

**Journey to the West**

**——The Experience of Chinese  
International Students' Sociocultural,  
Academic and Psychological Adaptations  
in Spain**

by

**CHANG TAN**

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*This dissertation is dedicated to all the Chinese international students in Spain*

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# Extracto

## **Viaje al Oeste – La experiencia de la adaptación sociocultural, académica y psicológica de los estudiantes internacionales chinos en España**

La cantidad de estudiantes internacionales de China ha alcanzado unos niveles sin precedentes en la presente década. Países como España e Italia están incrementando su popularidad entre los estudiantes internacionales chinos como nuevos destinos. En contraste con este incremento en la cantidad de los estudiantes internacionales chinos en España, tenemos pocas investigaciones disponibles acerca de sus vidas interculturales. Como tal, este estudio se centra en descubrir las ricas y dinámicas experiencias de los estudiantes internacionales chinos en España, así como el complejo significado de sus historias vitales. Ello demostraría que la experiencia de los estudiantes internacionales chinos en España es mucho más que una nota a pie de página en la historia de los estudiantes internacionales chinos.

Esta investigación es un estudio etnográfico que combina metodología cuantitativa y cualitativa para investigar la experiencia transnacional de la adaptación sociocultural, académica y psicológica de los estudiantes chinos a la sociedad Española. En la parte cuantitativa, un total de 259 estudiantes internacionales chinos estudiando en 8 regiones en España participaron en una encuesta por internet. Los datos fueron recogidos por un formulario online que constaba de 63 preguntas referentes a información demográfica y una auto evaluación de la adaptación sociocultural, académica y psicológica. El método cuantitativo permite así estudiar la relación entre la experiencia transnacional y otras variables como la edad, tiempo de estancia, estado civil e interrelaciones sociales.

Además, el estudio etnográfico comprende entrevistas semiestructuradas en profundidad de 10 estudiantes internacionales chinos, y dos periodos de observación participativa siguiendo a un grupo de estudiantes chinos de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid en diferentes contextos de su vida durante dos meses arrojaron luz sobre la experiencia intercultural en España desde sus propias perspectivas, reflejando las vidas reales de los estudiantes en el extranjero. Para los estudiantes internacionales chinos, estudiar en España fue no sólo un viaje físico, sino que implicó un viaje cultural y psicológico incluyendo cambios en su manera de pensar, sentir y comportarse. A través

de participar en su vida diaria, sus clases en la universidad y su vida social en el tiempo libre, se avanza en una comprensión más profunda de sus experiencias interculturales. Pudiéndose revelar algunos factores hasta ahora ocultos.

En términos generales los estudiantes internacionales chinos no encontraron grandes problemas de adaptación sociocultural o académica, ni tampoco sufrieron depresión. Estaban satisfechos con su estancia en España. A pesar de que más de la mitad (60%) de los estudiantes internacionales chinos todavía eligieron regresar a China al final de sus estudios en España, aquellos con puntajes más altos en adaptación sociocultural y académica preferirían quedarse en España o continuar estudiando en otros países después de la graduación, y específicamente estudiar de nuevo en España si tuvieran otra oportunidad. Además, los estudiantes internacionales chinos han adoptado diversas estrategias de aculturación para lograr una adaptación exitosa tanto a la sociedad española como a la cultura, eligieron las estrategias de integración o asimilación de aculturación para las conductas externas, pero de separación para relaciones íntimas.

La investigación cuantitativa demostró: los estudiantes masculinos tuvieron un menor grado de dificultad para adaptarse que las mujeres en términos del aspecto sociocultural y académico. Los estudiantes mayores tuvieron una mejor adaptación académica y psicológica. De manera análoga cuanto mayor era la duración de la estancia de los estudiantes chinos en España mejores puntuaciones tenían en cuanto a sentir una mejor adaptación sociocultural y académica. Con respecto a la relación entre el tipo de residencia y las adaptaciones socioculturales, académicas y psicológicas, los estudiantes internacionales chinos que vivían con las personas que no eran de origen chino tuvieron menos dificultades que aquellos que vivían con los chinos, tanto en adaptación sociocultural como en adaptación académica. En lo relativo al estado civil los estudiantes sin pareja tuvieron una mayor dificultad de adaptación sociocultural y académica que aquellos quien tenían pareja. Así los participantes cuyos círculos de amigos estaban compuestos predominantemente por grupos multiculturales (españoles o de otra nacionalidad) tuvieron menos problemas en adaptación sociocultural y académica que aquellos cuyo grupo social estaba constituido predominantemente por amigos chinos. Sin embargo, y en contra de la hipótesis del estudio, no había una diferencia significativa entre aquellos que eran hijos únicos y sus adaptaciones.

Las entrevistas y la observación participativa revelaron que estudiar en el extranjero no era sólo una manera de nutrir el currículo profesional, sino un proceso de madurez y de crecimiento y desarrollo personal. Para ellos, el choque cultural fue algo inevitable. Los principales problemas y desafíos a los que los estudiantes internacionales chinos tuvieron que adaptarse en sus esfuerzos a la sociedad española y su sistema académico fueron: la barrera lingüística; la dificultad para desarrollar amistades sólidas con españoles; el desafío académico – que fue percibido como el problema más serio – y la soledad y la presión para encontrar pareja y casarse. La mayoría de los estudiantes chinos coincidieron en que buenas habilidades de comunicación eran absolutamente necesarias, pero que pocos se tomaban el tiempo y el esfuerzo necesario para optimizar su competencia en español. Además, la relación entre los estudiantes jóvenes y sus compañeros mayores forman una red social sólo dedicada a la comunidad de los estudiantes chinos, por ejemplo, las asociaciones de estudiantes internacionales chinos en las universidades Españolas. Para los estudiantes internacionales chinos, las asociaciones de estudiantes jugaron un importante papel en cuanto a familiarización académica, defensa de los derechos de los estudiantes e impulsando la adaptación social. La red social WeChat impacta en las vías en las que los estudiantes internacionales chinos se comunican y hace que se concentren en grupos más numerosos, incluso aunque éstos se encuentren dispersos geográficamente entre diferentes campus. Los estudiantes internacionales chinos usan WeChat para hacer amigos con sus compatriotas en España. WeChat también sirve para abordar problemas como el que los estudiantes internacionales chinos puedan sentirse desconectados de sus familias durante su estancia en España. Los estudiantes internacionales chinos usan WeChat para recopilar información académica y completar sus tareas de clase, y trabajos a tiempo parcial como restaurantes invisibles y Dai Gou<sup>1</sup> se han podido desarrollar en virtud de We Chat.

Finalmente, este estudio ha mejorado la comprensión del trasfondo, las experiencias vitales y el proceso de aculturación de los estudiantes chinos en España. Esta información resultó ser de gran utilidad para mejorar las bases en los diseños de programas y servicios

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<sup>1</sup> N. de T.: Dai Gou hace referencia a un servicio similar a la mensajería aprovechando los viajes internacionales de los estudiantes internacionales.

apropiados para esta población en instituciones educativas chinas y españolas. Se discutirán por tanto las implicaciones de esta investigación junto con sugerencias para futuras investigaciones.

**Palabras Clave:** Estudiantes internacionales chinos, aculturación, adaptación transcultural, adaptación sociocultural, adaptación académica, adaptación psicológica, universidad española.

# CAPÍTULO 1

## INTRODUCCIÓN

*Viaje al Oeste*, también conocido como *Las Aventuras del Rey Mono*, es una novela china perteneciente a una de las Cuatro Grandes Novelas Clásicas de la literatura china. Esta obra fantástica relata la legendaria peregrinación del Monje budista Tang Xuanzang y sus tres discípulos (o sería mejor decir, protegidos) en tiempos de la dinastía en su viaje cruzando todo el país en dirección al Oeste, en lo que en aquel tiempo eran la India y Asia Central, en su búsqueda de unos textos sagrados budistas. Es un viaje lleno de pruebas, cuyo número total es de 81, y de demonios sedientos por la caza de su carne, de la que se dice otorgaría la inmortalidad. Aparentemente Xuanzang, un joven tímido y no muy fuerte, no parece estar bien preparado para realizar tan aventurado viaje por sí solo. Aunque finalmente, y con la ayuda de sus tres discípulos, Xuanzang supera todas las adversidades y consigue retornar a China con las obras sagradas.<sup>2</sup>

Xuanzang es por tanto visto como el primer “estudiante internacional chino” y su antigua leyenda persiste hasta hoy día. Justo como Xuanzang los estudiantes chinos modernos viajan hacia el Oeste en busca de las preciadas obras. Aunque el mundo de Occidente tiene actualmente un nuevo significado, haciendo referencia a Europa, Norteamérica y Australia y Nueva Zelanda. En chino, estos países son referidos como “Mundo Occidental” tal y como en la antigüedad se hacía referencia a la India y Asia Central. Esas “obras sagradas” que los estudiantes internacional chinos esperan obtener cambian con tiempo y constancia, hoy día quieren conseguir un desarrollo personal, obtener las lecturas del mundo humano, o salvar a su país, o simplemente conseguir un trabajo mejor (Fong, 2011). Esta etapa fue definida por Schuetz (1944) como “un campo de aventura... un cuestionable tema de investigación y una situación problemática en sí misma y difícil de manejar” (p.108).

Exactamente como Xuanzang, este traslado físico al Oeste a menudo implica paralelamente una adaptación psicológica y cultural que consistente en cambios en la manera en la que el individuo piensa, siente, y se comporta. De manera general, la mayoría de las tribulaciones que los viajeros tienen que enfrentar guardan cierto parecido

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.zggdwx.com/xiyou.html>.2015-10-11.

con las pruebas que uno debe superar en el plano psicológico. Los estudiantes internacionales modernos tienen más probabilidades de verse afectados por la falta de apoyo social en los países de acogida junto con las tensiones de la vida matrimonial (Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006); por lo general, retrasan la obtención de ingresos y viven con los estipendios propios de los estudiantes mientras que sus pares en el país de origen entran en el mercado laboral y tienen que tomar decisiones relacionadas con las opciones educativas y profesionales (Ni, 2005). Además, los estudios acerca de los estudiantes internacionales graduados mostraban con frecuencia los desafíos académicos a los que debían enfrentarse, como por ejemplo un menor dominio del idioma en los debates en el aula y la independencia cada vez más acusada en las actividades académicas (Kim, Kim & Kang, 2007), así como en las actividades de enseñanza como asistente de enseñanza no nativo (Trice, 2003).

## **1.1 Los Herederos de Xuanzang en el Mundo: Situación General.**

Estudiar en el extranjero no es un concepto nuevo en China. La cultura china concede una gran importancia a la educación. Existe una gran tradición de atención sobre la importancia de los estudios internacionales, lo que implica enviar tanto a estudiantes como a profesores y académicos a estudiar al extranjero, concretamente a los países occidentales. Parte de la estrategia de desarrollo de la capacidad nacional de China se basa en alentar a los estudiantes para que continúen y amplíen su educación en el extranjero, y traer de vuelta tecnología y conocimiento modernos que son útiles para construir un país fuerte (OCDE/Banco Mundial, 2007). A Principios del Siglo XX el Gobierno chino había enviado estudiantes al extranjero con las expectativas políticas de hacer más fuerte el país. En los años posteriores descendientes de Xuanzang continuaron marchando al Oeste durante diferentes épocas de la historia, de diversas formas y con diferentes escalas.

Los estudiantes internacionales chinos modernos reflejan tendencias antiguas y nuevas. El gobierno central chino envió y financió a casi todos los primeros estudiantes internacionales chinos, que en su mayoría estaban orientados a ciencias naturales y otros campos técnicos. Como algo socialmente funcional, la educación occidental había sido aceptada como consigna desde 1800. Después del derrocamiento del Gobierno Imperial



de Qing en 1911, aumentó en número de estudiantes internacionales chinos con recursos propios provenientes de familias ricas. Los objetivos de estudiar en el extranjero fueron gradualmente cediendo al interés personal. La investigación sobre los estudiantes y académicos internacionales chinos ha experimentado un rápido desarrollo desde que China introdujo un sistema de reforma y se abrió en 1978, y ahora estas investigaciones sirven como una ventana para entender los intercambios culturales entre China y otros países (Li, 1995; Xiang, 2003).

Actualmente el número de estudiantes chinos en el extranjero ha alcanzado cotas sin precedentes. A día de hoy, China se ha convertido en el país líder a nivel mundial proporcionando estudiantes internacionales. Entre los años 2007 y 2012 el ratio de estudiantes chinos en el extranjero ha mantenido un crecimiento anual sostenido de más del 15% (EY, 2014). No hay otro país que haya enviado tantos estudiantes a estudiar en el extranjero y ningún otro país ha tenido una influencia tan espectacular en el mercado educativo global como China (OCDE, 2013). Es de remarcar que el crecimiento del número de estudiantes chinos en el extranjero se da especialmente en las familias de clases media/baja. Por ejemplo, a finales del año 2009 estudiantes de este tipo de familias sólo constituían un 2% de todos los estudiantes internacionales chinos, habiendo crecido la proporción al 34% a finales del año 2010 (Centro para China y Globalización [CCG], 2013).

Desde 1978 a 2015 los números de los estudiantes internacionales chinos que habían estudiado o estaban estudiando en el extranjero alcanza una cifra superior a los 4 millones de personas. Sólo en 2015, el número de estudiantes internacionales chinos en el exterior fue de 523.700 de acuerdo con las estadísticas oficiales del Ministerio de Educación de la República Popular China. El año de 2015 representa un nuevo récord en términos de cifras. De los 523.700 estudiantes, el Gobierno central financió 25.900, sus empleadores costearon 16.000 y otros 481.800 lo fueron por sus propios medios (Ministerio de Educación de la República Popular China [MoE], 2015). Como podemos ver el nuevo viaje de la mayoría de los descendientes de Xuanzang es autofinanciado.

A nota particular, cada vez más estudiantes chinos regresan del extranjero debido al atractivo mercado de trabajo de China. Recientemente, la diferencia entre el número total de estudiantes internacionales chinos y aquellos retornados que se han visto atraídos de vuelta a China se ha estrechado. Para ser exactos, el ratio, que era de 3.15 a 1 en 2006 ha

caído a un nivel de 1.28 a 1 en 2015. Para el mercado de trabajo, de acuerdo con las fechas del Libro Azul para Estudiantes en el Extranjero Retornados y el Mercado de Trabajo: El trabajo más atractivo era el relacionado con finanzas con una alta proporción del 31.24%, el segundo más atractivo eran los relacionados con la educación en una proporción del 11.72%, el siguiente escalafón era el compuesto por los servicios de tecnologías de la información y software con un 8.13%, sector manufacturero con un 7.22%, cultura y deporte con un 5.19% e investigación científica con un 4.29% (MoE, 2015).

Dado que hay tantos estudiantes chinos internacionales establecidos en cada rincón del mundo, ¿cómo son ellos en general? Si usted viaja a China desde otro país, probablemente el pasajero que se siente a su lado sea un Xuanzang cuya imagen actual pueda ser descrita de acuerdo con lo siguiente:

*Él en realidad será más probablemente ella, de entre 23 y 33 años de edad, es un estudiante de máster o postgrad. Si es estudiante de postgrado su campo de estudio será principalmente de química, ciencias de materiales, economía, electrónica o ingeniería eléctrica, mientras que si es de máster estará un tanto más orientada a la contabilidad, finanzas, gestión empresarial, dirección o negocios internacionales. (Informe Hurun, 2014; Xin Dongfang, 2016)*

Como nota particular adicional, cada vez son más jóvenes los Xuanzang que parten hacia el Oeste. De acuerdo con los datos publicados por el Ministerio de Educación de la República Popular de China, en el año 2014 hubo un fuerte crecimiento en los indicadores de inscripción en la escuela secundaria para estudiar en el extranjero. En el mismo año, el número de estudiantes internacionales adolescentes chinos alcanzó una cifra récord de hasta el 30% de los adolescentes chinos que estaban estudiando en el extranjero en la escuela secundaria. En 2010, aproximadamente el 20 por ciento de los estudiantes internacionales chinos obtuvieron un certificado académico en el extranjero en la escuela primaria y secundaria. A finales de 2011, el número saltó a aproximadamente el 23 por ciento (MoE, 2014).

Y, ¿cuál es el país que alberga más Xuanzang? Los países tradicionales más atractivos son los Estados Unidos, donde China es el principal país de origen para los estudiantes internacionales, el Reino Unido, Alemania y Francia. Sin embargo, la participación de estudiantes internacionales de EE. UU. y el Reino Unido está

disminuyendo; la aparición de nuevos jugadores como Australia, Nueva Zelanda, España y Corea del Sur fue notable en el mercado internacional de la educación (OCDE, 2013; IIE, 2015; Libro Blanco, 2015).

## **1.2 Los Herederos de Xuanzang en el España: Situación específica.**

Como un nuevo destino en el mercado de estudios en el extranjero, España está empezando a tener una participación en el capital financiero e intelectual de los estudiantes internacionales en el nivel de educación superior. En comparación con EE. UU. o el Reino Unido, que han acogido estudiantes chinos durante bastantes años, la cantidad de estudiantes chinos en España es realmente menor y su historia es más corta. Según los registros oficiales, el primer grupo de seis estudiantes chinos llegó a España en 1949 enviado por los jesuitas de la provincia de Anhui, donde abrieron una universidad católica(Li, 1995). Fue en el año 1952 cuando se fundó el primer departamento de español en China. Y los profesores eran de Rusia. En el año de 1960, Cuba se convirtió en el primer país de habla hispana en establecer relaciones diplomáticas con China. En los años siguientes, Cuba fue el destino de los estudiantes internacionales chinos que querían aprender español(Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte [MECD], 2012). En ese momento, los estudiantes internacionales chinos en España eran de Taiwán, y la proporción era reducida.

En los últimos años, la cantidad de estudiantes internacionales chinos en universidades españolas ha ido aumentando progresivamente. Sólo 500 estudiantes chinos estaban estudiando en España en 2003 según los datos de los Asuntos Educativos de la Embajada de China en España, ocho años después la cifra aumentó a 5.500 en 2011. El impresionante aumento es de más del 1000% en solo ocho años. Y a finales de 2016, la cifra era de 11.161 personas<sup>3</sup>. Los datos del Departamento de Educación de la Embajada de España en Pekín (ver Gráfico 1.1), indican que los estudiantes de China se convirtieron en el mayor grupo de estudiantes internacionales en España en el año académico 2013/14, seguidos por los de Estados Unidos de América, Colombia y México, mientras que apenas diez años antes habría sido difícil encontrar a un estudiante chino en España.

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<sup>3</sup> Entrevista con el anterior responsable de la oficina de asuntos educativos de la Embajada China en España, Ávila, 2011 (<http://www.20minutos.es/noticia/1238682/0/>). 2016-11-23.

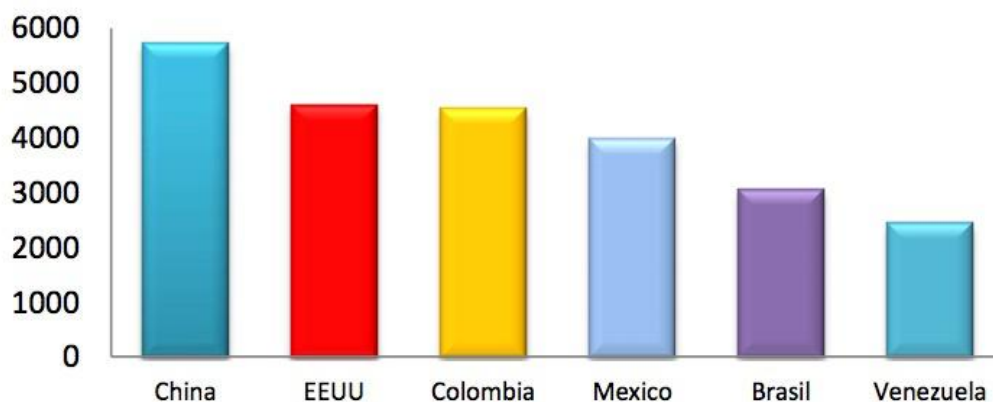


Gráfico 1.1 Cifra de extranjeros con Autorización para permanecer en España como Estudiantes (Fecha Efectiva 31.03.2013)

Fuente: Ministerio de Educación de la Embajada de España en Beijing, 2013.

Entonces, ¿por qué España, como primo lejano geográfico de China, está ganando popularidad entre los estudiantes internacionales chinos? Este fenómeno puede ser causado por los siguientes factores:

En primer lugar, los estudiantes internacionales chinos se sienten atraídos por el encanto de la lengua y la cultura española. El idioma español es innegablemente uno de los idiomas más hablados en el mundo actualmente.

En segundo lugar, la notable prosperidad del mercado latinoamericano llevó a los empleados chinos a darse cuenta de la importancia del español como activo económico. La posibilidad de aumentar sus perspectivas de empleo impulsa a los estudiantes chinos a elegir un camino menos transitado, que es quedarse en España y estudiar español, ya que las empresas requerirán personas que dominen el chino y el español.

En tercer lugar, para facilitar el acceso bilateral a las instituciones de educación superior, el Gobierno de la República Popular de China y el Gobierno del Reino de España firmaron un acuerdo sobre reconocimiento mutuo de grados académicos en el año 2007. Significa que ambas partes admitirían estudios parciales, grados, diplomas y niveles académicos que tienen validez oficial dentro de los sistemas educativos de ambos países<sup>4</sup>. Además, para allanar el camino para un futuro aumento en la demanda de

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mecd.gob.es/china/reconocimiento-titulos.2016-11-28>.

estudiar en España, un real decreto eliminó en 2014 el examen Selectividad como requisito de ingreso obligatorio para estudiantes extranjeros. Con este importante cambio en el sistema de admisión de estudiantes extranjeros, los estudiantes chinos sólo necesitan certificaciones reconocidas como equivalentes al bachillerato español para ingresar a las universidades españolas<sup>5</sup>.

Finalmente, los menores gastos de estudiar en España, la hace un destino más atractivo. Con más y más estudiantes chinos saliendo de China a todas partes del mundo, el mercado de servicios para los estudiantes chinos que van al extranjero, del cual los consumidores principales son de clase media, tiene mucha más prosperidad (Guo & Guo, 2016). Según un informe publicado por Forbeschina.com, la clase media de China superó los 10 millones de personas en 2012 y, aunque tienen menos interés en emigrar que las personas más ricas, tres cuartas partes están considerando enviar a sus hijos a estudiar al extranjero (Forbes, 2012). Para ellos, los menores gastos de estudiar en España, la hace un destino más atractivo. Según la encuesta realizada por un proveedor de estudios en el extranjero para un estudiante chino, el gasto anual medio de estudiar en el Reino Unido es de 17.850 a 35.710 dólares y el de los Estados Unidos es de 25.000 a 45.000 dólares, mientras que el estudio en España cuesta alrededor de 17.000 dólares por año.<sup>6</sup>

### **1.3 ¿Una Aproximación de Xuanzang a los Herederos de Xuanzang?**

Desde la infancia, soñaba con emprender un viaje lleno de aventuras como la de Xuanzang y el Rey Mono. Lo único que veía era el encanto del viaje ignorando los sufrimientos ocultos. La primera oportunidad me llegó en el año de 2008, cuando me enviaron a estudiar a Hong Kong como estudiante de intercambio desde China continental. Desde el primer momento que llegué a Hong Kong, me sorprendió esta magnífica ciudad. "El Paraíso no puede ser más hermoso que esto", me dije. Irónicamente, cuando traté de adaptarme a la vida cotidiana allí, me sorprendió tanto que esta vez me hizo redefinir el paraíso. Las diferencias en la comida, idioma, código de conducta, sistema educativo, etc., que no noté de manera tan acusada, empezaron a destacar en este

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2014/06/07/pdfs/BOE-A-2014-6008.pdf>.2016-11-30.

<sup>6</sup> <http://xibanya.liuxue86.com/feiyong/>

período. Afortunadamente, el dolor pasado es placer. Esta experiencia de medio año me hizo prestar mucha atención a la adaptación de estudiantes transnacionales. No aplastó mi entusiasmo por viajar hacia el oeste, al contrario, me hizo considerar el próximo viaje para estudiar más detalles sobre esta experiencia desde el punto de vista del propio testimonio.

Este estudio revela lo que aprendí y sentí sobre las experiencias de adaptación intercultural, social, académica y psicológica de estudiantes internacionales chinos y estudiantes de intercambio que estudian en colegios, universidades y escuelas de idiomas en España.

Estos estudiantes constituyen una comunidad característica que considera que tal educación amplía sus posibilidades de acceso en un mundo desarrollado social y cultural, y en ocasiones para obtener una ciudadanía legal en los países desarrollados, mientras tanto también quieren mantener su imagen social y cultural en China. Como miembro de ellos, los he seguido en el viaje de China a España, experimentado el choque cultural, luchado por adaptarme a la vida y el estudio de España, y explorando cómo el proceso de estudio en el extranjero nos iba transformando, nos llevaron a redefinir el Mundo Occidental, lo que consideramos paraíso.

Hasta ahora, los estudios trabajando en estudiantes chinos en el extranjero han centrado casi exclusivamente en América del Norte, el Reino Unido, Australia y Asia, los estudios sobre estudiantes chinos en España son mucho menos conocidos. Este estudio demostrará que la experiencia de los estudiantes internacionales chinos en España es mucho más que una nota a pie de página en la historia del estudio chino en el extranjero. Algunas características notables de la experiencia de la adaptación transcultural de los estudiantes internacionales chinos en España presentan las características de la popularización del estudio chino en el extranjero, que es una de las tendencias de desarrollo del estudio transnacional chino.

Muchos de los estudiantes internacionales chinos en España son la primera generación de niños que nacieron bajo la política de hijo único en China y sus metas en la vida, valores e intereses son diferentes a las de la generación anterior que una vez estudiaron en el extranjero. Bajo la política de hijo único, fueron "criados como solteros con aspiraciones del mundo desarrollado" (Fong, 2011, p.172). La presión que estos niños reciben de sus padres es más acusada que antes, donde "se espera que cada niño sea

un ganador" (Fong, 2011, p. 71). En estas circunstancias, ¿qué tipo de deseos iniciales y esperanzas tendrán los estudiantes internacionales chinos para estudiar en el extranjero?

Por lo general, los estudiantes internacionales chinos a menudo son estereotipados por ser callados, reservados y no asertivos (Jin, 2005), lo que tiende a reforzar el conformismo y el colectivismo (Lee, 2006). Por ejemplo, los estudiantes en China creen que la colaboración social es el factor más importante que incide en su búsqueda de trabajo (Lee, 2006). Los logros académicos y la armonía social son muy valorados en la cultura china. El éxito de estudiar en el extranjero para estudiantes chinos significa que es probable que su futuro estatus social y económico mejore (Greer, 2005; Lee, 2007).

Por estas razones, los estudiantes chinos tienden a estudiar relativamente duro en comparación con los estudiantes de otros países. Se suele pensar que los estudiantes internacionales chinos suelen ser silenciosos y obedientes en su clase; que no se sienten cómodos para expresar sus pensamientos y hacer preguntas activamente, a menos que sean invitados pasivamente a hacerlo (Wang, 2009). Del mismo modo, varios estudios (Jin, 2005; Kim et al., 2007; T. Lee, 2009) pusieron de relieve que los estudiantes chinos en las universidades coreanas también tienden a expresarse indirectamente, en lugar de transmitir sus sentimientos de forma explícita. ¿Qué efecto tendrá este carácter en la adaptación académica de los estudiantes internacionales chinos en España? ¿Puede esto a veces llevar a que se sientan marginados, resultando en un fracaso académico?

Con más instituciones intentando atraer estudiantes internacionales, se predice que la competencia entre ellos tenderá a ser mayor, como resultado, la preocupación por la experiencia intercultural de los estudiantes aumentaría en consecuencia. Sobre todo, es esencial que las universidades presten más atención a las experiencias de aculturación que los estudiantes internacionales chinos están experimentando en consideración del papel importante que han jugado los estudiantes internacionales chinos, de modo que las instituciones más ambiciosas reclutarán más estudiantes internacionales cuando se enfrenten a la competencia mundial. Vale la pena señalar que no solo los estudiantes chinos más brillantes estudian en el extranjero, hoy en día muchos estudiantes que son promedio o inferiores al promedio han encontrado su posición en algunas universidades desconocidas con estándares de admisión más bajos cuando no pudieron ingresar a la universidad de buena calidad en China.

Debido a la problemática anterior, este estudio sigue las experiencias de 259 estudiantes internacionales chinos y tiene un conocimiento profundo de 10 jóvenes chinos que, en la veintena, están estudiando en España; empleando métodos cuantitativos y etnográficos para dar una voz a los estudiantes internacionales chinos que están viviendo en una cultura extranjera, y para descubrir los desafíos, el crecimiento y los cambios que enfrentan al tratar de adaptarse a la sociedad española y a su cultura del aprendizaje. Sus experiencias interculturales de adaptación sociocultural, académica y psicológica ocupan un lugar central en esta investigación.

En concreto este estudio se propone responder a las siguientes preguntas:

- ¿Cuáles son las principales características de los estudiantes internacionales chinos que estudian en España?
- ¿Qué experiencias de adaptación sociocultural tienen los estudiantes internacionales chinos en España?
- ¿Qué experiencias de adaptación académica tienen los estudiantes internacionales chinos en España?
- ¿Qué experiencias de adaptación psicológica tienen los estudiantes internacionales chinos en España?



# **ABSTRACT**

## **Journey to the West**

### **—The experience of Chinese international students' sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations in Spain**

International students from China have reached unprecedented levels in recent decade. New destinations like Spain and Italy were increasing in popularity among Chinese international students. Despite an increasing amount of Chinese international students in Spain, little research was available on their across-cultural lives. As such, this study focused on uncovering the rich and dynamic experiences of Chinese international students in Spain as well as the complex meanings of their life stories. It would demonstrate that the experience of Chinese international students in Spain is much more than a footnote to the story of the Chinese overseas study.

This research employed quantitative and qualitative methodology to investigate the transnational experience of Chinese students' sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptation to Spain. In the quantitative research, a total of 259 Chinese international students studying in 8 Spanish regions participated in a web survey. Data was collected by a 63-item online questionnaire which asked for demographic background information, and self-rating of sociocultural, academic, and psychological adaptation. The quantitative approach allowed studying the relationship between the adaptations and other variables like age, length of stay, type of pair engagement and social networks.

Furthermore, ethnographic field research comprising in-depth semi-structured interviews of 10 Chinese international students and two periods of participant observation following a group of Chinese students of the UAM in different life contexts during two months illuminated the cross-cultural experience in Spain from their own perspectives, reflecting the flesh and blood of the students' oversea lives. For Chinese international students, study in Spain was not only a physical journey, but also implied a cultural and psychological journey including changes to their ways of feeling, thinking and behaving. Through participating in their daily life, their classes in the university, and as well as their social life in the free time, a deeper understanding of what they have undergone was progressing. Some hidden facts may be uncovered.

Generally speaking, Chinese international students neither met great problem with their sociocultural and academic adaption, nor feel depression. They were satisfied with their stay in Spain. In spite that more than half (60%) of them still choose to go back to China at the end of their overseas studies in Spain, those with higher scores in sociocultural and academic adaptation scales would prefer to stay in Spain or continue to study in other countries after graduation, and specifically to study again in Spain if given another chance.

The quantitative research found that Chinese international students had a lower degree of difficulty in adjusting than did females in terms of sociocultural and academic adaptations. Older students had better academic and psychological adaptation. The longer Chinese international students stayed in Spain, the better adaptation they felt in sociocultural and academic adaptation. With regard to the relation between the type of residence and sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations, Chinese international students who lived with non-Chinese had less difficulties than those who lived with Chinese in both sociocultural and academic adaptations. The participants whose circle of friends was dominated by cultural outgroups (Spaniards or other nationalities) felt better in sociocultural and academic adaptations than those whose social network was dominated by Chinese friends. As for the type of pair engagement, single Chinese international students had more difficulties than those who had boyfriends or girlfriends in sociocultural and academic adaptations. However, contrary to the hypothesis of the research, there was no significant difference between the Only Child and their sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations.

Interviews and participant observation found that studying abroad was not only a way of boosting CVs of Chinese international students, but also a maturing process and a personal expansion. For them, culture shock was inevitable. Major problems and issues faced by Chinese international students with their endeavor to adapt to the Spanish society and academic system were: language barrier; difficulty to build a deep friendship with Spaniards; academic challenge which was viewed as the most serious problem; and the loneliness and pressure on dating and marriage. Most Chinese students agreed that good communication skills were absolutely necessary, but few took enough time and effort to optimize their Spanish abilities. What's more, the relations between Chinese

younger siblings and their elders formed a network of the Chinese students' ethnic community, for example, the Chinese Students Associations in Spanish universities. For Chinese international students, students association has played an important role in like instructor of the academic adaptation, promoter of the social adaptation, and defender of student rights. However, a delicate balance between the community of co-nations and larger institution should be kept. The social media WeChat impacted the ways that Chinese international students communicate and made Chinese international students concentrate in large community, even though they were geographically dispersed across their campus. Chinese international students used WeChat to make friends with their co-nations in Spain; WeChat also served as a method of addressing issues like that Chinese international students may feel disconnected from their family member while abroad in Spain; Chinese international students used WeChat to gather academic information and to complete their class assignments; and invisible restaurants and part-time job as Dai Gou were done in virtue of WeChat.

In the end, this research has improved the understanding of the background, life experience, and acculturation processes of Chinese students in Spain. This knowledge was useful to advance design principles for culturally appropriate programs and services for this population in Chinese and Spanish educational institutions. The implications of this research along with suggestions for future research were discussed.

**Key words:** Chinese international students, acculturation, cross-cultural adaptation, sociocultural adaptation, academic adaptation, psychological adaptation, Spanish university

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*Journey to the West*, also known as *Monkey king*, is a Chinese novel, which is one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature. This fantasy relates the legendary pilgrimage of the Tang dynasty Buddhist monk Xuanzang and his three disciples (or it's better to say three protectors), as they cross the whole country traveling to the West where was Central Asia and India at that time, in search of Buddhist Sutra. It is a journey full of trial that the number is 81 totally and devils who hunt for his flesh that is said to impart immortality. Apparently, Xuanzang who is young, timid and physically not strong is not well prepared for such a venturesome journey all on his own. Yet, in the end, with the help of his three disciples, Xuanzang overcomes all the sufferings and returns to China with sacred scriptures.<sup>7</sup>

Xuanzang is seen as the first “Chinese international students”, and his old legend continues to today. Just like Xuanzang, in the new era, Chinese international students pilgrim to the Western world to fetch back the “scriptures”. However the Western world has a new meaning, which refers to Europa, America, Australia and New Zealand. In Chinese, these countries are all called Western world, like the old Central Asia and India. Those “scriptures” which the new Chinese international students want to fetch change with time and generation, they want to improve themselves, to get the scriptures of human world, or to save his country, or just to get a better job (Fong, 2011). This stage as Schuetz (1944) described “field of adventure...a questionable topic of investigation...and a problematic situation itself and one hard to master” (p. 108).

Just like Xuanzang, this physical journey to the West often parallels a psychological and cultural adaptation that consists of changes to the way in which the individual feels, thinks, and behaves. Above all, most of the tribulations that the following sojourners have to face resemble the trials that one must overcome on a psychological journey. Modern international students are more likely to be strained by their lack of social support in the host countries along with marriage life strains (Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006); usually, they delay making an earning by living on student stipends, whereas their peers back

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.zggdwx.com/xiyou.html>.2015-10-11.

home are going into the labor market. They have to face the decision related to educational and career choices (Ni, 2005). In addition, studies of international graduate students frequently reported academic challenges that they have faced, for instance, lower language proficiency in classroom discussions and the increasingly independent academic activities (Kim, Kim, & Kang, 2007), as well as in teaching activities as non-native speaking teaching assistants (Trice, 2003).

