Understanding Chinese International Graduate Students' Adaptation to Learning in North America: A Cultural Perspective

Zhongheng Zhang
Huazhong University of Science and Technology
Juan Xu
Brock University

Abstract

Chinese graduate students studying on American campuses as international or foreign students have very different experiences than other students. These differences relate to the fact that they are interfacing between two very different systems of higher education. It is important then, to find out more about their experiences, and how these differences might be connected to discourses and discussions that take place in the field of higher education. This paper looks specifically at the differences in approaches to teaching and learning in American higher education as compared to Chinese higher education. It is based on primary research drawn from the learning experiences of eleven newly-arrived Chinese international graduate students at one North American university. The major comparisons drawn include: a) learner responsibilities, b) learner engagement during and after class, and c) learner assessment. Chinese international students learned many "hard lessons" at this North American university. This paper discusses these experiences in the context of the literature of comparative higher education.

Introduction

The presence of international students on university campuses across North America has increased over the past decade. Chinese students represent one of the largest groups amongst international students in North America. For example, in the United States, Chinese students were the second largest group of international students. Among the 565,039 foreign students in 2004/05, there were 62,523 from China (Institute of International Education, 2005).

The number of Chinese international students in the United States has grown by 15 percent over the last five years. In the spring 2006, at the Midwestern American university where this study took place, there were 1211 foreign students from 106 different countries. Of the 1211 international students on campus, there were 248 Chinese students, the largest segment international foreign students (International Office, 2006).

There is a strong connection between approaches to teaching and learning in university contexts and the local, ethnic or national culture of that university's context. As scuh, studies on international students suggest that adaptation to teaching and learning in a host country depends on the similarity of the foreign students' cultural background to the culture of the host country (Hull, 1978). Several cross-cultural studies (Hofstede, Hofstede & Bond; Hui & Triandis) suggest that the American culture and the Chinese culture represent two extremes in a cultural continuum, in light of the identified dimensions of culture (Hofstede, 1997). As a result of these considerable cultural distinctions, the transition from learning in the Chinese academic setting to learning in the American setting may present great difficulties for newly-arrived Chinese students.

The purpose of this case study is to describe the differences that newly-arrived Chinese graduate students experienced between the North American and the Chinese university teaching and learning arrangements, and the ways they handled those differences.

Culture and School

In this paper, culture hinges around Hofstrede's definition of culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede, 1997, pp. 260). Although many belong to a number of different groups and categories of people at the same time, such as a racial group and a gender group, nations "are the source of a considerable amount of common mental programming of their citizens" (Hofstede, 1997, pp.12). Many analyses and investigations of social settings and contexts employ national identities as a starting point for a theoretical framework. The American sociologist Alex Inkeles and psychologist Daniel Levinson theorized that national identities affect the following four elements which are also important in a teaching and learning situation: relationship to authority, conception of the self and conception of the relationship between the individual and society, conception of masculinity and femininity, and the lat of all, expression of feelings and ability to resolve conflict (Inkeles & Levinson, 1969, pp. 447).

In his large-scale study of human values, Hofstede (1997) drew from Inkles and Levinson's work on the relationship between nationality and culture and the four above-mentioned human values. In his study, however, he re-worked and re-named these

elements as: *power distance* (from small to large), *collectivism versus individualism, femininity versus masculinity*, and *uncertainty avoidance* (from weak to strong) and added a fifth dimension, a *long-term orientation* in life versus a *short-term orientation.* Some of the findings that this framework of concepts brings to light help illustrate some differences between Chinese and American cultural values. Chinese culture as reflected by subjects from Hong Kong and Taiwan, as an example, is characterized by low individualism, large power distance, strong uncertainty avoidance, femininity, and a long-term orientation. American culture, in contrast, is characterized by high individualism, small power distance, weak uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and short-term orientation. Hofstede asserted that, if bipolar continua were drawn on the five cultural dimensions, the Chinese culture and the American culture would be located at the opposite poles of the continua (Hofstede, 1997).

