

LEARNING AMERICAN CULTURE THROUGH FACEBOOK COMMUNICATION:  
A WAY FOR CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS  
TO ADAPT TO A NEW ENVIRONMENT

by

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(Under the Direction of Dr. Leara Rhodes)

ABSTRACT

This study examined how Chinese international students who study in the United States learn American culture through Facebook communication. This study employed Kim's (2001) theoretical framework about cross-cultural adaptation, and explored this field within the realm of social media. By collecting the responses about how the Chinese international students who currently study in a southern university in the United States feel about American culture, their life in the United States and about Facebook communication, the study supported Kim's theory that host communication competence is related to sojourners' Facebook (social) communication, psychological health and functional fitness. At the same time, this study also found the sojourners' Facebook communication can help predict their psychological health.

INDEX WORDS: Cross-cultural adaptation, Social media, Communication, Facebook, Culture learning

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B.A., Jincheng College of Sichuan University, China, 2011

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2013

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May 2013

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe great thanks to my major professor, Leara D. Rhodes. Without her guidance and support I would never be able to accomplish this project. In addition, I want to thank the guidance from my committee members Itai Himelboim and Jhih-Syuan Lin, and the support I received from faculty members of Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, my friends and a lot of people I met.

I also wish to thank my parents; for their support, encouragement and unconditional love as I pursued my master's degree in the United States.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Communication scholars Watzlawick, Bavelas and Jackson (1967) pointed out that communication (including both verbal and non-verbal communication) can not be reversed or repeated. Communication is such a dynamic activity that can be described by words from Heraclitus: “no man ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and he’s not the same man” (Kahn, 1979). People, through communication, are constantly changing, and so are their relationships.

There are many forces, as Friedman (2007) said in his book, *The World Is Flat*, driving the processes of globalization. People are facing cultural differences and learning to cooperate and to understand each other. Sojourners and new immigrants, who move across cultural boundaries, are at the forefront of this trend.

Moving across cultural boundaries is a big shift, according to McKay-Semmler (2010). This interaction between individuals and a broader society within an unfamiliar cultural context has attracted scholars’ attention. Issues that have been studied include the way people adjust to new cultures and specifically young immigrants’ adaptation (Kao, 1999; Berry, Phinney, Kwak, & Sam, 2006).

Communication has been taken to another level thanks to the advancement of informational technology. Today people can interact with others through various methods,

such as instant messaging, email, video chat and social networking sites. Among all the communication methods, social networking sites (SNS) provide people with a new platform to reinforce and to construct their social networks and have become one of the most popular communication methods to exchange information, to build connections, and to express emotions (Walther, 1996).

Facebook, the SNS launched in February 2004, has gained a population which is as big as the entire world's population was in 1804, nearly one billion people (Rosen, 2012). It has become one of the inseparable parts of people's social life, especially for the younger generations. For sojourners and new immigrants, their cultural adaptation agenda would include the adaptation of social media in the host culture, especially for those college students.

There have been some studies about international students' cross-cultural adaptation experiences (Maruyama, 1998; Martin, 1987; Wang, 2012), but few of them have addressed this phenomenon within the context of social media. This study uses Facebook as a context to uncover the role that social media plays in the sojourners' acquisition of a host culture.

To explore this topic, this study will focus particularly on the adaptation experience of Chinese international students. Chinese international students have become the largest group of international students who study in the United States, 23 percent of all international students, according to the Open Doors report data from the Institute of International Education (2012). When these students enter the American culture, they have

limited opportunities to build their social networks on Facebook in China due to the government regulations. Many of them started using Facebook when they arrived in the United States. As a cultural tool, Facebook would be another new place for adaptation. Therefore, this particular study is designed to help provide a theoretical perspective on the sojourners' cross-cultural adaptation through social media.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies, which focused on the Chinese international students' experiences in the Western countries regarding social media, mainly target the issues of education, such as online learning experiences (Chen, Bennett & Maton, 2008). Few studies are aimed at addressing the cultural adapting issues in the daily life of students.

This research will start by studying culture for there are huge differences between Chinese and American cultures. Chinese students need to tackle cultural barriers first to enable them to adapt to the U.S. culture.

#### **Culture**

The heart of a culture, as Banks & Banks (2013) found, lies in its members' interpretation, usage and perception of it. They defined culture as "the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies" (p. 35). Within the same culture, people would identically interpret phenomena and symbols most of the time.

Culture is not something naturally gifted. It is embedded within day-to-day living patterns. Damen (1987) defines culture as "mankind's primary adaptive mechanism" (p. 367). From the view of cross-cultural study, Hofstede (1980) gives his understanding

about culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another” (p.9). Therefore, it can be said that the culture defines us who we are, and who we are not.