## **1.1.The Offspring of Xuanzang in the World: the Overall Situation**

Study abroad is not new in China. Chinese culture attaches great importance to education. There is a long tradition of national-level attention on the importance of international students, which implies sending its students and scholars to study abroad, to be precise, the western countries. One part of the Chinese national capacity building strategy is encouraged students to pursue further education abroad, and bring back modern technology and knowledge that are helpful to build a stronger country (OECD/World Bank, 2007). In the very beginning of 20 century, Chinese government had sent students abroad with political expectations to make the country stronger. In the following years, the offspring of Xuanzang keep going to the West during different stages of history, in various forms and with different scales.

Modern Chinese international students reflect both old and new trends. The Chinese central government sent and supported almost all the early students, which most of them were oriented to the natural science and other technical subjects. As socially functional, Western learning had become an accepted motto since the 1800. After the overthrow of Qing imperial government in 1911, the number of self-supported Chinese international students who came from rich families increased. The noble goals of study abroad gradually yielded to personal interest. The research on Chinese international students and scholars has seen rapid development since China turned to reform and open up in 1978, and now these researches serve as a window for understanding the cultural exchanges between China and other countries (Li, 1995; Xiang, 2003).

Currently, the number of overseas students from China has reached unprecedented peaks. Today, China has become the world's leading source of international students.

Between the year of 2007 and the year of 2012, the annual growth rate of Chinese international students' number has always maintained more than 15% (EY, 2014). There is not another country that has sent so many students to study abroad, and no other country has such a dramatic influence on the global educational market like China (OECD, 2013). It is noteworthy that the rise of Chinese international students' number was especially within the lower-middle-class families. For instance, in the end of 2009, students from such families compose only 2% of all Chinese international students, while the proportion had risen to 34% in the end of 2010 (Center for China & Globalization [CCG], 2013).

From 1978 to 2015, the number of Chinese international students who had studied or were studying overseas is more than 4 million. In 2015 alone, the number of Chinese international students abroad was 523,700, according to the official statistics of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. The year of 2015 represents a new record in terms of the number. Among these 523,700 students, central government funded 25,900, their employers supported 16,000, and other 481,800 were at their own expense (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China [MoE], 2015). As we can see, the new journey of the overwhelming majority of the offspring of Xuanzang is self-founded.

Of particular note, more and more Chinese international students have returned from abroad due to the attractive job market of China. Recently, the difference between the number of Chinese international students and that of returnees who has been drawn back to China was narrowed. To be exact, the ratio was 3.15 to 1 in 2006, now it has been down to 1.28 to 1 in 2015. For the job market, in accordance with the dates of Blue Book on Returning Overseas Students and the Labor Market: the most attractive job was finance-related with a high rate of 31.24%, the second most attractive is related with education at a rate of 11.72%, the following is about information and software service with 8.13%, manufacturing 7.22 %, culture and sports 5.19 % and scientific research 4.29% (MoE, 2015).

Since there are so many Chinese international students located in every corner of the world, what are they like in general? If you're traveling to China from another country,

maybe the passenger who sits next to you is a Xuanzang whose new image can be described as following:

*He is actually mostly a she, aged 23 to 33, a master student, a postgraduate, or an undergraduate with a specialized subject. If a postgraduate, his main fields should mainly be chemistry, material science, economics, electronics and electrical engineering, while the masters fields of study are somewhat more into the direction of finance, accounting, business management, management studies, or international business studies. (Hurun Report, 2014; Xin Dongfang, 2016)*

Of another particular note, more and more younger Xuanzang set off earlier to the West. According to the dates published by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, in the year of 2014, there was a strong growth indicator for secondary school enrolment of studying overseas. In the same year, the number of teenage Chinese international students hit a peak, which was up to 30% of Chinese teenagers studying abroad in high school. In 2010, approximately 20 percent of Chinese international students have obtained an overseas academic certificate in elementary and secondary school. By the end of 2011, the number jumped to roughly 23 percent (MoE, 2014).

And which country hosts more Xuanzang? The traditional most attractive countries are United States where China is the top origin country for international students, the United Kingdom, Germany and France. However, the share of international students of the US and UK is declining, the appearance of new players like Australia, New Zealand, Spain and Korea was remarkable on the international education market (OECD, 2013; IIE, 2015; White Paper, 2015).

## **1.2. The offspring of Xuanzang in Spain: A Specific Situation**

As an emerging destination in the market of studying abroad, Spain is beginning to hold a share of the financial and intellectual capital of international students in the level of higher education. Compared with the USA or the UK who has hosted Chinese students for so many years, the number of Chinese students in Spain is truly lower and their history is shorter. According to the official records, the first group of six Chinese students came to Spain in 1949 sent by the Jesuits of the province of Anhui, where they opened a university Catholic (Li, 1995). It was the year 1952 when the first department of Spanish

founded in China. And the teachers were from Russia. In the year of 1960, Cuba became the first Spanish-speaking country establishing diplomatic relations with China. In the following years, Cuba was the destination for the Chinese international students who wanted to learn Spanish (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte [MECD], 2012). In that time, the Chinese international students in Spain were from Taiwan, and the scale was small.

In recent years, the amount of Chinese international students in Spanish universities has been progressively increasing. Only 500 Chinese students were studying in Spain in 2003 according to the data from the Educational Affairs of the Chinese Embassy in Spain, eight years later the number has risen to 5500 in 2011. The impressive increase is over 1000% in just eight years. And by the end of 2016, the figure was 11161 persons.<sup>8</sup>

According to the data of the Department of Education of the Spanish Embassy in Beijing (see Figure 1.1) indicate that students from China became the largest group of international students in Spain in the academic year 2013/14, followed by those from the United States of America, Colombia and Mexico, while ten years ago you would struggle to spot a Chinese student in Spain.

So why Spain, as a geographical Scotch cousin of China, is increasing in popularity among the Chinese international students? This phenomenon maybe caused by the following factors:

Firstly, Chinese international students are attracted by the charm of the Spanish language and culture. Spanish is undeniably one of the most spoken languages in the world right now.

Secondly, the remarkable prosperity of Latin American market led Chinese employees to notice the importance of Spanish as an economic asset. The possibility of increasing their employment prospects drives Chinese students to choose a way less traveled, which is sojourning in Spain and studying Spanish, since business would require people fluent in Chinese and Spanish.

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with the former chief of the office of educational affairs of the Chinese Embassy in Spain, Ávila, 2011 (<http://www.20minutos.es/noticia/1238682/0/>). 2016-11-23.



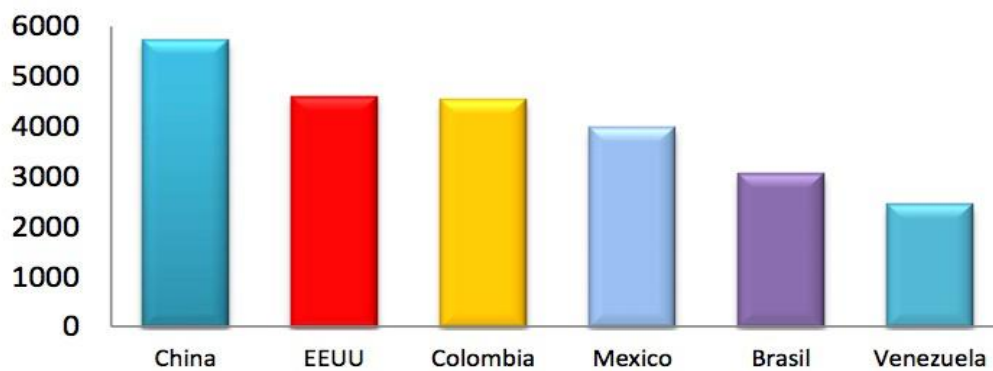


Figure 1.1 Numbers of Foreigners with Authorization to Stay in Spain as Students

Source : Ministry of Education of the Spanish Embassy in Beijing, 2013.

Thirdly, to facilitate bilateral access to institutions of higher education, the Government of the People’s Republic of China and the Government of the Kingdom of Spain signed an agreement on mutual recognition of academic degrees in the year of 2007. It means that both sides would admit partial studies, degrees, diplomas and academic levels which have official validity within the educational systems of both countries.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, to pave the way for a future increase in demand to study in Spain, a royal decree removed in 2014 the *Selectividad* exam as a mandatory entrance requirement for foreign students. By this major change to the system of foreign undergraduate admissions Chinese students now only need certifications recognized as equivalent to the Spanish Baccalaureate to entry in Spanish universities.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, the lower cost of studying makes Spain a more attractive destination. With more and more Chinese students step out of China to the world, the rising Chinese middle class is the main force behind the prosperity of the Chinese studying abroad market (Guo & Guo, 2016). According to a report released by Forbeschina.com, China’s middle class was above 10 million in 2012 and, though they have lower interest in emigrating compared with richer people, three-quarters are considering sending their children to study abroad (Forbes, 2012). For them, the lower cost of studying makes Spain a more attractive destination. According to the survey made by a study abroad provider: for a

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.mecd.gob.es/china/reconocimiento-titulos.2016-11-28>.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2014/06/07/pdfs/BOE-A-2014-6008.pdf.2016-11-30>.

Chinese student, the average annual cost of learning in the U.K. is from 17,850 to 35,710 dollars, that of the U.S.A. is from 25,000 to 45,000 dollars, while study in Spain costs around 17,000 dollars.<sup>11</sup>

### **1.3.A Xuanzang's Approach to the Offspring of Xuanzang?**

Since the childhood, I was dreaming to take a journey full of adventures like that of Xuanzang and Monkey King. All in my eyes is the charm of the journey ignoring the hidden sufferings. The first opportunity came to me in the year of 2008, I was sent to study in Hong Kong as an exchange student from the Mainland China. The first moment when I arrived at Hong Kong, I was shocked by this magnificent city. "The Paradise can't be more beautiful than this." I said to myself. Ironically, when I tried to get myself adapted into the normal life there, I was so shocked this time that made me redefine the paradise. The differences on food, language, code of conduct, educational system and so on, which I didn't notice so seriously, highlight in this period. Fortunately pain past is pleasure. This half-year experience made me pay close attention to the adaptation of transnational students. It didn't crush my enthusiasm to travel West, on the way round, it made me look forward to the next journey to study more details about this experience from the point of view of the witness.

This study reveals what I learned and felt about the experiences of cross-cultural social, academic and psychological adaptation of Chinese international students and exchange students who are studying at colleges, universities, and language schools in Spain. They build up a characteristic community who consider such education would increase their access to the developed social and cultural world, and sometimes to get a legal citizenship in developed countries meanwhile they also want to maintain their social and cultural status in China. As a member of this country, I follow them on the journey from China to Spain, experienced the culture shock, struggled to adapt to the life and study of Spain, and explored how the process of study abroad transformed us. All these experiences would lead us to redefine the Western World what we considered paradise and where we could find it.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://xibanya.liuxue86.com/feiyong/>

Until now, scholars working on Chinese overseas study have focused almost exclusively on North America, United Kingdom, Australia and Asia, studies on Chinese students in Spain are much less known. This study will demonstrate that the experience of Chinese international students in Spain is much more than a footnote to the story of the Chinese overseas study. Some remarkable features of the experience of Chinese international students' cross-cultural adaptation in Spain present the characteristics of the popularization of Chinese overseas study, which is one of the development trends of Chinese transnational study.

Many of the Chinese international students in Spain are the first generation of children who were born under the one-child policy in China and their goals of life, values and interests are different from the elder generation who once studied abroad. Under the one-child policy, they were "raised as singletons with developed world aspirations" (Fong, 2011, p. 172). The pressure that these children receive from their parents is more than before, where "every child is expected to be a winner" (Fong, 2011, p. 71). In these circumstances, what kinds of initial desire and hopes Chinese international students will have to go study overseas?

Typically, Chinese international students are often stereotyped as being quiet, reserved and non-assertive (Jin, 2005), which tends to reinforce conformity and collectivism (Lee, 2006). For example, students in China believe that social networking is the most important factor affecting their job search (Lee, 2006). Academic achievement and social harmony are highly valued in Chinese culture. The success of studying abroad for Chinese students means that their future social and economic status is likely to improve (Greer, 2005; Lee, 2007). For these reasons, Chinese students tend to study relatively hard compared to students from other countries. Chinese international students are usually thought to be silenced and compliant in their class; they do not feel comfortable to express their thoughts and ask questions actively, unless they are passively invited to do so (Wang, 2009). Similarly, several studies (Jin, 2005; Kim et al., 2007; T. Lee, 2009) reported that Chinese students in Korean universities also tend to express themselves indirectly, rather than conveying their feelings explicitly. What affect will this character have on the academic adaptation of Chinese international students when they

are sojourning abroad? Can this sometimes lead to their feeling marginalized, resulting in academic failure?

With more institutions trying to attract international students, their competition would increase as well as the concern on students' cross-cultural experience. In this worldwide competition, in order to increase international recruitment, the weight of Chinese students in this mobility should lead ambitious institutions to pay more attention to the acculturation experiences of Chinese international students. It's worth noting that, nowadays, not only the brightest Chinese students but also many average or below-average students look for a position in some unknown foreign universities with lower admission standards when they failed to enter to university of good quality in China.

With the concern above, this study follows the experiences of 259 Chinese international students and looks for in-depth understanding of ten 20s' years old Chinese youngsters studying in Spain. The study employs quantitative and ethnography methods to give a voice to Chinese international students which are sojourning in an alien culture, and to uncover the challenges, the growth, and the changes they are facing when trying to adapt to the Spanish society and learning culture. Therefore, their cross-cultural experiences of social, academic and psychological adaptations take center stage in this research.

Specifically this study aims to answer the following questions:

- What are the main characteristics of the Chinese international students in Spain?
- What experiences of sociocultural adaptation do Chinese international students have in Spain?
- What experiences of academic adaptation do Chinese international students have in Spain?
- What experiences of psychological adaptation do Chinese international students have in Spain?

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review will provide us with a framework for a better understanding of the experiences of cross-cultural adaptation of sojourners and also serves to identify the gaps where the study will fit. Literature was drawn from various theoretical and empirical studies in cross-cultural adaptation and Chinese international students, particularly in terms of their experience of adaptation while studied abroad. Many scholars have been interested in this topic because the cross-cultural adaptation would not only reveal the quality of relationship between individuals from distinct cultures, but also disclose the satisfaction and sufferings in the sojourn, many scholars have always been interested in this area. A systematic overview of the highly various, increasing research literature on cross-cultural adaptation, Chinese international students and an understanding of factors are likely to foster or hinder their sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptation in the new sociocultural context is provided in this review.

In this literature review, in response to the limitations of higher education research on international student acculturation, theories and research on sojourners are employed. While anthropological and sociological studies have primarily utilized. These theories and the empirical research that supported them described what adapting to a new culture entails and what it would take to prevail in that process. They are particularly relevant to understanding the process of change that international students go through, and how they change from being cultural outsiders to cultural insiders, affected by a series of contextual, personal, social, cultural, and psychological factors.

Generally speaking, the literature is divided into three sections:

The first section focused on definition of Xuanzang in the background of modern society: that is to say what the international students mean in nowadays. This serves to provide a clearer understanding of the participants of this study. And findings from empirical studies related to Chinese international students are examined, serving as an indispensable reference for understanding the particular cross-cultural adaptation experience of Chinese international students. Secondly, focus then shifts towards understanding how the process of acculturation has been conceptualized in previous

researches: in other words, how acculturation and adaptation have been defined, what models have been constructed to represent the process or stages of adaptation and what factors affected this process. Lastly, the rich existing theories on cross-cultural adaptation is analyzed, which are some models (U-Curve model, W-Curve model, Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity model and Stress-Adaptation-Growth model) that can be used to explain the acculturation process. Each of those presented below would help us explain a different aspect of cross-cultural adaptation, from a cognitive, affective, or behavioral perspective.

## **2.1. International Students and Chinese International Students**

### **International Students**

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the OECD and Eurostat define international students as the individuals who are not residents of the host country where they are studying or the individuals who have received their prior education in a country different from his motherland. Foreign students are defined in the consideration of their citizenship. International students are considered as a subset of foreign students. Data on foreign students are employed, when those of international students are not accessible (OECD, 2013). International students are also considered as sojourners who make a short-term visit to a country with a specific task to perform namely studies (Rosenthal, Russell, & Thomson, 2007). A sojourn is defined as a temporary stay in a new place (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001, p. 142).

In this study, international students are defined as those who aim to obtain international education as students, accordingly choosing to sojourn temporarily in another country that is not the country of their citizenship or permanent residence. International students are distinguishable socially and culturally with citizens from the host country. This definition has three key emphases: “the temporary status of the sojourners, the educational purpose of the sojourn, and the cultural backgrounds that distinguish international from host country students” (Paige, 1990, p. 162-163).

It is vital to pay high attention on our understanding of international students that “being an international student” means a common minority in the host country (Schmitt,

Spears, & Branscombe, 2003). Surrounded by the alien culture, these new comers have different values and behaviors, and they are separated from not only the mainstream culture, but also their own culture. International students would face a high degree of uncertainty along with unfamiliar customs of social and academic life. At the initial stage this uncertainty is probably highest and it would reduce gradually with time. Schuetz (1944) described this stage of the new comers as a “field of adventure...a questionable topic of investigation...and a problematic situation itself and one hard to master” (p. 108).

### **Chinese International Students**

To clarify how the key areas of research on Chinese international students are, and also to provide a frame of reference for the particular analysis of research on the experience of Chinese international students, a more systematic overview of the growing and highly diverse research literature on Chinese international students, as an analysis and interpretation of current research, is necessary. In the light of this broader context, we see Chinese international students as complex ‘constructed’ subjects:

- As customers, as a source of revenue for higher education institutions, especially institutions in the USA, United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia, where previous research has explored Chinese students’ perception and choice of ‘selecting study destinations’ (Mazzarol et al, 2001; British Council, 2008; Shen, 2010).

- As a source of ‘irritation’, inducing or initiating change at the institutional and individual level, and in some cases as a source of ‘fear’, also, due to their impact on teaching and learning at host institutions (McGowan & Potter, 2008; Eaves, 2011).

- As a challenge and option for mutual learning and mutual enrichment in theory-building and developing practice (Zhou, 2007; Tan et al, 2008).

- As the world’s largest floating academic potential, which will increasingly lead to intensive competition within a worldwide market of top-level manpower and, as a consequence, to a growing share in the international student body (Huang, 2002; Szelényi, 2006; Finn, 2010; Pan, 2010, 2011; Zeithammer & Kellogg, 2011).

- As a special reference group for general research on culture shock, adaptation and adjustment (Pritchard, 2011).

This research will mainly be restricted to an explanation which Chinese international students are regarded as customers, as the world's largest increasing academic force and a special group in reference to general researches on acculturation, culture shock, and cross-cultural adaptation. In this study, Chinese international students in Spain mainly refer to Chinese undergraduates, graduate students, Ph.D. students, exchange students and students in language school who are staying in Spain with the purpose of study from the mainland China.

Henze and Zhu (2012) analyzed some important researches on Chinese international students during the recent 30 years and provided us an overall perspective on this field, as we can see from the figure 2.1, the current research literature on Chinese students fully covers from beginning to end of the process of studying abroad, including pre-entry, abroad, to return home or to stay abroad. Recently researchers tend to focus on the academic performance, and psychological adjustment of Chinese students.

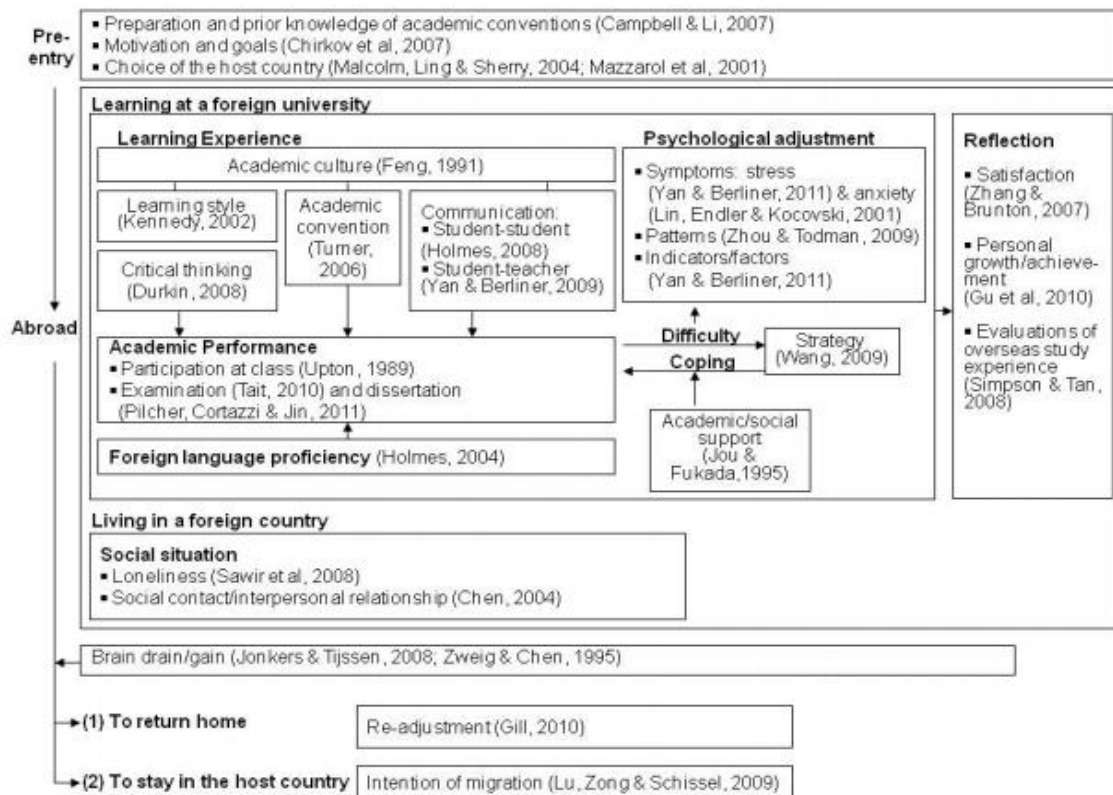


Figure 2.1 Landscape of current research on Chinese international students



*Source:* Henze, J., & Zhu, J. N. (2012). Current Research on Chinese Students Studying Abroad. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 7 (1): 91.

Sue and Kirk (1973) employed a quantitative study comparing two ethnic groups with their acculturation process and found that Chinese students are more conservative in the sense of obedience and conformance to authority, less socially extroverted, more inhibited and conventional, less ready to express their impulses. Furthermore, due to their cultural backgrounds, family influence and tradition, Chinese international students have more difficulties in their adaptation to American culture and campus life.

In the research of Sun and Chen (1999) on Chinese international students in the U.S.A, three dimensions of difficulties were found that are language ability, cultural awareness, and academic achievements. Specifically, cultural differences, insufficient of language proficiency, and unfamiliarity with the learning environment were found to be the primary barriers in the academic and social adaptation of Chinese international students.

Yan and Berliner (2009) studied the stressful respects of Chinese international students' academic adaptation. Most participants were identified to have experienced a high level of academic stress. And insufficient of language proficiency, strong desire to get academic success, ineffective communication with professors and educational differences between China and the host country were seen to contribute to such kind of stress. Huang (2006) found that Chinese international students were most skillful in their English reading ability and grammar, while their defective areas were the ability of English speaking and listening. Further more, Chinese international students were also lack of confidence of their vocabulary, pronunciation and writing ability.

Chinese international students' cross-cultural experiences are also explored in a psychological perspective. For example, Wang and Mallinckrodt (2006) studied the relation between psychological attachment and acculturation of 144 Chinese international students. Their study told us that students who bore more attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance had more possibility to experience socio-cultural adaptation difficulties and psychological stress. Another important findings of their research was that

international students who preferred to adopt the values and life styles of the host country seemed to acquire better adaptation to the local society.

The research of Wei et al. (2007) showed that acculturative stress is positively linked with depression of Chinese international students. To be precise, international students with high level of maladaptive perfectionism (discrepancy between performance and expectations) were more likely to experience depression. And the length of stay in the host country together with maladaptive perfectionism and acculturative stress serve as predictors of depression.

Yan (2017) in his new book concluded that because of the cultural background, although research demonstrated that Chinese international students are experiencing more distress, signs of Chinese students' stress may not be visible to outsiders. Traditionally, Chinese children were taught to be studious and quiet, and they are less likely to seek help from the outside for emotional problems. To "save face", Chinese international students are discouraged to express concerns and are inhibited in seeking help from non family member or beyond close friends.

In spite of the abundant research literature on Chinese international students, so far a coherent frame of theory building combining multi-dimensional empirical study are relatively insufficient, particularly concerning the transnational adjustment of the "One Child" while they study abroad. It's worth noting that for Chinese international students, their acculturation experiences are not the same with those of refugees, immigrants, and ethnic minorities within Spain, owing to sojourning issues, the temporary nature of their stay in Spain, the desire to succeed in Spanish academic system, and the demand rapidly to equip themselves with skills to negotiate the needs of their everyday life, interaction with host society.

## **2.2. Acculturation and Adaptation**

### **Acculturation**

Study abroad is a multidisciplinary field, it has been investigated extensively from different perspectives in various social science disciplines, like cross-cultural psychology and sociology, and has also received contributions from applied linguistics, and education. At the same time, studies in cross-cultural adaptation have included all types of

sojourners who move to a different culture, whether as refugees, migrants, students or professionals.

There are many competing views about the meaning of acculturation. Two formulations in particular have been widely quoted. The first is

*Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups...under this definition, acculturation is to be distinguished from culture change, of which it is but one aspect, and assimilation, which is at times a phase of acculturation (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p:149–150).*

In another formulation, acculturation was defined as

*Culture change is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems. Acculturative change may be the consequence of direct cultural transmission; it may be derived from non-cultural causes, such as ecological or demographic modification induced by an impinging culture; it may be delayed, as with internal adjustments following upon the acceptance of alien traits or patterns; or it may be a reactive adaptation of traditional modes of life (Social Science Research Council, 1954, p: 974).*

For the last three decades, the study on acculturation remains an important strength of scientific inquiry, which is directly connected with sojourning in the new culture within the discipline of psychology. Generally, the conception of acculturation represents a major empirically actuated and practically beneficial theory to facilitate our understanding about cultural transition for sojourners travelling from one culture to another in the field of the affecting factors, the processes, and the consequences of cultural transition.

In the first definition, acculturation is considered as a broader concept of culture change and change is viewed to be generated in “either or both groups”; as such, acculturation generally happen in the host or dominant group while also in the non-dominant group. Acculturation is not the same with assimilation; that is to say, there exist several alternative goals and patterns to the process of acculturation, for instance,

John W. Berry's four-fold model of acculturation strategies: assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization. Integration refers to the action that values both cultural maintenance and intergroup relations; separation describes a cultural maintenance activity but not appraise intergroup relations; assimilation refers to reject the individual's original cultural identity with the fully adaptation of the new culture; marginalization refers to neither hold the cultural maintenance nor the intergroup relations.

In the second formulation, a number of special features are proposed, for instance, change that is not direct and is delayed (internal adaptation, presumably of both a psychological and cultural character). Fundamentally, acculturation can be "reactive", which means by refusing the cultural influence of the host group and returning back to a more "traditional" way of life, instead of inevitably towards greater similarities with the host culture (Berry, 2005).

The stress and coping experience of individuals become most conspicuous when they face crucial changes and challenges in their life. Sojourning experience demonstrate a proper example of such an important life change. Expectedly for most sojourners, immigrants or international students, coping responses to relieve stresses that result from cultural transition are inevitable and natural parts of acculturation. The common stressors faced by immigrants (Yakushko et al, 2008) are (1) pre-migration stressors, such as fear linked with flight and conflict that would happen in the host country; and (2) post-migration stressors associated with acculturative stress, relocation, loss of social status and contact, mental and physical health problems, and oppression by the host society.

In addition, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) claim that although different individuals face stressors in the similar environment, they can have different experiences, and psychological and physical reactions, because of individuals' inclinations in: (1) primary phase – to which degree stressors are regarded as threats; and (2) secondary phase – the assessment and evaluation of one's individual's to cope with stressors. The second phase refers directly to the coping strategies that the sojourners would most likely to choose to deal with the target stressors and would subsequently affect the individual's adaptation and well-being.

## Adaptation

Within the framework of acculturation research, adaptation can be understood as the relatively stable changes that take place in an individual or group in response to external demands (Berry & Sam, 1997). As such, adaptation would or would not further the “fit” between international students and the host country. In other words, adaptation is not an expression that necessarily indicates that international students turn to become more like their host country, nevertheless, it could involve resistance or maybe attempts to influence the host cultures or to get away from them. When viewed this way, adaptation may or may not be a positive outcome (i.e., referring to only well-adapted). The two terms---adaptation and adjustment would be used interchangeably in this paper.

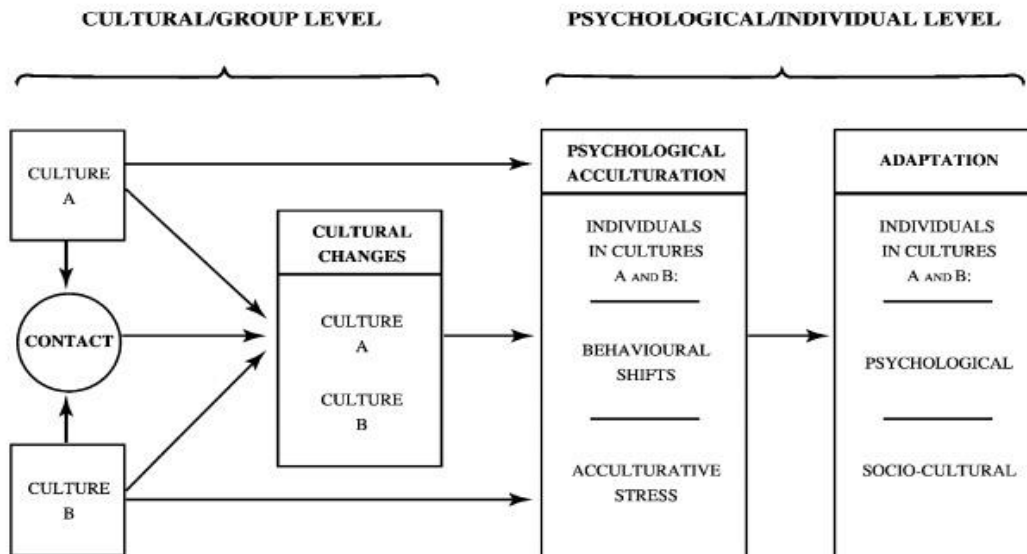


Figure 2.2 A General Framework for Understanding Acculturation

*Source:* Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation and adaptation. *Applied Psychology*, 46, 5–68.

Adaptation is also multifaceted. In the theories and research on sojourners, the most frequently research approach to adaptation implies that it can be divided into two categories: sociocultural adaptation and psychological adaptation (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Ward and Kennedy (1993, 1999) suggested that sociocultural adaptation should be best understood from a culture-learning framework, and it embraces behavior modification through cultural learning and social skills acquisition; psychological

adaptation may be best understood in a stress and coping framework, and it consists of the individuals' emotional well-being and a collection of skills that are necessary for coping with situations to produce this well-being.

Ward, Okura, Kennedy and Kojima (1998) researched the sociological and psychological challenges that individuals faced in the new environments using a longitudinal study. They argued that sociocultural adaptation is reflected in how well an individual is capable of managing daily life during his acculturating in the host environment, whereas psychological adaptation largely refers to the physical and psychological well-being of the individual. Sociocultural adaptation normally shows a linear improvement with the length of residence in the host country; however, psychological problems often show a growth soon after the arrival, but it follows a general (but variable) decreasing trend over time. Other research by Ward (1996, 2001) further argued that different sets of variables would affect the psychological and sociocultural adaptations: sociocultural adaptation is related to the length of stay in the host environment, individuals' cultural knowledge and language ability, what's more, the acculturation strategy; psychological adaptation is connected with personality traits, available social support, and coping strategies. As such, good sociocultural adaptation could be predicted by the degree of contact between the sojourners and the host environment, the individuals' cultural knowledge, and their positive intergroup attitudes, whereas good psychological adaptation could be predicted by personality variables of the individuals, the social support they can get and life change events.

Previous literature demonstrated that international students' adaptive challenges to colleges or universities are multifaceted, including social, academic, and psychological issues that are highly related (Church, 1993; Ward & Kennedy, 2001). During the period from 1960s to 70s, researches dedicated to international students' adaptation in the U.S.A mostly concentrated on academic performance (Halamandaris & Power, 1999). With the condition that the positive adaptation outcome is correlated with academic success, the researches turn to understand better those factors, which would contribute to the academic success of international students. Researches often mix academic issues with other ones related to social relations and cultural adaptation. The use of broad, ill defined terms like academic success and academic adjustment has led to conflicting results and

prevented researchers from more effectively targeting key topics for study and analysis (Altbach & Wang, 1989).

Tseng and Newton (2002) identified four major fields in the adaptation of international students in the U.S.A: general living adaptation, academic adaptation, socio-cultural adaptation, and personal-psychological adaptation. Exactly speaking, general living adaptation refers to accommodate to American food, transportation, local climate, living environment, and health care systems. Academic adaptation includes proficiency in native language, knowledge about the American educational system and learning environment, and effective learning skills. While sociocultural adaptation issues refer to culture shock, new social/cultural regulation, traditions and customs, perceived discrimination, and local laws. On the other hand, psychological adaptation issues refer to loneliness, isolation, depression, homesickness, frustration, and the loss of identity.

Tseng and Newton (2002) also identified eight coping strategies for positive adaptation adopted by international students, including expanding their worldview, understanding themselves and the others, developing relationship with others, establishing social and cultural contacts, asking for information, improving language proficiency, building relationships with advisors and instructors, and solving problems.

Literature on international students generally distinguished three interrelated domains of adaptation: socio-cultural, academic and psychological adaptation (Chataway & Berry, 1989; Church, 1993; Ward & Kennedy, 2001; Zhou, et al., 2008). Therefore, to present the panoramic view of the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese international students, this study would investigate their experience of socio-cultural, academic and psychological adaptation.

## **2.3. Influencing Factors of the Cross-cultural Adaptation of International Students**

Actually the overall level of satisfaction and adaptation of international students is identified to be a function of time with a gradual process, affecting by many factors. In this literature review, four main factors: language proficiency, cultural distance, social interaction and friendship ties, and personal characteristics would be presented.

### **Language Proficiency**

Language proficiency has been central to research on influencing factors of acculturation. The reviewed literature identified lack of language proficiency as a major obstacle for the cross-cultural adaptation. This fact arises interesting questions, taking in account that enhancing the foreign language competence was also one of the main goals of studying abroad (Kim, 1988; Cushner, & Karim, 2004; Henze & Zhu, 2012). On the one side, proficiency in the language of the host society can help sojourners to maintain contacts with the majority cultural group, and be requirement for participation in social and academic institutions. On the other side, language is also one of the factors that could regulate the boundaries of certain groups; lack of language competence could obstacle contacts and participation in certain activities with the majority group.

Language competence problems affect international students' interactions with local people, their classmates, teachers and even faculty members. Language limitations led to less communication, misunderstanding, and limited participation in social and academic activities. On all accounts, the lack of proficiency in language affects the overall cross-cultural adaptation of international students. Many students from Asian countries were found to meet problems in taking notes, understanding lectures, answering questions, and writing essays (Fukada & Jou, 1996; Greer, 2005; Kuo & Roysircar, 2006). While there was no evidence that could show a clear positive link between language and successful acculturation.