Hofstredes' framework is useful for comparing and contrasting the experiences of Chinese university students learning on North American campuses. This is because national and cultural differences are often reflected in education – in this case university teaching environments. According to Hofstede (1997), "different value patterns in the cultures from which the teacher and the students have come are one source of the problem. They [the national cultural differences] usually affect the relationships between teacher and students, among students, and between teacher and parents" (pp. 216). Hofstede (1997) summarizes how the differences of the four elements noted above affect teaching and learning in school settings. He states that, in a large power distance school setting, "teachers are treated with respect"; and "the education process is teacher-centered". While in the small power distance setting, "teachers and students are equally treated by each other"; and "the educational process is student-centered" (pp. 34).

The review of cultural differences and their reflection in schools indicates that in order to be successful in the host culture (which is very distinct from their own culture), foreign students must undergo a process of adaptation to new teaching and learning systems.

International Students in the United States

Hull (1978) performed a comprehensive survey on overall adaptation of foreign students within the American educational environment. A total of 669 foreign students from three US institutions responded to the survey, representing 70 percent of all foreign students at those three universities. The study found that students from various cultural backgrounds clearly differed in their adjustment and the relation seemed dependent on the similarity of their backgrounds to the American culture.

While several studies on Chinese international students have indicated that most Chinese international students are successful in the United States (Huang,1997, Orleans, 1988), other studies report upon difficulties Chinese students often encounter while studying in the United States. As an example, Sue and Zane (1985) conducted a study on academic achievement and socio-emotional adjustment among Chinese international students. The study consists of 177 students enrolled at the University of California at Los Angeles, and includes both recent immigrant Chinese students and American-born Chinese students. The findings indicate that "for some Chinese students, particularly recent immigrants, good academic performance may involve certain academic and psychological costs" (pp.517), and that the recent Chinese immigrant students reported more socio-emotional difficulties than American-born Chinese students.

Sun and Chen's study (1997) explored the dimensions of difficulties Mainland Chinese students encountered in the process of adjusting to the American culture. They conducted 10 in depth interviews with Mainland Chinese students who enrolled in a mid-size public university. One dimension of the difficulties encountered by the Mainland Chinese students included concerns about their academic performance. These concerns were caused primarily by the differences in teaching and learning styles between Chinese and American academic settings.

Another study of international (mostly Chinese) students in a teacher-training program of a Mid-Atlantic University by Chen (1996) found that loneliness was a common feeling among international students. The students reported that they had few or no friends in the new country, mainly because their time was restricted due to the heavy academic work-load and language limitations.

Ultimately, despite indications that Chinese students may encounter difficulties in adapting to the differences in teaching and learning in the US, the literature on the experiences of these students is relatively sparse. The review of the literature presented above suggests that none of the studies focus on newly arrived Mainland Chinese graduate students and that none concentrate only on academic adjustment. Changes in teaching and learning styles are seldom mentioned in previous studies. This study, in contrast, was designed to focus specifically on the academic adjustments of newly-arrived Chinese international graduate students.

Methods: The Sample

The participants in this study include eleven newly-arrived Chinese international graduate students, all of whom had volunteered for the study. They were selected because their studies were in different disciplinary areas and these areas represented the actual discipline distribution among the new Chinese international students at the university. Furthermore, all of the students gained experiences of graduate education in China within the previous five years, and this was their first time visiting another country. Additionally, the participants' gender, age, and level of English proficiency were considered in order to provide maximum diversity. Table 1 shows their characteristics.