Previously, studies have focused on the comparison between cultures and tried to create categorizations about different cultural characteristics. For instance, Schwartz (1994) categorized culture-level value types based on previous studies about cultural value types and dimensions. One of the most widely used models for culture character analysis is Hofstede’s culture dimension, which provides well-grounded support for multi-dimensional study of culture and cross-cultural comparison. There are four categories of cultural dimensions, which include “Power distance,” “Uncertainty avoidance,” “Individualism vs. Collectivism” and “Masculinity vs. Femininity.”

According to the overview study conducted by Kirkman, Lowe and Gibson (2006) about the researches incorporating Hofstede’s (1980) theoretical frameworks within the past two decades, nearly 180 research articles were crafted based on the theoretical framework of Hofstede (1980). Those studies helped demonstrate that this theory is still highly relevant with cross-cultural studies and also can be adapted into current and future studies.

The key factor among those four dimensions, which affects the culture most, would be the IC dimension, since it is the “fundamental dimension on which societies differ” (Hofstede, 1980). People from individualist cultures understand the composition of in-

group members differently than people from collectivist cultures (Triandis, 1995). The in-group members of people from collectivist cultures are composed of families, friends and people who share common interests with each other. More trust is placed on the “insiders” for collectivists who are under stronger moral and social pressures within that group. Meanwhile, in-group members may be more indifferent towards people from out-groups. For the people who come from individualist cultures, they define their in-groups as people who share similar social class, race, belief, attitudes and values (Triandis, 1995). Individuals are more detached from their in-groups when compared with people from collectivist cultures.

The key feature of a collectivist culture, defined by Triandis (1995), is “oneness,” which is composed of three important facets (Chen & West, 2008): consideration (consideration of the implications of one’s decisions and actions for others); pride (sharing of each other’s success); and shame (sharing of each other’s failures). For the individualist culture, the core feature is “separateness,” which is defined by three characteristics: independence, competitiveness and uniqueness.

For most scholars, China is regarded as one of the most typical collectivist cultures and the United States would be representative of individualist cultures (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis et. al. 1988). However, current social transitions in China indicate that there has been a social transformation from collectivism to individualistic (Cao, 2009), especially for the post-80s generation who have a lifestyle that is self-oriented. This lifestyle

motivated people with this characteristic to seek overseas studies. As sojourners, they want to learn but then to return home. However, although the young people in China are becoming more individualistic, they still have grown up in a collectivist culture.

### **Cross-Culture adaptation**

Adaptation is something that humans are constantly challenged within their living environments (Slavin & Kriegman, 1992). People need to adapt in order to maintain and enhance their relationships with others. Adaptations are activities constantly happening in every stage and every aspect of life (Kauffman, 1995). For international students who study abroad, they need to go through the process of cultural adaptation and to modify their actions and behaviors to fit into the new culture.

Cross-cultural adaptation has been regarded as a subject and has been studied since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kim (2001) developed an integrative communication theory about cross-cultural adaptation. She defined cross-cultural adaptation, from an open-system perspective, as “the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments, establish (or reestablish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments” (Kim, 2001, p. 31). The essence of individual adaptation is to fit into the new environment for better social life opportunities.

The first step before cross-cultural adaptation is called “enculturation,” for one needs to learn and to become socialized through embracing the basic process of

communication and the home culture. A student who leaves the home culture and moves to a host culture would go through the socialization of culture again, which is called “acculturation.” While acculturation is happening, the unlearning of parts of the home culture could occur as well and that is the “deculturation” process. The adaptation process is heading towards the final stage called “assimilation,” which is “a state that reflects a maximum convergence of the strangers’ internal conditions with those of the natives and a minimum maintenance of the original cultural habits” (Kim, 2001, p. 48).

There have been many criticisms about Kim’s theory, such as by Hottola (2004) who states that the cultural adaptation process cannot be quantitatively estimated or measured, as the psychological status of a person is hard to measure. Furthermore, there are many other factors, which could effect one’s change of state of mind rather than just encountering a new culture, as argued by Kramer (2000). Kim (2001), at the same time, admitted that “the field of cross-cultural adaptation remains far from cohesive” and this theory is one “within which many of the existing approaches and models can be housed, with their interrelationships clarified” (p, 11).

Although cross-cultural adaptation theory carries some criticism and is far from being cohesive, it would help to look into the factors that affect the cross-cultural adaptation process in an integrative way.

There are two models within the theoretical framework of Kim’s theory. Distinctive from each other as they are, the two are interrelated and together they explain the

occurrence of cross-cultural adaptation: the stress-adaptation-growth model describes the process of personal adaptation into a new culture whereas the structural model addresses the key factors influencing the individual's adaptation process.

