?” I was so surprised that this was considered to be rude. “They just would like to ask the price. What’s wrong with that?” “If I were them, I would say: ‘Excuse me, how much is this?’ I said: “because it is your mother language, you are speaking English. If you go shopping in China, if you can say ‘how much’ these two little words, I would be happy. At least we can communicate with each other. Considering they are old, it is not a simple job for them to say ‘how much.’”

Eurocentrism can be used to explain this person's behavior. According to Merriam-Webster online dictionary (www.merriam-webster.com), Eurocentrism reflects the tendency "to interpret the world in terms of western and especially European or Anglo-American values and experiences." Qin Yue said he understood how his friend felt. It is a habit for Americans to say "Excuse me" when they feel they are bothering somebody. However, it is not a Chinese habit, nor is it rude to not say it. Qin Yue stated, "You cannot judge any culture, because culture cannot right or wrong, they are just different." Therefore, it is very important for Americans to recognize the existence of different social norms and customs and not limited their views from a Western perspective.

Overconfidence is also reported by the Chinese as one of the communicative challenges of U.S. nationals. Ye Chao was bothered by the attitudes of some Americans. He said, "I do think Americans can be arrogant sometimes. They are proud of the country's leading position in the world, and it seems some of them believe America is superior to other countries." Wang Shuo also pointed out that some Americans are arrogant and critical of China:

Sometimes when I first meet a person, they ask me "is that true that Chinese only like boys, if a girl is born, she will be killed or abandoned?", or like, "how many people were killed in Tiananmen Square?" I do not think it is appropriate for Americans to criticize our history as if he is the judge. I think nobody has the right to do so, including the American president.

Wang Shuo agreed that it is fine to exchange perceptions of other countries among friends, but not during the first few times of contact.

Americans recognized many communication barriers as well. The group effect is one of them. Helen, a student consultant working for the International Cultural Center, shared her insights: "A lot of Americans kind of have a barrier to meet people from other

countries, maybe it's their comfort zone. They have to get out of that comfort zone to establish that friendship." Elsie also noticed the importance to make the effort to step out of the comfort zone:

I just think it is important to not be like so much stuck in American culture that you don't care about anybody else. 'Cause sometimes people, especially from a small West Texas town, or some other small town, they can't see past their own town. I just think it is really important for people in general to understand that not everybody is exactly like them and people grow up differently.

Elsie realized one can learn from people in other cultures. She believes other cultures might provide alternatives which your own culture doesn't offer.

Americans also felt they did not have adequate knowledge of China when communicating with Chinese people. Veronica believes that misunderstandings can be prevented if you understand the other culture. She said: "When I was in Japan many years ago, I went to a restaurant and heard them eating noodles. That was so noisy. I thought: 'How rude! How awful!' But that's not rude for Japanese. If I knew it is normal in Japanese culture, I would not get upset about it." Betty realized the bias of media concerning the information about China, and she believes it is important to learn the story from both sides: "That way you won't let other people, like government, influence what you think about the other countries." Just like Elsie said: "If I would be able to go to China, I think I would be able to know her better. And to see her in China, I think I would see a different side of her." In general, American participants believe that knowledge of China is necessary to further develop friendships with the Chinese.

The present chapter discusses intercultural friendship among Chinese international students and U.S nationals from three main aspects: levels of friendship, function of friendship, and quality of friendship. The results revealed that friendship

conceptualizations shaped by cultural values have largely influenced all three abovementioned aspects of friendship. Hofstede's (1980, 1991) cultural dimensions are used to explain these cultural specific conceptualizations in both cultures. Among the five cultural dimensions, individualism vs. collectivism dimension is most frequently adopted in clarifying cultural conceptualizations. For instance, best friend relationships in Chinese culture are described as family-like, interdependent relationships, while Americans respect personal space in this most intimate level of friendship. Other cultural dimensions such as power distance and long- short- term orientation have also been utilized to explain cultural conceptualizations in the current study. Hall's (1976) concept of high- low-context is adopted to explain the different communication styles of the Chinese and the Americans. China, a high-context culture, relies on an indirect communication style. In contrast, America as a low-context culture is often considered to be direct on words. In addition to Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Hall's concept of high-low-contexts, other factors such as religion, personal traits, and traditions are also considered to be important factors of friendship.

The chapter also discussed the perceived communication challenges of both Chinese and U.S. cultures which hinder the development of intercultural friendship. The perceived communicative challenges from Chinese respondents are: language barrier, lack of confidence, lack of access to Americans, and reluctant to adjust to the new culture. The perceived communicative challenges from U.S. participants are: neglect of the importance of merging into American society, group effect, and cultural and language barriers. While asked what the communicative challenges might be for U.S. nationals developing friendships with Chinese international students, the Chinese participants

reported that Americans are lack of tolerance to cultural difference and being critical of other cultures. American participants pointed out that group effect and lack of familiarity with China hinder their communication with the Chinese.