Table 1: Background information of the participants

Name	Case #	Gender	Work Experience	Study Area
Student A	One	M	No	Computer Science
Student B	Two	M	2 Yrs.	Mechanical Engineering
Student C	Three	F	No	Computer & Management
Student D	Four	M	1 Yr.	Mechanical Engineering
Student E	Five	F	3 Yrs.	Computer Science
Student F	Six	F	5 Yrs.	Education
Student G	Seven	M	3 Yrs.	Management
Student H	Eight	M	No	Biology
Student I	Nine	F	No	Chemistry
Student J	Ten	F	No	Engineering Mechanics
Student K	Eleven	M	1Yr.	Accounting

Data Collection

The data in this study was collected primarily through interviews with the participants. A total of four interviews were conducted with each of the participants at four different stages in the semester – prior to the start of classes, two weeks after the start of the semester, the middle of the semester, and at the end of the semester. Of the 44 interviews, 29 were conducted face-to-face, 12 were phone interviews, and three were conducted via email. Each of the face-to-face and telephone interviews lasted for about 45 minutes and was tape-recorded. The interviews were conducted in Chinese and were transcribed and translated into English at a later stage.

Analysis of the data began while the interviews were being transcribed and translated and as this occurred the researchers highlighted key statements that depicted important themes and issues. Following this, researchers aggregated these key themes into a generalized summary of important and illustrative themes. Researchers repeated this analytical coding process was repeated to ensure that the themes were applicable to participants' experiences, but were specific enough to properly describe their situation.

The researchers also included measures to ensure that research results possessed a measure of authenticity. These measures consist of statements about possible biases in presenting and interpreting the data, in-depth participants descriptions and original quotations and clarification of statements and participant feedback. Additionally, portions of transcripts were sent back to participants for their responses. The primary researchers of this study sought out additional verification by having an experienced peer review the interviews and the findings.

Findings

The participants in this study remarked upon mechanisms and tools and values that they encountered that were different than their university learning experiences in China. The researchers aggregated these remarks and based on participants' comments constructed three student typologies to which U.S. higher education caters, and to which they needed to adapt. These typologies, the informed learner, the committed learner, the active learner, and the committed learner, and participants' reactions to these typologies are described below.

Informed Learners

The informed learner typology hinges around the notion of preparedness in graduate education that to which Chinese students were unaccustomed. The course syllabus represents a good example of this preparedness. Participants reported that they were impressed with the course syllabi. Many reported that they were not given a course syllabus like the ones they were given by the American professors. For instance, Student I said:

> I think here a course is very well planned. It is very clear in the syllabus in terms of what to learn, and at what time, etc. But in China, the professor decided everything as a semester was going. Students hardly had any clue about the overall schedule of a course.

Similarly, Student D reported that although his Chinese professors talked about the general plan for the course at the very beginning, "nothing was as detailed as" what was put in the syllabus for an American course and "no print-out" was given to the students. Student A thought that, through a syllabus, students were "well informed of what was to be covered for each week" and as to when "each homework assignment was due." He thought that, in return, students would be "clear on the progress for a course." Student B was amazed that "everything, such as the schedule for exams, had been determined even before the first class started!"

While students noted the presence of the course syllabus, they did not use the syllabus as efficiently as they might have, had they more experience with them. It did not seem to be well recognized that a course syllabus was not only a schedule but was also a mechanism with which to communicate learner expectations.

Some participants seemed to be impressed only with the fact that students in an American course were well informed about the detailed schedule of a course. To others, a course syllabus did not seem worthy of much attention. For example, Student D reported that he "just had a look at" his syllabus in order to "know what textbooks were to be used" and Student K reported that he had not read the syllabus for each course "carefully" because he "took it for granted" that they were all "similar." One of the students, when talking about a course syllabus during the interview at the second week of the semester, confused it with lecture notes.

As a result of the lack of recognition regarding the importance of a course syllabus in the beginning of the semester, several students reported "frustrating" experiences later in the semester. For example, student K reported that he did not know about the homework policies, which were included in the course syllabus, until he was about to lose credits due to a delay in completing a homework assignment. As he explains:

> The professor refused my request for an extension and asked me to hand in whatever I had finished for the homework. ... Later on I tried to give him the part I had missed, he would not accept it until I promised him that it would be the last time I did so. I did not understand why he was so serious until later I knew that, homework counted for 10 percent of the final grade. I never knew it since I did not look at the syllabus at all. I had thought that it did not matter if I turned in my homework late, just as I did back in China. Here not only do you have to hand in your homework before it is due, but also you have to take it seriously because it counts for

> the final grade! Half of the semester had passed before I realized this. I felt so scary when I thought about what if I could not realize it for the whole semester!"