### **Cultural Distance**

Hofstede (1980) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others”. According to this short definition, culture is always a collective phenomenon, while it can be connected to different collectives. In his earlier factor analysis research with data from a multinational company (IBM), Hofstede (1980) proposed four dimensions distinguishing between cultures at the national level: 1. Power distance, related to the nature of human relationship in terms of hierarchy. 2. Individualism versus Collectivism, related to relationship between the individual and the group. Individualistic societies emphasize the “I” versus the “we”. Individualism encourages people to take care of themselves and make decisions based on individual needs. While collectivism encourages people to be primary loyal to the group and make decisions based on what is best for the group. In the



individualistic cultures, people speak out, question, and are confrontational and direct. In the collectivistic cultures, people blend in, avoid conflict and use intermediaries. 3. Uncertainty avoidance, related to how cultures adapt to changes and cope with uncertainty. 4. Masculinity versus Femininity, masculinity is seen to emphasize ambition and acquisition of wealth, while femininity is seen to stress caring and nurturing behaviors, sexuality equality, and environmental awareness. In later research, Hofstede added two further dimensions, the long-term versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus self-restraint (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

	China	Spain	Mean score:53 countries/regions
Individuality	20	51	43
Power distance	80	57	57
Masculinity	66	42	49
Uncertainty avoidance	30	86	65

Figure 2.3 The Hofstede’s Culture Dimension score of China and Spain

Source: Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture’s Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations across Nations*. 2nd Edition, Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications.

Figure 2.3 shows us the differences of Hofstede’s Culture Dimension between China and Spain. As to the differences of China and Spain compared with the mean, nearly all the scores of China and that of Spain situate on the separated side of mean scores. There are huge differences between China and Spain on the four dimensions: individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity. For instance, China scores significantly lower on individuality than Spain. Under this highly collectivist culture, Chinese people consider more on the interests of the community but not necessarily on themselves, they are more likely to put the overall well-being of society long before personal preferences. In-group considerations affect their action, Chinese people won’t prefer to stand out from the crowd.

The biggest difference between China and Spain is the uncertainty avoidance dimension. Spain is on the higher side, while China is on the lower one. To most Spanish people, they are more likely to try to control the future, meanwhile they would feel less comfortable with ambiguity. To most Chinese people, they think that the truth is relative and the laws are flexible to suit the current situation, and they are more comfortable with the ambiguity (Hofstede, 2001). With regard to the masculinity, the score of Spain is 42, lower than the average. While with the score of 66, the Chinese society is a masculine, which means that they are success oriented and driven. Chinese students attach importance to their studies, regarding their academic scores and rankings of exams as the evaluation standard of their success. Compared with the other three dimensions, power distance is a correspondingly “similar” characteristic seen between China and Spain. China ranks significantly higher in power distance. Chinese society tends to be submission to authority, ancestor worship, male dominance, fatalism and defensiveness, conservatism and endurance.

From a more subjective point of view, Ward defined cultural distance as the *perceived* similarities and differences between two cultures (Masgoret & Ward, 2006, p.71). The level of difficulty faced by international students was found related to the extent of cultural similarity between the society of origin and the host society (Babiker, Cox, and Miller, 1980). The adaptation of international students would be more difficult as greater the differences between the culture of origin and the host culture (Pedersen, 1991). The dissimilar cultural values and practices between cultures may make international students feel difficult to adapt to the new environment. Thus, studies have shown that international students from collectivist cultures residing in an individualistic culture had lower levels of satisfaction and adaptation than those coming individualist cultures (Kinoshita and Bowman, 1998; Sam, 2001).

Furthermore, the study conducted by Sun and Chen (1997) employing in-depth interviews with 10 Mainland Chinese students showed that cultural differences seem to be the main obstacle in the adjusting process of Chinese students in the United States. They observed that the differences between collectivistic orientations in Chinese society and individualistic orientations in American society affect the adaptation of Chinese students in the U.S.A. In this context, they identified three dimensions of difficulties

Mainland Chinese students encountered in the U.S.A.: language ability, academic achievements and cultural awareness. In the same line, Major (2005) found that Asian students had difficulties adapting to the Western learning culture due to the features of the Socratic dialogical practices like the questioning, criticizing, refuting, arguing, and debating), which are usual in Western but not unfamiliar to Asian educational cultures.

### **Social Interaction and Friendship Ties**

The importance of social interaction and friend ties for the successful adaptation of international students has long been emphasized by researchers. For example, Bochner et al, (1977) analyzed the social networks of 30 international students in America and differentiated three categories of social networks: 1) the conational network which suffices for the confirmation and expression of the original culture; 2) the network with host nationals, which serves as the instrumental facilitation of social and academic desires; 3) the multinational network which is more recreational. Since then, the social networks of international students have become more complex due to the innovation of IT media such as social software and video chat. Recent research showed that the level (quantity of networks) of social media use was positively associated with level of perceived social adaptation but not with the level of perceived social support (Seo et al, 2016).

According to Kim (2001), the adaptation process of sojourners is influenced by the strength of host ties, the size of social networks, and the amount of host media use. That is, the more sojourners use the host interpersonal and mass communication, the better the individual's intercultural adaptation. The quantity and quality of contact with host nationals also are key factors to the adaptation process. The research of Surdam and Collins (1984) and Poyrazli et al. (2004) indicated that international students who often interact with natives were significantly more well-adapted than those that mostly socialize with other international students. Similarly, a study of Taiwanese international students found that those who had more social interactions and social support from the natives reported less loneliness feelings. Their overall experience in the host country was influenced by the quality of social relationships with the natives. (Ying and Liese, 1994).

### **Personal Characteristics**

The level of international students' adaptation is also affected by personal factors such as gender, age, level of education, length of stay, and type of pair engagement. Many studies have found that female international students experienced much more difficulty than male students in adapting to the new culture (Church, 1982; Manese, Sedlack, and Leong, 1988; Pruitt, 1978). Younger international students tend to adjust more quickly (Ying and Liese, 1994) while elder international students are found to have less successful adaptation mainly due to for the reason of housing and marital issues (Huntley, 1993); and the level of international students' adaptation was positively related to their length of stay (Hull, 1978).

Also, the process of adaptation is influenced by other variables, including: general knowledge about a new culture (Ward and Searle, 1991); previous experience abroad (Klineberg and Hull, 1979); acculturation modes (Ward and Kennedy, 1994); temporary versus permanent residence in a new country (Ward and Kennedy, 1993); and cross-cultural training (Deshpande and Viswesvaran, 1992).

## **2.4.Process-oriented models**

After the 1950s, with the increasing numbers of expatriate worker, international students and scholars, studies on cross-cultural adaptation have received more attention in the areas of sociology, psychology and anthropology. Firstly, research in these areas has extensively focused on the psychological problems related to cross-cultural adaptation (Anderson, 1994). "The early theories applied to the study of international students were clinically oriented and strongly related to medical models of sojourner adjustment" (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001).

In contrast to that problem-oriented perspective, later research considered sojourning as a learning experience and growth producing process. It argued that appropriate positive action would consist of preparation, orientation, and the acquisition of skills relevant to the host culture (Bochner, 1982). Researchers turned to investigate the developmental and growth-facilitating side of cross-cultural adaptation. Sojourning was viewed as a dynamic experience, not only for international students but also for members of the host culture. The following literature review will discuss the main theoretical and empirical works which view cross-cultural adaptation as a learning process.

Culture shock is one of the most practical, productive and controversial concepts for researches on the theme of cross-cultural adaptation. It remains a core concept within the fields of psychology, anthropology and intercultural communication. Oberg was the first researcher who applied culture shock to all the people that sojourn in new cultures to explain the common feelings of those who first faced their cross-cultural experience. Alongside the culture shock concept, U-Curve model by Lysgaard and W-Curve model of adaptation have emerged and evolved. Other researchers also developed elaborations or variations on the culture shock models to deal with what they considered simplistic or overly deterministic aspects of the original conceptions.

When dealing with topics with respect to acculturation strategies, two major issues should be taken into considerations (Berry, 1980, 1990), which are: (1) maintenance of heritage culture and identity; (2) contact and participation in the host society. According to Berry, a conceptual framework that consists of four acculturation strategies is generated, when these two issues are considered simultaneously. Young Yun Kim (2001) proposed the Stress-Adaptation-Growth model, claiming that in a spiral-like process, personal growth and cultural adaptation happen gradually. The challenges faced by sojourners are important for their personal growth, and owing to those experienced difficulties that sojourners would learn and adapt, or, in other words, grow.

Together, the following theories would provide a firm conceptual foundation for this study, and assist us understand the Chinese international students' cross-cultural adaptation.

### **2.4.1. Culture Shock Theory and the U-curve Model**

For decades, culture shock is one of the most practical, productive and controversial concepts for researches on the theme of cross-cultural adaptation. It remains a core concept within the fields of psychology, anthropology and intercultural communication. Many researchers examined psychological reactions of sojourners to divide the stages involved in the process of cross-cultural adaptation (Adler, 1975; Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963; Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1958).

Although the anthropologist Ruth Benedict from Columbia University may have been the original source of culture shock, the term “culture shock” was first publicly used

in the year of 1951 by the anthropologist Cora DuBois with the aim to describe the disorienting experience faced by many anthropologists when sojourning in foreign cultures (Paige, 1993). In 1954, Kalervo Oberg expanded DuBois' term to apply to all the people who sojourn in new cultures. Oberg used "culture shock" to explain the common feelings of those who first faced their cross-cultural experience, defining it as a series of emotional reactions "precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" which would affect all those "people who have been suddenly transplanted abroad" (Oberg, 1954).

According to Oberg (1954), culture shock includes 4 stages of honeymoon, crisis, resolution (or recovery), and stabilization. The honeymoon stage happens when sojourners first encounter the new culture, and is characterized by a sense of fascination, elation and optimism. Then the sojourners begin to feel more impatient, anxious, and frustrated in the new culture, encountering more differences in the new culture and difficulties in adapting. Then the sojourners start to experience the crisis stage, which is one of hostility and emotionally stereotyped attitudes toward the new culture and increased association with fellow sojourners. When language knowledge and ability to function well in the new culture increased, here comes the resolution stage. At the final stage of adaptation, anxiety is replaced by acceptance and enjoyment between the host culture and their own native culture.

Henderson, Milhouse, and Cao (1993) examined Chinese students' cross-cultural experience in America using four-stage model of cultural shock of Oberg. The study indicated that the first "honeymoon" stage which lasts from one week to one month, was the shortest in the four stages. Chinese students' elation and optimism subsided as soon as they confronted the pragmatics of living in the American way of life. While the crisis stage which varies from two to three months is the most painful and the longest period in the four stages. In this crisis stage, most Chinese students became emotionally paralyzed with different degrees of indications. The majority of the international students arrived at the last resolution and stabilization stage while they became familiar with the host environment step by step, and endeavored to adapt to the foreign society, local customs and education system.

Lysgaard (1955) first posited the U-curve model describing a curvilinear relationship between the sojourners' psychological reactions and the length of time that the sojourners stay in the new culture. This process consists of three stages: initial adaptation, crisis, and regained adaptation. The level of adaptation in this curve is seen as a function of time in the new surroundings. The U-curve begins with a initial optimism and jocundity for the new culture and environment, then a following dip precipitated to the low point of the U-curve by the straitened circumstances in adapting to the new culture, the following is a gradual recovery to a higher, more positive attitude as the sojourners become adjusted.

Furtherly, Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) attached a new U-curve of re-entry (or return home) extending this adaptation process of U-curve model to a "W-curve". The new phase is which the sojourners goes through a similar process once again. The following research findings on the curve hypotheses haven't been so confirming. A longitudinal study on the Japanese students' psychological and sociocultural adaptation in New Zealand, which was conducted by Ward and her colleagues (1998), found a linear, progressive process of adaptation. While the researches of Church (1982) and Torbiorn (1982) were more favorable to the U-curve model.

Many researchers argue that the models are neither accurately descriptive nor particularly predictive. The models do not capture the unpredictability and the apparent "messiness" of the adaptation process. Neither have they accounted for cases when the stages did not occur in order. For instance, Colleen Ward and other researchers have found that sojourners do not always experience a "honeymoon" phase but distress is frequently highest in the beginning of the adaptation (Ward et al., 2001).

## **2.4.2. Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity**

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) of Bennett's specifically explains us more the intercultural learning process. The model presents how people construe cultural differences and react in transnational situations based on their different backgrounds (Bennett, 1993). Professor Milton Bennett offers us a conceptual tool that researchers can employ to ascertain the personal reactions, so that we can better discern the position of an individual on the matter of adaptation to another culture. The

stages in the development of intercultural sensitivity provide elements for observations that can serve to diagnose. A relativist position is at the center of the development of intercultural sensitivity. DMIS is an interesting tool for understanding the emotional movement and some of classic reactions to culture shock.

The DMIS frame conceptualizes the increasing sensitivity to cultural difference into six stages, moving from ethnocentric to ethnorelativist stages. As developmental model, the DMIS assumes a linear progression from the beginning stage to the end. However, this model takes into account the possibility of “retreat” or “regress” during the process. The progression through the stages would not always be one-way or permanent.

The DMIS defines the first three stages as ethnocentric, which means that individual’s own culture is experienced as central to the reality one builds and people judges the others based on their own experiences and culture. In the first stage, negation, people use to deny cultural differences, perceive their own culture as the only real culture, and do not perceive difference, or construe it in rather vague ways. It is suggested that denial of cultural difference means the default condition of monocultural primary socialization. Whereas, the defensive response to cultural differences is that one’s own culture is conceived as the only “viable” culture and differences are like threats to one’s self-esteem and identity.

The last three DMIS stages are defined as ethnorelatives, which means that the individual’s own culture is perceived in the context of other cultures. From the first to the third stage, there is a fundamental shift from an unconscious ethnocentric assumption to a conscious assumption that the individual’s own culture is one of the several correspondingly viable cultures. And other cultures are viewed as equally complex and different constructions of the reality. In addition, it is believed that identifying the significant differences between cultures is crucial to understand the cross-cultural interaction. While the importance is that the acceptance does not mean agreement. Hence it is probable that one can accept the existence of other cultures and values, but still feel that the values are inappropriate. That’s to say that the adaptation to different cultural means that the individual acquires the ability to shift the cultural position which is the basis for biculturalism or multiculturalism, which is not only cognitive, but also includes affective and behavioral adaptation. As such, people in the adaptation stage could express



their experience in other culture as befitting feelings and behaviors. Integration lets the individual expand the definition of self to contain the movement in and out of different cultural values.

## **2.5. Berry's Four Acculturation Strategies**

The cross-cultural acculturation is not experienced by all the sojourners in the same way, differences exist in how groups and individuals try to engage the process. Berry (1980) described these variations as acculturation strategies. Usually, acculturation strategies consist of both attitudes (the preference of an individual on how to acculturate), and behaviors (the actual activities of an individual), which are presented in the day-to-day intercultural encounters. A variety of antecedent factors that are both cultural and psychological can affect sojourners to conduct the strategies, and variable strategies orient to different adaptive consequences that are again cultural and psychological.

Berry (1994, 1997, 2005) stated that acculturation strategies emerge from the combination of two basic attitudinal dimensions: maintenance of the original cultural identity and practices, and communication with the other cultural groups. The combination produces four acculturation strategies (Fig. 2.4): integration, separation, assimilation and marginalization. To be specific, integration refers to the action that values both cultural maintenance and intergroup relations. Separation describes a cultural maintenance activity but not appraise intergroup relations. Assimilation refers to reject the individual's original cultural identity with the fully adaptation of the new culture. Marginalization refers to neither hold the cultural maintenance nor the intergroup relations.

Ward and Deuba (1999) conducted a study on 104 foreign residents in Nepal, examining the acculturation manners about the relationship of sociocultural and psychological adaptation from the original culture to the host culture. Their study found that the relation between sociocultural and psychological adjustment changes with the situations of the individual's acculturation, which is that their correlation increases with the closeness to or the integration to the dominant country. Participants whose acculturation mode was assimilation style were found to experience less social difficulty. And, strong host national identification was correlated with the better sociocultural

adaptation while strong co-national identification was associated with psychological well-being. That's to say, in the framework of Berry's four acculturation strategies, sojourners whose acculturation mode is an integrated style would bear markedly less psychological hardship than others.

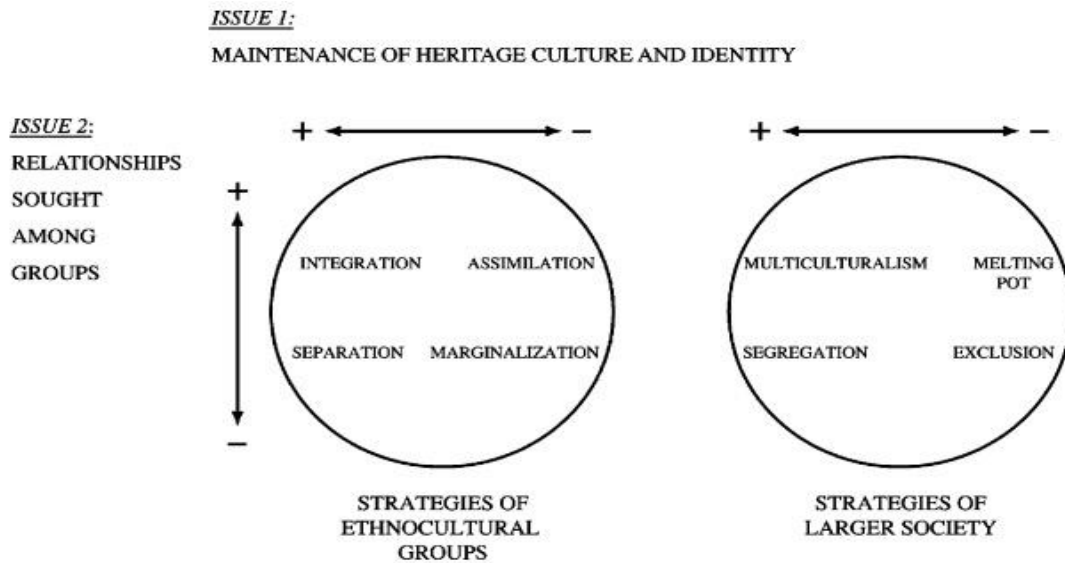


Figure 2.4 Four Acculturation Strategies by Berry

*Source:* Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation and adaptation. *Applied Psychology*, 46, 5-68.

Focusing on Chinese population, the research of Guan and Dodder (2001) resulted in a similar construct to Berry's model. Their study investigated two groups of Chinese students: 107 Chinese international students in the U.S.A and 185 Chinese native students in China to compare the impact of cross cultural contact on values and identity. The four dimensions of group integration, self-protection, social order and cultural conservation were tested. The hypothesis of the research was that Chinese native students in China would have a higher score on all the values, and the connection with the American culture would supposedly reduce the importance of the dimensions among the participants in America. Unexpectedly, the group in China scored lower in the two dimensions: group integration and self-protection, and followed the hypotheses scoring. While as predicted they scored higher in cultural conservation. The study also indicated that cross-cultural contact would bring about changes in the individuals: some values increase their

importance in cultural adaptation among Chinese students while others decrease their significance for cultural identity.

Regarding the relation between length of residence time and acculturation, the study of Birman and his colleagues (2001) employed a multidimensional view of adjustment about three acculturation dimensions that were language, identity and behavior with 144 Soviet Jewish adolescent refugees in America. They expected that acculturation would be related to the age of arrival and length of residence time in the host country, and a linear acculturation process that was the increasing adjustment to the American culture would gradually diminish the Russian cultural identity. Against these hypotheses, Birman et al (2001) found that compared with their parents, the identification of Soviet adolescents was more with Russian culture.

## **2.6. Kim's Integrative Theory of Cross-cultural Adaptation**

Professor Young Yun Kim's theory is comprehensive and many existing methods and models are combined to cover the psychological, communicative, and personal developmental issues that are realized accordingly with the individual's cross-cultural adaptation. Adaptation is placed at the intersection of an individual and the new environment, regarding cross-cultural adaptation as a communication process, which "makes the intersection possible through the exchange of information" (Kim, 2001, p.32). Kim's cross-cultural adaptation theory assumes that (1) each individual is an open system; (2) every person is a self-reflexive and dynamic organization that adjusts to environmental challenges; (3) adjustment is a driving and complex process that creates qualitative changes in the individual.

Kim argues that both the quality and the quantity of sojourners' communication activities in the shelter environment are critical to their adjustment. Kim identifies a number of factors that would facilitate or impede the process with the purpose of explaining the differential rates at which the cross-cultural adaptation process develops. First, sojourners' communication in the host society is conceptualized as having two dimensions that are inseparable: personal communication (host communication competence) and social communication. Specifically, personal communication means the sojourners' abilities to relate to the host culture, which is the individuals' overall capacity

to receive and manage information befittingly and effectually, and to initiate and respond to the others correspond with the dominant communication system. Those key elements that comprise personal communication competence have been grouped into cognitive, affective, and operational (or behavioral) categories.

Knowledge of the host language and culture is the primary element of cognitive competence, which consists of both language proficiency and knowledge about the daily pragmatic use of the language of host culture. Affective competence refers to individual's "readiness" to accommodate cross-cultural challenges, such as empathy, flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity and the ability to suspend judgment. This competence lets sojourners empathize with local people, according to and generating a sense of belonging, what's more, a positive regard for the host culture' local people. Behavioral competence is the individual's "abilities to be flexible and resourceful in actually carrying out what he or she is capable of in the cognitive and affective dimensions" (Kim, 2001, p. 269).

According to Kim, social communication is comprised of two aspects, which are host social communication and ethnic (sojourner) social communication. Host social communication refers to social participation through interpersonal relation with native people in the new culture and the exposure to the mass media of the host country. In the theory of Kim, the adaptation process of sojourners is influenced by the strength of host ties, the size of social networks, and the amount of host media use. That is, the more sojourners use the host interpersonal and mass communication, the better the individual's intercultural transformation. Sojourners' participation in the social processes of a new culture is complicated by interactions with co-ethnics. On the one hand, ethnic social communication can facilitate short-term adaptation as it involves interactions with people who have already advanced in their adaptive experiences. On the other hand, prolonged communication within ethnic communities can impede long-term adaptation.

Apart from the personal and social communication dimensions of cross-cultural adaptation, environment is the third dimension. Three conditions or factors of the environment have been identified as being most significant to the cross-cultural adaptation process: the degree of host receptivity toward sojourners, the conformity pressure thrown from the host culture to the sojourners, and the sojourner's ethnic group strength in the host culture. Kim (2001) notes that a receptive host environment facilitates

adaptation by extending its welcome and support, and exerts implicit or explicit pressure on sojourners to acquire and practice the new cultural norms. The presence of a resourceful and organized co-ethnic community, however, tends to discourage adaptation because a strong ethnic support network tends to perpetuate the long-term maintenance of the original cultural identity and practices.

Kim's theory also takes into account individual background characteristics that have significant bearing on the adaptation process. Three key aspects constitute the overall "adaptation potential" of a sojourner: one's readiness for and understanding of the challenges involved in crossing cultural borders and his or her knowledge of the host culture, the proximity of one's culture to the host culture, and one's psychological makeup or personality attributes such as openness and positivity. Together, these personal characteristics can explain variations in sojourners' host communication competence and their participation in social communication activities. Collectively and interactively, these dimensions influence, and are influenced by, the adaptive changes leading to intercultural transformation. Kim notes that cross-cultural adaptation can be seen as a continuum along which sojourners show differential levels of intercultural transformation.

The step-by-step process of intercultural transformation, then, is the result of continuous participation in the dominant society. Kim describes intercultural transformation in terms of its three specific facets: intercultural identity, functional fitness, and psychological health. Functional fitness is reflected in individuals' capabilities of carrying out day-to-day activities smoothly and feeling comfortable in a host environment. As Kim states, "functionally fit individuals have developed a broadened, clearer, more objective, and more differentiating perception of the host cultural and communication patterns" (Kim, 2001, p.186). An increase in functional fitness is accompanied by an increase in overall psychological health as problems associated with culture shock and stress decline. The increased functional fitness and psychological health of sojourners in the host environment lead to formation of a new, alternative identity that is "broader, more inclusive, and more intercultural" (Kim, 2001, p.191).

The consideration of intercultural transformation in the process of cross-cultural adjustment is the highlight of Kim's theory, especially the development of an intercultural identity. An intercultural identity results when an individual internalizes new cultural

elements and constructs an active self-based on his or her understanding of multiple realities. Kim explains cross-cultural adaptation as “a personal journey that ultimately leads to a transcendence of cultural categories in individual consciousness” (Kim, 2001, p.195). Essentially, the process of intercultural transformation results in an “intercultural personhood”, a special kind of orientation toward self, others, and the world.

In conclusion, Kim’s theory not only gives us a combinative explanation of how sojourners cope, learn, and experience personal development in a foreign society, it also highlights how an individual sojourner’s motivation and perception (both cognitive and affective) influence their adaptation and the individual transformation that occurs during the adaptation process.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study used a three-phased sequential mixed methods exploratory approach to address the research questions. Quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire and qualitative data from fieldwork. Preliminary pre-testing was held to collect information in order to modify or add specific questions to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was used as a self-evaluation of the ability that Chinese international students have on the cross-cultural adaptation in Spain. The questionnaire data were analyzed and the results helped to refine the questions for ethnographic field research. Furthermore, ethnographic field research comprising in-depth semi-structured interviews of 10 Chinese international students and two periods of participant observation, following a group of Chinese students of the UAM in different life contexts during two months, illuminated the cross-cultural experience in Spain from their own perspectives, reflecting the flesh and blood of the students' overseas lives. Two periods of participant observation are conducted to gain a close and intimate familiarity with this young group. Through an intensive involvement with the Chinese international students in the natural environment, more detailed, multidimensional and accurate information about the cross-cultural adaptation experience were acquired. Observable details and more hidden details were observed.

### **3.1. Quantitative Research**

#### **3.1.1. Instrument**

A web-based survey program with questionnaire was chosen to collect data for the quantitative study. Web-based surveys facilitate accessibility of target populations, instant data collection, generates coded data, and minimizes sources of error (Nardi, 2006). It also allows researcher to gather data from geographically dispersed populations (Dillman, 2007), which is ideal to gather information from the Chinese international students throughout Spain. Before sending out the link of the online survey, a pilot test of the questionnaire was carried out with a sample of thirty Chinese international students. Then some items were dropped and modified because of their valuable suggestions and comments.

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) was based on the works of Babiker, Cox and Miller (1980), Hanassab (2006), Kuo and Roysircar (2006), and Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). It included questions on demographic background information, acculturation strategies, and self-reports of sociocultural adaptation, academic adaptation and psychological adaptation. . The cover sheet explained the purpose of the research and assured respondents of the confidentiality of their information. The final version of the questionnaire had 63 items: 30 items on demographic characteristics of the respondents; 11 items on sociocultural adaptation, 12 items on academic adaptation, 10 items on psychological adaptation, which all used 5-point Likert-type response scales.

### **Demographic Information**

The section of demographic information asked participants about their gender, age, major, nationality, ethnicity, type of pair engagement, etc.

### **Acculturation Strategies**

To be more exact, the participants were also asked about their intercultural practices as reflected in the type of residence (e.g. live with Chinese vs live with non-Chinese), habits and customs (eating and dressing), social networks (friendship), social life, and academic performance. These questions would provide information about the acculturation strategy of the participants in terms of their maintenance of the home culture and their participation in the Spanish society and culture. The answers of the participants would reflect the Chinese international students' choice about the four acculturation strategies suggested by Berry. What's more, the last three questions of the first part of this questionnaire, which ask information about participants' plan after graduation, choice to study abroad again, and choice to study in Spain again, could be seen as an outcome of the acculturation of Chinese international students.

### **Adaptation scales**

#### **Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS)**

This part of the questionnaire is based on the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale developed by Ward and her colleagues (Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Ward & Rana-Deuba 1999). It was applied in samples of students studying abroad (e.g., Chinese international



students in Singapore and Japanese international students in New Zealand), with high internal reliability. Therefore, Ward & Kennedy (1999: 662) sustained that SCAS is a reliable and valid instrument that “can be easily modified according to the characteristics of the sojourning sample”. SCAS is a Likert 5-point scale and aims to measure participants’ experiences of the degree of social difficulties in their everyday social 61 situations in the host society (e.g., “Finding food that you enjoy”; “Understanding native jokes and humor”). The 5-point scale (1 = Not at all competent; 5 = Extremely competent) references to the amount of social difficulty they were currently experiencing. Higher scores indicate less social difficulty and better sociocultural adaptation. Its abridged version in the current study has 11 items in total (see Appendix A).

### **Academic Adaptation Scale (SACQ)**

The Academic Adaptation Scale is an abridged version of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) designed by Baker and Siryk (1999) for freshmen. SACQ is a self-report instrument to assess the student’s adaptation to college, assuming that the beginning of university life is a multifaceted process, which requires adjustment to a variety of demands. Baker and Siryk (1999) measured four aspects of adaptation to the university: academic adaptation, social adaptation, personal-emotional adaptation and institutional adaptation. In this application, some SAQC items were dropped due to confusion or inadequacy and a few additional items were modified and added to get the self-assessment of Chinese students about how well they met the educational demands of the Spanish university; how well they dealt with interpersonal experiences in the classroom; and their commitment towards the university as institution. The modified version has overall 12 items in Likert 5-point scale (1 = Not at all competent; 5 = Extremely competent). Higher scores indicate less difficulty and better adaptation (see Appendix A).

### **Psychological Adaptation Scale**

There are multiple measures of psychological adaptation in the literature, but no psychological adjustment scale was specifically developed for international students. Zung’s (1965) Self Rating Depression Scale was chosen because it could properly represent and measure international students’ psychological adaptation, it was widely

applied in the field of cross-cultural adaptation, including the adjustment of international students (e.g. Ward & Kennedy, 1999), and it has shown cross-cultural reliability and validity in that previous research. It comprises 20 items describing various symptoms of depression. For this study, 10 items were carefully choose because their suitability for the situation of the Chinese international students. Participants were asked to rate how frequently they have experienced those feelings during the past week on a four-point scale: number 1 means rarely or none of the time (less than one day), number 2 means some or a little of the time (1-2 days), number 3 means occasionally or a Moderate amount of the time (3-4 days), number 4 means most or all of the time (5-7 days). Lower scores indicate less difficulty and better adaptation (see Appendix A).

### **3.1.2.Procedure and Recruitment**

In order to recruit the participants in the web survey, the research proposal was submitted to the Education Office of Chinese Embassy in Madrid to obtain their collaboration in the recruitment of participants. Thanks to their approval, the participants were recruited through eight Chinese student unions registered in the Education Office of Chinese Embassy in Madrid. Each student union sent the link of questionnaire to its Wechat account. Wechat is a social network used by nearly every Chinese student. This ensured an appropriate sampling of participants, representative of the Chinese international students in Spain.

The questionnaire was written in Chinese, translating the existing scales when needed. Its items were constructed in a uniform format and uploaded on the website of the Chinese professional survey platform “Sojump” (<https://www.sojump.com/>).

Then the link of the questionnaire was sent to the mobile phone of potential participants via the Chinese social networking software “WeChat”. This procedure allows the respondents to fill out the survey quickly and easily at anytime they want. Survey research has shown that incentives offered with the request to answer a questionnaire improve the overall response rates (Church, 1993). Thus, a small incentive was offered to students based on a “lottery” (From 0.5 euro to 1 euro). The participants were requested to read and sign a simple consent form, which stated the purpose of the study and asked

them for consent to use the data in future publication of the study. This informed consent assured strict confidentiality of the data gathered from the online survey.

The estimated time for completing the survey was approximately 11 minutes. Data collected in the Sojump program was exported into SPSS 21.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for further statistical analysis. This online survey was developed to gather data from Chinese international students studying in Spain during the spring term of 2016.

Data analysis of this study was an ongoing process that happened in a natural setting with data collection and continued throughout the process of report writing. The overall data analysis process was not a fixed linear approach, but a recurring spiral way of data reading, management, classifying and interpreting, describing and representing (Creswell, 2009).

### **3.1.3.Data Analysis**

For the quantitative research, the data gathered by the online survey was analyzed with the Standard Package for Statistical Sciences (SPSS 21.0). Statistical methods including Pearson's Correlation, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA), *t*-tests and Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD) were utilized to test the relation between age, length of stay, type of residence, social network, type of pair engagement, and sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations of Chinese international students. It's worth noting that the items of the Psychological Adaptation Scale reflecting lack of psychological well-being (#1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9) were reversed in the scale analyses. In the computed scale, higher scores reflect better psychological adaptation (psychological well-being).

### **Reliability**

The reliability of the questionnaire scales was verified by Cronbach's alpha. This statistic measures the internal consistency of the scales. It reflects to what extent the informants had a shared pattern of answer to conceptually related questions. The three adaptation scales of this questionnaire showed high reliability according to Cronbach's Alpha: f 0.897 for Sociocultural Adaptation Scale, 0.937 for Academic Adaptation Scale, and 0.856 for Psychological Adaptation Scale.

### 3.1.4. Participants

The target population for this research is Chinese international students who come from the People’s Republic of China and live in Spain now with the purpose of study, including Chinese undergraduates, graduate students, Ph.D. students, exchange students and students in language school.

Two hundred and seventy Chinese international students in Spain answered to the web-based survey. Data from those participants who have finished less than 70% of the questionnaires were eliminated; in the end, a sample of 259 surveys were believed to be valid and were used for data analysis. These participants were living in 18 Spanish cities, and geographically distributed throughout 8 Spanish regions (See Table 3.1). That demonstrates the survey was widely spread among all the Chinese international students in Spain.

Table 3.1 Geographical Distributions of Participants by Region

<b>Region (Autonomous Community)</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Madrid	Madrid: 135 Alcalá de Henares: 7	142
Catalonia	Barcelona: 24 Tarragona: 18 Girona: 1	43
Valencia	Alicante: 22 Valencia: 5	27
Castilla-Leon	Salamanca: 13 Ávila: 5 Burgos: 1 Segovia: 1 Valladolid: 1	21
Galicia	Santiago de Compostela	6

Andalucia	Cádiz: 5 Sevilla: 4 Málaga: 2 Granada: 1	12
Castilla-La Mancha	Toledo	4
La Rioja	Logroño	4

## 3.2. Ethnographic Research

### 3.2.1. Interview and Participant Observation

Ethnographic approaches offer a better picture for understanding, describing, and discovering the experience of acculturation in its whole complexity from the participant's perspective. The experience of living in another culture is complex, it can only be told as a story of a life-changing journey. Ethnographic field research was employed in this study as an appropriate way for obtaining a vivid and in-depth description of Chinese international students' social, academic and psychological adaptation experience. It allows the researcher to collect first-hand information from participants' in-depth narrative and interpret how they made sense out their cross-cultural adaptation.

The fieldwork was conducted at the Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM). UAM is a public university located in the capital of Spain, Madrid. This university is a research intensive university which grants Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees in a variety of disciplines. This University hosts more than 20,000 students, including approximately 500 Chinese students. The data has been gathered primarily through interviews, participant's observations, and my own experience of adapting to the Spanish society.

Firstly, 10 of Chinese international students from University UAM including freshman, sophomore, senior, junior and postgraduate student, and the president of Chinese Students Association were interviewed face-to-face using a semi-structured protocol in order to acquire a detailed account of the Chinese international students' past and present experiences, as same as their reflections on the meaning of their cross-cultural experiences.

The interview protocol (see Appendix B) was developed based on literature review and research topics. The protocol covered a broad range of questions related to their social, academic, and psychological adaptation experience, which namely to talk about their daily life, social interaction with others (Chinese, Spanish and other nationalities), students associations and their academic studies. Additionally, issues that could affect their adaptation were asked about.

For instance, some interview questions were about the reason of coming to study in Spain and the influence of their parents and friends on their choice; the challenge and problems that they have met in Spain; their relationship with local people and with Chinese community; the changes they have experienced since they came to Spain; whether they felt depression. Additional questions were asked according to each participant's response in the interview.

The interviews were conducted in Chinese, audio-recorded, transcribed, and then were translated into English. All the interviews were completed in September and October of 2016. All participants were assured of the confidentiality of their narratives. Some of the interviews took place in the residence of the participants and others in the university A. The length of each interview lasted from 30 minutes to 60 minutes. Most interviews were conducted individually, while two of them were conducted with a pair of students.