Chapter V

Implications and Future Directions

Implications of the Current Research

There are several major implications one can gain from the study. First, the experience of the Chinese and U.S. participants shows that the understanding of differences in conceptualization across cultures is the key to developing and negotiating intercultural friendships. The majority of participants reported that they feel more comfortable with friends in the same ethnic group because they share the same social norms and rules, and their expectations of friendship are similar. On the other hand, while communicating with people from other cultures, the long-established expectations of friendship are challenged. For example, the Chinese value sacrificing one's self for the goodness of others and are comfortable with accepting others' help. On the contrary, Americans are known for their self-reliance and their unwillingness to give up self for others' needs. While the Chinese expect deep, life-long friendships, Americans are developing wide-spread friendships and consider it a social success (Stewart, 1972). Therefore, conceptualization shaped by cultural value systems is the fountainhead for explaining social phenomenon. It serves as a core to understand social behaviors. Without discussing the conceptualizations of friendship across cultures, one cannot explain the situation of intercultural friendship between people from these two cultures.

Second, the present study paid special attention to the development of literature on friendship conceptualizations and patterns in Chinese culture. Very few studies (e.g., Gareis, 1995; Chen, 2005) have been found to explore Chinese unique friendship conceptualizations and their impact on intercultural friendship. On the contrary,

numerous books, journals, and handbooks of American friendship patterns have been published (e.g., Berscheid & Walster, 1991; Dodd, 1991; Matthews 1986; Pogrebin, 1987; Rubin, 1975). Because literature of Chinese friendship patterns is seriously missing, it is difficult for researchers to comprehensively understand intercultural friend relationships among Chinese and Americans. For these reasons, the current study deliberately attempted to discover unique Chinese friendship conceptualizations and patterns. For instance, Chinese terms *zhi ji* (soul mate) is introduced in explaining a unique relationship among friends in the Chinese culture, and the term *zhi tong dao he* is brought to the literature in describing friends who reach a high level of understanding to each other.

Third, this qualitative study made an effort to define and clarify the characteristics of each level of friends from two different cultures. Although individuals agree that there are differentiations among the terms *best friend*, *close friend*, *casual friend*, and *acquaintance*, each person has his or her own definition of these terms, and the intimacy degree of each friendship level are different according to individuals. Defining these terms in a cross-cultural context makes it more complicated. Since friendship is characterized by each culture's own unique set of values and dimensions (Gudykunst, 1993, 1995), to conceptualize friendship in an intercultural context can be even more diverse and subjective than in an intercultural context. Consequently, the definition of the terms *casual friend*, *close friend*, *best friend*, etc. were largely neglected in research literatures (Gareis, 1995). The current study adopted a qualitative research approach in gaining a descriptive understanding of individuals from China and U.S. By asking questions such as, "why do you think he is your best friend?" or "what makes him a best

friend instead of a close friend?” the researcher gains a profound understanding of the conceptualizations of each friendship level in both cultures. These conceptualizations help clarify the degree of friendship and provide in-depth information on studying friendship in a cross-cultural context.

The fourth implication stemming from the current study is that it looked at the friendship relations from the perspectives of both sojourners and host people. In order to analyze intercultural communication, one has to look at the receptivity of the host society. While discussing cross-cultural adaptation, many scholars have only focused on the sojourners’ perspective: what they should do to adjust themselves to the host culture, but neglecting the idea of “what a host culture can do to help the adaptation process.” Both Chinese and U.S. participants in the current study suggested that Americans proactively pursue friendship with the Chinese, show interest to Chinese culture, and be tolerant to the cultural differences. Kim (2001) identified three important environmental factors exerting the greatest potential influence on cross-cultural adaptation: the host’s receptivity, the host’s conformity to pressure, and the strength of the sojourner's ethnic group. Therefore, cross cultural friendship cannot be formed without receptivity of the host people.

Last, although the current thesis particularly focused on friendship development of Chinese international students in the U.S., the results revealed from the study can be utilized to apply to Asian international students in general. Previous researchers have discussed the similarities of Asian cultures. For example, Hofstede (1980, 1991) indicated that Asian countries in general scored high in collectivism and power distance. Hall (1976) suggested that most Asian countries are classified as high-context cultures.