Student G also reported that he did not realize that the American professors were strict on the timelines of homework until he was warned after several delays.

At the end of the semester, when asked about sharing their lessons with incoming Chinese international students, several students mentioned the importance of course syllabi. For example, Student F stated that "the syllabus for a course is very important and should be carefully read." Student G also recommended that, "at the very beginning of a course, [they] read carefully the course syllabus and try best following the requirements [stated in a syllabus]."

Overall, the participants reported that students in an American course were well informed of the course plan and course policies through the course syllabus. They learned that they needed to be very serious with the course syllabus in order to be clear on the expectations of the professors.

Active Learners

During the interviews conducted right before the semester started, participants were asked to describe a typical graduate class as they took it at their home institution back in China. While teaching and learning varies from institution to institution and from class to class within an institution, many participants reported that, in most of their graduate classes, the lecture was the only instructional method and students seldom participated in the instructional process. Student H recalled that in most of his classes, "the professor was just presenting and the students were only listening." Student E described a "typical" class she had taken: The professor entered a class and began to give a lecture (without any interruptions). The class was over when the lecture was done. The professor then dismissed his class and was gone until the next session. Student A thought that teaching was no more than a "transmission of knowledge" in most of his Chinese graduate classes. Some participants reported that, even though some professors try to give students opportunities to speak during a class, often times it did not work. For example, Student F reported that "actually" they were given opportunities to speak during a class, but few students would do so. Student D also recalled that sometimes professors "purposely" directed the class toward more student involvement by encouraging students to present their ideas to the class, but "often times" it did not work "towards what the professors had expected."

In their North American experiences, participants described the lecture as central to the instructional method, just as back in China. However, they were also impressed with the close attention the American professors paid to students during a lecture, as well as with students' active participation during their classes. As Student B explains **"**every once in a while" during a lecture his professors would ask "any questions?" The participants also observed that the American students were very active during a class. Besides raising questions when invited by professors, they often made uninvited "interruptions." For example, Student C thought that the American students in her classes were "extremely brave" to present themselves during a class. At times she even thought that the American students were "rude". Student K reported that he had not "gotten used to "stopping the professor to ask questions" during a class, but the American students "did not care." Student F thought that because of the "aggressiveness" of the American

learners, it must be a "greater challenge" being an American professor as compared to being a Chinese professor.

The participants reported that while other students were very active in class, they took a very different approach, particularly at the beginning of the semester. Part of this related to linguistic difficulties since, as Student J describes, when the professor asked a question in class, sometimes she "knew the answer", but she "did not know how to say it" in English. Often, in such a case, she chose not to speak. Indeed, being afraid of embarrassment was an important reason why few of the participants spoke during class. Student B said: "I was afraid to be embarrassed. Even if I was able to make myself understood when asking a question in class, what should I do if I was not able to respond to the professor in case he asked me back?"

Those students who ventured to speak in class adopted a very cautious approach. Student H reported that when he was about to ask a question in class, he "had to make sure" that he was "well prepared", because he was afraid to be "looked down" upon by other students if his question was viewed to be "silly". Student J also described her thoughts about speaking during a class:

> When the professor asked a question, whomever his eyes were directed to, was supposed to respond. If I were not sure about the answer, I would try to escape from his eyes. ... I would choose to speak only when I was very sure about the answer and knew how to say it. If I was not a hundred percent sure, I would never speak.