### **Participant Observation**

In addition to interviews, participant observation was also used to get a detailed and intimate understanding of the social, academic and psychological cross-cultural adaptation experience of Chinese international students. Through participating in their daily life, their classes in the university, and as well as their social life in the free time, a deeper understanding of what they have undergone was progressing. Some hidden facts may be uncovered. Participant observation was carried out over two periods of two months from September to October 2016, and late January to late February 2017. Two groups of participants were observed in all the periods in the UAM.

During these two periods, I attended classes with them for a whole week including their first class in the university and observed their social gatherings through the break

between classes. I sat with one Chinese student in the back of the class. In the class, there were about twenty students: most of them were Spanish students; and there were four Chinese students. Normally, they have two or three classes per one day, each class last two hours. I always spent the time of lunch with these four students. I visited the residence of the participants who live in the university, live with Chinese students or live with Spanish. They also invited me to join them in their social life, like dining with friends, hiking out. I also participated in some activities organized by the Chinese Students Association and other organizations, like two of the largest Chinese students' parties (celebrating Moon Festival and Spring Festival), Madrid Basketball League, and a lecture on Spanish Literature organized by the Educational Office of the China Embassy in Madrid.

### **3.2.2.Data Analysis**

It was challenging to read and interpret the participants' statement. To capture the essence of the students' cross-cultural experiences, it was necessary to analyze, synthesize, and reduce the amount of texts with a creative and systematic approach.

The interview data was submit to thematic analysis to identify themes that emerged from the participants' narratives, to analysis and to generate insights of interpretations on how the statements were organized and how the participants constructed their cross-cultural experiences. Thematic analysis includes specific guidelines for "identifying, analyzing and reporting themes within the data and describing data in rich detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79), which means this approach is more flexible and detailed to interpret various aspects of the research topic. For this study, a step-by-step procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) is followed by to direct the procedure of the thematic data analysis (Table 3.2). The major instrument of this study was the researcher.

The six phases of thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006) fit well to this research. The first phase of data analysis is the familiarization of verbal data, which involved listening and transcribing the raw data. It was time consuming but rewarding. The researcher was immersed with the entire data and developed a better understanding of the data. Re-listening to the recording allowed the researcher to check the

transcriptions back against the original audio in the purpose to obtain the real information from the interviewees.

Table 3.2 Phases of Thematic Analysis

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Description of the process</i>
1. Familiarizing with data	Transcribing, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Gathering data and collating codes into potential themes
4. Reviewing themes	Checking the themes in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic “map” of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming Themes	Ongoing analysis to refine each theme and generate clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	Selection of vivid, compelling text extracts relating to the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report.

*Source:* Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2): 91.

Moving into phase two, the researcher highlighted the meaningful textual segments, developed textural and structural description in an effective way. The researcher did a close reading of the data and mined it for ideas, and then created codes for ideas, captured notable topics and themes. In the coding process, all data should be given the researcher equal attention. And to retain accounts from the interviews, initially the researcher should code as many potential themes as possible. As such, some meaningful textual segments were coded not only one time.

The third phase was intended to identify themes. The researcher analyzed the codes at a broader level including sorting and collating other relevant codes. The focus of the fourth phase was reviewing and refining the themes, which aims to ensure those themes' validity, accuracy and consistency. The task of the fifth phase was to define and name the themes identified in phase three. The themes were defined and further refined to identify the key characteristics of each one, in consideration of the research questions. In the last



phase, the researcher write a summary report of a concise, logistic and coherent account translated from the complex story of the data.

With the guidance of this thematic analysis, five common themes were brought forth from a detailed analysis of the participants’ narrative to present a clear report of the result:

1. Motivations of studying in Spain
2. Social, academic, psychological challenge and adjustment
3. The role of Students Associations
4. The role of social media --- WeChat
5. Reflections on cross-cultural experiences

### **3.2.3.Participants**

In selecting the interviewees, the purpose was to contain completely an appropriate range and balance across the following criteria: gender (male, female), age (young, mature), field of study (social science, physical science), educational level (graduate, postgraduate), type of accommodation (shared house, university hall, host family), and part-time job. Before the interviews, the researcher talked with respondents and got to know the students with the purpose to build up rapport and a sense of trust.

10 Chinese students were interviewed at their natural study context of the Autonomous University of Madrid. The interviewees cover a wide range of study stages, disciplines, and experience in Spain. For the sake of confidentiality, all the names of the participants and places below are pseudonyms. Among the interviewees, there are more girls than boys. Most of the interviewees chose to share an apartment with the others including students from China and students from other countries. As for type of pair engagement, all of them are single. Table 3.3 presents participants’ the information about code name, gender, age, accommodation, type of pair engagement, and education.

Table 3.3 Profiles of Participants of Fieldwork

<b>Code Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Accommodation</b>	<b>Type of Pair</b>	<b>Education</b>
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				<b>Engagement</b>	
Interviewee 1	Female	21	Shared apartment with three Chinese students	Single	Freshman
Interviewee 2	Male	21	Shared apartment with one Spanish student and one Korean student	Single	Freshman
Interviewee 3	Female	22	Student dormitory of the university	Single	Sophomore
Interviewee 4	Female	22	Shared apartment with three Chinese students	Single	Senior
Interviewee 5	Male	22	An apartment near the university	Single	Senior
Interviewee 6	Female	27	Shared apartment with one Spanish girl and one Colombian girl	Single	Ph.D.
Interviewee 7	Female	27	Shared apartment with two Spanish students	Single	Master
Interviewee 8	Male	24	Shared apartment with two Chinese students	Single	Junior

Interviewee 9	Female	23	Shared apartment with two Spanish students	Single	Junior
Interviewee 10	Female	25	Shared apartment with three Chinese students	Single	Master

# CHAPTER 4

## RESULTS

### **4.1. Half of the Story: The Results of Quantitative Research**

For the first stage, the link of the questionnaire survey was sent to Chinese international students with the help of all the Chinese Students Associations in Spain. And I received answers from an initial sample of two hundred and seventy Chinese international students who were living in Spain. Then I eliminated those dates from participants who finished less than 70% of the questionnaires; in the end, two hundred and fifteen-nine surveys were believed valid and were used for data analysis. These subjects were from 18 Spanish cities and geographically distributed throughout Spain. It means that this online questionnaire was widely spread among the Chinese international students in Spain.

#### **4.1.1. Participants' background: Descriptive Statistics**

In terms of gender distribution, 70% of the participants were female and another 30% were male, more precisely, the number of girls was twice that of boys. And according to the data from the educational office of the embassy China in Spain, it was in accordance with the gender distribution of Chinese international students in Spain. The age of the informants ranged from 17 to 35 years old, with an average of 25 years old. Among them, 75% of the participants identified themselves as the Only Child (See Table 4.1). Only 9% of the participants claimed that they had family member living in Spain (See Table 4.1), it meant that most of Chinese international students were alone in Spain. The educational levels of participants were undergraduate (53%), master's (27%), doctoral (14%), and other (6%). That is to say, more than half of Chinese participants were undergraduate.

With respect to the subjects distributing, 58% of the participants majored in Social and Legal Sciences (Ciencias Sociales y Jurídicas), 21% in Arts and Humanities (Artes y Humanidades), 9% in Engineering and Architecture (Ingeniería y Arquitectura), the others in Science (Ciencias) and Health Sciences (Ciencias de la Salud). And among all the participants, about 56% of them came from the developed regions of China, which include coastal cities and four municipalities.

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Background Variables (Q7-Q16)

Item/Percent/Choice	Yes	No
7. You are the only one child	194(74.9%)	65(25.1%)
8. You are an exchange student	23(8.88%)	236(91.12%)
9. Before you come to Spain, you have some cross-culture experience	37(14.29%)	222(85.71%)
10. Before you come to Spain, you have already known about this country	41(15.83%)	218(84.17%)
11. Before you applied for your school, you have already known about it	124(47.88%)	135(52.12%)
12. You applied for the school with the help of an agency	202(77.99%)	57(22.01%)
13. You have a scholarship	36(13.9%)	223(86.1%)
14. You have a part-time job	86(33.2%)	173(66.8%)
15. You read the native newspaper frequently	131(50.58%)	128(49.42%)
16. Have you ever voted in the selection in your university or community	60(23.17%)	199(76.83%)

The average monthly expenditure of the informants was about 850 euros. For about 81% participants, their parents or other family member were their main economic sources (See Table 4.2.3). As Table 4.1 shows that only 13% of the participants claimed that they had a scholarship, and 33% of informants had a part-time job. What's more, about 48% participants indicated that they had employed Study Abroad Agency to help them do the

application for Spanish universities (Table 4.1). For 40% of the participants, the main reason for coming to study in Spain was to learn the language Spanish (Table 4.2.1), this confirmed that the charm of Spanish language has captivated many Chinese students.

Table 4.2.1 Descriptive Statistics of Background Variables (Q17)

Item/Percent/Choice	A. Learn Spanish	B. The request of your study	C. Find a better job	D. Immigrate	E. The cost is lower	F. There isn't other choices	G. Others
17. Why do you choose to study in Spain?	40.20%	22.80%	14.7%	14.3%	0.40%	4.60%	3.10%

The length of residence of the participants in Spain ranged from one month to more than 36 months (3 years), and 51% participants have studied in Spain for more than two years (See Table 4.2.2). In terms of residence (see Table 4.2.4), 56% of Chinese students lived with their fellow co-national, another 17% participants shared an apartment with foreigners including Spanish, and the third most popular choice was to live in the school dormitory (15%). It's obvious that Chinese international students preferred to live with their compatriots.

Table 4.2.2 Descriptive Statistics of Background Variables (Q18)

Item/Percent/Choice	A. Less than three months	B. Three months to half year	C. Half year to one year	D. One year to two years	E. Two to three years	F. More than 3 years
18. The length of study in Spain since you first arrived her	13.50%	2.30%	12.70%	20.10%	22.40%	29.00%

Table 4.2.3 Descriptive Statistics of Background Variables (Q19)

Item/Percent/Choice	A. Parents or family members	B. Part-time job	C. Scholarship	D. My own savings	E. Others
19. Your major financial source is	81.10%	7.30%	9.30%	1.50%	0.80%

Table 4.2.4 Descriptive Statistics of Acculturation Strategy: Residence (Q20)

Item/Percent/Choice	A. With Chinese	B. With foreigners	C. In the school dormitory	D. As an aupair	E. In the dormitory of a Spanish family	F. Others
20. You are living	55.60%	17.40%	15.10%	1.50%	2.70%	7.70%

As the Table 4.2.5 and Table 4.2.6 show, 54% of Chinese international students preferred a combination of Chinese and Spanish cuisine, and for another 41%, their diet was dominated by Chinese food. Especially, 72% participants were habituated to buy their clothes in Spain.

Table 4.2.5 Descriptive Statistics of Acculturation Strategy: Food Choice (Q21)

Item/Percent/Choice	A. Mainly Asian cuisine	B. Mainly Western cuisine	C. A combination of these two styles	D. Others
21. What's your eating habits here in Spain?	41.70%	3.10%	54.40%	0.80%

Table 4.2.6 Descriptive Statistics of Acculturation Strategy: Cloth Choice (Q22)

Item/Percent/Choice	A. China	B. Spain	C. Others
22. Where do you buy the majority of your clothes and shoes?	24.30%	72.20%	3.50%

That's to say, the majority of Chinese international students in Spain bought their clothes in Spain and had a mixed eating habit of Chinese and Spanish food. These data give us important information about the degree to which Chinese international students have adapted themselves to the Spanish society. They chose integration and assimilation acculturation strategies for external behaviors in their cross-cultural adaptation to the Spanish society.

In terms of social network (friendship), the majority of participants (84%) claimed that most of their friends were Chinese (Table 4.2.7). Besides, more than half (61%) of their Chinese friends were in Spain as Table 4.2.8 shows. We could conclude that the social network of Chinese international students in Spain was dominated by their compatriots who also lived in Spain. What's more, for the type of pair engagement, 39% of the participants reported that their mate were Chinese, and only 5% participants said that their boyfriend/girlfriend were Spaniards (See Table 4.2.9). Along with the data of residence in Table 4.2.4 that more than half of the participants (56%) claimed that they were sharing an apartment with Chinese, it is obvious that Chinese international students chose separation acculturation strategy for intimate relationship in Spain.

Table 4.2.7 Descriptive Statistics of Acculturation Strategy: Friendship Ethnic Choice (Q23)

Item/Percent/Choice	A. Chinese	B. Spaniard	C. Foreigner (not including Spanish)	D. Others
23. The majority of your friends is	84.20%	8.10%	3.50%	4.20%



Table 4.2.8 Descriptive Statistics of Acculturation Strategy: Friends' Residence (Q24)

Item/Percent/Choice	A. In China	B. In Spain	C. In other places except China and Spain
24. The majority of your Chinese friends are	35.50%	60.60%	3.90%

Table 4.2.9 Descriptive Statistics of Acculturation Strategy: Pair Ethnic Choice (Q25)

Item/Percent/Choice	A.I don't have	B. Chinese	C. Spaniard	D. Foreigner (not including Spaniard)
25. Your boy/girl friend is	54.05%	39.38%	4.63%	1.94%

What's more, the ratio of average daily study time were (Table 4.2.10): less than two hours (29%), 2-4 hours (31%), 4-6 hours (23%), and more than 6 hours (17%). It shows that Chinese international students normally spend up to 4 hours on study.

Table 4.2.10 Descriptive Statistics: Learning Time (Q26)

Item/Percent/Choice	A. Less than 1 hour	B. 1-2 hours	C. 2-4 hours	D. More than 4 hours
26. How many hours do you spend on study everyday?	29.00%	31.30%	23.20%	16.60%

When the participants were asked to describe their leisure time in Spain using one word, 34% Chinese international students chose "busy", and 18% were "happy" while 15% were "boring" and 12% had "nothing to do" (See Table 4.2.11).

Table 4.2.11 Descriptive Statistics: Leisure Experience (Q27)

Item/Percent/Choice	A. Boring	B. Happy	C. Busy	D. Nothing to do	E. Others
27. The word to describe your leisure time is	14.70%	18.10%	34.40%	12.40%	17.40%

#### 4.1.2. Self-evaluation of the Experience of Cross-cultural Adaptation

##### 1. The Results of Sociocultural Adaptation

The modified Likert 5-point Sociocultural Adaptation Scale was employed to measure the degree of participants' experiences of social difficulties in their everyday social situations in Spain. The 5-point scale (1 = Not at all competent; 5 = Extremely competent) references to the amount of social difficulty Chinese international students were currently experiencing. Higher scores indicate less social difficulty and better sociocultural adaptation. Table 4.3 presents an overview of results of the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale. The mean score was 3.45, which demonstrates that, generally speaking, participants didn't meet great problem with their sociocultural adaptation.

While among all the eleven items, the most difficult thing participants experienced in their daily social life was to interact at local social event (with the mean score of 2.81). And this may be contributing to the phenomenon that the interaction between Chinese students and Spaniards was less. Secondly, many participants viewed "reading and writing Spanish" (with the mean score of 3.07) with "understanding and speaking Spanish" (with the mean score of 3.17) as not so easy for them to adapt into the Spanish society, even though they felt "understanding and speaking Spanish" was a little bit better than "understanding and speaking Spanish". Thirdly, "interacting with members of the opposite sex" (with the mean score of 3.15) was found to be another impediment for participants. While compared with other dimensions, the easiest thing that the participants thought was "adapting to the pace of life in Spain".

Table 4.3 Sociocultural Adaptation Scale: Descriptive Statistics\*

Item/Percent/Point	1	2	3	4	5	Std. Deviation	Mean
1. Building and maintaining relationships	3.86%	17.37%	37.45%	25.48%	15.83%	1.057	3.32
2. Interacting at local social events	15.44%	22.78%	35.52%	17.37%	8.88%	1.160	2.81
3. Adapting to the noise in my neighborhood	5.41%	10.04%	28.57%	24.71%	31.27%	1.174	3.66
4. Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's gestures and facial expressions	2.7%	10.04%	34.36%	31.66%	21.24%	1.017	3.59
5. Interacting with members of the opposite sex	13.51	14.67%	31.66%	23.55%	16.6%	1.253	3.15
6. Adapting to the pace of life in Spain	2.32%	5.41%	17.37%	39.77%	35.14%	.976	4
7. Modifying my behavior to adapt to the native social attitudes, norms, beliefs, rules, and customs	1.54%	5.41%	26.64%	37.07%	29.34%	.950	3.87

8.Changing the rate of my speaking in a culturally appropriate manner	1.54%	9.27%	28.57%	33.98%	26.64%	1.001	3.75
9.Understanding and speaking Spanish	8.49%	16.99%	36.29%	25.48%	12.74%	1.118	3.17
10.Reading and writing Spanish	9.27%	19.31%	37.84%	22.39%	11.2%	1.112	3.07
11.Dealing with the bureaucracy in the government services	2.7%	14.29%	33.98%	25.1%	23.94%	1.086	3.53

\*Note: N = 259, Cronbach's Alpha =0.897

## 2.The Results of Academic Adaptation

Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (Baker and Siryk, 1999) is a self-report instrument to assess the student's adaptation to college, assuming that the beginning of university life is a multifaceted process, which requires students to adjust to a variety of demands. The modified version that has overall 12 items in Likert 5-point scale (1 = Not at all competent; 5 = Extremely competent) was employed in this current study, with the purpose to examine the amount of difficulty they were currently experiencing. Higher scores indicate less difficulty and better adaptation. Table 4.4 presents an overview of results of the Academic Adaptation Scale. The mean score was 3.58, which demonstrates that, generally speaking, participants didn't meet grave problems with their academic adaptation.

Nevertheless, compared with other items, “attending or participating in university activities” (with the mean score of 2.99) was considered by the participants as the most difficult. As in the collective society like China, students were accustomed to join in collective activities passively, like every year Spring Tour organized by the college. While surrounded by the alien culture in Spain, Chinese students felt confused how to join in the university activities forwardly, or even wondered where the activities were. It’s notable that the items “participation in the class” (with the mean score of 3.42) and “communicating with teachers” (with the mean score of 3.53) also got a relative lower score. And what they felt more confident were: “Gaining feedback from other students colleagues to help improve my performance” (with the mean score of 3.85), “dealing with the exams and homework”, and “dealing with the bureaucracy in the university”.

Table 4.4 Academic Adaptation Scale: Descriptive Statistics\*

<b>Item/Percent/Point</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Mean</b>
1.Managing my academic responsibilities	3.86%	15.06%	37.45%	29.73%	13.9%	1.021	3.35
2.Working effectively with other students colleagues	1.54%	9.65%	33.98%	40.93%	13.9%	.902	3.56
3.Gaining feedback from other students colleagues to help improve my performance	1.16%	5.02%	25.48%	44.79%	23.55%	.880	3.85
4.Expressing my ideas to other students/colleagues in a culturally appropriate manner	0.77%	9.27%	33.98%	37.45%	18.53%	.915	3.64

5.Following my academic interests and hobbies	1.54%	11.2%	28.19%	35.91%	23.17%	1.001	3.68
6.Obtaining academic services I require	1.16%	8.11%	28.19%	42.08%	20.46%	.918	3.73
7.Attending or participating in university activities	12.36%	20.08%	32.43%	26.25%	8.88%	1.148	2.99
8.Dealing with the bureaucracy in the university	1.54%	8.11%	27.41%	34.75%	28.19%	.991	3.8
9.Communicating with teachers	2.32%	13.51%	31.27%	34.36%	18.53%	1.016	3.53
10.Participation in the class	4.25%	14.29%	35.14%	27.8%	18.53%	1.077	3.42
11.Dealing with the exams and homework	0.77%	9.65%	26.64%	39%	23.94%	.952	3.76
12.Adapting to the teaching methods	0.77%	13.9%	28.96%	36.29%	20.08%	.984	3.61

\*Note: N = 259, Cronbach's Alpha = 0.937

### 3.The Results of Psychological Adaptation Scale

In this study, Zung's (1965) Self Rating Depression Scale was modified to probe psychological adaptation, which could well represent and measure Chinese international students' psychological adaptation. For this study, 10 items were carefully choose because their suitability for the situation of the Chinese international students.

Participants were asked to rate how frequently they have experienced those feelings during the past week on a four-point scale: 1 means “rarely or none of the time (less than one day)”, 2 means “some or a little of the time (1-2 days)”, 3 means “occasionally or a moderate amount of the time (3-4 days)”, 4 means “most or all of the time (5-7 days)”. For most of items, lower scores indicate less difficulty and better adaptation, while items #5 and #10 are in the opposite direction. Once the items were arranged to indicate increasing psychological wellbeing (better psychological adaptation), the mean score was 3.05, which demonstrates that, generally speaking, participants didn’t feel psychological problems and are confident in their psychological adaptation.

Table 4.5 presents an overview of results of the Psychological Adaptation Scale. The students reported feeling “...hopeful about the future” and “...happy” most of the time, while they felt that “...could not get “going”, “...fearful”, “...that everything I did was meaningless”, “...bothered by things that usually don’t bother me”, or “...had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing” during the past week.

Table 4.5 Psychological Adaptation Scale: Descriptive Statistics\*

Item/Percent/Point	1	2	3	4	Std. Deviation	Mean
1.I was bothered by things that usually don’t bother me	25.48%	45.17%	22.78%	6.56%	.859	2.1
2.I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing	27.03%	44.79%	19.69%	8.49%	.895	2.1
3.I felt depressed	35.91%	39.38%	16.99%	7.72%	.916	1.97
3. I felt that everything I did was meaningless	40.15%	39.38%	16.99%	3.47%	.829	1.84
5.I felt hopeful for the future	6.95%	18.15%	37.84%	37.07%	.911	3.05

6.I felt fearful	44.79%	35.52%	15.44%	4.25%	.855	1.79
7.My sleep was restless	41.7%	29.34%	18.92%	10.04%	1.005	1.97
8.I felt lonely	38.61%	33.2%	19.31%	8.88%	.968	1.98
9.I could not get “going”	49.03%	37.84%	8.88%	4.25%	.807	1.68
10.I was happy	8.11%	26.64%	34.75%	30.5%	.940	2.88

\*Note: N = 259, Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.856

#### 4.Adaptation Scales: Means and Inter-correlations

While the level of sociocultural adaptation, academic adaptation and psychological adaptation serves as an indicator of the degree of satisfaction of Chinese international students with their cross-cultural experience in Spain. These high mean scores (See Table 4.6), which are respectively 3.45, 3.58, and 3.05, show that most Chinese international students in Spain feel confident in their sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations.

Table 4.6 Mean Scores of the Scales of Sociocultural Adaptation, Academic Adaptation and Psychological Adaptation (N = 259) \*

	<b>Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (1-5)</b>	<b>Academic Adaptation Scale (1-5)</b>	<b>Psychological Adaptation Scale (1-4)</b>
<b>Mean Score</b>	3.45	3.58	3.05**

Note: \*The scale is 1-5 for sociocultural and academic adaptation, and 1-4 for psychological adaptation.

\*\*The items reflecting lack of psychological well-being (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9) were reversed. In the computed scale, higher scores reflect better psychological adaptation (psychological well-being).

#### **The Relation between Sociocultural, Academic and Psychological Adaptations.**

The relationship between sociocultural adaptation, academic adaptation and psychological adaptation of Chinese international students was tested using Pearson’s



Correlation. The result of Table 4.7 revealed that the academic adaptation is strongly related to both sociocultural and psychological adaptation ( $r = .685$ , and  $r = .405$  respectively; both  $p < .001$ ), while sociocultural and psychological adaptations are more weakly related ( $r = .286$ ,  $p < .001$ ). It means that Chinese international students in Spain who have better sociocultural adaptation ability would be more confident in their academic adaptation and feel less stressful in their daily life.

Table 4.7 Pearson's Correlation between Sociocultural Adaptation, Academic Adaptation and Psychological Adaptation (N = 259)

	Sociocultural Adaptation	Academic Adaptation	Psychological Adaptation
Sociocultural Adaptation	1	.685***	.286***
Academic Adaptation		1	.405***
Psychological Adaptation			1

Note: \*\*\*  $p < .001$

#### 4.1.3. Effects of the Demographic Variables

In addressing some of the research questions, the background variables of the participants like gender, age, type of residence, social network (friendship), type of pair engagement, average learning time, and the Only Child were examined using one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA),  $t$ -test, and Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD) test, and ratio variables like length of stay were analyzed by Pearson's correlations to estimate their effects on the outcome variables: sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations.

**Gender.** The result of  $t$ -test (Table 4.8) showed a significant effect of gender on sociocultural adaptation and academic adaptation scales: male students reported higher mean adaptation in both scales ( $t_{(257)} = -3.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $t_{(257)} = -2.73$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Table 4.8 The Result of T-Test of the Effect of Gender on Sociocultural, Academic and Psychological Adaptations (N=259)

	Female (n=181)	Male (n=78)	$t$	d.f.	$p$
Sociocultural Adaptation	3.35±.056	3.68±.083	-3.233	257	.001

<b>Academic Adaptation</b>	3.49±.056	3.77±.083	-2.733	257	.007
<b>Psychological Adaptation</b>	3.07±.045	2.99±.064	1.031	257	.303

**Age.** The correlation between the mean scores of sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations and the Chinese international students' age was tested using Pearson's Correlation (Table 4.9). The results revealed that age correlated positively with academic adaptation ( $r= 0.311, p < .001$ ) and psychological adaptation ( $r=0.132, p < .05$ ). That's to say that the older Chinese international students were, the better academic and psychological adaptation they felt.

Table 4.9 The Results of Pearson's Correlation between Age and Sociocultural, Academic and Psychological adaptations (N = 259)

		<b>Sociocultural Adaptation</b>	<b>Academic Adaptation</b>	<b>Psychological Adaptation</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	0.131	0.311***	0.132*
	<b>p</b>	0.614	0.000	0.043

Note: \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p < .05$

**Length of Stay in Spain.** The correlation between the mean scores of sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations and the Chinese international students' length of stay in Spain were tested using Pearson's Correlation (Table 4.10). The results revealed a significant positive correlation between their length of stay in Spain and their sociocultural and academic adaptations ( $r=0.317$  and  $r= 0.256$ ; both  $p < .001$ ): the longer Chinese international students stayed in Spain, the better sociocultural and academic adaptation they felt. Nevertheless, there was not significant correlation between their length of stay in Spain and the psychological adaptation. Our findings suggest that the

psychological wellbeing of these students is improving with age but it is not depending on their Spanish experience.

Table 4.10 The Results of Pearson’s Correlation between Length of Stay in Spain and Sociocultural, Academic and Psychological Adaptations (N = 259)

		Sociocultural Adaptation	Academic Adaptation	Psychological Adaptation
Length of Stay in Spain	Pearson’s Correlation	.317***	.256***	-.026
	<i>p</i>	0.000	0.000	.679

Note: \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Type of Residence Ethnic Choice.** The relationship between type of residence ethnic choice and sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations was tested using *t*-test (Table 4.11). The participants were classified in two different groups: one group was participants who lived with Chinese; another group was those who lived with non-Chinese (including participants who lived in the school dormitory or a Spanish family as an aupair and other cases). The results showed a significant effect of type of residence on sociocultural adaptation ( $t_{(257)} = 3.332, p < .001$ ) and academic adaptation ( $t_{(257)} = 2.311, p < .05$ ), to be precisely, Chinese international students who lived with non-Chinese had fewer difficulties than those who lived with Chinese in sociocultural and academic adaptations. However, there was no significant difference for psychological adaptation.

Table 4.11 The Results of T-Test of the Effect of Type of Residence Ethnic Choice on Sociocultural, Academic and Psychological Adaptations (N = 259)

	Lived with Non-Chinese (n=115)	Lived with Chinese (n=144)	<i>t</i>	d.f.	<i>p</i>
<b>Sociocultural Adaptation</b>	3.62±.072	3.30±.083	3.332	257	.001
<b>Academic Adaptation</b>	3.70±.070	3.48±.062	2.311	257	.022
<b>Psychological Adaptation</b>	3.09±.052	3.01±.052	1.065	257	.288

**Social Network (Friendship Ethnic Choice).** One-way ANOVA was used to test for significant differences in adaptation among three types of participants' social networks: Chinese Friends Type which their circle of friends was dominated by Chinese (n=218), Spanish Friends Type which the majority of their friends were Spaniards (n=21), and Friends of Other Nationalities Type (n=20). As Table 4.12 presented that the mean scores for sociocultural adaptation and academic adaptation showed significant differences according to the type of friends ( $F_{2, 256} = 8.155$  and  $F_{2, 256} = 6.029$ ; both  $p < 0.001$ ). The participants whose circle of friends was dominated by cultural outgroups (Spaniards or other nationalities) had better sociocultural and academic adaptations than those whose social network was dominated by Chinese friends. The scale of psychological adaptation did not show significant difference according to the type of friends' circles.

Table 4.12 The Results of One-Way ANOVA Test between Social Network Ethnic Choice and Sociocultural, Academic and Psychological Adaptations (N = 259)

	Chinese Friends Type (n=218)	Spanish Friends Type (n=21)	Friends of Other Nationalities Type (n=20)	<i>F</i>	d.f.	<i>p</i>
<b>Sociocultural</b>	3.36±.051	4.07±.151	3.78±.171	8.155	258	.000

<b>Adaptation</b>						
<b>Academic Adaptation</b>	3.50±.051	4.14±.142	3.73±.181	6.029	258	.001
<b>Psychological Adaptation</b>	3.02±.042	3.12±.114	3.32±.128	1.340	258	.262

**Type of Ethnic Choice for Pair Engagement.** The effect of type of pair engagement on the adaptation of Chinese international students was tested using one-way ANOVA (Table 4.13). The participants were classified in four different groups: single (n=140), engaged with Spaniards (n=12), engaged with Chinese (n=99) and engaged with other nationalities (n=8). The results showed that there was significant difference according to type of pair engagement on sociocultural and academic adaptations ( $F_{2, 256} = 4.78, p < .001$  and  $F_{2, 256} = 3.149, p < .05$ ). The results of Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD) Test show (Table 4.14) that single Chinese students had more difficulties in sociocultural and academic grounds than those having boyfriends or girlfriends.

Table 4.13 The Results of One-Way ANOVA Test between Type of Ethnic Choice for Pair Engagement and Sociocultural, Academic and Psychological Adaptations (N = 259)

	<b>Single (n=140)</b>	<b>Engaged with Spaniards (n=12)</b>	<b>Engaged with Chinese (n=99)</b>	<b>Engaged with Other Nationalities (n=8)</b>	<b>d.f.</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Sociocultural Adaptation</b>	3.28±.065	3.91±.122	3.60±.075	4.04±.117	258	4.781	.001
<b>Academic Adaptation</b>	3.44±.061	3.90±.166	3.68±.080	4.25±.237	258	3.149	.015

<b>Psychological Adaptation</b>	3.04±.047	3.21±.176	3.03±.065	3.62±.159	258	2.075	.085
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Table 4.14 The Results of LSD Test between Type of Ethnic Choice for Pair Engagement and Sociocultural, Academic Adaptations (N = 259)

	Type of Pair Engagement	Type of Pair Engagement	Mean Difference	<i>p</i>
<b>Sociocultural Adaptation</b>	Single (n=140)	Engaged with Chinese (n=99)	-.317	.001
		Engaged with non-Chinese (n=20)	-.629	.005
<b>Academic Adaptation</b>	Single (n=140)	Engaged with Chinese (n=99)	-.232	.018
		Engaged with non-Chinese (n=20)	-.456	.043

**The Only Child.** The difference in adaptation according to being or not being Only Child was tested using t-test (Table 4.15). Contrary to the hypothesis of the research, there was not significant difference according to Only Child on their sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations.

Table 4.15 The Results of T-Test of the Effect of the Only Child on Sociocultural, Academic and Psychological Adaptations(N = 259)

	<b>YES</b> (n=194)	<b>NO</b> (n=65)	<i>t</i>	<b>d.f.</b>	<i>p</i>
<b>Sociocultural Adaptation</b>	3.48±.053	3.36±.099	1.138	257	.256

<b>Academic Adaptation</b>	3.61±.053	3.48±.101	1.230	257	.220
<b>Psychological Adaptation</b>	3.08±.042	2.97±.074	1.053	257	.186

#### 4.1.4.The Outcomes of Cross-cultural Acculturation

In the end, when we took a hard look at the cross-cultural experience of Chinese international students in Spain, 87% expressed they would still choose to study abroad if given another chance. Besides, 70% would study abroad in Spain. As such, we could say that most Chinese international students were satisfying with their academic and social life in Spain (Table 4.17). However, more than half (60%) of the participants still chose to go back to China when finish their overseas study in Spain (Table 4.16). This may seem in contradiction to the conclusion that Chinese international students were satisfied with their adaptation to the Spanish society. But when we look for the deep reasons, it is not difficult to understand that the better adaptation won't necessarily lead to immigration.

Table 4.16 Descriptive Statistics of Acculturation Outcome (Q28)

<b>Item/Percent/Choice</b>	<b>A. Stay in Spain</b>	<b>B. Go back to China</b>	<b>C. Go to another country</b>	<b>D. I have no idea</b>
28.When you finish the study, you want to	16.22%	59.85%	16.21%	7.72%

Table 4.17 Descriptive Statistics of Acculturation Outcomes (Q29-Q30)

<b>Item/Percent/Choice</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
29.If you were given another choice, would you choose to study abroad?	86.50%	13.50%
30.If you were given another choice, would you choose to study in Spain again?	70.30%	29.70%

Then a further step was taken to analysis the relation between the sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations of Chinese international students, and the outcomes of cross-cultural acculturation, which included plan after graduation, choice to study abroad again and choice to study in Spain again.

**Plan After Graduation.** One-way ANOVA was used to test for significant differences in sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations among four types of participants' plan after graduation: go back to China (n=155), stay in Spain (n=42), go to another country (n=42), and I have no idea (n=20). As Table 4.18 presented that the mean scores for sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations showed significant differences according to the plan after graduation ( $F_{2, 256}=3.728$ ,  $F_{2, 256} = 2.872$ , and  $F_{2, 256}=3.804$ ; all  $p < .05$ ). The Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD) Test was employed to look for further information, and the results show (Table 4.19) that the Chinese international students who had a better ability in sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations would choose to stay abroad instead of going back to China. Sociocultural adaptation is specifically related to the preference to stay in Spain.

Table 4.18 The Results of One-Way ANOVA Test between Plan After Graduation and Sociocultural, Academic and Psychological Adaptations (N = 259)

	Go back to China (n=155)	Stay in Spain (n=42)	Go to another country (n=42)	I have no idea (n=20)	d.f	F	p
<b>Sociocultural Adaptation</b>	3.32 ± .062	3.64 ± .088	3.65 ± .129	3.60 ± .152	258	3.728	.012
<b>Academic Adaptation</b>	3.48 ± .062	3.68 ± .098	3.84 ± .119	3.54 ± .167	258	2.872	.037
<b>Psychological Adaptation</b>	2.98 ± .049	3.09 ± .088	3.31 ± .076	2.94 ± .125	258	3.804	.011

Table 4.19 The Results of LSD Test between Plan After Graduation and Sociocultural, Academic and Psychological Adaptations (N = 259)

	Plan After Graduation	Plan After Graduation	Mean Difference	p



<b>Sociocultural Adaptation</b>	Go back to China (N=155)	Stay in Spain (N=42)	-.318	.016
		Go to another country (N=42)	-.331	.012
		I have no idea (N=20)	-.288	.107
<b>Academic Adaptation</b>	Go back to China (N=155)	Stay in Spain (N=42)	-.202	.122
		Go to another country (N=42)	-.359	.006
		I have no idea (N=20)	-.057	.748
<b>Psychological Adaptation</b>	Go back to China (N=155)	Stay in Spain (N=42)	-.103	.312
		Go to another country (N=42)	-.329	.001
		I have no idea (N=20)	.048	.732

**Choice to Study Abroad Again.** *T*-Test was employed to test for significant differences in sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations among Chinese international students who would choose to study abroad again or not if given another chance. The results of Table 4.20 reveal a significant relationship between choice to study abroad again and the sociocultural, academic, psychological adaptations ( $t=3.422$ ,  $t=4.965$  and  $t=5.708$ ; all  $p < .001$ ). It shows, to be exact, that Chinese international students who have felt better sociocultural, academic, and psychological adaptations would choose to study abroad again if given another chance.