According to Smith and Smith (1989), Asian students on American campuses frequently experience severe cultural differences, tension and depression resulting from value conflicts. The great disparity between cultural life-styles causes Asian international students particular social difficulties and social isolation has been identified as a major problem (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Kitao, 1989). Researchers also suggested that The results of the study can be helpful for Asian international students to develop personal relationships with people from the host culture.

Advice from Participants

One of the purposes of the current study is to provide advice for both Chinese international students and U.S. nationals in order to help initiate and develop intercultural friendships. Participants in the current study were asked to give suggestions for the Chinese students and U.S. nationals who would like to develop friendships with each other.

Advice to Americans

Proactively pursue friendship. “To initiate a friendship, someone has to take the first step.” Weiwei said this when asked to provide advice to Americans. “Go up and actively pursue to talk to them,” Elsie said, “because once you have talked to Chinese people, really I don’t think y’all are as shy as most Americans think. Y’all are actually very out-going.” Helen also has the same opinion: “Just take the first step, initiate the friendship, don’t stop at the first encounter...Keep initiating and keep asking the person to go and do things. Don’t be afraid to do that.” According to Berscheid and Walster (1991), proximity is considered a necessary factor for initial contact. Creating opportunities to have common activities will be the first step to initiate friendships.

Understand the special situation of Chinese students. Rick, who used to provide host family services to international students, pointed out the importance of being aware of Chinese students' special situations: "Knowing their routine of study is number one," Rick said. "They are going to go to the lab, they are going to go to the library, they are going to focus on projects rather than anything else in their life—that's why they are here." "A lot of host families had really good relationships with the student, but when he graduated, he had to go," Rick said. "Realize that it can be a short term deal—maybe two years, maybe five years—and they are going to leave." People from the host culture should expect that Chinese students come to American Universities for their degree and only plan to stay in the U.S. for a short period of time.

Show an interest in Chinese culture. When Chinese students were asked how the friendship with Americans developed, most of them agreed that Americans' interests of Chinese culture certainly brought them together: "He showed his interest in my culture." "He loves Chinese food, and always asks me about things that have happened in China." Elsie, who is a close friend of her Chinese roommate, noted: "...if you hang out with somebody from other countries, they are going to want to let you know what their country is like, just like Sharon told me how the Chinese culture celebrates the New Year.... If you really want to make friends with the Chinese or anyone, you need show your interest in their culture, show your interest in their food, and show your interest in their lives." These findings are in harmony with previous research (Kudo & Simkon, 2003; Gudykunst, Gao, Sudweeks, Ting-Toomey, & Nishida, 1991) showing that the host nation's knowledge of and interest in sojourners' cultures facilitated the intercultural friendship formation. According to Berscheid and Walster (1978), reciprocity of liking

plays an important role in forming friendships. In most cases people are attracted to people who like them and are interested in them, showing interests to the culture might be a shortcut to initiate friendships.

Be tolerant to the cultural differences. Veronica told me a story that happened when she and her husband went to a picnic organized by some international students:

We had so many people that day, and everybody was waiting in the line for food. You know Indians, some of them are vegetarians. Several Indian students just took forever to pick up their food, “what’s in here, what’s in there.” They were afraid of picking up something they are not supposed to eat, so everybody just had to wait. Oh boy, they really took a long time.

She said these Indian students were considered to be inconsiderate, but Valerie is very tolerant of it: “Sometimes their behaviors are considered rude and offensive in American culture, but if you consider their cultural background, you will find out these behaviors are actually understandable.” Her husband later shared his principle for getting along with foreigners: “Don’t expect them to be exactly like you, don’t expect them to think exactly like you, and don’t expect them to live exactly like you. Realize that there will be some differences. Learn to live with these differences.” Kudo and Simkin (2003) indicated that pleasant attitudes and communication accommodation of host nationals can make intercultural friendship formation easier. Just like Qin Yue said, “The most important thing in intercultural communication is that to realize the existence of another culture and be tolerant about it,” tolerance of cultural differences is the key to successful intercultural friendships.

Advice to Chinese

Build up confidence. Chinese students are generally perceived to be timid and introverted in the eyes of Americans. During the interview, more than half of the

participants addressed that Chinese like to hang out with people in their own ethnic group. “They always study with, talk to, or play with this particular group of Chinese people. They go out eat with the same group, play basketball with the same people, and eventually their social circle is becoming smaller and smaller,” said Weiwei, who sees the Chinese in her department as a completely separate group from the rest of students. Sally believes that lack of confidence is the main problem that holds back Chinese students to seek out friendship with host people: “for some reason I will say the confidence level... So be proud, be confident in them, and believe the situation you made for them.” Anxiety and uncertainty are often considered as major factors associated with low confidence level of sojourners in intercultural interactions (Gudykunst, 1993; Gudykunst & Kim, 1992). Participants suggested that Chinese students should not be intimidated by their language barrier, but try their best to attempt to communicate with Americans.