Active learning presented problems to some Chinese students. Student C reported that she was very "dismayed", because although she sometimes could not understand the professor, she was afraid to ask for clarification. She reported that she felt "alienated" during a class because other students all tended to be active. Student H also reported that he felt he was a "sit-in" student because he did not speak in class. Student F reported that he had to spend a lot more time after class "catching up", because, all parts of the lecture were "connected", and not being able to understand one part was detrimental to the understanding of the other parts.

Overall, the participants observed that the American learners were much more active in class. Most of the Chinese students were very cautious in the American classroom. For some of them, being too cautious did have a negative impact on their studies.

Committed Learners

Before the semester began, the participants were asked about their thoughts on the course grade system in the graduate courses they took in their home institutions back in China. Many participants reported that they were not serious about their grade for a course, because everyone got "similar" grades. For example, Student C reported that, moving from being an undergraduate student to being a graduate student, she felt that she had become "less and less serious" about her studies, because "it had become easier and easier to get an A". She thought that it was "hard" to tell who "had learned better" from a grade. Student A shared similar thoughts. As he explained, "once we became graduate students, everything became so easy. We did not have to work hard and it was fine." Student K thought that there was no "big gap" in grades between those who had learned more and those who had not. He said: "Everyone's grade was in the eighties in most of my graduate classes, with the highest of eighty-eight and the lowest,

probably, of eighty-two." Because of this, the students reported that they "rarely cared about" their grades. Student J thought that since it was "impossible" to fail a course, she felt very "relaxed." She stated that, "except for the final Master's Thesis, nothing had made me feel pressured."

The participants reported that the fact that a grade was assigned mainly through a final exam may also have contributed to their less serious attitude toward their studies for courses back in China. For example, Student H said: "Back in China, I felt I was done when a class session was over. I did not even think of what I had learned in the session until it was time close to the final exam." Student I shared a similar thought: "While in China, I would be fine if I just spent time studying right before the final exams."

The participants found that it was quite different taking a course in the American university because they had to work over the course of the whole semester. In an American course, a grade consists of many components. Besides mid-term and final exams, class participation, homework assignments, tests and quizzes all count toward a student's final grade.

The participants were particularly impressed by the amount of homework in an American course. For example, Student B said that there were "always homework assignments" for his courses. Student J thought that the "major difference" between taking a graduate course back in China and at the American University was "in homework." She reported that she had "a lot of homework" to do and that none of her homework assignments were easy to work on. Student G said that because of the homework requirements, he "had to make sure" that he had grasped everything taught in each class; otherwise he would have "trouble" working on homework. Student D said: "I found that people around me here talked a lot about homework. It would be impossible to hear like 'How are you doing with your homework?' when two graduate students were visiting each other on a Chinese campus."

Besides homework, participants reported that they needed to take several quizzes or tests for a course. Student I, who quit her doctoral study at a prestigious Chinese university and came to pursue a doctorate in the same field at the American university, was bitter when taking about tests. She said: "we kept taking tests, one after another … and they (the tests) put a lot of pressure on us. I think I have never been relaxed. I have to work hard to prepare for tests during weekends, or even during this fall break time. The pressures have made me hardly breathe."

The participants eventually learned that they had to be more committed in order to succeed in an American course. However, at the beginning of the semester, a less serious attitude towards a course caused problems. Quite a few of the participants reported that they had not done well in their first set of exams. Student K reported that he was "frustrated and desperate" after taking his first test in Statistics. He did not finish answering all of the questions and, as a result, he got a low score for the test. Student E reported the same problem. The test time ran out before she even "got a chance to finish reading the last few questions." Student G also reported that he had not done well in "all" of his mid-term tests.

One of the most frequently mentioned reasons for the problems experienced, according to the participants, was that they were not "serious" about their studies from the beginning. For example, Student G said in a later interview: "If I were serious enough, I would have listened more carefully in class and would have spent more time preparing for

the exams after class." Student H reported that he felt low because he ignored the fact that there were "great" differences in teaching and learning between the Chinese and the American systems, especially "in the area of exam policies." He socialized with other new Chinese students and he knew that, like himself, many of his friends had not done well in their first exams. He tried to summarize the problems: "I think the biggest problem for us [the new Chinese students], who just came to the United States from China, was that we were not serious about our learning. As a result, we all experienced consequences because we had not done well in our first exams."