Table 4.20 The Results of T-Test between Choice to Study Abroad Again and Sociocultural, Academic and Psychological Adaptations (N = 259)

	Yes (N=224)	No (N=35)	d.f	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Sociocultural Adaptation</b>	3.51±.049	3.05±.127	257	3.422	.001
<b>Academic Adaptation</b>	3.66±.047	3.01±.141	257	4.965	.000
<b>Psychological Adaptation</b>	3.13±.038	2.55±.091	257	5.708	.000

**Choice to Study in Spain Again.** *T*-Test was employed to test for significant differences in sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations among Chinese international students who would choose to study in Spain again or not if given another chance. The results of Table 4.21 revealed a significant relationship between choice to study in Spain again and the sociocultural, academic, and psychological adaptations ( $t=3.095$ ,  $p<.05$ ;  $t=4.007$ ,  $p<.001$ , and  $t=4.004$ ,  $p<.001$ ). It shows, to be exact, that Chinese international students who have felt better sociocultural, academic, and psychological adaptations would choose to study in Spain again if given another chance.

Table 4.21 The Results of T-Test between Choice to Study in Spain Again and Sociocultural, Academic and Psychological Adaptations (N = 259)

	Yes (N=182)	No (N=77)	d.f	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Sociocultural Adaptation</b>	3.54±.055	3.23±.086	257	3.095	.002
<b>Academic Adaptation</b>	3.70±.051	3.27±.094	122.150	4.007	.000

<b>Psychological Adaptation</b>	3.14±.043	2.86±.066	257	4.004	.000
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#### 4.1.5. Summing up

Table 4.22 Summary of Relationships of Background and Outcome Variables with Sociocultural, Academic and Psychological Adaptations

	<b>Sociocultural Adaptation</b>	<b>Academic Adaptation</b>	<b>Psychological Adaptation</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male > Female	Male > Female	
<b>Age</b>		The older, the better	The older, the better
<b>Length of Stay in Spain</b>	The longer, the better	The longer, the better	
<b>Type of Residence Ethnic Choice</b>	Lived with non-Chinese > Lived with Chinese	Lived with non-Chinese > Lived with Chinese	
<b>Ethnic Social Network (Friendship Ethnic Choice)</b>	Cultural Outgroups Type (Spaniards or other nationalities) > Chinese Friends Type	Cultural Outgroups Type (Spaniards or other nationalities) > Chinese Friends Type	
<b>Type of Ethnic Choice for Pair Engagement</b>	Engaged Persons > Singles	Engaged Persons > Singles	
<b>Plan after Graduation</b>	Stay in Spain, Go to another country > Go back to China	Stay in Spain, Go to another country > Go back to China	
<b>Choice to Study Abroad</b>	Yes > No	Yes > No	Yes > No

<b>Again</b>			
<b>Choice to Study in Spain Again</b>	Yes > No	Yes > No	Yes > No

1. As depicted in this survey, the typical image of Chinese international students in Spain would be like the following: she is probably a girl of 25 years old coming from the developed regions of China, as the Only Child of her family, pursuing her Bachelor degree in Social and Legal Sciences; she is single and sharing an apartment with other Chinese; the average monthly expenditure was about 850 euros and her main economic sources were from their parents or family member; her life here is very busy with an average daily study time of 2-4 hours and she often reads Spanish news paper; most of her friends are Chinese; her eating habit is a combination of Chinese and Spanish cuisine; and many of her clothes are bought in Spain. The main reason why she came to Spain is to learn the language. She will go back to China after her graduation, but she would choose to study again in Spain if given another chance.
2. This survey shows that Chinese international students in Spain choose integration and assimilation acculturation strategies for external behaviors, but separation for intimate relationship. Specifically, the Chinese international students tend to adopt Spanish customs and they seek involvement with the Spanish society in external behaviors, for example, 72% of the participants are accustomed to buy Spanish clothes; 54% use to eat a combination of Western and Asian cuisine; in the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale, the easiest thing that the participants have scored is “adapting to the pace of life in Spain” compared with other dimensions; and they are very confident in changing their behavior to suit the local social norms, rules, attitudes, beliefs, and customs. On the other hand, they also want to maintain their Chinese culture and identity, especially when building intimate relationship. Separation is the most frequent predominant acculturation strategy in this domain.

For instance, 56% of the participants live with other Chinese; the social network is dominated by Chinese for 84% of the participants in our survey.

3. This survey shows that Chinese intentional students in Spain are concentrated in undergraduate studies of Social and Law Sciences, while the number of postgraduate students is increasing year by year. The gender distribution is dominated by female, the number of girls is twice that of boys. The age of the participants ranges from 17 to 35 years old, with an average of 25 years old. Among them, 75% of the participants identify themselves as the Only Child. Most of the participants don't have scholarship or part-time job. Their main economic sources are from their parents or family member. When we took a hard look at the cross-cultural experience of Chinese international students in Spain, 86% expressed they would still choose to study abroad if given another chance. Besides, 70% would study abroad in Spain. As such, we could say that most Chinese international students were satisfying with their academic and social life in Spain. However, more than half of the participants still chose to go back to China when finish their overseas study in Spain. This may seem in contradiction to the conclusion that Chinese international students were satisfied with their adaptation to the Spanish society. But when we look for the deep reasons, it is not difficult to understand that the better adaptation won't necessarily lead to immigration.
4. Generally speaking, Chinese international students neither met great problem with their sociocultural and academic adaption, nor feel depression. While the most difficult thing they experienced in their daily social life was to interact at local social event. "Reading and writing Spanish" with "understanding and speaking Spanish" was viewed by Chinese international students as not so easy for their adaptation into the Spanish society, even though they felt "understanding and speaking Spanish" was a little bit better than "understanding and speaking Spanish". "Interacting with members of the opposite sex "was found to be another impediment. "Attending or participating in university activities" was considered by Chinese international students as the most difficult in consideration of academic adaptation. It was notable that "participation in the class" and " communicating with teachers" also were not easy for Chinese international students. And in the recent week, what they felt more

were “I felt hopeful about the future” and “I was happy”. While some or a little of the time of the past week, they felt “I was bothered by things that usually don’t bother me” and “I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing”.

5. There is a positive correlation between sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptation of Chinese students. Academic adaptation is strongly related to both sociocultural and psychological adaptation while sociocultural and psychological adaptations are more weakly related.
6. The sociocultural and academic adaptations of Chinese international students are affected by background and acculturation experience factors, such as gender, age, length of stay in Spain, ethnic types of residence, social network (friendship), and pair engagement, while the psychological adaptation is only related to age.
7. The sociocultural, academic, and psychological adaptations of Chinese international students affect their acculturation outcomes in Spain, for instance, better adaptation was found related to stay abroad from China, the disposition to study abroad again and to study in Spain again.

Their relationship with the sociocultural, academic, and psychological adaptations found by this research may be summarized as follows:

Male Chinese international students in Spain have a lower degree of difficulty in adjusting than do females in terms of sociocultural and academic adaptations. Older students have better academic adaptation and psychological adaptation. The longer Chinese international students stay in Spain, their better sociocultural and academic adaptations. Preference for non-Chinese residence or circle of friends are related to better sociocultural adaptation and academic adaptation. As for type of pair engagement, single Chinese international students have more difficulties than those who have boyfriends or girlfriends in sociocultural and academic adaptations. However, contrary to the hypothesis of the research, Only Child students do not show significant difference in their sociocultural, academic or psychological adaptations.

Chinese international students in Spain who have a better sociocultural adaptation and academic adaptation would prefer to stay in Spain or go to other countries

instead of going back to China. Better sociocultural, academic or psychological adaptation are related to the disposition to go again abroad to study and especially to study in Spain if they have another chance.

## **4.2. The Other Half of the Story: Results of the Qualitative Analysis**

The ethnographic research provided a more rich and insightful picture of Chinese international students' adaptation experiences during their sojourn in Spain. Some of the findings were consistent with previous literature and research. More interesting, this fieldwork illuminated many new results or rarely discussed findings in previous literature. For many young Chinese international students, traveling to Spain to study for a shorter or longer period entailed the novel experiences of living on their own and managing their own daily activities. They fell upon the social conventions and cultural expectations in this new environment, which were far from self-evident to them. As such, they were elicited to reflect upon – or maybe leave behind – many practices and routines, which they were accustomed to.

As a way of responding to the unfamiliar environment in Spain, Chinese international students were compelled to compare the unfamiliar with the familiar in both intellectual and emotional ways. In this sense, the foreign surroundings urged Chinese international students to take a culturally reflective and self-reflective stance experiencing social, academic and psychological adaptation. With sufficient distance between China and Spain, accustomed Chinese life lost its former self-evidence and transformed to be an object of reflection. The familiar was also disturbed by the fright of the unfamiliar, while the unfamiliar was approached from a standpoint in the familiar. Based on our systematic analysis, four recurring themes have been identified: more than just a diploma (Sojourning in a new country, the whole society is your university Sojourning in a new country, the whole society is your university); not only a physical journey (studying abroad is more than just a physical journey full of challenges); a home away from home: Chinese international students community; the social media WeChat.

### **4.2.1. More Than Just a Diploma**

*Sojourning in a new country, the whole society is your university.*

In the imagination of Chinese international students, “abroad” is a fundamental category. In the extensive study of Vanessa Fong (2011) about transnational Chinese educational migration in the early 2000s, it was found that in a binary language of China, migratory aspirations were overwhelmingly phrased versus abroad. Her study showed that in the interviewees’ reflections before setting out, “abroad” was always compared favorably to China, especially so for the case of higher education. The term “abroad” meant “developed countries”, which more precisely were the USA, the UK, Western European nations, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. One idea rooted in the minds of Chinese students is that a diploma from these “developed countries” will guarantee them a good job.

As such, overseas experience is always held to be important. And that the results of quantitative research revealed that it is frequently claimed that their initial desire to go abroad would be broadening their horizons and getting access to global academic standards. In this context, educational migration is understood in the framework of academic capital accumulation. When these interviewees come to rethink fundamental aspects of their lives in the new circumstance, studying abroad is not only a way of boosting their CVs, but also would profoundly change their lives. Just as a claim put forward by interviewee 1 “Sojourning in a new country, the whole society is your university”.

Chinese international students claimed that studying abroad could be life-changing when it concerns perceptions of ways of life, life purposes, and the self. The changes that our informants have experienced were matters of self-development, of maturation, or simply of personal change. Furthermore, the claim that going abroad to study is a potentially life-changing event has become a widely shared assumption among young Chinese today, not only among students abroad (Fong, 2011). All in all, successful educational migration inspires more migration. It is significant that the decision to study abroad is often inspired by the desire for life change, and this desire is usually shared by peers and family.

Of course, this motivation of learning abroad is likely to have some of its origins in Chinese culture. The Confucian tradition’s influence and the highly intensely competitive nature of Chinese society give us some reasons that these various groups of Chinese



young students have showed the willingness to adjust themselves to the host society, and they are anxious about falling behind and ambitious about getting ahead.

The below explanation made by an informant would make good sense,

*Chinese society is very competitive, everyone is striving to get ahead. My first choice was to attend into a top Chinese university, while I failed to do it. I chose to follow the trend to study abroad. It looks like that an overseas diploma would make find a better job easier. Since the majority Chinese students went to the traditional English-speaking countries, I preferred the road that less traveled. My parents thought Spanish maybe a good choice, because supply fell short of demand in the job market of the language Spanish in China. However, when I have studied in Spain for quite a while, I found that a diploma from abroad was not such appealing as it was thought of. The most important thing of studying abroad is the personal change you have experienced. (Interviewee1, 2016)*

Except the total personality change, the experience of adaptation with studying abroad is combination of a personal expansion, a maturing process, a personal development and an opening of one's potential world. The findings of this research demonstrate that it is the adaptation of Chinese international students to their particular social, academic and living surroundings that facilitate these changes. We argue that the constructs shaped by culture are not unchangeable, and the nature of every person's experiences and motivations are senior factors to change it.

Furthermore, given such a context that most of these Chinese international students were born under the Only Child policy, which led to the modern Chinese students have grown up under the meticulous care of their two parents and four grandparents. Hence, it is not surprising that we concern about their social adaptation to the alien surroundings. The student interviews showed that the improved abilities gained with their cross-cultural experience that Chinese international students felt most impressed were cooking food for themselves, arranging their personal life, communicating with people from various backgrounds, balancing their study with part-time job, and above all, living an independent life. A detailed description given by a Chinese international student were as follows,

*I think the most impressive change is the improved ability to manage my life independently. Now I can arrange everything for myself. I'm used to the situation that there is nobody around to help me with all the things. That's also the reason why my parents sent me to study in Spain, they want me to be more mature. What's more, my experience in Spain has improved my ability to communicate with people. You know that learn abroad means that you have to adapt to a completely alien environment and meet different people. Sometimes when I met problems, I learnt to ask for help from the others. Especially, it is truly a great satisfaction and pride that now I could cook delicious food. If you asked me if study abroad pay off the money, I can tell you that it is worthy, it's not just about the money, but it's also worth for the money. I think my interpersonal abilities have greatly increased since I began to study in Spain. (Interviewee4, 2016)*

It is perhaps appropriate to quote another Chinese international student's experience, which presents more profound changes. Her learning experience in Spain has broadened her mind and brought in a deep personal, or to be more exactly, growth.

*My first desire was to attend into one university in UK, but what a pity is that I didn't get in. So I chose to study in Spain, because it was more likely to be admitted by the university and the cost was not so high like UK. I think the biggest change happened to me is that I was beginning to think about what job I would take and what kind of life I want to live in the future. Spanish people have a really happy lifestyle enjoying sunshine, beach, and a healthy and green environment. I was surprised that the shops and supermarkets closed in the weekend, and the local people cherished their holiday, which to them, was their time with family. Comparing with China, it seems that the time goes much slower. There is less societal pressure and the competition was less intense in Spain. I felt that I have changed a lot, in fact, I was trying to adapt to this kind of life to be more carefully fostering enjoyable lives. While I have never thought of it before. Chinese people used to pursue constantly a higher position and more money. Unlike Spanish, we never stop working. (Interviewee3, 2016)*

#### **4.2.2. Not Only a Physical Journey**

*Studying abroad is more than just a physical journey full of challenges*

Going abroad to study is not only a physical journey, but also a psychological journey with several difficulties exclusive to the Chinese learners. Except for the need of adjusting socially to the host culture, international students meet the problem of adjusting academically to the foreign education system. The adaptation to another living style and the collision of different traditions, customs and beliefs can be emotionally and psychologically challenging. According to the results of online questionnaire, Chinese international students commented that the sociocultural adaptation was much easier than academic adaptation. The most overwhelming experience of sojourning in Spain would be the endeavor to adjust to the different teaching and learning environment, not the physical and psychological struggle to settle in the alien society. While their sociocultural adaptation experiences can be summarized into four categories: (a) linguistic adaptation; (b) social interaction; (c) academic challenges; (d) enjoy loneliness.

### **1.Linguistic Adaptation**

Linguistic adaptation was the most significant topic brought up by our interviewees. Language proficiency has long been recognized as a considerable predictor of sociocultural adjustment of international students. Given that Spanish, rather than English which they have learnt since the Primary school, is the predominant language in Spain, Chinese students need to adapt themselves to a different linguistic context. And it is particularly true for Chinese undergraduates for whom fluent Spanish is absolutely necessary for academic achievements. For undergraduates, it's required to learn Spanish for at least three months before coming to study in Spain, and they normally would also focus on improving their Spanish by taking linguistic lessons in language school for more than six months after arriving in Spain. However, no matter undergraduates or graduates, all of them found that their Spanish ability in speaking and writing was not good enough to communicate with Spanish socially and academically.

This research found that Chinese learners perceived linguistic adaptation was the major obstacle in the process of cross-cultural adaptation into the social and study life in Spain. Linguistic adaptation is the first thing Chinese international students target to improve. Problems and issues associated with linguistic adaptation Chinese students have reported are their lack of proficiency with the Spanish language; social and academic

adaptation problems were generated by language barrier; their self-perception were influenced by the language barrier; and their social and academic surroundings compounded linguistic adaptation.

The first common theme mentioned by Chinese students is the lack of Spanish proficiency. That means understanding questions and conversations in class is one of the greatest challenges at the beginning of their study in Spain. For example, many interviewees reported that they were unable to understand the teachers because their teachers speak Spanish so fast that they can hardly follow the pace, not to mention answering the question of the professors. While their coping strategy to this problem is to borrow notes from their Spanish or Chinese classmates, then copied and reviewed the notes after class. However, this phenomenon normally doesn't last long time, only in the first one or two semesters. Henceforth, Chinese students tried to improve their listening and speaking skills in a short time mostly by taking Spanish language classes, listening to Spanish Radio and watching Spanish movies. Fewer adopted measures like making friends with Spaniards, and joining in language exchange activities. Some of them would also carefully read correlative teaching materials in advance to get rid of language problems in class.

As Interviewee 4 put it, "The language barrier is indeed a problem, it takes time to adapt myself to the language environment. It was difficult to communicate with the others [as viewed "Spaniard"], but if you keep reading papers and listening to the radio all the time, you would adjust to their fast pace." However, expressing their thoughts and feelings in a proper way to let others understand themselves still remained a constant struggle for Chinese students even after years of study in Spain. Another linguistic challenge participants faced was academic writing: writing reports and papers. Many showed their worries about meeting the academic standards of their class, presenting themselves and their work in class. For undergraduates, they haven't been well trained before they entered into the Spanish university. For graduates that writing in English (let alone Spanish) is not considered as essential in academic training in China.

Especially, respondents pointed out that the lack of Spanish proficiency impedes their integration into the local student community. Many other Chinese students expressed the same concern that because of language barriers, they had to refrain from

socializing with local Spanish students, and thus turned to take part in activities organized by Chinese international students. Despite they have language training, their speaking ability still lagged behind writing. Even studied for three or four years in Spain, some of them still could not use Spanish to communicate fluently. As one final year Chinese Ph.D. student commented, “Spanish is a totally different language system from Chinese. Although I have been in Madrid for five years, I still don’t have the confidence to speak Spanish with locals. Lack of practicing is the main reason.”

The following interview exemplifies a bitter experience of a Chinese international student:

*I think the lack of Spanish proficiency is a serious problem... When my Spanish friends used idiomatic expressions in Spanish, I totally could not understand. This really made me feel embarrassing. Although they tried hard to speak slowly, even spoke English with me, I still felt that lack of Spanish proficiency impede the convenient communication. I’m afraid that my poor Spanish would result in misunderstanding. For example, the letter “R” is hard to pronounce. It’s impossible for me. Thus, there were many times Spanish tried to correct me, especially when I participated in local activities and classroom discussion. It made me feel ‘troublesome’, so I chose to stay away. (Interviewee 2, 2016)*

Just as Interviewee 2 said, another common theme expressed by the participants about their Spanish level is not being able to understand others or express what they want to mean, or sometimes misunderstanding others. These phenomenons made them feel incompetence and discomfort. Many interviewees shared the same feeling that language barriers undermined their confidence in communicating with Spaniards. As one of them said, “This made me feel unintelligent, stupid sometimes. It was the biggest frustration.”

Interviewees’ thoughts and feelings regarding their Spanish competency reveal that Chinese international students are in need of more than just language knowledge to intercommunicate with Spaniards confidently and effectively. Chinese students are sensitive about their language abilities, and this would easily generate frustration or sometimes feelings of inferiority. They need understanding and support from native

speakers, and they want to be accepted as who they are, not only by their Spanish abilities. Interviewee 5 shared another example:

*Even I got B2 in DELE, in the beginning, I was still so intimidated by speaking with locals in Spanish that I tried to avoid talking with my colleagues and professors in Spanish. I thought they would laugh at my bad pronounce, it would be really embarrassing. Hence, I was frightened to speak Spanish. However, it turned out that they were very generous and would not laugh at me at all. They often encouraged me to stop being shy and to talk with them in Spanish as much as possible. Little by little, I found my confidence. Now I feel that I am pretty confident with my Spanish, yeah, quite confident. (Interviewee 5, 2016)*

To cope with the language barrier, all of the participants in the interviews claimed that they were self-motivated to take efforts to enhance their language skills even though there is no official requirement for international students to take Spanish language courses. Many participants used mass media such as television, magazines, movies, radio, music to improve their language skills, and to acquire information as well. Some Chinese international students took further steps to seek opportunities to communicate with Spaniards, like joining language exchange activities, living in the same apartment with international students. While in terms of the results, “we just tried to improve the Spanish language skills, but we haven’t tried our best”. Most Chinese students agreed that good communication skills were absolutely necessary, but few took enough time and effort to optimize their Spanish abilities. And yet, surrounded by a “Chinese speaking” environment, most Chinese international students lacked initiative to sharpen their Spanish skills.

The statement below may tell us some of the reasons to this problem encountered by Chinese students.

*Many of my friends complained that Spanish was really difficult, but I don’t think so. It was hard to master Spanish for them because a lot of them didn’t study hard. It doesn’t feel like that they are taking their Spanish seriously. Some of them hardly attended Spanish language class... But there were also somebody [as viewed “Chinese students”] could speak Spanish fluently, they just wouldn’t join in the discussion in the class*

*because they are worried about that the rest would laugh at them... We have to go through in adjusting to Spanish academic writing by reading journal articles and scholarly magazine, especially those written by our faculty professors. (Interviewee 4, 2016)*

What's more, one of the reasons that Chinese students creatively sought ways to deal with their Spanish proficiency is the limited opportunity to practice Spanish in their daily surroundings. Like Interviewee8 experienced,

*I was disappointed that my Spanish did not improve as much as I expected, although I had lived in Spain for not a short time. However, when I looked deep into the reasons, I found that many of us studied and lived in an environment surrounded by our co-nationals that didn't require us to speak Spanish. Even though we are living in Spain, but it seems that we are closed to our own world separated with the Spanish society. Chinese people are very shy and passive to communicate with foreigners, we are always waiting the others to send us the invitation. Hence, we prefer to live with our co-nationals and choose to be in the same study team in class. Our group in class and my friends were mostly Chinese students, so basically except writing homework in Spanish I didn't need to use Spanish to live in Spain. (Interviewee 8, 2016)*

Just as Interviewee 8 stated that some Chinese students lived in Spain in “the Chinese way”, socializing primarily with other Chinese peers and watching Chinese movies. While many attempted to change their lifestyle in hopes of using Spanish more frequently. Interviewee 10 recalled her internship experiences and highlighted the contextual factor,

*I didn't have any Chinese colleagues in the class. And my roommates were all Spaniards. The reason I chose to live like this was to force myself to improve Spanish. It was difficult at first, but it turned out to be very helpful, my Spanish improved a lot after my first internship. I was motivated to seize every opportunity to practice Spanish. (Interviewee 10, 2016)*

## 2.Social Interaction

The second acculturative stressor that many Chinese international students faced is that they need to adjust themselves to a different social interaction pattern outside and in the campus. And this is reflected not only in the interactions between Chinese students and Spanish students, but also in the interactions among Chinese students themselves. When we tried to explore the experience of interviewees with reference to three groups of people: Chinese co-nationals, Spanish (staff and classmates), and the others who were neither the Chinese nor the Spaniards, the interviewees tended to use only two categories: Chinese and “foreigners”, except that they wanted to talk about specific individuals. Nevertheless, it was originally hoped that they would systematically distinguish between Spanish and the other non-Chinese overseas students.

Many Chinese students expressed that the foreigners have been very helpful for them in both daily and academic lives. Their general feeling was that “Spaniards are very friendly and helpful, most of them are very outgoing and enthusiastic”. On the other hand, they feel that the enthusiasm of Spanish is mostly superficial. Chinese students found that it was really difficult to build a strong relationship, more precisely, a deep friendship, “We are just hi-bye friends”:

*Interviewee 7: If the foreigners [as viewed “the Spaniards”] are not agreed with you about something, they’ll say “no” directly. But for Chinese, we’ll consider more. We won’t reject the others directly. We are more willing to help them and we have stronger sympathy with the others.*

*I: What did you feel when rejected directly by the Spanish?*

*Interviewee 7: Well, the reason may be the cultural difference between China and Spain. I don’t feel that they’re warm [as viewed “the Spaniards”]. Unlike the foreigners, we [as viewed “Chinese”] have more initiatives to be helpful, more attentive and more considerate.*

*I: Can you give me an example?*

*Interviewee 7: If foreigners come to study in one university in China, the faculty and staff will be more helpful like asking them once in a while how things are going. However*



*during my three half years in Spain, if I didn't ask them for help, they would never come and ask me how everything was going.*

*Interviewee 7: My general feeling about the Spanish people is that they are more willing to help others. For example, if you ask for directions in the street, they will show you in great detail, or even take you there. But it's really hard to make close friends with them.*

*I: What do you mean by "close friends"?*

*Interviewee 7: Like real friends, not just greeting to each other with "Hi, how are you?" We can talk about many things, eat together, and play together. I don't have too much contact with them. I am confused how to build friendship with them.*

Evidence from both quantitative research and qualitative research suggest that Chinese international students tended to keep a closer relationship more with their co-nationals than with other groups. Chinese international students considered themselves as "outsiders" in the Spain society. In the interviews, only one participant mentioned that she has an intimate Spanish friend. Seven of the participants even claimed that they do not have any Spanish friends at all. They mentioned that their relationships with Spaniards were kept at a superficial level.

As understand by the students themselves, the reasons are both internal, which is the perceived cultural enclosure of Chinese international students; and external, which is the perceived "superficiality" and incurious nature of Spanish students, and Chinese international students' weak Spanish-language skills, as well as a lack of opportunities for mutual interaction. In fact, a secondary and bi-cultural network between Chinese international students and Spanish students sometimes is established, whereas more for instrumental purposes, for example, to help them improve the language proficiency. On another dimension, many Chinese students think their Spanish peers are "party animals, very good at chasing girls, while seldom worry about their future", and "this life-style we could hardly follow up".

Communication between different civilizations was always put an end to cultural differences. The friendship, emotional exchange, and externally warm, epitomize the ways that people receive, interpret and express their own experiences when they interact

with the others. The experiences in interacting with Spanish students are interpreted in a way influenced by Chinese students' culturally-constructed beliefs, values, attitudes and behavioral norms. It's notable that Chinese people have developed a "self" that is linked with various kinds of relationships. The meaning of Chinese interpersonal and relational "self" is quiet not the same with the Spanish "self". Compared with the former, the later is more individualistic and attach more importance to independence. Chinese people are more group-oriented and tend to emphasize harmony.

In China, the collectivistic life style in school provides students with an opportunity to develop an intimate friendship, and frequent interactions with friends are common. Chinese people were educated that they should put themselves in other people's shoes, shouldn't deny others directly, and make others feel good. Chinese students like being concerned about, they have compassion to take care of and help those who have difficulties, and they prefer to tolerate others in times of conflicts, to save face for both others and oneself avoiding the awkwardness, and what more important is that implicitly expressing one's opinions, especially negative ones.

As Chinese students' interaction with local students was impeded, they turned to form groups by socializing with their domestic peers. Yet, even when interacting with other Chinese students, their contact is still as more 'point to point' than 'collective'. Some Chinese students attributed this to the non-existence of the concept of university "classes". For example, in the universities of China, students majoring in the same subjects usually live together in the university dormitory. The collectivistic concept of university "class" has taken deep root, which enables Chinese students to attend lectures together and even eat together with their classmates. By contrast, at Spanish universities, all the students are independent from each other and they are probably not bound by a fixed class.

According to one informant, the interactional pattern of Chinese university "classes" was not available in Spain, where students' schedules were not compatible, as such they have to learn to live an independent life:

*For example, we may move to another apartment or have different roommates frequently. What's more, the roommates may be from different universities or our peers*

*who are studying in another discipline, hence, it is not easy for us to keep pace with each other, such as having lunch together. (Interviewee 5, 2016)*

### **3.Academic Challenges**

Academic challenge was regarded as the most serious problem by Chinese international students in their cross-cultural adaptation. It was found that the vast majority of Chinese international students encountered a widely acknowledged learning shock. Learning shock is believed to be an important subtheme of culture shock. It generates some unpleasant feelings and difficult experiences when cross-cultural learners are exposed to the new academic environment. Learning shock primarily results from Chinese students' unfamiliarity with the different Spanish teaching and learning tradition, and insufficient language ability. As noted by a graduate student in our study:

*In the beginning, we had serious difficulty adjusting to expectations of the Spanish education system, especially the autonomous approach to study. In China, we were used to be told what to learn, how to do it, and every question has a standard answer. We were ready to work hard for good records. But the Spanish system is totally another thing. Understanding the teaching difference is extremely challenging. The whole educational system including teaching and learning method, how teachers and students communicate with each other is different. I was worried and confused by that shift of responsibility. ...While, the language can be a major reason. However, the cultural issues are far more important. (Interviewee 10, 2016)*

Most of the participants in this study didn't have any college education experience before they came to study in Spain. They have been accustomed to the Chinese teaching and learning styles. While the open and individualistic oriented atmosphere in the Spanish classroom gave them a great impact. When participants were asked about their learning shock, their comments clustered around two sub-themes of academic challenges: adjusting to the learning environment and becoming an independent learner. Each issue is discussed in the subsequent sections.

#### **Adjusting to the Learning Environment**

Interviewees often reported challenges associated with systemic differences between Spanish and Chinese education, like teaching and learning practices interpersonal relationship in the class. Participants shared various experiences at all levels from foundation courses to postgraduate works where they felt most challenged by Spanish academic practices during their adaptation to the new learning environment. Different participants at different points meet different challenges. Some collisions happened in the initial stages of their undergraduate study while others came in the graduate study. However, in both cases respondents described them as the most conspicuous experiences in their academic adjustment.

For example, some Chinese international students discovered that things were quite different in classroom of Spain. Many of them chose to sit in the back of the classroom, as they felt incompetent and excluded. Some attributed their problems to their lack of Spanish fluency, so they tried to escape the concern of their professors. Some students mentioned that the reason for their lack of involvement in class discussions was not because they didn't understand the subjects or the topics, while it was a matter of habit, psychologically. When Chinese students didn't feel totally confident about the answers, they would choose to be silent and not take the risk to answer it. Other participants said they felt uncomfortable to ask questions and speak up in classes.

Class presentations were found to be more discouraging for some individuals, especially when complex theories and concepts were hard to describe in words. As Interviewee 10 recalled,

*I had to learn how to design PowerPoint to present my assignments in the class. Above all, I should be careful with the language skills to do the presentation. Although I am confident and fluent in Spanish, I still feel nervous and a little bit afraid to speak in front of the class, even after three years' study here. I think we [Chinese students] are not good at expressing our thoughts well enough to let the others understand or pay attention to us. (Interviewee 10, 2016)*

What's more, critical thinking and group work were reported new to Chinese students. They also felt challenged when they had to criticize others' work. For most undergraduate Chinese international students, it was their first time to review and critique

literature. One interviewee noted, “To my Spanish classmates, it was quiet easy. For us [viewed as “Chinese students”], it was difficult at first. But I finally learned how to write reviews, critique the goodness and weakness of a paper, and how to express my opinion.” While a challenge is an opportunity of growth. Interviewees thought the group work where were able to engage intellectual conversations and cooperate with their colleagues. One graduate student interviewee told us that group work enhanced his critical thinking, which was an element absent from his undergraduate education in China.

Interviewee 10 concluded that Spanish learning and teaching practice aim to equip students with the ability to “do” things with critical thinking, while in China the higher education still try to teach student to “remember” things. She illustrated, “In my first year in the Spanish university, I have to learn how to interview others. Well, I have never been interviewed or interviewed the others before. Whenever you have an idea, you are required not only to present the idea, but also to present how and where do you get the idea. So it’s more practical and more interesting. I have to learn to cooperate with the others to conduct an interview or a project.”

Although the results of online survey showed that Chinese international students could get the academic resource, the interviewees stated that they had very rarely used the support services from their university. The reason was partly because they don’t know what services are available, and partly because Chinese students don’t know how to get the academic recourse or they are dubious of their value to them. As interviewee 7 said, “The problem is not that we are not capable of doing things well, while it is that we lack the knowledge and experience of navigating the Spanish university environment.”

### **Becoming an Independent Learner**

Another major challenge mentioned by the participants in the study was that they should learn to be very independent, especially to be an independent learner. “To be independent means do not expect on others, especially the parents, to take care of your life and to solve your problems.” Nearly all the participants mentioned that learning to cope with problems by oneself was crucial in the Spanish individualistic culture. When one is in need for help, he/she must express him/herself explicitly, which is in stark contrast to that in China young people are encouraged to be humble and quiet

(passiveness). When asked about the most profound change they have experienced since they traveled Spain to study, many Chinese international students repeatedly stated that the first profound change was the apparent improvement in their Spanish proficiency, and the second is their greatly enhanced sense of independence and self-responsibility in managing their life and study.

As reported previously, Chinese international students have experienced some kind of learning shock when they were sojourning in the learner-centered educational atmosphere in Spain, whereas the teacher-centered and spoon-fed educational tradition in China. In Spain, study hard truly means that students need to pay a large amount of mental energy to generate creative ideas, make new uses of the knowledge they have learned, and they should ask their own questions. While the research has found that most Chinese students could overcome such learning shock successfully. Interviewees were delighted that they have improved study skills, and this allowed them to become an independent learner focusing more on their own learning. The process of cross-cultural adaptation could be miserable, while most Chinese learners had done it with happy ending. The following quotation gives us more evidence on the development of their independent learning abilities:

*The adaptation process is very painful. But it truly forced us to increase self-confidence and involve more in the class interaction. Compared with the Western teaching method, the Chinese was like 'stuffed ducks'. Now we enjoy the study 'freedom'; prefer to give presentation and other practical activities in class; have a lot of space to develop us. I am more independent in my life here. (Interviewee 5, 2016)*

For Chinese graduate students, even though they have joined in research projects in China, the adaption to be an independent researcher was still very challenging. Nearly none of them had the experience of doing a research independently. The touring style of Chinese professors was to assign students with very detailed tasks and to give them step-by-step directions. However, Chinese students have to grow up to be independent researcher from choosing a research topic and developing research agenda to conduct it in the Spanish university. The freedom they didn't have in China turned to be a challenge, to be exactly, a skill that they have to handle. Like Interviewee6 stated that despite the challenge, she enjoyed working independently and developing her own research agenda:

*In China, I didn't have too much freedom with the research. The majority of training that we were given was basic. While I feel it's really independent here. I had to figure out everything by myself, so in the beginning I felt a bit of lost, I didn't know how to do it. My professor gave me some directions and some ideas, then the rest was up to me to figure out how and what to do. In the end, I carved out my way to be an independent researcher, which has made me feel so proud. (Interviewee 6, 2016)*

Chinese students felt more appreciated than frustrated with the independent learning process. Becoming an independent researcher boost Chinese international students' confidence and motivation for cross-cultural study. In addition to the academic freedom, Chinese students were also pleasant with their new ability to get resources to support their research, to be "skillful at navigating and taking advantage of rich academic resources".