Be willing to adjust to American culture. Another image of Chinese people in America is that because they are so proud of their own culture, they are unwilling to accept a different culture. Joe Brown commented, “Chinese people have the concept that you should do what I do in China, instead of saying, I am in America, I will try to adjust to this culture. I shouldn't have the concept I will be like the Chinese culture as much as possible.” Chen Hui told me that he couldn't believe that the majority of the Chinese people he knew couldn't tell what the homecoming day meant. He said: “Homecoming is a very important tradition in American colleges or even high schools, when alumni come back to the college they used to study in. A lot of Chinese people who lived in the U.S.

for 3 or 4 years still don't know anything about it. We simply close ourselves in our small circle." Later in the interview, Chen Hui went on to say:

How many people go to watch football games? Not so many. However, you will ask them to come to our Chinese New Year. You will ask them to try our moon cake. Yes we want to promote our culture. But have you tried to accept the other's culture? Did you spend your time learning their history, their norms, and their interests? If you don't have the knowledge, how can you communicate with them on a deep level? Again, communication is interactive. Without the interaction, it is difficult to establish friendships...

"Go to American restaurants. Create opportunities to know their customs; for example, go attend some events on the homecoming day during the football season." Chen Hui went on and suggested Chinese people try to get to know American culture and life has to offer before trying to promote Chinese culture.

Improve communication skills. Almost all participants agreed that to improve communication skills and enhance knowledge of American culture is crucial to develop good intercultural friendships. For instance, speak slowly and clearly, ask questions if you don't understand. And more importantly, some knowledge of American culture will help international students have better communication with the American students. Jia Ming realized that there are some taboo topics for the Americans: "Do not mention their privacy or family issues. I think Americans are very sensitive about protecting their privacy regarding things like age and income, although these are the topics we can even ask an acquaintance (in China)." "However," he continued to say, "other than those taboos, you can pretty much discuss anything with Americans; as a matter of fact, you need to be straightforward with them, otherwise they won't understand." Jia Ming's opinion is in harmony with Furnham's (1994) view, which suggested sojourners learn social and communication rules of the host culture with the intention of relating

appropriately to the host culture. Kudo and Simkin (2003) also noted that high levels of competence in language skills, supportive verbal and non-verbal behaviors, social skills, and interaction management can reduce anxiety and improved the quality of intercultural interactions.

Man Ting and Ye Chao commented that Chinese students cannot be honest about their real feelings or thoughts. Man Ting said, “it is almost becoming a habit among Chinese people to hide their real thoughts, because we are taught to be humble and compromise with others’ opinions.” In answering it, Ye Chao noted: “Very importantly, don’t always say yes. You need to express your real feelings. If you do have a different opinion, you need to tell them ‘I don’t think so.’” These responses confirmed previous research (e.g., Barnlund, 1989; Chen & Starosta, 1995) suggesting individuals in high-context Asian culture tend to be passive in self-disclosure during conversations with acquaintances and strangers. Therefore, it is important for the Chinese to realize Americans prefer a different communication style, and indirect messages might not be appreciated in American culture.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the researcher carefully considered the sampling method and process of the current study, several limitations within the study exist. These research limitations may serve to direct future research in the area of intercultural friendship. First, among the 22 respondents who participated in the study, only one Chinese participant (Li Hua) claimed that she has a best-friend relationship with her U.S. friend. All 11 U.S. participants and 8 Chinese stated close-friend relationships with people from the other culture, and two Chinese (Ye Chao and Ning Yuan) reported that they have casual

friendships with their U.S. friends. During her interview, Li Hua, who achieved a best-friend relationship with an American, demonstrated other differences from the other Chinese respondents. She claimed that she has more American friends than Chinese friends and has difficulty making Chinese friends because they do not share the same belief system; she is a Christian while most Chinese are atheists or Buddhists. One of the limitations of the current study is that it did not intentionally sample participants in a way that differentiated levels of friendship. Considering the individual differences between Li Hua and the other Chinese participants, future research may consider sampling participants in the categories of best friends and examine how the individuals can be different in their characteristics at the level of a best friend relationship.