Overall, the participants learned that taking an American course demanded more from students and that there more pressure over the course of the entire semester. Difficulties in adjusting to these different academic and learning expectations were at the root of their problems.

Despite the difficulties and the "pitfalls" the participants reported early in the semester, it seemed that all of them were, overall, doing well in their studies for the semester. In the last of their interviews, participants discussed their efforts to achieve success in their studies during the first semester at the American university. Besides spending more time on their studies, purposeful changes to their ways of studying also contributed to their success. For example, many students reported that they felt more free to ask questions in class and to go to seek help from the professors and other students after class. The students who initially had experienced "pitfalls" reported that they had become more serious and had closely followed "the expectations and requirements" for the rest of the semester.

Conclusion and discussion

The Chinese students in the study reported that American graduate courses are very different than Chinese courses. Students in American courses tend to be well informed around the dates, assignments and scheduling for the courses, and more importantly, about the professors' expectations of them. Students were expected to be actively involved in the classroom instructional process and they were required to accomplish more during the whole period when a course was offered. While it was a great challenge for newly arrived Chinese international students to adjust to the American mode of graduate learning on campus, after some time and struggling the students appreciated the differences between Chinese and American higher education.

What follows is a discussion of the main differences between Chinese education and American in light of the Hofstredes' framework of cultural differences described in the first section of this paper. Many of Hofstredes' statements are consistent with this study's findings.

Power Distance

The free atmosphere, the interactive teaching style, and the active participation by students in an American classroom indicated that the social distance between the professor and students was small in an American classroom. This finding is consistent with Hofstede's (1997) conclusion about American culture and its reflection of schools. According to Hofstede (1997), American culture was characterized as "small power distance." In a small power distance situation, "teachers and students are equally treated by each other", "the educational process is student-centered, with a premium on

student initiative", and "Effective learning in such a system depends very much on whether the supposed two-way communication between students and teacher is, indeed, established" (Hofstede, 1997, pp.34).

The "full-of-fun" expression was alive when Student F described a session of her class during an interview: The professor and other students were sitting in the audience listening to a student making a presentation. Just as other members of the audience did, the professor raised a question. The first response from the student presenter was: "This is a good question!" Student F was "shocked" and thought that the manner in which the presenter treated the professor was exactly the way a student was treated by the instructor. "It was a complete change of roles between the instructor and the students!" she said.

In contrast, the participants reported that their Chinese professors "decided everything as a semester was going" and that the students were seldom involved in the instructional process. This indicated that the professor in a Chinese course played a more dominant role in the teaching and learning process and was consistent with Hostede's findings about the Chinese culture and its reflections at schools. According to Hofstede (1997), Chinese culture was characterized as "large power distance"; and in a large power distance setting, "the teachers are treated with respect, the education process is teacher-centered" (Hofstede, 1997, pp. 34).

Chinese students subscribed to the traditional vision of the professor as the authority in the instructional setting. Student A tried to give explanations as to why the American students were more active in class than the Chinese learners. He thought that one of the reasons why the American students asked many questions in class was that they were attempting to "extend" what was taught in class. In contrast, the goal of taking a class for the Chinese learners was to "take in" what was taught by the professor. He said: "Our [the Chinese students] thought during a lecture was something like this: Oh, the professor said this, right, right, the professor must be right."