Very often the Chinese students have problems with their study even to extend their course from one to two years or more. While the story of one Chinese Ph.D. Student told by Interviewee8 strongly indicated success in Chinese students' efforts to be more independent learning:

*While the story of my fellow countrymen who once was a Ph.D. Student here also encouraged me to go on studying. Once I thought the Western system was difficult to adapt to, as many Chinese students extended their course from three years to four years or more. She also met problems that she didn't know how to find the useful academic resource. But she didn't give up and did her research successfully with the help of her professor. Eventually, she published an important article. She found her enjoyment to be a researcher. (Interviewee 8, 2016)*

#### **4. Enjoy Loneliness**

When refer to the psychological adaptation, the word that participants mentioned most was loneliness. Chinese students identified that being away from their familiar surroundings, family and friends as the main reason of their feeling of loneliness. Since most Chinese students studying in Spain are without the company of their family, it's not difficult understand that they often feel lonely living in a new culture. Even though many

Chinese students stay close to their co-national friends, and use WeChat to keep in contact with their family and friends, whereas this doesn't necessarily solve the problem. The loneliness was basically caused by the separation from their loved ones. Apart from this reason, the failure of Chinese students to make connections in the alien environment also results in their loneliness.

A freshman female student stated:

*The first semester in the new culture was extremely challenging. I was surrounded by strangers. I didn't know anyone with whom I can talk about my frustration and depression. I always told my parents that everything was fine to not let them be worried about me. And my friends in China couldn't understand my situation. They all thought I was living happily here. The only thing I can do was to 'enjoy' the loneliness. (Interviewee 1, 2016)*

While 'enjoy' and 'loneliness' do not logically collocate well together. The statement presents powerfully the profound psychological frustration that Chinese international students may have to face in addition to the academic challenge related stress and tensions. As such, Chinese international students' survival and adaptation in Spanish universities include far more than improve their language proficiency, get a diploma and subject knowledge. The deepest level change should be personal and psychological. This study suggests that such adaptations did have happened on Chinese international students, at least to a degree.

Indeed, many Chinese international students were dismayed to know that the new freedoms they acquired in Spain were not as complete, satisfying, as they had imagined and hoped. Studying abroad entailed the loss of many welfares they had taken for granted in China, like spending time with friends and family members, enjoying native Chinese food, culture, crowded city life, and relationships, getting married and having children at the same time as their peers, and living as part of the mainstream middle class. On the contrary, now they have to face the uncertainty and instability associated with the floating life as a sojourner, and to suffer in the marginal migrant lower class.

The levels of loneliness and depression among Chinese international students make a strong case for the university and Spanish society to give them more adequate personal



and social support. Maybe one good example for the Spanish universities is to regularly organize activities to help Chinese students build connection with local students, and enrich their overseas experience in Spain.

### **Pressure on Dating or Marriage**

Most Chinese international students in Spain are in their 20s or early 30s. In China, this period is when most first marriage happens. Nevertheless, Chinese international students felt the frustration and anxiety to find a boyfriend/girlfriend among the limited number of candidates just as the quantitative research and field work showed. Especially, among the Chinese international students in Spain, the number of girls is twice that of boys. And the worst is that most single Chinese students claimed that they could not find a dream mate in Spain. To the boys, they are frustrated that the Chinese girls in Spain are too manly while their Ms. Right should be caring and submissive. However, Chinese international students feel the pressure from parents to get married. A female interviewee said,

*It's really hard to find a boyfriend here. I think the main reason was that I didn't know many boys here, not Chinese boys or Spanish boys. My circle of friends is really small. And the boys around me are not my type. I prefer someone that is emotionally stronger and mentally smarter than me. I would rather bear the loneliness than marry with a man I don't like. My parents pushed me to finish my study as soon as possible in the purpose to come to back to China, so that I can find someone to get married. For me, I also feel really lonely and depressed here. I think if I stay here much longer, I would be alone till the end of my life. (Interviewee 4, 2016)*

In addition to those who are still struggling to find their boyfriends, there are also some partners suffering the breakup of their long-distance relationships. And this gives Chinese students the feeling of insecurity. As one said, "Nothing is secure abroad. The life, study, health, work and family, are all not secure. The life abroad is a survival test."

### **4.2.3.A Home Away from Home: Chinese International Students Community**

*I would like to choose the class where there are several Chinese. It would be much better if I can see some of my friends in the class. I feel secure when I see them. It's*

*much easier to communicate with them. We can help each other with homework and we often watch over each other. When I didn't understand what the teacher was talking in the class, I can turn to my friends who sit just next to me in Chinese for answers. (Interviewee 1, 2016)*

“To be together” was often heard during the student interviews and participant observation in this research. No matter in the campus or in the class, Chinese international students were always seen to stay together in their circles. Precisely from the outside, Chinese international students are often viewed as a cluster of passive learners who enclose to themselves by the media and institutions. A small handful of scholars who investigated international student communities have demonstrated that they often form close networks with their co-nationals (Li, 1995; Wan, 1996; Sun, 1999). Sojourners from interdependent and collectivistic cultures are more likely to value interpersonal connections. In this line, Chinese immigrants have built many China-towns throughout the world.

Furnham and Alibhai (1985) in their study found that international students tend to create a direct, monocultural network composed of close friendships with other co-nationals although they are studying abroad. The common language that everyone understands, the same eating habits that shared by them, the jokes that make sense – all these factors build a comfortable space in which Chinese international students could spend their leisure time with co-nationals after a busy and tiring day.

International students can find companionship, help with personal problems in this kind of primary network. And they are also provided “a setting in which ethnic and cultural values can be rehearsed and expressed” (Furnham and Alibhai, 1985, p. 709). Just as one Ph.D. female students explained,

*We have a lunch group of four Chinese girls who were all doing their dissertation in UAM. Everyday we got together from different faculties at 13:00 o'clock in the eating room of the faculty of education where was much closer to everyone. It was the most comfortable time of the day. I can finally speak Chinese. We talked about the study, daily life, TV shows or some interesting things happened in China. It felt like that we were in China again. (Interviewee 6, 2016)*

Through a strong mentoring and peer-support circle, Chinese international students are provided with crucial academic capital by the academic network of the community, which composes of information about Spanish academic system and norms, strategies of choosing majors and courses, information about homework and exams, and how to be a successful student in the university. When Chinese students first arrive at the campus, they encounter new academic/cognitive geography. Spanish University usually offers enormous programs and a long list of courses in multiple sessions in the name of different instructors.

The course/major selection system furnishes flexibility and diversity to students with an ostensibly infinite array of choices. While such diversity creates difficulties to most Chinese freshmen who are unaccustomed to this system. Fewer Chinese high school systems allow students to make a choice on the courses that they would take. As such, Chinese international students who want to be successful are confused about which courses to choose. They need more information about which courses would best suit them, and the most important is which courses could guarantee their academic success. Although they could consult academic advisers in the university, Chinese international students are inclined to seek guidance from their peers and senior colleagues, particularly academically successful elders.

Just like a freshman male student acknowledged,

*I often asked my senior brothers and sisters (Chinese) for advice about my academic work, for example, which course was much easier, which professor would give Chinese students a high score. They were also Chinese students, so they knew my situation well, they knew what was better for me. They could give me guidance on which class to take and which teacher is an easier grader. Specially, I appreciated their help in gaining the admission into UAM, without them, I would not be here today. (Interviewee 2, 2016)*

A male sophomore explained how one senior student helped him find accommodation and register in the university during his early time in Spain.

*In the early days of my life in Madrid, I couldn't communicate with local people fluently. This caused many problems and I was worried. However, with the help of one*

*senior sister-in-learning, I registered in the university and also found a affordable room in the student dormitory. She is a member of the Student Association (Chinese only ) and later I became a member with her recommendation. She is more sister than senior sister-in-learning. (Interviewee 3, 2016)*

The relations between Chinese younger siblings and their elders form a network of the Chinese ethnic community. This network offers experience like an apprenticeship, where newcomers learn to do the application processes, improve their inadequate Spanish proficiency, offset the lack their engagement in classrooms and campus life, in a word, to acquire the skills to settle down and move on. Younger Chinese international students, above all, those freshmen tend to rely on their elders for information and support. This informal network that is grounded in home-country connections presents Chinese international students an essential and more widely available service that facilitate their adaptation to and success in Spanish social and academic environment.

### **Students Association**

The academic information are inherited and shared not only between the elders and siblings (Interviewee 2), but also at level of friends (Interviewee1 ). Perhaps most significantly, as Interviewee 3 narrated the story of the help he acquired, it occurs at a larger level of the Chinese Students Association. That's to say, the Students Association guided many Chinese international students. Now there are Chinese Students Associations (Chinese Only) in many Spanish universities. Though the figure of Chinese international students in Spain is small, its growth led to 19 Chinese Students Associations (CSA) in Spain registered in the Education Office of the Embassy China in Spain. These unions are independent, but they often organize jointly activities, mostly focused on the celebrations of festivals like traditional Chinese festivals. Mid-autumn Festival and Spring Festival, Spanish festivals like Semana Santa and Christmas Day.

CSAs are non-profit and non-official organizations with short history. Usually CSAs find Chinese companies in Spain like sponsors for their event, for example, Huawei Technologies Co. Ltd in Spain has been a big sponsor for their annual Chinese Spring Festival event. Membership in the unions is open to all the Chinese international students. In other words, every Chinese student is tacitly approved to be a member of CSA as long

as she or he gets admitted to the corresponding university. We take the CSA of Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM) as an example. It was founded in the year of 2015. Although until now it has not registered officially in UAM as a student union, it has more than 500 Chinese students members. CSA is more like a loose alliance, all the members volunteer to participate in various activities, and what's more, there are not rules or regulations that they have to compliance with.

The committee of CSA is composed of president, vice presidents, and department heads such as Finance, Activities organize and Study, and would be elected by current members. Everyday working of the CSA remains quite independent. Programming decisions are made by the committee, and there is no day-to-day interference in the union's running. How much influence the Education Office has upon the programming, mentoring, and community-building of Chinese Students Associations is a matter of debate and perspective. The office maintains contact with CSA student leaders and CSAs are funded by the Education Office occasionally. Every November the Education Office of the Embassy China in Spain convokes a plenary meeting in Madrid for all the leaders of CSAs in Spain. For Chinese international students, CSA plays a role like instructor of the academic adaptation, promoter of the social adaptation, and defender of student rights.

### **Instructor of the Academic Adaptation**

CSA functions as a means of social and academic engagement. Its primary activities show a concern for conveying practical guide and academic advice to newcomers. It eases students' adaptation to the new environment. In the interviews, the words Chinese freshmen often mention were being "looked after" and "watched over". The presence of co-nations and the support on study, entertainment and living offered by the CSA not only help Chinese international students adapt to the new life, but also give them psychological security. CSA hosts several events to allow participants to meet new people and have fun, like the following promotional message of the first general meeting of AECCUAM (Chinese Students Association of the Autonomous University of Madrid, "AECCUAM") proclaimed,

The long wait is over: welcome to UAM! Meet and hang out with elders of UAM and CSA officers! Stop by Thursday to find out what we have in store for you! Super “study masters” will show up to tell you how to get good scores in UAM. There will be snacks and classic Chinese games like Panda Kill! If you can’t wait to talk to us, we are always available in the WeChat Group. Scan the QR code (Of the WeChat group of this CSA) and join us! It’s a great way to start your new life in UAM. (CSA WeChat Group Post 1, 2016)

The student leader proudly told us about the endless efforts of AECCUAM in staging this programme:

*AECCUAM really wants to do our best to help the new comers. Pre-departure orientations, useful information about the local living habit, housing, transportation, the university, academic advising, and more details are available in our WeChat group. House rental information is published between whiles. The way out of puzzles was put forward when they were still in China. We are always here to help, to take care of the freshmen.*

Except this kind of regular meeting for the new comers, academic information like lecture notes, study guides, papers and research work are releasing aperiodically by seniors Chinese students from CSAs in the WeChat group or the official account in Weibo to all the members. Representatives from senior Chinese students with excellent academic achievements, usually called “study masters”, are invited by CSAs to provide information and advice on major and course selection, time management and learning strategies to all the members on social media. It’s open only to Chinese international students and intends to make sure the academic success of the entire Chinese undergraduate community. In this regard, Students Association acts like an academic community. Academic information and admission guidance have been conveyed from student-peers and senior colleagues to the younger cohort. These connections maintain the continuity and stability of the Chinese student community. The president of the AECCUAM explained their object, as “We want to be a family for those who are away from home”.

### **Promoter of the Social Adaptation**

In addition to academic support and advice that help Chinese students with the academic adaptation, the CSA runs like a well-oiled machine for providing staging social and cultural events to facilitate their social and psychological adaptation. It plans, co-ordinates and executes social and intellectual activities for its members. It provides information about internship and recruitment. It also aims to uphold a healthy relationship between the CSA and other student bodies both on campus and other places. Just like the president of the AECCUAM said,

*We work to promote the general well-being of Chinese international students in UAM, in both social and academic standards. What's more, to establish a network between different nationalities across Spain. From pre-departure and adaptation to the new surroundings to find a job when they graduate, every stage we can provide Chinese international students corresponding information and help. Except for the release of daily information, every quarter we organize one special event. For example, the activity with the largest number of participants and the highest level of visibility is the annual celebration of Spring Festival in February. And our annual special job fair (Chinese Only) in June is warmly welcomed by Chinese international students.*

The research has found that CSAs in Madrid have organized many large-scale and student-run orientation activities since 2015. They provided a platform for making friends with people of similar interests, for improving skills, for showing student talents, and also for offering information about internship and recruitment. The Madrid Basketball League (Chinese only) is an especially lively example of community-building. The league is composed of eight Chinese students basketball teams from six universities in Madrid. It's jointly organized by six CSAs in Madrid every year. Every team battles for the league championship with the guidance of their coaches. Each of them has their own logo and propaganda film. Usually the gymnasium of Charles III University of Madrid is the main stadium. It would be decorated with trophies and scoreboards when the games begin on a Saturday afternoon in October. The whole afternoon, the stadium is filled with the sounds of cheering fans and squeaking sneakers.

The audience enjoyed this experience while the players valued the experience. One of them described this arena as “united us, improved our skills and maintained our interests.” This league represents an enterprising spirit and organizational leadership,

which certainly some of these characteristics are the universities hope to cultivate in their students. In the interviews, some Chinese international students believe that they “cannot compete with Spanish both physically and technically”. Therefore they find on their own a suitable site to stage some impressive events, where as the organizer of Madrid Basketball League said, “Every Chinese player can meet their teammate and take the chance to play basketball”.

### **Defender of Student Rights**

In addition, CSAs do more than merely serve as a point of connection for Chinese international students, they are also defender of student rights. The following example would fully certify this. As the research has found that the low cost of studying and living in Spain once was overwhelmingly attractive to Chinese international students. As a matter of fact, nevertheless, in the last years public funding has decreased in Spain, which results in a gap in financial resources. Many universities tried to increase tuition fees, especially tending to rely on higher fee-paying non-EU students to balance their budgets. In the late of year 2015, the University of Alcalá was the first in Madrid to increase tuition fees, resulting that international students have to pay up to 400 per cent more than Spanish local students in the university. To students who came for the charm of low cost, this policy could prove damaging, giving freshmen a lot of economic pressure.

A leader of Kun Peng Study Abroad Agency (the largest Chinese Study Abroad Agency in Madrid) described this policy, as “It’s horribly wrong. It would make Spain lose its competitive advantage to Chinese students in the higher educational market”. Not to mention the fact that this makes Chinese international students feel that they not treated as equals. As one freshman said, “Disgracefully, the very first lesson I learnt from attending this Spanish university is that we are not an equal”. From the early of year 2016, the topics about the increase of tuition fees occupy the headlines of the major Internet forums of Chinese international students. The increase of tuition fees triggered outrage among Chinese students who would not be permitted to protest in China. CSAs stand up for protesting against tuition fees. CSAs put calls out on WeChat group and Internet forums to appeal Chinese international students sign a letter of protest which would be submitted to the rectors of universities.



In the April of 2016, the Chinese Students Association of Complutense University of Madrid collected more than 400 signatures from Chinese international students in their letter of protest. They sent the letter to the office of rector of Complutense University of Madrid and the office of the mayor of Madrid. This action inspired other CSAs to call on more students to protest against tuition fees. Part of the message AECCUAM sent to students in the WeChat group was as follows:

*No longer silent for the increase of tuition fees in the region of Madrid! We'll fight tooth and nail! We are calling on all the students to unite to sign this protest letter! It's a letter that can save you thousands of euros (the increase amount of the tuition fees)!*

*UAM has admitted that they disagree with this discriminatory approach to increase tuition fees. They finally decided that elders would be given a subsidy to cut the increase of the tuition fees and freshmen are required to pay twice the tuition fee. That decision allows all of us to start drawing conclusions about how kindness the university is. Nevertheless, have you ever asked why those freshmen have to pay more tuition fees that they are not supposed to do?*

*No matter elders or freshmen, no matters Chinese or Europeans, all of us should not be treated differently! This time we choose to resist discriminatory terms!!! We should not be passive in addressing this threat. AECCUAM calls on the all the CSAs to join together to fight for our rights. (AECCUAM WeChat Group Post 2, 2016)*

The CSA has been a pivotal player in the creation of the Chinese student community on and out the campus; it can be considered the epitome of the social, academic and psychological adaptation of Chinese international students. With the study guidance from elders, social activities like the Madrid Basketball League and many annual events, CSAs do more than merely serve as a point of connection for Chinese international students, in which members speak same languages and have similar cultural background.

Thus mono-cultural bonds are of vital importance to Chinese international students. In addition to providing positive social and academic support, the Chinese student community could be beneficial for psychological well-being of Chinese international students because it provides a sense of security and facilitate the adaptation, particularly at the initial stages. As a whole, “material, informational, emotional, educational, and

entertainment services” provided by close contacts with co-nations play a role of “gatekeeper” or “culture broker” (Kim, 1988), giving international students with: (1) belongingness in the alien environment, (2) mutual esteem and support, (3) suitable marriage partners.

Nevertheless, the Chinese student community may be viewed as a segregated space for students protected within their closed community. It is so effective at offering a wide repertoire of support to Chinese international student that it seems that cross-cultural exchange would be increasingly unnecessary for Chinese international students, which is an obvious central purpose of studying abroad. A completely closed community is contrary to the main target of the CSAs, which is actually to build a platform that connects the community to mainstream society, and that is not beneficial for the host society and also the Chinese students.

In spite of that, Chinese international students’ strong academic-mentoring and peer-support network sometimes could bring on negatively consequence, for example, cutting off Chinese international students’ paths for communicating with Spaniards, or sometimes leading students to follow a well-worn educational track.

The following narrative of the president of the AECCUAM presents us the dilemma that CSAs have met, or Spaniards’ impression of the Chinese students in a way:

*Hardly can we balance the integration and the segregation between the Chinese community and Spanish community. We wanted to provide Chinese international students social, academic, and spiritual support. But if we do more, there would be campus stereotypes, which is that we prefer to close to ourselves. My classmate once complained to me that we have excessively kept together as a group. There were indeed some Chinese students who are segregated from the Spanish society, giving the impression that they are physically living in Spain, while socially, culturally and psychologically in China. We have noticed that there were some boys playing video games most time of the day, stepping out of their world to the class a few hours. But the majority of Chinese international students are vividly living in Spain. We refrain from the segregation from the main society. Nonetheless, I can't deny that compared with other foreign students, our co-national friendship network are much stronger. I agree that the more we bounded, the*

*less we adjusted to the local life. We should be more open to the foreigners. (Interviewee 9, 2016)*

Indeed, it would be better that Chinese international student clubs and organisations open more to host nation or other foreign nations. A delicate balance between the community of co-nations and larger institution should be kept. If the balance goes too far toward the co-national community, it would separate Chinese international students from the rest of the university and Spanish society. Shielded too much, students would have fewer interactions with the host society, knowing less about the Spanish society and culture, less likely to improve their Spanish-language skills, and following a narrower view of academic success and potential vocation.

While going out of their comfort zones and interacting within a different culture can be favorable to students (international and domestic). Here is the experience of one Chinese student, which is totally contrast to the Interviewee 1:

*I would not choose the popular classes [as viewed among Chinese international students]. I avoid taking classes with many Chinese students. The main reason was that this would hinder me from practicing Spanish. If I live with Spaniards, take class with them, and play with them, I can improve my Spanish quickly. The language was the reason why I came to study here. The group work is of vital importance in the class of Spanish university, I can learn how to clarify the responsibility of proper disposal from the other excellent foreign students in the Spanish group. If we are all Chinese in the group, there won't be a clear division of labor so that some would never do their part of the work. What's more, the communication with other different people [as viewed from different cultures] could be creative. (Interviewee 5, 2016)*

When we try to look for the possible reasons for insufficient communication between Chinese international students and native students, two key arguments are found: firstly, chances for the two groups of students to meet and know each other are fewer. As informants have reported that there were not many or they didn't know there are group activities. Secondly, common topics with each other for both groups are fewer: Language serves more than a tool for communication, it is a “system of representation” for thinking

and perception. Social and cultural diversity, such as educational, family and cultural background, and different definitions of identity interfere with their communication.

#### **4.2.4.The Social Media WeChat**

WeChat is a messaging app, perhaps best described as a mixture of Whatsapp, Facebook and Skype. Users can send written or voice messages to the others, post and comment on pictures. This software is developed by the large Chinese IT and telecommunications company Tencent. WeChat boasted 762 million users up to the march of 2016. The vast majority of users are between the ages of 18 and 35. And most users report visiting the software between 11 and 30 times a day. Surprisingly, almost a fifth accessed it for more than 4 hours a day.<sup>12</sup>

As noted above, the social media called WeChat were mentioned frequently, used by Chinese international students as a platform to receive academic information, to organize activities, and to maintain the daily contact. Social media like WeChat impact and change ways that Chinese international students communicate, interact with and adapt to the host culture on a daily basis in multiple ways. Even before Chinese international students set foot on campus, they could link up with the Chinese student community to attain social and academic support. Nearly every Chinese international student has a WeChat account. This social media plays an important role in their social, academic and psychological adaptation. WeChat makes the community of Chinese international students a vivid community.

WeChat is very popular among Chinese international students in Spain. They are using it in a variety of ways to help them adjust to living in Spain. In the participant observation, the following phenomenons are founded: Chinese international students use these sites to make friends with their co-nations in Spain; it also serves as a method of addressing issues like that Chinese international students may feel disconnected from their family member while abroad in Spain and they may also could not stay in contact with friends. Consequently, WeChat is used as a connection point to their family and friends.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://walkthechat.com/wechat-impact-report-2016/2016-12-01>

What's more, Chinese international students use WeChat to gather academic information and to complete their class assignments. They could get information from WeChat for daily living, such as renting information, where to eat, coupons, what to do with free time, travel info and local news. Every Chinese student organization, even Chinese immigrant group and Chinese newspaper in Spain uses a WeChat account to disseminate activity information. For example, the AECCUAM's WeChat account promotes a wide range of activities. Some core activities are primarily meaningful to the Chinese students, such as the Spring Festival celebration. Others are for the entire campus community. On 19 September 2016, one message was posted on the AECCUAM WeChat account. It referred to an activity of celebration of Chinese Mid-autumn Festival, which was intending to present Chinese culture to the entire campus. The promotional message proclaimed:

*In celebration and recognition of the Chinese Mid-autumn Festival with the whole UAM, AECCUAM will be throwing a spectacular banquet on Thursday, September 24th at the lawn in front of the Faculty of Education. Come with your Spanish classmate and enjoy delicious Chinese homemade food especially moon cakes while taking in performances featuring, games and much more. Let's celebrate Mid-autumn Festival and let UAM know more about Chinese culture together in an unprecedented style! (AECCUAM WeChat Group Post 3, 2016)*

This activity was just one of the many events that would present and strengthen their Chinese identity. At the same time, it was also an attempt that Chinese students made to break the boundary between Chinese and Spanish. Besides this occasional information about the celebration of Chinese festival, Chinese students are talking in the WeChat group of AECCUAM everyday about the daily life, finding someone eat together in UAM, asking for information, sharing difficulties and pressure, and much more.

In the participant observation, there were two notable phenomenon connected with WeChat, one is the online Chinese restaurant, another is the Dai Gou. Many Chinese international students have built virtual restaurants and bakeries that are selling Chinese food and dessert, and offering home delivery through WeChat without physical stores. Although students claim that their restaurant business do not clash with their study, I did not find enough proof to support their viewpoint in my participant observation. Of course,

there is no shortage of examples that some students have successfully turned their invisible restaurant into physical stores after their graduation, such as the restaurant Chuan Yu in calle estrella 5 of Madrid.

Some “master chefs” in the Chinese students community cooperate with their co-nationals to manage their online Chinese restaurants or bakeries, normally the kitchen is in their home. Their customers who are mainly Chinese international students and Chinese immigrants could order the food via WeChat after browsing the digital menu of the restaurant or bakery. Then they would receive delicious Chinese food or cakes in a certain time. Free home delivery service is available on condition that customers meet a minimum purchase amount, and usually this service is provided by the restaurant and the bakery. While nowadays there is appearance of professional Chinese home delivery service company dedicated to the Chinese community.

In addition to the home delivery service, other services like legal services, tourism service, pick-up service and housekeeping service offered by a Chinese agency are all available through WeChat. It also enables Study Abroad Agency and Spanish universities recruit more Chinese students. All the Chinese newspapers in Spain have their own WeChat account and post Spanish news to their followers everyday on the platform of WeChat, serving as a bridge that connects the Chinese students community to the mainstream society.

Another popular part-time job among Chinese international students in Spain based on WeChat is known as “Dai Gou”(代购, dài gòu): “overseas luxury buyers” for their domestic client in mainland China. Thanks to foreign exchange rates (from EUR to RMB), tax refunds and other discounts (such as the shopping center of las rosas village), the luxury products like watches, jewelry, clothes and shoes can offer great savings compared with the prices in mainland China. What’s more, considering the food safety scares in China, we are not surprised to find that there is huge demand for overseas product like dietary supplements for elder family member and baby milk powder. Chinese international students in Spain find a way to cash in on this demand. With the help and promotion of their friends and relatives, they gradually set up extensive networks of Chinese client through WeChat.

Most of the Students Dai Gou in Spain are girls, and they spend hours every day going around to source her supply, to take photos of goods to post on WeChat and to receive the orders of the customers in their leisure time. On a regular day of shopping, they negotiate with the staffs of local shop in Spanish and with their customers from China in Chinese, then eventually send the parcels to China. For them, WeChat is not only a social media but also a sales platform, like eBay and Amazon. Chinese international students struggle to gain a foothold in Spain using their own way, and Dai Gou, this new online “international trade”, opens up an opportunity for Chinese international students, which adds life experience, widens their social circles and improve their Spanish level in their shopping activity, at the time also provides a side income. One Chinese student Dai Gou describe this part-time job as,

*Dai Gou is becoming a trend in the Chinese student community in Madrid, at least 3 of my 10 Chinese friends buy cosmetics and luxuries to on-sell back home. I started to step in this market because many of my friends were doing it. In my part-time, I'm so busy at going around in Serrano, Las Rosas Village, and Pharmacy, taking photos and talking with my client. Thanks to this part-time job, I've improved a lot my Spanish, known much more about the Spanish culture, and I even made friends with two Spanish staffs of the cosmetic shops. Dai Gou enriches my life here, I would make a career out of this business to be a truly member of Spanish society not as sojourns when I graduate. (Interviewee 8, 2016)*

With digital media allowing speedy communication between people from different geographic areas, Chinese international students often maintain a high level of active communication with friends and family in both China and Spain. These one-to-many and many-to-many communication technology affordances like WeChat facilitate interactions with multiple types of social, academic, and spiritual support and information at the same time. Even though Chinese international students are geographically dispersed across their campus, the social media WeChat makes them concentrate in large community. Chinese international students create their own social network community through an ethnically focused student associations, academic network, and social media. These three key modes are fundamentally interrelated, which one cannot exist without the others.

#### 4.2.5. Summing up

Based on systematic analysis, the following themes have been identified in the fieldwork and participant observation:

1. More than just a diploma: sojourning in a new country, the whole society is your university
2. Not only a physical journey
  - Linguistic adaptation (lack of Spanish proficiency, lack of confidence in Spanish, limited opportunity to practice Spanish);
  - Social interaction (how to build a deep friendship with Spanish);
  - Academic challenges (learning shock, adjusting to the learning environment, becoming an independent learner);
  - Enjoy loneliness (pressure on dating or marriage)
3. A home away from home
  - Students association (instructor of the academic adaptation, promoter of the social adaptation, defender of student rights)
4. The social media WeChat
  - The invisible restaurants: some “master chefs” from the Chinese students community cooperate with their co-nations to manage online Chinese restaurants or bakeries.
  - Dai Gou: Chinese international students struggle to gain a foothold in Spain using their own way, and Dai Gou (also known as overseas luxury buyers), this new online “international trade”, opens up an opportunity for Chinese international students.

The influence of the Confucian tradition and the highly intensely competitive nature of Chinese society help to explain why these diverse groups of Chinese young students have demonstrated their willingness to adapt themselves to the host environment, their anxiety about falling behind, and ambition about getting ahead. Chinese international students claimed that studying abroad could be life-changing when it concerns perceptions of ways of life, life purposes, and the self. The changes that our informants



have experienced were matters of self-development, of maturation, or simply of personal change. Except the total personality change, the experience of adaptation with learning abroad is a maturing process, a personal expansion, and an opening of one's potential universe. The findings of this research suggest that it is the adaptation of Chinese international students to their particular living, social and studying environments that facilitates changes. The improved abilities gained with their cross-cultural experience that Chinese international students felt most impressed were cooking food for themselves, arranging their personal life, communicating with people from various backgrounds, balancing their study with part-time job, and above all, living an independent life.

Going abroad to study is not only a physical journey, but also a psychological journey with several difficulties exclusive to the Chinese learners. Except for the need of adapting socially to the host society, international students meet the problem of adjusting academically to the foreign education system. Linguistic adaptation was the most significant topic brought up by our interviews. In consistent with other researches in this field, the first common theme mentioned by Chinese students was the lack of Spanish proficiency. That means understanding questions and conversations in class is one of the greatest challenges at the beginning of their study in Spain. And expressing their thoughts and feelings in a proper way to let others understand themselves still remained a constant struggle for Chinese students even after years of study in Spain. Another linguistic challenge participants faced was academic writing: writing reports and papers. Especially, respondents pointed out that the lack of Spanish proficiency impedes their integration into the local student community. To cope with the language barrier, all of the participants in the interviews claimed that they were self-motivated to take efforts to enhance their language skills even though there is no official requirement for international students to take Spanish language courses.

“To be together” was often heard during the student interviews and participant observation in this research. No matter in the campus or in the class, Chinese international students were always seen to stay together in their circles. Precisely from the outside, Chinese international students are often viewed as a cluster of passive learners who enclose to themselves by the media and institutions. While a small handful of scholars who investigated international student communities have demonstrated that

international students often form close networks with their co-nationals (Li, 1995; Wan, 1996; Sun, 1999). Especially sojourners from interdependent and collectivistic cultures are more likely to value interpersonal connections. Just like Chinese immigrants have built many China-towns throughout the world.

The second acculturative stressor that many Chinese international students faced was that they need to adjust themselves to a totally different social interaction pattern outside and in the campus. In the interviews, participants express that it is really difficult to build a strong relationship, more precisely, a deep friendship with Spanish. This is reflected not only in the interactions between Chinese students and Spanish students, but also in the interactions among Chinese students themselves. It's notable that the meaning of Chinese interpersonal and relational "self" is quite not the same with the Spanish "self". Chinese international students feel that the enthusiasm of Spanish is mostly superficial, and it was really difficult to build a strong relationship, more precisely, a deep friendship with the Spanish. As Chinese students' interaction with local students was impeded, they turned to form groups by socializing with their domestic peers. Yet, even when interacting with other Chinese students, their contact is still as more 'point to point' than 'collective'.

Academic challenge was regarded as the most serious problem by Chinese international students in their cross-cultural adaptation. It was found that the vast majority of Chinese international students encountered a widely acknowledged learning shock. They have been accustomed to the Chinese teaching and learning styles. While the open and individualistic oriented atmosphere in the Spanish classroom gave them a great impact. Properly speaking, the academic challenges of Chinese international students are: adjusting to the learning environment and becoming an independent learner. "To be independent means do not expect on others, especially the parents, to take care of your life and to solve your problems." (Interviewee 5). Nearly all the participants mentioned that learning to cope with problems by oneself was crucial in the Spanish individualistic culture.

Part of the reason is that Chinese culture laid emphasis on education, personal academic success is always connected with family's honor. They also want to pay back the time, energy and financial resources that their parents have invested on them. Chinese

international students are accompanied by this cultural character traveling to Spain. This journey is too long for them to fail. In the interviews, Chinese international students also claimed that the highly competitive Chinese society also give them the pressure to study hard. Another reason is that many Chinese international students study in a relative traditional way, which means to memorize knowledge in order to pass tests.

However, in Spain Chinese international students should be a independent learner, they need to pay a large amount of mental energy to generate creative ideas, make new uses of the knowledge they have learned, and they should ask their own questions. When one is in need for help, he/she must express him/herself explicitly, which is in stark contrast to that in China young people are encouraged to be humble and quiet (passiveness). This requires more time to overcome the intellectual and emotional exhaustion. When asked about the most profound change they have experienced since they traveled Spain to study, many Chinese international students repeatedly stated that the first profound change was the apparent improvement in their Spanish proficiency, and the second is their greatly enhanced sense of independence and self-responsibility in managing their life and study.

The relations between Chinese younger siblings and their elders form a network of the Chinese students ethnic community. For many Chinese international students, these communities serve like a home away from home. This network offers experience like an apprenticeship, where newcomers learn to do the application processes to the Spanish university, to acquire the skills, to settle down and move on. It could also be beneficial for psychological well-being of Chinese international students because it provides a sense of security and facilitate the adaptation, particularly at the initial stages. Besides, the members maybe also could find their suitable marriage partners, as many participants bear the pressure of marriage.

In the interviews and participant observation, I found that Chinese Students Association (Chinese Only) as part of their overseas home has an important significance to Chinese international students in Spain. The CSA has been a pivotal player in the creation of the Chinese student community on and out the campus; it can be considered the epitome of the social, academic and psychological adaptation of Chinese international students. The major function of CSA is the instructor of the academic adaptation, Except

the regular meeting for the new comers, academic information like lecture notes, study guides, papers and research work are releasing aperiodically by seniors Chinese students from CSAs in the WeChat group or the official account in Weibo to all the members.

In addition to academic support and advice that help Chinese students with the academic adaptation, the CSA runs like a well-oiled machine for providing staging social and cultural events to facilitate their social and psychological adaptation as the promoter of the Social Adaptation of Chinese international students in Spain. In addition, CSAs do more than merely serve as a point of connection for Chinese international students, they are also defender of student rights. For instance, when many universities tried to increase tuition fees, especially tending to rely on higher fee-paying non-EU students to balance their budgets, the Chinese Students Association of Complutense University of Madrid collected more than 400 signatures from Chinese international students in their letter of protest. They sent the letter to the office of rector of Complutense University of Madrid and the office of the mayor of Madrid. This action inspired other CSAs to call on more students to protest against tuition fees.

Thus mono-cultural bonds are of vital importance to Chinese international students. In addition to equipping a complete and positive social, academic support system, the Chinese student community as the co-national friendship network and maintains, could be beneficial for psychological well-being of Chinese international students because it provides a sense of security and facilitate the adaptation, particularly at the initial stages. However, a delicate balance between the community of co-nations and larger institution should be kept. If the balance goes too far toward the co-national community, the community becomes limited to the larger institution, separating its members from the rest of the students and Spanish society, losing the diversity. Shielded too much, students would have fewer interactions with the host society, knowing less about the Spanish society and culture, less likely to improve their Spanish-language skills, and following a narrower view of academic success and potential vocation.

Even though Chinese international students are geographically dispersed across their campus, the social media WeChat makes them concentrate in large community. Chinese international students create their own community through an ethnically focused student associations, academic network, and social media. The social media WeChat impact and

change ways that Chinese international students communicate, interact with and adapt to the host culture on a daily basis in multiple ways.