Second, the current study did not deal with the topic of cross-sex intercultural friendship. Among 22 participants, 4 reported a cross-sex friendship with a person from the other culture (Man Ting, Jia Ming, Matt, and Helen). Man Ting, who reported having a close-friend relationship with a U.S. male college student, said she couldn't share things she normally shared with her girlfriends because he might not understand. Darren also addressed the situation in which friendship can lead to a romantic relationship:

For Chinese coming here, maybe they are interested in having a boyfriend or a girlfriend. Likewise, maybe the foreigners would like get to know Chinese...it seems like in some cases friendship leads to that... there might be some cultural differences there will be worth looking at.

Studies described cross-sex friendships as different from same-sex friendships as far as the communication style (Matthews, 1986) and not as encouraged (Parlee, 1979). Chen (2005) also indicated that cross-sex friendships happen in China far less often than in Western countries. Future research may seek to explore cross-sex friendship existing

between intercultural friends and analyze how gender can play a role in developing intercultural friendship.

Third, the current study paid special attention to explore the experience of existing intercultural friendships. The study was designed to interview Chinese students who have American friends and U.S. nationals who have Chinese friends. Therefore, the voices are limited to students who were able to form intercultural friendship and U.S. nationals who are open to Chinese friends. As a result, the study didn't include the voice from Chinese students and U.S. nationals who have not developed such relationships. Future studies may explore the experience of these groups of people and investigate the problem areas in intercultural friendship.

Fourth, the current study needs to pay more attention to how cross-cultural friendships are initiated and whether people actively pursue or passively receive such a relationship. More than half of the participants met their international friends through a social group; for example, international friendships could be formed by classmates or coworkers attending the same club. Some met through a third person, such as a family member or a common friend. Their friendships were based on certain social bonds which allowed them to see each other regularly. Therefore, friends did not actively pursue such a relationship. On the other hand, some others intentionally seek friends from other cultures, such as attending a welcoming party for international students or joining the program designed for helping international students with their English-speaking ability. Therefore, more efforts have been put on developing such a relationship. The current study did not examine whether there is a difference between these two groups of participants. Future research may explore the differences between active and passive

friendship formation and how each kind of friendship impacts their intercultural friendships.

Last, the study was conducted in a mid-sized Southwest city, where Chinese populations are a fairly small percentage of the residents, comparing to cities such as San Francisco with a 19.6 percentage of Chinese population and Honolulu with a 10.7 percentage of Chinese population (Levy & Karst, 2000). Previous research suggested that proximity is one of the most important factors of developing friendships (e.g., Berscheid & Walster, 1991; Pogrebin, 1987). Therefore, the possibility of establishing intercultural friendship with Chinese people is much higher in those areas than in the city where the current study was conducted. Another assumption is that intercultural friendship might be easier to be accepted and recognized in the areas having a higher international population than in areas dominated by U.S. citizens. Taking these factors as consideration, future research needs to recruit participants from different areas in order to minimize the geographic limitation.

Conclusion

Intercultural friendship is a complicated research topic which only recently was introduced by communication scholars (Gareis, 2000a). Many aspects of this area still remain unexplored. The current study aims at addressing our understanding of friendship among Chinese internationals and U.S. nationals. By interviewing 22 Chinese international students and U.S. nationals, the research has developed a descriptive picture of the experience of intercultural friendship among the participants. However, there is no doubt that there are innumerable questions waiting to be answered. Future research is needed to explore many other aspects of intercultural friendship.

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Appendix A

Consent form

Dear participant,

My name is Yijia Huang and I am a Master's student in Communication Studies at Texas Tech University. I am currently working on a research project entitled "Friendship conceptualization: Relationships between Chinese international students and U.S. nationals," and I am now inviting you to be a participant in this study.

The main purpose of this study is to see how Chinese international students and U.S. nationals conceptualize and describe friendships, and what considerations are important for Chinese international students and U.S. nationals in developing friendships. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire and engage in an in-depth interview. You will be asked to provide your demographic information in the questionnaire, which will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. During the interview, I will ask in-depth questions about intercultural friendship, and the entire interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview will be recorded using electronic audio-recording equipment and transcribed into word document files. The electronic documents of the interview will be kept in the personal computer of the Co-PI researcher. All hand copy documents, such as transcripts, will be locked in a file cabinet under the Co-PI's control.

The content of all the information you provide to me will be completely confidential. No one but my thesis committee members and I will see and hear your answers. You will be told not to write your name or any type of identifiable remarks that could associate your name to you on the questionnaire. The electronic documents will not contain any of your identifying information. The documents will be marked with a pseudonym you provide on the questionnaire.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You will not lose anything by refusing to participate. Also, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time if you so choose.