Risk Avoidance

The many discussions raised by participants in their interviews with the researchers addressed many issues and challenges related to language. These interviews revealed as well as certain cautiousness on behalf of the Chinese students. Many reported that they preferred keeping silent in class and this was not only as a result of English but also because, as they explained, they were afraid to make mistakes. Student B, for example, reported that while other students asked questions from time to time, all of the Chinese students in his classes kept silent. One reason was that they "were afraid to be embarrassed." They were concerned that they might not be able respond to the professor when the professor "asked back." Those few who ventured to speak during class did so only when they were "very sure" of themselves. The pursuance of safety in American classes reflected the Chinese culture characterized as "high risk avoidance" (Hofstede, 1997). In contrast, it was observed that the American students were "extremely" brave in class, and they did not seem to be afraid of making mistakes. To the Chinese students, some of the questions the American students asked during class were even "silly", but they "did not seem to care." The observation about American students reflected the "low risk avoidance" characteristics in the American culture (Hofstede, 1997).

Learning as a Communal Act

The findings that students were given more opportunities to give feedback on what had been learned in American classes and the interactive nature of American classes reflects the contemporary teaching and learning theories about college instruction in American higher education.

Meyer and Jones (1993) identified learner reflection as a basic element of active learning. They introduced Piaget's insights when stressing the importance of learner reflection: "In a sense, the process of education is an ongoing dialectic between equilibrium and disequilibrium. For it to work, that dialectic must include some quiet time for reflection so that students can integrate and appropriate new knowledge" (Meyer & Jones, 1993, pp. 29).

The importance of social interaction among the learners and between the learners and the instructors was also well recognized and documented in the literature on learning and cognition. For example, while admitting that the recognition of the importance of social interaction in learning had come "more from pedagogical trial and error than as a deduction from cognition theory", Bruning (1993) pointed out that "the most successful programs for developing critical thought have been those involving social interaction" (Bruning, 1993, pp. 14).

The review of the literature on teaching and learning also indicated that one fundamental change in the development of teaching and learning theories related to the roles of teachers. It has been recognized that teachers should not only serve as sources of discipline expertise but also as facilitators of learning. The task as educators is to be "midwife-teachers" who help students "give birth to their own ideas, in making their own tacit knowledge explicit and elaborating it" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, pp. 217-218). Two of the most recent scholars -- Barr and Tagg (1995) have advocated a "Paradigm Shift" -- from the traditional "Instruction Paradigm" to the new "Learning Paradigm" and that shift represents a change of the role of the teacher from "a sage on a stage" to "an inter-actor--a coach interacting with a team" (Barr & Tagg, 1995, pp.24).

Academically, all of the Chinese international students in the study performed well over the semester whole because of their willingness to work hard, their efforts to seek help from other people, and the purposeful change of the ways of learning by the Chinese international students. This was consistent with the findings in other studies about Chinese students and scholars in the United States (Huang, 1977; Orleans, 1988). As Huang (1997) concluded: "Most of the Chinese students and scholars were very successful in the United States, mainly because they came from a hard-working tradition and they worked hard." The hard-working nature of the Chinese students reflects the Chinese culture characterized as "long-term orientation".

Overall, the transition from learning in a Chinese University to the learning in an American University represents a shift from a traditional teacher-center passive system to a contemporary student-centered active teaching and learning system. The differences in teaching and learning between the two settings and the ways the Chinese international students dealt with those differences reflect the cultural distinctions between China and the US.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Researchers

Research biases were present in this study since one of the authors was a Chinese international student at the university where the study was being conducted. As such, it is possible that the author's own experiences of studying at the American university affected the interpretation of the research findings. It is therefore recommended that similar studies be conducted by researchers with different experiences in order to diminish bias.

This paper reports upon findings on the differences in the approach of teaching/learning in American higher education from that in Chinese higher education, as experienced by eleven newly-arrived Chinese international graduate students. Depending on what courses these students were taking for the first semester, the Chinese students may not have gotten to know all aspects of the teaching and learning at the American University. Future research may appropriately include studying the experiences of international students who are at later stages of their studies.

Finally, the findings of the study are tentative and are applied only to certain Chinese students at a particular American University. Future research may usefully adopt a survey study method approach in order to verify the findings of this study.

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