Chinese international students use these sites to make friends with their co-nations in the host country. It also serves as a method of addressing issues like that Chinese international students may feel disconnected from their family member while abroad in Spain. And the use of WeChat is geared more towards gathering academic information to complete their class assignments. They also foster this kind of online relationships to get information for daily living, such as renting information, where to eat, coupons, what to do with free time, travel info and local news. Chinese international students also run invisible restaurants and do part-time job as Dai Gou in virtue of WeChat.

In the end, when refer to the psychological adaptation, the word that participants mentioned most was loneliness. The strategy of Chinese international students to meet the challenge is to enjoy loneliness. Chinese students identified that being away from their familiar surroundings, family and friends as the main reason of their feeling of loneliness. Since most Chinese students studying in Spain are without the company of their family, it's not difficult to understand that they often feel lonely living in a new culture. Even though many Chinese students stay close to their co-national friends, and use WeChat to keep in contact with their family and friends, whereas this doesn't necessarily solve the problem. The loneliness was basically caused by the separation from their loved ones. Apart from this reason, the failure of Chinese students to make connections in the alien environment also results in their loneliness.

While 'enjoy' and 'loneliness' do not logically collocate well together. The statement presents powerfully the profound psychological frustration that Chinese international students may have to face in addition to the academic challenge related stress and tensions. As such, Chinese international students' survival and adaptation in Spanish universities include far more than improve their language proficiency, get a diploma and subject knowledge. The deepest level change should be personal and psychological. This study suggests that such adaptations did have happened on Chinese international students, at least to a degree.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

The physical journey of international students from their native country to the host country often parallels a psychological journey of cross-cultural adaptation including changes to their ways of feeling, thinking and behaving. And international students contribute to the creation of a more diverse society by presenting different cultural values and perspectives. In addition, they provide important economic benefits to the host country. While we should keep in mind that cross-cultural experiences generate opportunities for studying and individual growth as well as problems and loneliness; cross-cultural adaptation is a process of communication between international students and the new circumstance; and individual characteristics, migratory experience and friendship type of international students have an important influence on their adaptation strategy and shape their adaptation process; while the cross-cultural adaptation initiates a qualitative transformation in international students' sense of self, worldviews, values and relationships with other culture groups.

This study will benefit Chinese intentional students in their adaptation processes in the host country. Such information will advise new Chinese students in their forthcoming abroad study. At the same time, this information may help the Spanish society and universities know the concerns, desires and problems of Chinese students to offer a better service. In the end, this chapter will summarize all the findings of the research, discuss practical implications and give advice to the future research.

#### **5.1. Summary of Findings**

Firstly, the characteristics of Chinese international students in Spain are different from those of Chinese international students in the U.S.A. that is the most frequent overseas study destination among Chinese international students. On the whole, Chinese intentional students in Spain are concentrated in undergraduate studies of Social and Law Sciences, while the number of postgraduate students is increasing year by year. The gender distribution is dominated by female, the number of girls is twice that of boys. By

contrast, Chinese international students in the U.S.A. are mainly postgraduate students in natural science, and there are more men than women (Yan, 2017).

According to the answers to the survey of this thesis, the typical image of Chinese international students in Spain would be like the following: she is probably a girl of 25 years old coming from the developed regions of China, as the Only Child of her family, pursuing her Bachelor degree in Social and Law Sciences; she is single and sharing an apartment with other Chinese; the average monthly expenditure was about 850 euros and her main economic sources were from their parents or family member; her life here is very busy with an average daily study time of 2-4 hours and she often reads Spanish newspapers; most of her friends are Chinese; her eating habits are a combination of Chinese and Spanish cuisine; and many of her clothes are bought in Spain. The main reason why she chose Spain is to learn the language Spanish. She plans going back to China after her graduation, and she would like to study again in Spain if given another chance.

Secondly, sociocultural, academic, and psychological adaptations are positively related, though the relation between sociocultural and psychological adaptation is weaker. The sociocultural and academic adaptations of Chinese international students are affected by background and acculturation experience factors, such as gender, age, length of stay in Spain, ethnic types of residence, social network (friendship), and pair engagement, while the psychological adaptation is only related to age. This findings stand in line with Klineberg and Hull (1979), Ward and Searle (1991), Deshpande and Viswesvaran (1992), and Ward and Kennedy (1993). The sociocultural, academic, and psychological adaptations of Chinese international students affect their acculturation outcomes in Spain, for instance, the better adaptation is related to the disposition to stay in Spain, to study abroad again or to study in Spain again. Their relationship with the sociocultural, academic, and psychological adaptations studied in this research is summarized as in follows:

Male Chinese international students in Spain have a lower degree of difficulty in adjusting than do females in terms of sociocultural and academic adaptations. Older students have better academic adaptation and the group of 25-29 years old students have better psychological adaptation than the group of 16-20 years old. The longer Chinese

international students stay in Spain, the better adaptation they feel in sociocultural and academic adaptations. With regard to the relation between the type of residence and sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations, Chinese international students who live with non-Chinese have less difficulties than those who live with Chinese in both sociocultural adaptation and academic adaptation. The participants whose circle of friends is dominated by cultural outgroups (Spaniards or other nationalities) feel better in sociocultural and academic adaptations than those whose social network is dominated by Chinese friends. As for type of pair engagement, single Chinese international students have more difficulties than those who have boyfriends or girlfriends in sociocultural and academic adaptations. However, contrary to the hypothesis of the research, the Only Child students do not show significant differences in their sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations.

Thirdly, most Chinese international students in Spain feel confident in their sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations, for instance, 86% participants express they would still choose to study abroad if given another chance; besides, 70% participants would study again in Spain; the mean scores of self-evaluation of the scales of sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptations are really high: 3.45, 3.58, and 3.56. In spite that more than half (60%) of them still choose to go back to China at the end of their overseas studies in Spain, those with higher scores in Sociocultural and Academic Adaptation scales would prefer to stay in Spain or other countries after graduation, continue to study in other countries, and specifically again in Spain. That means that the Chinese international students who feel more socio-culturally and academically competent would like to stay abroad after their graduation. This finding stands in line with the Chinese international students satisfaction with studies in Spain, their adaptation to the Spanish society. This satisfaction may explain the disposition of Chinese international students in this survey to come back to Spain for study if they have another chance.

Fourthly, Chinese international students conceive travelling to study abroad in the framework of their academic capital accumulation. Nevertheless, it turned out that the deepest effect of overseas studies is on personal and psychological levels. When Chinese international students come to rethink fundamental aspects of their lives in Spain,



studying abroad is not only a way of boosting their CVs, but also a way to profoundly change their lives in a process of maturation and personal expansion. Just as a claim put forward by one of Chinese international students “Sojourning in a new country, the whole society is your university”.

Major problems and issues faced by Chinese international students with their endeavor to adapt to the Spanish society and academic system are: the language barrier, which could result in poor academic and social communication with their surroundings; the different patterns of social interaction, by which Chinese students feel really difficult to build a strong relationship, more precisely, a deep friendship with Spaniards; the academic challenge mainly of adjusting to the learning environment and becoming a independent learner, which is regarded as the most serious problem by Chinese international students in their cross-cultural adaptation; and, finally, the loneliness and the pressure to dating and marriage are also challenging for the female Chinese students whose number is twice that of men.

Among these problems, linguistic adaptation was the most significant topic brought up by our interviews. In consistence with other research in this field (Kim, 1988; Cushner, & Karim, 2004; Henze & Zhu, 2012), the first common theme mentioned by Chinese students was the lack of Spanish proficiency. The understanding of questions and conversations in class is one of the greatest challenges at the beginning of their study in Spain. Expressing their thoughts and feelings in a proper way, to let others understand themselves still remained a constant struggle for Chinese students even after years of study in Spain. Another linguistic challenge participants faced was the academic writing of reports and papers. Especially, respondents pointed out that the lack of Spanish proficiency impedes their integration into the local student community.

Many participants used mass media such as television, magazines, movies, radio, and music to improve their language skills and to acquire information. Some Chinese international students took further steps to seek opportunities to communicate with Spaniards, like joining language exchange activities, living in the same apartment with international students. However, interviewees’ thoughts and feelings regarding their Spanish language competency reveal that Chinese international students are in need of more than just language knowledge to communicate with Spaniards confidently and

effectively. Chinese students are sensitive about their language abilities, and this would easily generate frustration or sometimes feelings of inferiority. They need understanding and support from native speakers, and they want to be accepted by who they are, not only by their Spanish abilities. Moreover, Chinese students need creatively seek ways to deal with their Spanish proficiency because their limited chance to practice Spanish in their daily life, since they are surrounded by a “Chinese speaking” environment, and most Chinese international students lack personal initiative to enhance their Spanish skills.

Fifthly, Chinese international students have adopted various acculturation strategies to accomplish a successful adaptation to the Spanish society as well as culture. To cope with the Spanish social and cultural challenges, Chinese international students mainly changed their extrinsic behaviors, costumes, lifestyle and Spanish language skills, but not the internal cultural characteristics including religious, ethnic values, cultural heritage and friendship.

As the quantitative part of this study shows, the Chinese international students choose integration and assimilation acculturation strategies for external behaviors, but separation for intimate relationship. Specifically, the Chinese international students tend to adopt Spanish customs and they seek involvement with the Spanish society in external behaviors, for example, 72% of the participants are accustomed to buy Spanish clothes; 54% use to eat a combination of Western and Asian cuisine; in the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale, the easiest thing that the participants have scored is “adapting to the pace of life in Spain” compared with other dimensions; and they are very confident in changing their behavior to suit the local social norms, rules, attitudes, beliefs, and customs. On the other hand, they also want to maintain their Chinese culture and identity, especially when building intimate relationship. Separation is the most frequent predominant acculturation strategy in this domain. For instance, 56% of the participants live with other Chinese; the social network is dominated by Chinese for 84% of the participants in our survey; and we find that Chinese international students have built a tight-knit community of co-nationals in the participant observation.

“To be together” was often heard during the student interviews and participant observation in this research. No matter whether in the campus or in the class, Chinese international students were always seen to stay together in their circles. From the

out-group perspective, Chinese international students are often viewed by the media and institutions as a cluster of passive learners enclosed to themselves. This finding stands in line with previous research on international student communities, which have demonstrated they often form close networks with their co-nationals (Li, 1995; Wan, 1996; Sun, 1999). Furthermore, sojourners from interdependent and collectivistic cultures are more likely to value interpersonal connections. However, it's worth noting that the participants whose circle of friends dominated by cultural outgroups (Spaniards or other nationalities) have better sociocultural and academic adaptations than those whose social network is dominated by Chinese friends.

Sixthly, the integration into the local and university life, and making Spanish friends are the outstanding difficulties encountered by the Chinese international students in their cross-cultural sociocultural, academic and psychological adaptation. Participants indicate the lowest scores on interacting at local social events and attending or participating in university activities in both Sociocultural and Academic Adaptation scales. Our interviewees express they find really difficult to build a strong relationship, more precisely, a deep friendship with Spanish.

When I tried to explore the reasons behind these problems, I found them were both internal and external. Cross-cultural communication is seen always a mean to improve inter-cultural relations. Yet, social and cultural diversity, such as educational, family and cultural background, and different definitions of identity interfere with this communication. It's notable that Chinese people have developed a "self" that is linked with various kinds of relationships. The meaning of Chinese interpersonal and relational "self" is quite different of the more individualist. Chinese people are more group-oriented and tend to emphasize harmony instead of independence. Two more key arguments should be noted: firstly, there are few chances for the two groups of students to meet and know each other. As informants have reported, there were few inter-group activities or they were unknown. Secondly, interviewees saw few common topics to talk with the other group.

What's more, most Chinese students agreed that good communication skills were absolutely necessary, but few took enough time and effort to optimize their Spanish competence. Some students mentioned that their lack of involvement in class discussions

was not due to their lack of the answers, but a matter of psychological habit. When Chinese students didn't feel totally confident about the answers, they would choose to be silent and not take the risk to answer it.

Seventhly, the majority of Chinese international students do invest a lot of time in studying, for example, the quantitative study shows that the average daily study time is 2-4 hours for 31% of Chinese international students, another 23% use to study 4-6 hours, and 17% of them use to study more than 6 hours. They are busy in their leisure time, anxious about falling behind and ambitious about getting ahead. The participants also claimed that they feel troubled by the need to be an independent learner. "To be independent means not relying on others, especially on the parents, to take care of your life and to solve your problems." (Interviewee 5). Nearly all the participants mentioned that learning to cope with problems by oneself was crucial in the Spanish individualistic culture and they spend a lot of time on transforming themselves to be an independent learner.

This dedication reflects the emphasis of Chinese culture on education and personal academic success that is connected with family's honor. The Chinese students also want to pay back the time, energy and financial resources that their parents have invested on them. Chinese international students are accompanied by this cultural character traveling to Spain. For them, the journey to Spain is too long to fail. Our interviewees also claimed that the highly competitive Chinese society adds them pressure to study hard.

Another reason for this dedication is that many Chinese international students study in a relative traditional way, which means to memorize knowledge in order to pass tests. Moreover, in order to be an independent learner, they need to pay a large amount of mental energy to generate creative ideas, to make new uses of the knowledge they have learned, and to ask their own questions. He/she must express him/herself explicitly for help, and this use stands in stark contrast to Chinese communication practice where young people are encouraged to be humble and quiet (passive). Acting according to the individualist expectations requires more time, and the need to overcome the intellectual and emotional exhaustion. When asked about the most profound change they have experienced coming to study in Spain, many interviewees repeatedly stated that the first profound change was the apparent improvement in their Spanish proficiency, and the

second is their greatly enhanced sense of independence and self-responsibility in managing their life and study.

Eighthly, the relations between younger siblings and their elders form an ethnic network of the Chinese students' community. These communities serve like a home away from home for many interviewees. This network offers experience like a tutorial, where newcomers learn the application processes to the Spanish university, to acquire the skills, to settle down and move on. The ethnic network also enhances the psychological well-being of Chinese international students, because it provides a sense of security and facilitates the adaptation, particularly at the initial stages. Besides that, the members may also find suitable marriage partners, as many participants bear the pressure of marriage.

In the interviews and participant observation, I found the Chinese Students Association (Chinese Only) is perceived as part of their overseas home and has an important significance to the Chinese international students in Spain. The CSA has been a pivotal player in the creation of the Chinese student community on and out the campus; it can be considered the epitome of the social, academic and psychological adaptation of Chinese international students. The major function of CSA is to coach the academic adaptation. Besides the regular meeting for the new comers, the senior members of the CSAs release periodically academic information like lecture notes, study guides, papers and research work to all the members in the WeChat group or in the Weibo official account.

In addition to academic support and to helping advice with the academic adaptation, the CSA runs like a well-oiled machine for providing staging social and cultural events that facilitate the social and psychological adaptation of Chinese international students in Spain. CSAs also defend Chinese students' rights. For instance, when many universities tried to increase tuition fees, especially imposing higher fees to non-EU students to balance their budgets, the Chinese Students Association of Complutense University of Madrid collected more than 400 signatures from Chinese international students in their letter of protest, and represented them sending the letter to the office of the Rector of Complutense University of Madrid and the office of the mayor of Madrid. This action inspired other CSAs to call on more students to protest against tuition fees.

Thus mono-cultural networks are of vital importance to Chinese international students. In addition to offering a complete and positive social, and academic support system, the Chinese student community serves as the co-national friendship network. It seems to be beneficial for the psychological well-being of Chinese international students because it provides a sense of security and facilitate the adaptation, particularly at the initial stages. However, a delicate balance between the community of co-nationals and larger institution should be kept. If the balance goes too far toward the co-national community, the community becomes alienated of the larger institution, separating its members from the rest of the students and Spanish society, losing the diversity. Shielded too much, students would have fewer interactions with the host society, knowing less about the Spanish society and culture, less likely to improve their Spanish-language skills, and following a narrower view of academic success and potential vocation.

Ninthly, even though Chinese international students are geographically dispersed across their campus, the social media WeChat convenes them in a large community. Chinese international students create their own community through an ethnically focused student associations, academic network, and social media. The social media WeChat affects the ways for Chinese international students' communication, interaction with and adaptation to the host culture on a daily basis in multiple ways.

Chinese international students use these sites to make friends with their co-nationals in the host country. This social networks also serves to maintain the connection with their family while abroad in Spain. The use of WeChat is geared towards gathering academic information to complete class assignments. This kind of online relationships serves to get information for daily living, such as renting information, where to eat, coupons, what to do with free time, travel info and local news. Chinese international students also run invisible restaurants and do part-time job as Dai Gou by WeChat.

Finally, loneliness was the word that participants mentioned most when referring to psychological adaptation. The coping strategy of Chinese international students is to enjoy loneliness. They identified that being away from their familiar surroundings, family and friends is the main reason of their feeling of loneliness. Since most Chinese students studying in Spain are without the company of their family, it's not difficult to understand that they often feel lonely living in a new culture. Even though many Chinese students

stay close to their co-national friends, and use WeChat to keep in contact with their family and friends, this practices don't necessarily solve the problem. The loneliness was basically caused by the separation from their loved ones. Besides this reason, their loneliness may be due to the failure of Chinese students in building relationships in the foreign environment.

'Enjoy' and 'loneliness' do not logically fit well together. Their combination powerfully reflects the profound psychological frustration that Chinese international students may have to face in addition to the stress and tensions derived from academic challenges. As such, Chinese international students' survival and adaptation in Spanish universities include far more than improve their language proficiency, get a diploma and subject knowledge. The deepest level change should be personal and psychological. This study suggests that such adaptations did have happened on Chinese international students, at least to a degree.

## **5.2. Practical Implications**

According to the research findings, the following are a few suggestions for Spanish universities and other organizations to address the relevant issues faced by Chinese international students:

1. Orientation programmes for international students should be sent to them with the admission notice to help these academic sojourners well prepare for the new life and to facilitate their sociocultural, academic and adaptation sociocultural adaptation. The programmes should be offered not just before their departure, but also at regular intervals, and especially at the very beginning of their arrival. That's partly because their adaptation needs vary over time.

2. Organize more student events and encourage students organizations to intentionally bring Spanish and international students together, like language exchange activities and cultural introduction activities. Especially for the group work in the class, the teachers should better recommend Spanish students cooperate with international students. What's more, Spanish students should be encouraged to know more about other cultures and to learn more about intercultural issues. For example, it would be useful to

offer an introductory module in intercultural communication as an elective course to all the students.

3. The effectiveness of the programmes should be evaluated. Promote effective interaction between international students and faculty staff. Offer the international students available support systems. While the condition is that both academic and support staff are well equipped to offer appropriate support and help. This involves intercultural awareness training, and professional development workshops for faculty designed to improve social and learning environments should be offered. Even more important is that universities need to commit financial resources to support their staff to give the support for international students with what they need and deserve.

4. Promote more contact between international students and the local Spanish community. International students should be well informed about the existing opportunities for voluntary work in the community. Similarly, more local people could be encouraged to get contact with international students, like some cultural events where people from different culturas can know with each other.

5. Facilitate the formation of monocultural networks, as they play an important role in providing close friendships to international students, especially for the new comers and minority nationalities that have difficulty finding their co-nationals. One way of helping this would be to send them the information about the Student Association of their co-nationals. In addition, multicultural networks should organize sightseeing excursions, cultural evenings and so on. It is important for Students Associations taking cultural diversity properly into account, to organize more social activities besides the pub or drinking.

### **5.3.Limitations**

This study was restricted to Chinese international students who come from the People's Republic of China and live in Spain now with the purpose of study, including Chinese undergraduates, graduate students, Ph.D. students, exchange students and students in language school, it doesn't include students from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, which limits the generalizability of the results.



The qualitative data were collected in a self-reported, so there is a possibility that students may have not reported the data accurately. Neither the researcher, who was a student, nor the coordinator from the education office of the Embassy China in Madrid who helped collect data, had any position of authority over the students. The students were well informed that any information provided for the study would not affect their grades at the university and would be kept in deep secret to eliminate as much over and under inflation of answers, as possible, to improve the accuracy of the self-reported information.

Another potential limitation was the language ability of the researcher. The questionnaire was subjective and it may have been interpreted differently. Different participants may have different interpretations of the questions. For the sake of interlinguistic communication, the translation of some “native concepts” frequently used by the participants does not always exactly do justice to the native meanings of the Chinese concepts, which limits the expression in this paper.

As for the part of field research, this was a personally transforming experience. It may be emotionally taxing. It could be a challenge if the aim of this study is to observe as “objectively” as possible. Since the subjects of participant observation were only two groups, gathering very detailed information from them means being unable to gather data from a very large number of Chinese international students. As in any relationship, field researchers experience not just the highs but also the lows of daily life and interactions. And participating in day-to-day life with the research subjects can result in some tricky ethical quandaries (Keinman & Copp, 1993).

The opinions on Chinese international students from their teachers, Spanish classmates and roommates were not a part of this study and neither was the teaching methods and examines in the university. Although these probably are important variables, they were not included so that this study could be limited to a more manageable size.

## **5.4.Future Research**

The findings of this research provided a further step towards the understanding of difficulties Chinese international students encounter in the process of adapting to Spanish culture. This research could serve as an initiation and suggest a direction for future study

on Chinese international students in Spain. The insights provided here just open doors for further more profound understanding about the interconnections among international students' socialization, academic life, psychological health and cross-cultural adaptation. For example, future study can try to figure out the relationship between Chinese students and the local people or native students. And may examine more strategies Chinese students used to cope with the issues they face in the process of cross-cultural adaptation.

One remaining question from this research concerns the perspectives of Spanish professors, faculty and students on the Chinese international students' adaptation. It's believed that the other views from natives may give us more answers to the problems that international students have faced. What' s more, how the characteristics and culture of Spain and Spaniards, the curriculum, faculty practice, institutional and departmental climates affect Chinese students still remain unknown. Chinese students' experiences in this research have indicated that the culture of host country, and other environmental factors may influence their perceptions of challenges and adaptation. Research questions such as how is the relationship between faculty members and Chinese students, how Chinese students build relationship with their tutors could also be the research topics.

## **CAPÍTULO 5**

### **CONCLUSIÓN**

A menudo el viaje físico de los estudiantes internacionales desde su país de origen al país de acogida se realiza en paralelo a un viaje psicológico de adaptación intercultural que incluye cambios en sus formas de sentir, pensar y comportarse. Asimismo, los estudiantes internacionales contribuyen a la creación de una sociedad más diversa tanto en los países de origen como en los países de acogida al presentar diferentes valores y perspectivas culturales. Además, brindan importantes beneficios económicos para el país anfitrión. Si bien debemos tener en cuenta que las experiencias transculturales generan oportunidades para el estudio y el crecimiento individual, también incluyen problemas y soledad; la adaptación transcultural es un proceso de comunicación entre estudiantes internacionales y las nuevas circunstancias; y las características individuales, la experiencia migratoria y el tipo de amistad de los estudiantes internacionales tienen una influencia importante en su estrategia de adaptación y conforman su proceso de adaptación, mientras que la adaptación transcultural inicia una transformación cualitativa en el sentido de sí mismo, su visión del mundo, valores y las relaciones con otros grupos culturales.

Este estudio beneficiará a los estudiantes chinos intencionales en sus procesos de adaptación en el país de acogida. Dicha información aconsejará a nuevos estudiantes chinos en su futuro estudio en el extranjero. Al mismo tiempo, esta información puede ayudar a la sociedad y universidades españolas a conocer las preocupaciones, los deseos y los problemas de los estudiantes chinos para ayudar a ofrecerles un mejor servicio. Finalmente, este capítulo resume todos los hallazgos de la investigación, y discute las implicaciones prácticas.

#### **5.1 Resumen de Resultados**

En primer lugar, las características de los estudiantes internacionales chinos en España son diferentes de las de los estudiantes internacionales chinos en los Estados Unidos, que es el destino de estudio en el extranjero más habitual entre los estudiantes internacionales chinos. En general, los estudiantes intencionales chinos en España se

concentran en los estudios de grado de Ciencias Sociales y Jurídicas, y al mismo tiempo, el número de estudiantes de postgrado aumenta año tras año. La distribución de género está dominada por mujeres, siendo el número de féminas el doble que el de varones. En contraste, los estudiantes internacionales chinos en los EE. UU. son principalmente estudiantes de postgrado en materias científicas, y hay más hombres que mujeres (Yan, 2017).

Según las respuestas a la encuesta de esta tesis, el arquetipo del estudiante internacional chino en España sería el siguiente: probablemente sea una chica de 25 años procedente de una de las regiones desarrolladas de China, hija única en la familia, realizando su Licenciatura en Ciencias Sociales o Jurídicas, soltera, y comparte un apartamento con otras personas chinas. El gasto mensual promedio que realiza es de unos 850 euros y sus principales fuentes económicas son sus padres o familiares; aquí tiene una vida muy ocupada, con un tiempo promedio de estudio diario de 2 a 4 horas y suele leer periódicos en español. La mayoría de sus amigos son chinos y sus hábitos alimenticios son una combinación de cocina china y española; además muchas de sus prendas de vestir son compradas en España. Esta persona planea regresar a China después de su graduación, y le gustaría estudiar nuevamente en España si se le da otra oportunidad.

En segundo lugar, las adaptaciones socioculturales, académicas y psicológicas están positivamente relacionadas, aunque la relación entre adaptación sociocultural y psicológica es más débil. Las adaptaciones socioculturales y académicas de los estudiantes internacionales chinos se ven afectadas por factores como experiencias de aculturación antecedentes y trasfondos, como género, edad, duración de la estancia en España, tipos étnicos de residencia, redes sociales (amistad) y compromiso de pareja; mientras que la adaptación psicológica solo está relacionada con la edad. Estos hallazgos están en línea con Klineberg y Hull (1979), Ward y Searle (1991), Deshpande y Viswesvaran (1992) y Ward y Kennedy (1993). Las adaptaciones socioculturales, académicas y psicológicas de los estudiantes internacionales chinos afectan sus resultados de aculturación en España, por ejemplo, la mejor adaptación se relaciona con la disposición a quedarse en España, continuar estudiando en otros países o repetir estudiar en España. Su relación con las adaptaciones socioculturales, académicas y psicológicas estudiadas en esta investigación se resume de la siguiente manera:

Los estudiantes masculinos chinos internacionales en España tienen un menor grado de dificultad para adaptarse que las mujeres en términos de adaptaciones socioculturales y académicas. Los estudiantes de mayor edad tienen una mejor adaptación académica y psicológica. Cuanto más tiempo permanezcan los estudiantes internacionales chinos en España, mejor será la adaptación que se sientan en las adaptaciones socioculturales y académicas. Con respecto a la relación entre el tipo de residencia y las adaptaciones socioculturales, académicas y psicológicas, los estudiantes internacionales chinos que viven con personas que no son de origen chino tienen menos dificultades que quienes viven con personas de origen chino, tanto en adaptación sociocultural como en adaptación académica. Los participantes cuyo círculo de amigos está dominado por grupos interculturales (españoles u otras nacionalidades) se sienten mejor en las adaptaciones socioculturales y académicas que aquellos cuya red social está dominada por amigos chinos. En cuanto al tipo de compromiso de pareja, los estudiantes internacionales solteros chinos tienen más dificultades en adaptaciones socioculturales y académicas que aquellos que tienen pareja. Sin embargo, contrariamente a la hipótesis de la investigación, los estudiantes de la política de Hijo Único no muestran diferencias significativas en sus adaptaciones socioculturales, académicas y psicológicas.

En tercer lugar, la mayoría de los estudiantes internacionales chinos en España tienen confianza en sus adaptaciones socioculturales, académicas y psicológicas; por ejemplo, el 86% de los participantes expresan que volverían a elegir estudiar en el extranjero si tuvieran otra oportunidad; además, el 70% de los participantes volvería a estudiar en España; las puntuaciones promedio de autoevaluación de las escalas de adaptaciones socioculturales, académicas y psicológicas son realmente altas: 3.45, 3.58 y 3.56. Aunque más de la mitad de ellos (60%) todavía eligen regresar a China al finalizar de sus estudios en España, aquellos con puntuaciones más altas en adaptación sociocultural y académica preferirían estar en España o continuar estudiando en otros países, y específicamente en España después de su graduación. Eso significa que los estudiantes internacionales chinos que se sienten más competentes socio-culturalmente les gustaría quedarse en el extranjero después de su graduación. Esta idea se alinea con la satisfacción de los estudiantes internacionales chinos con sus estudios en España y su adaptación a la sociedad española. Esta satisfacción puede explicar la disposición de los

estudiantes internacionales chinos en esta encuesta para regresar a España para estudiar si tuvieran otra oportunidad.

En cuarto lugar, los estudiantes internacionales chinos conciben viajar para estudiar en el extranjero en el marco del desarrollo de su capital académico. Sin embargo, resultó ser que el efecto más profundo de los estudios en el extranjero es a nivel personal y psicológico. Cuando los estudiantes internacionales chinos vienen a revivir aspectos fundamentales de sus vidas en España, estudiar en el extranjero no es solo una forma de impulsar sus CVs, sino también una manera de cambiar profundamente sus vidas en un proceso de maduración y expansión personal. Esto queda representado en una de las afirmaciones expresadas por uno de los estudiantes internacionales chinos “Estando en un nuevo país, la sociedad entera es su universidad”.

Los principales desafíos y problemas a los que se enfrentan los estudiantes internacionales chinos en su intento de adaptarse a la sociedad y al sistema académico español son: la barrera del idioma, que podría dar lugar a una comunicación académica y social deficiente con su entorno; los diferentes patrones de interacción social, por los cuales los estudiantes chinos se sienten realmente limitados a construir relaciones fuertes, en concreto, una buena amistad con los españoles; el desafío académico principalmente el hecho de tener que ajustarse al entorno de aprendizaje y convertirse en un aprendiz independiente, que es considerado como el problema más grave por parte de los estudiantes internacionales chinos en su adaptación transcultural; y, finalmente, la soledad y la presión para las citas y el matrimonio también son un desafío para las estudiantes chinas cuyo número es el doble que el de los hombres.

Entre estos problemas, la adaptación lingüística fue el tema más importante planteado en nuestras entrevistas. En consistencia con otras investigaciones en este campo (Kim, 1988; Cushner, & Karim, 2004; Henze & Zhu, 2012), el primer tema común mencionado por los estudiantes chinos fue la falta de dominio del español. La comprensión de preguntas y conversaciones en clase es uno de los mayores desafíos al comienzo de su estudio en España. Expresar sus pensamientos y sentimientos de una manera adecuada, para lograr que los demás logaran entenderles, seguía siendo una lucha constante para los estudiantes chinos, incluso después de años de estudio en España. Otro desafío lingüístico al que los participantes tuvieron que enfrentarse fue la redacción de tarea académica. Especialmente, los encuestados señalaron que la falta de dominio del

español impide su integración en la comunidad estudiantil local.

Muchos participantes utilizaron los medios de comunicación como televisión, revistas, películas, radio y música para mejorar sus habilidades lingüísticas y adquirir información. Algunos estudiantes internacionales chinos tomaron medidas adicionales para buscar oportunidades de comunicarse con los españoles, como unirse a actividades de intercambio de idiomas, y compartir piso con estudiantes internacionales. Sin embargo, los pensamientos y sentimientos de los entrevistados con respecto a su competencia en el idioma español revelan que los estudiantes internacionales chinos necesitan algo más que conocimiento del idioma para comunicarse con los españoles con confianza y eficacia. Los estudiantes chinos son sensibles a sus habilidades lingüísticas, y esto generaría fácilmente frustración o, a veces, sentimientos de inferioridad. Necesitan comprensión y apoyo de hablantes nativos, y quieren ser aceptados por quienes son, no solo por sus habilidades en español. Además, los estudiantes chinos necesitan buscar maneras más creativas de lidiar con su competencia en español debido a su limitada posibilidad de practicar el español en su vida cotidiana, ya que están rodeados de un ambiente de “habla china” y la mayoría de los estudiantes internacionales chinos carecen de iniciativa personal para mejorar su competencia en español.

En quinto lugar, los estudiantes internacionales chinos han adoptado diversas estrategias de aculturación para lograr una adaptación exitosa tanto a la sociedad española como a la cultura. Para hacer frente a los desafíos sociales y culturales de España, los estudiantes internacionales chinos principalmente cambiaron sus comportamientos extrínsecos, como vestuario, estilo de vida y habilidad con el idioma español, pero no las características culturales internas, incluidos los valores religiosos, étnicos, el patrimonio cultural y la amistad.

Como muestra la parte cuantitativa de este estudio, los estudiantes internacionales chinos eligen las estrategias de integración o asimilación de aculturación para las conductas externas, pero de separación para relaciones íntimas. Los estudiantes internacionales chinos tienden a adoptar de manera específica a costumbres españolas y buscan involucrarse con la sociedad española en comportamientos externos, por ejemplo, el 72% de los participantes están acostumbrados a comprar ropa española y el 54% comen una combinación de cocina occidental y asiática. En la parte de la escala de adaptación sociocultural, lo que los participantes han marcado como más fácil es

“adaptarse al ritmo de la vida en España” en comparación con otras dimensiones, y tienen mucha confianza en cambiar su comportamiento para adecuarse a las normas sociales, reglas, actitudes, creencias y costumbres locales. Por otro lado, también quieren mantener su cultura e identidad chinas, especialmente cuando construyen una relación íntima. La separación es la estrategia de aculturación predominante más frecuente en este dominio. Por ejemplo, más de la mitad, el 56% de los participantes, viven con otros chinos; el círculo de amigos está dominado por los chinos para el 84% de los participantes en nuestra encuesta; y en la observación participativa encontramos que los estudiantes internacionales chinos han construido una comunidad unida de conciudadanos.

“Estar juntos” a menudo se escuchaba durante las entrevistas con los estudiantes y la observación participante en esta investigación. No importa si en el campus o en la clase, siempre se observó que los estudiantes internacionales chinos permanecen juntos en sus círculos. Desde la perspectiva del grupo externo, los medios de comunicación e instituciones a menudo ven a los estudiantes internacionales chinos como un grupo de aprendices pasivos encerrados en sí mismos. Este hallazgo se alinea con investigaciones previas sobre comunidades estudiantiles internacionales, que han demostrado que a menudo forman redes cercanas con sus connacionales (Li, 1995, Wan, 1996; Sun, 1999). Además, los viajeros de culturas interdependientes y colectivistas son más propensos a valorar las conexiones interpersonales. Sin embargo, vale la pena señalar que los participantes cuyo círculo de amigos está dominado por grupos externos culturales (españoles u otras nacionalidades) tienen mejores adaptaciones socioculturales y académicas que aquellos cuya red social está dominada por amigos chinos.

En sexto lugar, la integración en la vida local y universitaria, y hacer amigos en España son las grandes dificultades que enfrentan los estudiantes internacionales chinos en su adaptación sociocultural, académica y psicológica. Los participantes dan las puntuaciones más bajas al interactuar en eventos sociales locales y asistir o participar en actividades universitarias en las escalas de adaptación sociocultural y adaptación académica. Nuestros entrevistados expresan que se encuentran muy difícil construir una relación fuerte, más precisamente, una amistad profunda con los españoles.

Cuando traté de explorar las razones detrás de estos problemas, encontré motivos tanto internos como externos. La comunicación intercultural se ve siempre como un medio para mejorar las relaciones interculturales. Sin embargo, la diversidad social y



cultural, como los antecedentes educativos, familiares, culturales, y las diferentes definiciones de identidad interfieren con esta comunicación. Es notable que los chinos han desarrollado un “yo” que está vinculado con varios tipos de relaciones. El significado del “yo” interpersonal y relacional chino es bastante diferente del más individualista. Los chinos están más orientados al grupo y tienden a enfatizar la armonía en lugar de la independencia. Se deben señalar otros dos argumentos clave: en primer lugar, hay pocas posibilidades de que los dos grupos de estudiantes se conozcan entre sí. Como informaron los informantes, hubo pocas actividades intergrupales o fueron desconocidas. En segundo lugar, los entrevistados vieron pocos temas comunes para hablar con el otro grupo.