I will contact you within two days to find out your decision. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the study. My email address is yijia.huang@ttu.edu, phone number (cell phone) 806-252-8844, and my office is in Mass Communication building, Room 251. This thesis research is being directed by Dr. Amy N. Heuman. Should you have any questions about this project, you may contact her at a.heuman@ttu.edu or via phone at 806-742-3912. For questions about your rights as a subject, contact the Texas Tech University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Office of Research Services, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409, Phone number: (806) 742-3884.

By signing this sheet, you certify that you have read and understand the information on this form and agree to participate in this research.

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

Yijia Huang
Communication Studies, Master candidate

Participant's copy

Note: This consent is invalid after Feb 3rd, 2009

Interviewee's name : _____ (Please print)

Interviewee's signature _____ Date _____

Interviewer's name : _____ (Please print)

Interviewer's signature _____ Date _____

Please initial:

____ I give consent to be audio-taped.

Researcher's copy

Note: This consent is invalid after Feb 3rd, 2009

Interviewee's name : _____ (Please print)

Interviewee's signature _____ Date _____

Interviewer's name : _____ (Please print)

Interviewer's signature _____ Date _____

Please initial:

____ I give consent to be audio-taped.

Appendix B

Preliminary Questionnaire – Chinese Participants

Instructions: please check or fill in appropriate answers for the following questions.

1. Sex: Male _____ Female _____

2. Age _____

3. Relational Status:

Single _____

Dating _____

Married _____

Divorced _____

Widowed _____

Other _____

4. Occupation _____

Ignore question 5-8 if you are not a student

5. Classification Undergraduate student:

Freshman _____ Sophomore _____ Junior _____ Senior _____

Graduate student:

First year _____ Second year _____ Third year _____ Other _____

Doctoral student:

First year _____ Second year _____ Third year _____ Fourth _____

Fifth Year _____ Other _____

Post-Doctoral

First year _____ Second year _____ Third year _____ Other _____

6. Are you also employed?

Yes _____ No _____

If so, where?

Assistantship _____

Job on campus _____

Job off campus _____

Other _____

7. How many years is your degree plan? _____

8. What is your major field of study? _____
After finishing your study in the U.S., what would you prefer to do?
Stay in the U.S. (Years _____, forever _____)
Return home (Years _____, forever _____)
Go to a third country (Years _____, forever _____)
9. How long have you been in the U.S.? _____
10. Did you have other international experience before you came to the U.S. (travel, study, etc)?
If so, Where _____ How long _____ Purpose _____
11. Where is your hometown (province and city)? _____
12. Do you practice a religion?
Yes _____ No _____
If so, which religion? _____
13. Among your **close** friends, how many are
Americans _____ (students _____, non-students _____)
Persons from China _____ (students _____, non-students _____),
Persons from other countries _____ (students _____, non-students _____)
14. How important do you think friendship with Americans is while you are in the U.S.?
Very important _____
Important _____
Moderately important _____
Of little importance _____
Unimportant _____
15. How important do you think friendship with Chinese international students is for U.S. nationals?
Very important _____
Important _____
Moderately important _____
Of little importance _____
Unimportant _____

16. How do you rate your knowledge about American culture before coming to the U.S.?
Very good _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____ Very Poor _____
17. How do you rate your knowledge about American culture now?
Very good _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____ Very Poor _____
18. How do you rate your English ability?
Very good _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____ Very Poor _____
19. Approximately what percentage of your daily language use falls to
English _____% Chinese _____%
Other (name the language) _____ %
(Fill in the blank if you speak any more languages)
Name the language _____ %
Name the language _____ %
20. Please provide a pseudonym _____
(Please do NOT write your name or any type of identifiable remarks that could
associate your name to you!!)

You have completed the questionnaire, thank you very much for your assistance!

Appendix C

Preliminary Questionnaire – U.S. Participants

Instructions: please check or fill in appropriate answers for the following questions.

1. Sex: Male _____ Female _____

2. Your age _____

3. Relational Status:

Single _____

Dating _____

Married _____

Divorced _____

Widowed _____

Other _____

a) Occupation _____

Ignore question 5-8 if you are not a student

5. Classification Undergraduate student:

Freshman _____ Sophomore _____ Junior _____

Senior _____

Graduate student:

First year _____ Second year _____ Third year _____ Other _____

Doctoral student:

First year _____ Second year _____ Third year _____ Fourth _____

Fifth Year _____ Other _____

Post-Doctoral

First year _____ Second year _____ Third year _____ Other _____

6. Are you also employed?

Yes _____ No _____

If so, where?