Además, la mayoría de los estudiantes chinos coincidieron en que las buenas habilidades de comunicación eran absolutamente necesarias, pero pocos se tomaron el tiempo y el esfuerzo necesarios para optimizar su competencia en español. Algunos estudiantes mencionaron que su falta de participación en las discusiones de la clase no se debía a su falta de respuestas, sino a una cuestión de hábito psicológico. Cuando los estudiantes chinos no se sienten totalmente seguros de las respuestas, eligen guardar silencio y no correr el riesgo de responderlas.

En séptimo lugar, la mayoría de los estudiantes internacionales chinos invierten mucho tiempo estudiando, por ejemplo, el estudio cuantitativo muestra que el tiempo de estudio diario promedio es de 2-4 horas para el 31% de los estudiantes internacionales chinos, otro 23% lo usa para estudiar 4 -6 horas, y el 17% de ellos usa para estudiar más de 6 horas. Están ocupados en su tiempo libre, ansiosos por quedarse atrás y ambiciosos por salir adelante. Los participantes también afirmaron que se sienten preocupados por la necesidad de ser autónomos en su aprendizaje. “Ser independiente significa no depender de los demás, especialmente de los padres, para encargarse de su vida y resolver sus problemas.” (Entrevistado nº5). Casi todos los participantes mencionaron que aprender a lidiar con los problemas por uno mismo era crucial en la cultura individualista española y dedican mucho tiempo a transformarse para ser autónomos en su aprendizaje.

Esta dedicación refleja el énfasis de la cultura china en la educación y el éxito académico personal que está conectado con el honor de la familia. Los estudiantes chinos también quieren devolver el tiempo, la energía y los recursos financieros que sus padres han invertido en ellos. Los estudiantes internacionales chinos están acompañados por esta

característica cultural que viaja a España. Para ellos, el viaje a España es demasiado largo para fallar. Nuestros entrevistados también afirmaron que la sociedad china, altamente competitiva, les agrega presión para estudiar duro.

Otra razón para esta dedicación es que muchos estudiantes internacionales chinos estudian de una manera relativamente tradicional, lo que significa memorizar el conocimiento para pasar las pruebas. Además, para ser un aprendiz independiente, necesitan invertir una gran cantidad de energía mental para generar ideas creativas, hacer nuevos usos del conocimiento que han aprendido y formular sus propias preguntas. Él / ella debe expresarse explícitamente en busca de ayuda, y este uso contrasta con la práctica de comunicación china donde se alienta a los jóvenes a ser humildes y callados (pasivos). Actuar de acuerdo con las expectativas individualistas requiere más tiempo y la necesidad de superar el agotamiento intelectual y emocional. Cuando se les preguntó sobre el cambio más profundo que experimentaron al estudiar en España, muchos entrevistados declararon repetidamente que el primer cambio profundo fue la aparente mejoría en su dominio del español, y el segundo es su gran sentido de independencia y propia responsabilidad en las gestiones de su vida y estudio.

El octavo punto se refiere a las relaciones entre los hermanos menores y sus mayores, las cuales forman una red étnica de la comunidad de estudiantes chinos. Estas comunidades sirven como un segundo hogar lejos del propio para muchos entrevistados. Esta red ofrece la experiencia de otros miembros como una ayuda o tutorial, donde los recién llegados aprenden los procesos de solicitud a la universidad española, para adquirir las habilidades, establecerse y seguir adelante. La red étnica también mejora el bienestar psicológico de los estudiantes internacionales chinos, ya que proporciona una sensación de seguridad y facilita la adaptación, especialmente en las etapas iniciales. Además de eso, los miembros también pueden encontrar parejas matrimoniales adecuadas, ya que muchos participantes soportan la presión del matrimonio. En las entrevistas y la observación participante, encontré que la Asociación de Estudiantes Chinos (solo chinos) es percibida como parte de su hogar en el extranjero y tiene un importante significado para los estudiantes internacionales chinos en España. El CSA ha sido un actor fundamental en la creación de la comunidad de estudiantes chinos dentro y fuera del campus; se puede considerar el epítome de la adaptación social, académica y psicológica de los estudiantes internacionales chinos. La función principal del CSA es entrenar la adaptación académica.

Además de reuniones regulares para los recién llegados, los miembros sénior de las CSA publican periódicamente información académica como notas de conferencias, guías de estudio, trabajos de investigación y documentos para todos los miembros del grupo WeChat o en la cuenta oficial de Weibo.

Además del apoyo académico y para ayudar con la adaptación académica, el CSA funciona como una máquina bien engrasada para proporcionar eventos sociales y culturales que facilitan la adaptación social y psicológica de los estudiantes internacionales chinos en España. Además, los miembros del CSA también defienden los derechos de los estudiantes chinos. Por ejemplo, cuando muchas universidades intentaron aumentar las tasas, especialmente imponiendo tarifas más altas a los estudiantes no pertenecientes a la UE para equilibrar sus presupuestos, la Asociación de Estudiantes Chinos de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid recabó más de 400 firmas de estudiantes internacionales chinos en su carta de protesta, y los representó enviando la carta a la oficina del Rector de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid y a la oficina del alcalde de Madrid. Esta acción inspiró a otras CSA a llamar a más estudiantes para protestar contra las tasas.

Por lo tanto, las redes monoculturales son de vital importancia para los estudiantes internacionales chinos. Además de ofrecer un sistema completo y positivo de apoyo social y académico, la comunidad de estudiantes chinos sirve como la red de amistad co-nacional. Parece ser beneficioso para el bienestar psicológico de los estudiantes internacionales chinos porque proporciona una sensación de seguridad y facilita la adaptación, especialmente en las etapas iniciales. Sin embargo, se debe mantener un delicado equilibrio entre la comunidad de compatriotas y comunidades más amplias. Si el equilibrio se inclina demasiado hacia la comunidad compatriota, la comunidad se distancia de las comunidades más amplias y del entorno, separando a sus miembros del resto de los estudiantes y la sociedad española, y perdiendo así la diversidad. Protegidos en exceso, los estudiantes tendrían menos interacciones con la sociedad de acogida, conocerían menos la sociedad y la cultura españolas, tendrían menos posibilidades de mejorar sus habilidades en el idioma español y seguirían teniendo una visión más estrecha del éxito académico y su potencial.

Como noveno punto, aunque los estudiantes internacionales chinos están dispersos geográficamente en su campus, las redes sociales WeChat los congregan en una gran

comunidad. Los estudiantes internacionales chinos crean su propia comunidad a través de asociaciones estudiantiles étnicamente enfocadas, redes académicas y redes sociales. La red social WeChat afecta la forma en la que los estudiantes internacionales chinos se comunican, interactúan y se adaptan diariamente a la cultura de acogida de múltiples maneras.

Los estudiantes internacionales chinos usan estos emplazamientos para trabar amistad con sus connacionales en el país anfitrión. Estas redes sociales también sirven para mantener la conexión con su familia mientras están en el extranjero en España. El uso de WeChat está orientado a reunir información académica para completar las tareas de clase. Este tipo de relaciones en línea sirve para obtener información para la vida diaria, como el alquiler de vivienda, dónde comer, cupones de descuento, planes que hacer con el tiempo libre, información de viajes y noticias locales. Los estudiantes internacionales chinos también dirigen restaurantes invisibles y hacen un trabajo a tiempo parcial como Dai Gou en WeChat.

Finalmente, la soledad fue la palabra que los participantes mencionaron más al referirse a la adaptación psicológica. La estrategia para afrontar la soledad de los estudiantes internacionales chinos es disfrutar de la misma. Identificaron que estar alejados de su entorno familiar, familiares y amigos es la razón principal de su sentimiento de soledad. Dado que la mayoría de los estudiantes chinos que estudian en España están sin la compañía de su familia, no es difícil entender que a menudo se sienten solos viviendo en una nueva cultura. Aunque muchos estudiantes chinos se mantienen cerca de sus amigos compatriotas y usan WeChat para mantenerse en contacto con sus familiares y amigos, estas prácticas no necesariamente resuelven el problema. La soledad fue causada básicamente por la separación de sus seres queridos. Además de esta razón, su soledad puede deberse al fracaso de los estudiantes chinos en la construcción de relaciones en el entorno extranjero.

‘Disfrutar’ y ‘soledad’ no encajan lógicamente bien. Su combinación refleja poderosamente la profunda frustración psicológica que los estudiantes internacionales chinos pueden tener que enfrentar además del estrés y de las tensiones derivadas de los desafíos académicos. Como tal, la supervivencia y adaptación de los estudiantes internacionales chinos en las universidades españolas incluye mucho más que mejorar su dominio del idioma, obtener un diploma y el conocimiento de la materia. El cambio de

nivel más profundo debe ser personal y psicológico. Este estudio sugiere que tales adaptaciones sí sucedieron en estudiantes internacionales chinos, al menos hasta cierto punto.

## **5.2 Implicaciones Practicas**

De acuerdo con los hallazgos de la investigación, las siguientes son algunas sugerencias para las universidades españolas y otras organizaciones para abordar los problemas relevantes que enfrentan los estudiantes internacionales chinos:

1. Los programas de orientación para estudiantes internacionales deberían ser enviados con el aviso de admisión para ayudar a estos estudiantes extranjeros a prepararse para la nueva vida y para facilitar su adaptación sociocultural, académica y psicológica. Los programas deberían ofrecerse no solo antes de su partida, sino también a intervalos regulares, y especialmente desde el comienzo de su llegada. Eso se debe en parte a que sus necesidades de adaptación varían con el tiempo.

2. Organizar más eventos estudiantiles y animar a las organizaciones de estudiantes a reunir intencionalmente a estudiantes nacionales e internacionales, como actividades de intercambio de idiomas y actividades de introducción cultural. En concreto para el trabajo en grupo en la clase, los profesores deberían recomendar cooperar con los estudiantes internacionales. Además, se debe alentar a los estudiantes españoles a que conozcan más sobre otras culturas y aprendan más sobre cuestiones interculturales. Por ejemplo, sería útil ofrecer un módulo introductorio en comunicación intercultural como un curso optativo para todos los estudiantes. La efectividad de estos programas debería ser evaluada.

3. Promover la interacción efectiva entre los estudiantes internacionales y el personal de la facultad. Ofrecer a los estudiantes internacionales sistemas de apoyo disponibles. Si bien la condición es que tanto el personal académico como el de soporte estén bien equipados para ofrecer un apoyo y ayuda adecuados. Esto incluye capacitación en concienciación intercultural, y se deben ofrecer talleres de desarrollo profesional para el personal docente diseñados para mejorar los entornos sociales y de aprendizaje. Aún más importante es que las universidades deben comprometer recursos económicos para ayudar a su personal a brindar el apoyo a los estudiantes internacionales los cuales necesitan y merecen.

4.Promover más contacto entre estudiantes internacionales y la comunidad local española. Los estudiantes internacionales deben estar bien informados sobre las oportunidades existentes para el trabajo voluntario en la comunidad. Del mismo modo, se podría alentar más a la población local a establecer contacto con estudiantes internacionales, como algunos eventos culturales “abiertos” en los que las personas puedan conocerse entre sí.

5.Facilitar la formación de redes monoculturales, ya que juegan un papel importante en la creación de amistades cercanas a los estudiantes internacionales, especialmente para los recién llegados y las minorías internacionales que tienen dificultades para encontrar a sus compatriotas. Una forma de ayudar a esto sería enviarles la información sobre la Asociación de Estudiantes de sus compatriotas. Además, las redes multiculturales deberían organizar excursiones turísticas, veladas culturales, etc. Es importante que las Asociaciones de Estudiantes tengan debidamente en cuenta la diversidad cultural, para organizar más actividades sociales además del pub o la bebida.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A The Online Survey Questionnaire

### THE CROSS-CULTURE ADAPTATION EXPERIENCE OF CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN SPAIN

Dear Students:

Thanks for your participation. This questionnaire is designed to collect information for a Ph.D. thesis entitled on the “The Experience of Chinese International Students’ Sociocultural, Academic and psychological adaptation”. Your genuine response would help in making this study a success. It would take you about 11 minutes to finish it. And a lottery is waiting for you at the end. Your response will remain confidential. Feel **FREE** and give your true feelings on each item, whatever you answer is considered right.

Thank you in advance.

#### Basic information

1. Gender \_\_\_\_\_
2. Born year \_\_\_\_\_
3. Province of usual residence in China \_\_\_\_\_
4. You are pursuing \_\_\_\_\_
  - A. Bachelor Degree
  - B. Master Degree
  - C. Doctor Degree
  - D. A language Certificate (Language school)
  - E. Others \_\_\_\_\_
5. You are studying at \_\_\_\_\_ university (Spain), major in \_\_\_\_\_



6. Previous education before you come to study in Spain is \_\_\_\_\_

OR the place you worked for before come to study in Spain is \_\_\_\_\_

7. You are the only one child       Yes       No

8. You are an exchange student       Yes       No

9. Before you come to Spain, you have some cross-culture experience

Yes       No

10. Before you come to Spain, you have already known about this country

Yes       No

11. Before you applied for your school, you have already known about it

Yes       No

12. You applied for the school with the help of an agency       Yes       No

13. You have a scholarship       Yes       No

14. You have a part-time job       Yes       No

15. You read the native newspaper frequently       Yes       No

16. Have you ever voted in the selection in your university or community

Yes       No

17. Why do you choose to study in Spain?

A. Learn Spanish

B. The request of your study

C. Find a better job

D. Immigrate

E. The cost is lower

F. There isn't other choices

G. Others \_\_\_\_\_

18. The length of study in Spain since you first arrived here (more or less)\_\_\_\_\_

A. Less than three months

B. Three months to half year

C. Half year to one year

D. One year to two years

E. Two to three years

F. More than 3 years

19. Your major financial source is \_\_\_\_\_
- A. Parents or family members      B. Part-time job  
C. Scholarship                      D. My own savings      E. Others
20. You are living \_\_\_\_\_
- A. With Chinese   B. With foreigners   C. In the school dormitory   D. As an aupair  
E. In the dormitory of a Spanish family   F. Others
21. What's your eating habits here in Spain?
- A. Mainly Asian cuisine                      B. Mainly Western cuisine  
C. A combination of these two styles      D. Others
22. Where do you buy the majority of your clothes and shoes?
- A. China    B. Spain    C. Others
23. The majority of your friends is \_\_\_\_\_
- A. Chinese    B. Spanish    C. Foreigner (not including Spanish)    D. Others
24. The majority of your Chinese friends are \_\_\_\_\_
- A. In China    B. In Spain    C. In other places except China and Spain    D. Others
25. Your boy/girl friend is \_\_\_\_\_
- A. I don't have    B. Chinese    C. Spaniard    D. Foreigner(not including Spanish)
26. How many hours do you spend on study everyday?
- A. Less than 1 hour    B. 1-2 hours    C. 2-4 hours    D. More than 4 hours
27. The word to describe your leisure time is \_\_\_\_\_
- A. Boring              B. Happy              C. Busy              D. Nothing to do  
E. Others \_\_\_\_\_
28. When you finish the study, you want to

A. Stay in Spain B. Go back to China C. Go to another country

D. I have no idea

29.If you were given another choice, would you choose to study abroad?

A. Yes B. No

30.If you were given another choice, would you choose to study in Spain again?

A. Yes B. No

### Sociocultural Adaptation Scale

Thinking about life in Spain, please rate your competence at each the following behaviors (1 = Not at all competent; 5 = Extremely competent).

	1				5
	Not at all				Extremely
	competent				competent
1.Building and maintaining relationships	1	2	3	4	5
2.Interacting at local social events	1	2	3	4	5
3.Adapting to the noise in my neighborhood	1	2	3	4	5
4.Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's gestures and facial expressions	1	2	3	4	5
5.Interacting with members of the opposite sex	1	2	3	4	5
6.Adapting to the pace of life in Spain	1	2	3	4	5
7.Changing my behavior to suit social norms, rules, attitudes, beliefs, and customs	1	2	3	4	5
8.Varying the rate of my speaking in a culturally					

appropriate manner	1	2	3	4	5
9.Understanding and speaking Spanish	1	2	3	4	5
10.Reading and writing Spanish	1	2	3	4	5
11.Dealing with the bureaucracy in the government services	1	2	3	4	5

### Academic Adaptation Scale

Thinking about study in Spain, please rate your competence at each the following behaves (1 = Not at all competent; 5 = Extremely competent).

	1				5
	Not at all			Extremely	
	competent			competent	
1.Managing my academic responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5
2.Working effectively with other students colleagues	1	2	3	4	5
3.Gaining feedback from other students colleagues to help improve my performance.	1	2	3	4	5
4.Expressing my ideas to other students/colleagues in a culturally appropriate manner	1	2	3	4	5
5.Following my academic interests and hobbies	1	2	3	4	5
6.Obtaining academic services I require	1	2	3	4	5
7.Attending or participating in university activities	1	2	3	4	5
8.Dealing with the bureaucracy in the university	1	2	3	4	5
9.Communicating with teachers	1	2	3	4	5

10.Participation in the class	1	2	3	4	5
11.Dealing with the exams and homework	1	2	3	4	5
12.Adapting to the teaching methods	1	2	3	4	5

**CES-D Scale**

Please tell us how often you have felt this way during the past week:

- 1 Rarely or none of the time (less than one day)
- 2 Some or a little of the time (1-2 days)
- 3 Occasionally or a Moderate amount of the time (3-4 days)
- 4 Most or all of the time (5-7 days)

	1			4
	Rarely			Most time
1. I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me	1	2	3	4
2. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing	1	2	3	4
3. I felt depressed	1	2	3	4
4. I felt that everything I did was meaningless	1	2	3	4
5. I felt hopeful for the future	1	2	3	4
6. I felt fearful	1	2	3	4
7. My sleep was restless	1	2	3	4
8. I felt lonely	1	2	3	4
9. I could not get "going"	1	2	3	4

10. I was happy

1 2 3 4

If you really feel down recently,the main reason you think maybe is \_\_\_\_\_

A. The pressure of study B. The loneliness of daily life C.The homesick

D. Love Relationship Issues E. Others\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much!

If you want to know the result of the research, please contact us with  
wuxiaowu88@gmail.com or WeChat: 245786809.

## **Appendix B Interview Protocol**

1. Please present me briefly about yourself and your study here.

Prompts:

- (1) Please say something about your education background and your family.
- (2) Please say something about your university, your professor and your schoolfellow.
- (3) Please say something about your roommate.
- (4) How is your Spanish level and how did you improve it?

2. Why did you decide to study in Spain?

Prompts:

- (5) How your family and friends influenced your decision to study in Spain?
  - (6) Why did you choose this particular university?
3. What were the major challenges and difficulties you have experienced since you came to Spain? How did you deal with them?
  4. What challenges do you think are typical for Chinese international students?
  5. How about the study in Spain? What's the difference of academic life between China and Spain?
  6. How did you make friends in Spain? What's your relationship with your Spanish peers?
  7. How did you connect with your friends and family when you are in Spain?
  8. Have you experienced depression? And how did you overcome it?
  9. Have you changed in any ways? How did it happen?
  10. What would you recommend to the new comers?

## **Appendix C Interview Records**

Interviewee 1 (2016), interview, freshman female student, 21 years old, single, Autonomous University of Madrid, low level of Spanish, lived with three Chinese students.

Chinese society is very competitive, everyone is striving to get ahead. My first choice used to attend a top university in China, while I failed to do it. I chose to follow the trend to study abroad. It looks like that a diploma from abroad will make finding a job easier. Since the majority went to the traditional English-speaking countries, I prefer the road that less traveled. I thought Spanish was a good choice, because supply falls short of demand in the job market of Spanish in China. In the end, I found that a diploma from abroad was not such appealing as was thought of. The most important is the personal change you have experienced. I would like to choose the class where there are several Chinese. It would be much better if I can see some of my friends in the class. I feel secure when I see them. It's much easier to communicate with them. We can help each other with homework and we often watch over each other. When I didn't understand what the teacher was talking in the class, I can turn to my friends who sit just next to me in Chinese for answers. And we prefer to sit in the back of the classroom, this makes us feel safer and more comfortable. The professor wouldn't look at you all the time. I don't need to worry about that I have to ask the questions. I do afraid that my classmates would laugh at my poor Spanish level. They will laugh at you if you speak some wrong words. This is real embarrassing. I would say it a shame. It made me feel unintelligent, stupid sometimes, it was the biggest frustration. The first semester in the new culture was extremely challenging. I was surrounded by strangers. I didn't know anyone with whom I can talk about my frustration and depression. I always told my parents that everything was fine to not let them be worried about me. And my friends in China couldn't understand my situation. They all thought I was living happily here. The only thing I can do is to 'enjoy' the loneliness.

Interviewee 2 (2016), interview, freshman male student, 21 years old, Autonomous University of Madrid, low level of Spanish, lived with one Spanish student and one Korean student.



I think the lack of Spanish proficiency is a serious problem... When they use idiomatic expressions in Spanish, I totally cannot understand. This really made me feel embarrassing. Although they try hard to speak slowly, even speak English with me, I still feel that lack of Spanish proficiency impede the convenient communication. I'm afraid that my poor Spanish would result in misunderstanding. The letter "R" is hard to pronounce, for me, it's impossible. Thus, there were many times they tried to correct me, especially when I participated in local activities and classroom discussion. It made me feel 'troublesome', so I chose to stay away. Now I often ask my senior brothers and sisters (Chinese) for advice about my academic work, for example, which course is much easier, which professor would give Chinese students a high score. They are also Chinese students, so they know my situation well, they know what is better for me. They can give me guidance on which class to take and which teacher is an easier grader. Before I come here (UAM), I hesitated about the destination of studying abroad and which major should I chose, I joined a WeChat group and asked them for advises. Some of them gave me feedback, while some others disagreed. But from their discussion, I found my way. I also surf the internet for information where exist many forums about the experience of studying abroad, you can find all the news that you wanted to know. I truly appreciated their help in gaining the admission into UAM, without them, I would not be here today.

Interviewee 3 (2016), interview, sophomore female student, 22 years old, Autonomous University of Madrid, medium level of Spanish, lived in the student dormitory of the university.

My first choice was to attend a university in UK, but what a pity is that I didn't get in. So I chose to study in Spain, because it's more likely to be admitted to the school and the cost is not so high like UK. I think the biggest change happened to me is that I am beginning to think about what job I would take and what kind of life I want to live in the future. Spanish people have a really happy lifestyle enjoying sunshine, beach, and a healthy and green environment. I was surprised that the shops and supermarkets close in the weekend, and they cherish their holiday, which is their time with family. Comparing with China, it seems that the time goes much slower. There is less societal pressure and that competition would be less intense in Spain. I was changing, in fact, I am trying to adapt to this kind of life to be more carefully fostering enjoyable lives. While I have

never thought of it before. Chinese people used to pursue constantly a higher position and more money. Unlike Spanish, we never stop working. When I first arrived at Madrid, I couldn't communicate with local people fluently. This caused many problems. However, with the help of one senior sister-in-learning, I registered in the university and also found an affordable room in the student dormitory. She is a member of the Student Association (Chinese Only) and later I became a member with her recommendation. She is more sister than senior sister-in-learning.

Interviewee 4 (2016), interview, senior female student, 22 years old, Autonomous University of Madrid, medium level of Spanish, lived with three Chinese students.

I think the most impressive change is the improved ability to manage my life independently. Now I can arrange everything for myself. I'm used to the situation that there is nobody around to help me with all the things. That's also the reason why my parents sent me to study abroad, they want me to be more mature. What's more, my experience in Spain has improved my ability to communicate with people. You know that learn abroad means that you have to get used to a completely alien environment and meet different people. Sometimes when I met problems, I learned to ask for help from the others. It is truly a great satisfaction and pride that now I could cook delicious food. Did it pay off the money? I can tell you that overseas study is worthy, it's not just about the money, but it's also worth for the money. I think my interpersonal abilities have greatly increased. Many of my friends complaint that Spanish is really difficult, but I don't think so. It is hard to master Spanish for them because a lot of them don't study hard. It doesn't feel like that they are taking their Spanish seriously. Some of them hardly attended Spanish language class... But there are also someone could speak Spanish fluently, they just won't join in the discussion in the class because they are worried about that the rest would laugh at them... We have to go through in adjusting to Spanish academic writing by reading exemplary journal articles and scholarly books, especially those written by our faculty advisors. It's really hard to find a boyfriend here. I think the main reason is that I didn't know many boys here, not Chinese boys or Spanish boys. My circle of friends is really small. And the boys around me are not my type. I prefer someone that is emotionally stronger and mentally smarter than me. I would rather bear the loneliness than marry with a man whom I don't like. My parents pushed me to finish my study as

soon as possible in the purpose to come to back to China, so that I can find someone to get married with. For me, I also feel really lonely and depressed here. I think if I stay here much longer, I would be alone till the end of my life.

Interviewee 5 (2016), interview, senior male student, 22 years old, Autonomous University of Madrid, high level of Spanish, lived alone in an apartment near the university.

I thought the language Spanish would be very useful in the future, there were little people in China speak Spanish. Hence, it would be easier to find a good job. Before coming to UAM, I've learned Spanish in Salamanca for almost two years. Even I got B2 in DELE, in the beginning, I was still so intimated by speaking in Spanish that even my colleagues and professors noticed my fear. I thought they would laugh at me, and it would be really embarrassing. Hence, I was frightened to speak Spanish. While, it turned out that they didn't at all. They were so generous and often encouraged me to stop being shy and to speak out. Little by little, I found my confidence back. Now I feel, I am pretty confident with my Spanish, yeah, quite confident. The adaptation process is very painful. But it truly forced us to increase self-confidence and involve more in class interaction. Compared with the Western teaching method, the Chinese was like 'stuffed ducks'. Now we enjoy the study 'freedom'; prefer to give presentation and other practical activities in class; have a lot of space to develop ourselves. I am more independent in my life here.

I would not choose the popular classes [as viewed among Chinese international students]. I avoid taking classes with many Chinese students. The main reason was that this would hinder me from practicing Spanish. If I live with Spaniards, take class with them, and play with them, I can improve my Spanish quickly. The language was the reason why I came to study here. The group work is of vital importance in the class of Spanish university, I can learn how to clarify the responsibility of proper disposal from the other excellent foreign students in the Spanish group. If we are all Chinese in the group, there won't be a clear division of labor so that some would never do their part of the work. What's more, the communication with other different people [as viewed from different cultures] could be creative.

Interviewee 6 (2016), interview, Ph.D. female student, 27 years old, single, Autonomous University of Madrid, high level in Spanish, lived with one Spanish girl and one Colombian girl.

Spanish is a totally different language system from Chinese. Although I have been in Madrid for five years, I still don't have the confidence to speak Spanish with locals. We have a lunch group of 4 Chinese girls who are all doing their dissertation in UAM. Every day we get together from different faculties at 13:00 H in the eating room of the faculty of education where is much closer to everyone. It's the most comfortable time in the day. I feel so warm with them. I can finally speak Chinese. We talk about the study, daily life, TV shows or some interesting things happened in China. We feel like that we are in China. You know that this made me feel like a Chinese. And this lunch date lasted almost one year and half. It ended when two girls graduated from UAM and went back to China to teach Spanish in university. One of them works in the Fudan University, which is one of the top universities in China.

Their leaving makes feel very sad, and empty. It's like losing an important part in your life. I don't know if I can keep living in Spain or I would come back to China like them. Friendship is very important in the abroad life. Without them, you may feel very lonely. It's very difficult to meet a true friend. I first knew one of them in an event of celebration of Spring Festival that organized by the educational office of the China Embassy. It happened that we were in the same university. Then I made friends with her two friends who also in UAM. Except the lunch date, we also celebrated other Chinese festivals together and hanged out together. That's the story of the lunch date. In China, I didn't have much freedom with the research. The majority of training that we were given was basic. While I feel it's really independent here. I had to figure out everything by myself, so in the beginning I felt a bit of lost, I didn't know how to do it. My professor gave me some directions and some ideas, then the rest was up to me to figure out how and what to do. In the end, I carved out my way to be an independent researcher, which has made me proud.

Interviewee 7 (2016), interview, master's female student, 27 years old, single, Autonomous University of Madrid, high level in Spanish, lived with two Spanish students.

Interviewee 7: If the foreigners [as viewed "the Spaniards"] are not agreed with you about something, they'll just say "No". But for Chinese, we'll consider more. We won't reject the others directly. We are more willing to help them and we have stronger sympathy with the others.

I: What did you feel when faced this?

Interviewee 7: Well, the reason maybe is the cultural difference between China and Spain. I don't feel that they're warm. I think that my classmates don't like Chinese. We [as viewed "the Chinese"] have more initiatives to be helpful, more attentive and more considerate.

I: Can you give me an example?

Interviewee 7: If foreigners come to study in one university in China, the faculty and staff will be more helpful like asking them once in a while how things are going. However in my three half years, if I don't ask them for help, they'll never come and ask me how everything is going.

Interviewee 7: My general feeling about the Spanish people is that they are more willing to help others. For example, if you ask for directions in the street, they will show you in great detail, or even take you there. But it's really hard to make close friends with them [as viewed "the Spanish"].

I: What do you mean by "close friends"?

Interviewee 7: Like real friends, not just greeting to each other with "Hi, how are you?" We can talk about many things, eat together, and play together. I don't have too much contact with them. I was confused how to build friendship with them? The problem is not that we are not capable of doing things well, while it is that we lack the knowledge and experience of navigating the Spanish university environment.

Interviewee 8 (2016), interview, junior male student, 24 years old, single, Autonomous University of Madrid, high level in Spanish, lived with two Chinese students.

Many of us study and live in an environment surrounded by our co-nationals that doesn't require us to speak Spanish. Even though we live in Spain, but it seems that we are closed to our own world separated with the Spanish society. We, Chinese people, are very shy and passive to communicate with foreigners, we are always waiting the others to send us the invitation. Hence, we prefer to live with our co-nationals and choose to be in the same study team in class. Our group in class and my friends are mostly Chinese students, so basically except writing homework in Spanish I don't need to use Spanish to live in Spain. I was disappointed that my Spanish did not improve as much as I expected, although I had lived in Spain for not a short time. Dai Gou is becoming a trend in the Chinese student community in Madrid, at least 3 of my 10 Chinese friends buy cosmetics and luxuries to on-sell back home. I started to step in this market because many of my friends were doing it. In my part-time, I'm so busy at driving around in Serrano, Las Rosas Village, and Pharmacy, taking photos, talking with my client. Thanks to this part-time job, I've improved a lot my Spanish, known much more about the Spanish culture, and I even made friends with two Spanish staffs of the cosmetic shops. Dai Gou enriches my life here, I would make a career out of this business to be a truly member of Spanish society not as sojourns when I graduate. While the story of my fellow countrymen who once was a Ph.D. Student here also encouraged me to go on studying. Once I thought the Western system was difficult to adapt to, as many Chinese students extended their course from three years to four years or more. She also met problems that she didn't know how to find the useful academic resource. But she didn't give up and asked her professor for help. Eventually, she published an important article. She found her enjoyment to be a researcher.

Interviewee 9 (2016), interview, junior female student, 23 years old, Autonomous University of Madrid, high level in Spanish, student leader in AECCUAM. She was practicing in Santander Bank, and lived with two Spanish students.

We work to promote the general well-being of Chinese international students in UAM, in both social and academic standards. What's more, to establish a network between different nationalities across Spain. From pre-departure, adaptation to the new

surroundings to find a job after graduation, every stage we can provide Chinese international students corresponding information and help. Except for the release of daily information, every quarter we organize one special event. For example, the activity with the largest number of participants and the highest level of visibility is the annual Spring Festival in February. And our annual Job Fair (Chinese Only) in June is warmly welcomed by Chinese international students. AECCUAM really wants to do our best to help the new comers. Pre-departure orientations, useful information about the local living habit, housing, transportation, the university, academic advising, and more details are available in our WeChat group. House rental information is published between whiles. The way out of puzzles was put forward when they were still in China. We are always here to help, to take care of the freshmen. Hardly can we balance the integration and the segregation between the Chinese community and Spanish community. We wanted to provide Chinese international students social, academic, and spiritual support, but if we do more, there would be campus stereotypes, which is that we prefer to close to ourselves. My classmate once complained to me that we have excessively kept together as a group. There were indeed some Chinese students who are segregated from the Spanish society, giving the impression that they are physically living in Spain, while socially, culturally and psychologically in China. We have noticed that there were some boys playing video games most time of the day, stepping out of their world to the class a few hours. But the majority of Chinese international students are vividly living in Spain. We refrain from the segregation from the main society. Nonetheless, I can't deny that compared with other foreign students, our co-national friendship network are much stronger. I'm doubting if the more we bounded, the less we adjusted to the local life. We should be more open to the foreigners.

Interviewee 10 (2016), interview, master's female student, 25 years old, Autonomous University of Madrid, high level in Spanish, student leader in AECCUAM. She was practicing in Santander Bank, lived with three Chinese students.

In the beginning, we had serious difficulty adjusting to expectations of the Spanish education system, especially the autonomous approach to study. In China, we used to be told what to learn, how to do it, and every question has a standard answer to produce. We are ready to work hard doing that. But the Spanish system is totally another thing.

Understanding the teaching difference is extremely challenging. I felt worried and confused by that shift of responsibility. ...While, the language can be a major reason. However, the cultural issues are far more important. I didn't have any Chinese colleagues in the class. And my roommates are all Spaniards. The reason I choose to live like this is to force myself to improve Spanish. It was difficult at first, but it turned out to be very helpful, my Spanish improved a lot after my first internship. I was motivated to seize every opportunity to practice Spanish. "The most challenging thing is the presentation in the class. I had to learn how to design PowerPoint to present my assignments to the class. I also should be careful with the language skills to do the presentation. Although I am confident and fluent in Spanish, I still feel nervous and a little bit afraid to speak in front of the class, even after three years' study here. I think we [Chinese students] are not good at expressing our thoughts well enough to let the others understand or pay attention to us. Another difficulty is to learn critical thinking. To my Spanish classmates, it was quite easy for them. For us [Chinese students], it was difficult at first. But I finally learned how to write reviews, critique the goodness and weakness of a paper, and how to express my opinion. In my first year in the Spanish university, I had to learn how to interview others. Well, I have never been interviewed or interviewed the others before. Whenever you have an idea, you are required not only to present the idea, but also to present how and where do you get the idea. So it's more practical and more interesting. I have to learn to cooperate with the others to conduct an interview or a project.



## **Appendix D AECCUAM WeChat Group Post**

### AECCUAM WeChat Group Post 1, (2016)

The long wait is over: welcome to UAM! Meet and hang out with elders of UAM and CSA officers! Stop by Thursday to find out what we have in store for you! Super “study masters” will show up to tell you how to get good scores in UAM. There will be snacks and classic Chinese games like Panda Kill! If you can’t wait to talk to us, we are always available in the WeChat Group. Scan the QR code (Of the WeChat group of this CSA) and join us! It’s a great way to start your new life in UAM.

### AECCUAM WeChat Group Post 2, (2016)

No longer silent for the increase of tuition fees in the region of Madrid! We’ll fight tooth and nail! We are calling on all the students to unite to sign this protest letter! It’s a letter that can save you thousands of euros (the increase amount of the tuition fees)! UAM has admitted that they disagree with this discriminatory approach to increase tuition fees. They finally decided that elders would be given a subsidy to cut the increase of the tuition fees and freshmen are required to pay twice the tuition fee. That decision allows all of us to start drawing conclusions about how kindness the university is. Nevertheless, have you ever asked why those freshmen have to pay more tuition fees that they are not supposed to do? No matter elders or freshmen, no matters Chinese or Europeans, all of us should not be treated differently! This time we choose to resist discriminatory terms!!! We should not be passive in addressing this threat. AECCUAM calls on the all the CSAs to join together to fight for our rights.