Assistantship _____

Job on campus _____

Job off campus _____

Other _____

7. How many years is your degree plan? _____
8. What is your major field of study? _____
9. Have you ever visited any foreign country/countries (travel, study, etc)?
If so, Where _____ How long _____ Purpose _____
10. Where is your hometown (State, city)? _____
11. Do you practice a religion?
Yes _____ No _____
If so, which religion? _____
12. Among your **close** friends, how many are
Americans _____ (students _____, non-students _____)
Persons from foreign countries _____ (students _____, non-
students _____),
More specifically, among your international friends,
Persons from China _____ (students _____, non-students _____)
13. How important do you think friendship with Chinese international students is?
Very important _____
Important _____
Moderately important _____
Of little importance _____
Unimportant _____
14. How important do you think friendship with U.S. nationals is for Chinese
international students?
Very important _____
Important _____
Moderately important _____
Of little importance _____
Unimportant _____
15. How do you rate your knowledge about Chinese culture before you met your
Chinese friend(s)?
Very good _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____ Very Poor _____

16. How do you rate your knowledge about Chinese culture now?
Very good _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____ Very Poor _____
17. Can you speak Chinese? Yes _____ No _____
If so, how do you rate your Chinese ability?
Very good _____ Good _____ Fair _____ Poor _____ Very Poor _____
18. Approximately what percentage of your daily language use falls to
English _____ %
(Fill in the blank if you speak any more languages)
Name the language _____ %
Name the language _____ %
Name the language _____ %
19. Please provide a pseudonym _____
(Please do NOT write your name or any type of identifiable remarks that could
associate your name to you!!)

You have completed the questionnaire, thank you very much for your assistance!

Appendix D

Interview Guide – Chinese participants

Hello, my name is Caroline Huang, I am glad to be here today to have an interview with you. As you know, I am currently doing research concerning intercultural friendships between Chinese international students and U.S. nationals. You are invited here today because I think it is important to hear your responses to my research questions. Today's conversation is confidential and your real name will not be used in my research project. It will take approximately 45-60 minutes to conduct the interview. Do you have any question before we start?

General questions

1. What kind of person do you call a friend?
 - a) How do you define friendship?
2. What do you think is the definition of friendship in Chinese culture?
 - a) In what ways do you think Americans define friendship differently?
 - b) How do American definitions differ from your own understanding of friendship?
3. Think back over all your friends, who is or was your (Zui Hao Pengyou) best friend?
 - a) Where does he/she come from?
 - b) Why is this person special to you?
4. Think over your friends, who are your Hao You (good friends)?
 - a) Why do these people become your Hao You (good friends)
5. Describe a good friendship.
 - a) What kind of person will you not call a friend?

Specific questions about one Chinese and one U.S. friend (respondents define)

1. How do you meet this person?
2. Why do you think he/she eventually become your friend? (e.g., activities, personality, etc.)
 - a) Was there a particular occurrence that made this person a friend rather than an Shu Ren (acquaintance)?
3. Why do you consider him/her as your friend?
 - a) If you rate this person in the category of friendships, which one will you choose? (e.g., Pu Tong Peng You -- casual friend, Hao You -- close friend, Zhi Ji -- best friend)
 - b) Why do you categorize him/her as ... (casual friend, close friend, best friend)?
4. How often do you meet with this friend?
 - a) What do you usually do when you are together?

- b) What do you talk about?
- 5. Look back on your friendship with this person, recall something that you don't understand in your friend that confused you. Tell me about it.
 - a) What was your reaction?
 - b) How do you understand his/her behavior now?
- 6. Recall a conflict you had with your friend
 - a) What was your reaction?
 - b) What is the situation now?
- 7. How content are you with this friendship?
 - a) What would you describe as problem areas?
 - b) In what ways do you hope the relationships would be different?
- 8. Tell me what you think you can do to improve the relationship?
 - a) What can your friend do to improve the relationship?

Compare friends from two cultures

- 1. In what ways does your friendship with Americans differ from your friendship with Chinese? (Qualities, personalities, verbal and nonverbal communication, conversation topics, etc)
- 2. How many close friends do you have now in the U.S.?
 - a) Among them, how many are Americans, how many are Chinese? How many are from other foreign countries other than U.S.? (Specify to the country name).
 - b) How much are you satisfied with this situation? Why?
- 4. If you don't have enough friends, what do you think is the problem?
- 5. Do you think it is important to have American (host culture) friends, why?
 - a) Do you think it is important to have friends from other cultures, why?
- 6. If you were asked to give advice to Chinese students about how to make friends in the U.S., what do you think your advice would be?
 - a) What would be your advice to U.S. nationals who would like to make friends with Chinese people?

Conclusion

- 1. Is there anything else you would like to share with me that I did not mention in this interview?

Appendix E

Interview Guide – U.S. Participants

Hello, my name is Caroline Huang, I am glad to be here today to have an interview with you. As you know, I am currently doing research concerning intercultural friendships between Chinese international students and U.S. nationals. You are invited here today because I think it is important to hear your responses to my research questions. Today's conversation is confidential and your real name will not be used in my research project. It will take approximately 45-60 minutes to conduct the interview. Do you have any question before we start?

General questions

1. What kind of person do you call a friend?
 - a) How do you define friendship?
2. What do you think is the definition of friendship in American culture?
 - a) In what ways do you think Chinese culture define friendship differently?
 - b) How do Chinese definitions differ from your own understanding of friendship?
3. Think back over all your friends, who is or was your best friend?
 - a) Where does he/she come from?
 - b) Why is this person special to you?
4. Think over your friends, who are your close friends?
 - a) Why do these people become your close friends?
5. Describe a good friendship.
 - a) What kind of person will you not call a friend?

Specific questions about one Chinese and one U.S. friend (respondents define)

1. How do you meet this person?
2. Why do you think he/she eventually become your friend? (e.g., activities, personality, etc.)
 - a) Was there a particular occurrence that made this person a friend rather than an acquaintance?
3. Why do you consider him/her as your friend?
 - a. If you rate this person in the category of friendships, which one will you choose? (casual friend, close friend, best friend)
 - b. Why do you categorize him/her as ... (casual friend, close friend, best friend)?
4. How often do you meet with this friend?
 - a) What do you usually do when you are together?

- b) What do you talk about?
- 5. Look back on your friendship with this person, recall something that you don't understand in your friend that confused you. Tell me about it.
 - a) What was your reaction?
 - b) How do you understand his/her behavior now?
- 6. Recall a conflict you had with your friend. Tell me about it.
 - a) What was your reaction?
 - b) What is the situation now?
- 7. How content are you with this friendship?
 - a) What would you describe as problem areas?
 - b) In what ways do you hope the relationships would be different?
- 8. Tell me what you think you can do to improve the relationship?
 - a) What can your friend do to improve the relationship?

Compare friends from two cultures

- 1. In what ways does your friendship with Chinese differ from your friendship with Americans? (Qualities, personalities, verbal and nonverbal communication, conversation topics, etc)
- 2. How many close friends do you have?
 - a) Among them, how many are Americans, how many are Chinese? How many are from other foreign countries other than U.S.? (Specify to the country name).
 - b) How much are you satisfied with this situation? Why?
- 4. If you don't have enough friends, what do you think is the problem?
- 5. Do you think it is important to have Chinese friends, why?
 - a) Do you think it is important to have friends from other cultures, why?
- 6. If you were asked to give advice to Americans about how to make friends with Chinese, what do you think your advice would be?
 - a) What would be your advice to Chinese who would like to make friends with U.S. nationals?

Conclusion

- 1. Is there anything else you would like to share with me that I did not mention in this interview?

Appendix F

Description of Participants

Chinese Participants

No.	Chinese participants	Sex	Age	Relational Status	Occupation
2	Li Hua	Female	25	Single	Master's Student
4	Qin Yue	Male	32	Single	Ph.D. Student
7	Weiwei	Female	25	Single	Ph.D. Student
9	Kai Wen	Male	28	Married	Ph.D. Student
10	Jun Yong	Male	24	Single	Master's Student
11	Wang Shuo	Male	21	Dating	Undergraduate Student
12	Man Ting	Female	22	Single	Master's Student
13	Jia Ming	Male	23	Single	Master's Student
14	Ning Yuan	Male	23	Single	Ph.D. Student
17	Ye Chao	Male	26	Single	Ph.D. Student
21	Chen Hui	Male	27	Dating	Ph.D. Student

U.S. Participants

No.	U.S. participants	Sex	Age	Relational Status	Occupation
1	Elsie	Female	24	Single	Master's Student
3	Sally	Female	20	Single	Undergraduate Student
5	Jason	Male	51	Widowed	Property Owner
6	Darren	Male	42	Married	Assistant professor
8	Betty	Female	24	Single	Undergraduate Student
15	Matt	Male	22	Single	Master's Student
16	Helen	Female	57	Married	Director of K12 International Education outreach
18	Veronica	Female	81	Married	Housewife
19	Joe	Male	80	Married	Retired
20	Todd	Male	53	Married	University Professor
22	Amanda	Female	37	Single	IRIS Operations Manager

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Student Signature

10/31/2008
Date

Disagree (Permission is not granted.)

Student Signature

Date