**Cross-Cultural Adaptation: The Stress-Adaptation-Growth Model: A process of personal adaptation**

When people are learning to adapt to new cultures, they are not just gaining more knowledge about the new environments, but they will also undergo the process of letting go some old habits from their home cultures. The two processes form a whole called intercultural transformation (Kim, 2001). Sojourners need to abide by the rules and general practices in the new culture and the learning process can be long and slow for them. Kim (2001) pointed out that to some degree there are gaps between the host cultures' impositions on the newcomers and the ability of sojourners to match up to those impositions. The degree of pressure might depend on how much the sojourners feel they need to conform to the new culture. Therefore, those sojourners are undergoing the pressure to adapt to the new cultures. Sojourners experience stress from different aspects of their life during the culture learning process: the inevitable conflicts between embracing the new culture and resisting the loss of their home culture; the forces from the new culture and the home culture; and the sojourners' capacity to receive the new culture and the new culture's demands towards them. All the stress on sojourners can cause them to feel lost, anxious and out of place in the new culture, but at the same time,

they may actively seek ways to solve those problems. While they are going through the “facing problem—solving problem—facing problem” process, they are experiencing the internal subtle growth as well. As Kim (2001) pointed out, the central elements that composed sojourner’s cross-cultural experiences are stress, adaptation and growth, and the psychological process that directs them towards increasing successful adaptation is called “stress-adaptation-growth” model.

### **Cross-Cultural Adaptation: A Structural Model.**

Kim (2001) used four dimensions and core factors, which influence cross-cultural adaptation and could either move forward or hold back the adaptation process:

- Predisposition: The internal conditions of sojourners that would affect the process of cross-cultural adaptation, which includes the factors of adaptive personality, ethnic proximity/distance and preparedness for change.
- Environment: The circumstances sojourners face during their communication activities in the new culture, which include the factors of host receptivity, host conformity pressure and ethnic group strength.
- Intercultural transformation: The final outcome of sojourners’ successful adaptation to the new culture, which includes three influential factors of functional fitness, psychological health and intercultural identity.
- Communication: The core of cross-cultural adaptation, where the sojourners learned the new culture patterns. This part combines personal communication with social

communication, including the factors of host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, host mass communication, ethnic interpersonal communication and ethnic mass communication.

Studies have found that the core factors of cross-cultural communication do exert influences on the individuals who have been through the process (Wiseman & Koester, 1993; DeVos & Suarez-Orozco, 1990). Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide and Shimzi's (2004) study found that the communication competence of sojourners is strongly associated with their willingness to communicate in a foreign language. What's more, Hsu (2010) discovered that the Chinese in the United States who participated in the cultural life of the host country have clearer understandings about the new culture. Meanwhile they have stronger intentions and more capabilities to use proper language to communicate with people from the new culture. Hsu (2010) suggested that cultural adaptation, to some extent, could influence people's communication traits.

Furthermore, the influence of cultural adaption on people has been studied by Lyttle, Baker and Cornwell (2001). They found that people who have been through cultural adaptations tend to be sensitive socially as well as emotionally. However, the study findings do not suggest a correlation between sojourners' increasing intercultural experience and the increasing of their interpersonal sensitivity. The finding of Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide & Shimizi (2004) suggested that sojourners who have more

communication with people in the host culture would more likely to achieve a greater satisfaction towards their life.

As Kagan and Cohen (1990) pointed out that adjustments to a new culture is the result of multidimensional adaptation models because of the various factors' interactions and collaboration, which include behavioral, personal and social network elements. In current study, five constructs within Kim's (2001) structural model of cross-cultural adaptation will be used: host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, host mass communication, psychological health and functional fitness. Those constructs could help define the relationship between the Chinese international students' communication activities and their intercultural transformation outcomes.

### **1) Host Communication Competence.**

Competence, as utilized in Kim's theory, is defined as "an internal capacity or a set of identifiable capabilities associate with performance outcomes" (Kim, 2001, p. 98). As to the concept of host communication competence, it is mainly composed of three correlated factors: cognitive (knowledge of host communication system, cultural understanding and cognitive complexity development); affective (adaptation motivation, identity flexibility and aesthetic orientation); and operational (technical skills, synchrony and resourcefulness). These three factors interconnect and would affect the newcomers' host communication competence, intercultural transformation and communication activities.

One of the most important factors to assess sojourners' understanding of and engagement with the new culture is sojourners' host language ability, which is indicative of the cognitive component (Kim, 2001). The affective component can be assessed by the sojourners' willingness or eagerness to participate in the new culture. Together with cognitive competence, the affective component motivates sojourners to face the challenges in the process of learning the new cultures: they provide sojourners with a desire to know the new culture and languages and also the capability to better admire and understand the people from the host cultures (Kim, 2001). The operational component, one's internal capacity to behave according to the cultural norms, could be assessed by the behavior competence of respondents, which allows sojourners to behave according to the general cultural patterns (Kim, 2001).

As Kim (2001) pointed out that acquiring cultural understanding is more than "mastering" the language along, also the context and code within the language and non-verbal information are important in developing the competence. For example, as Davies (2002) pointed out that jokes can demonstrate the understanding of knowledge of culture as well as the ability to understand and refer to the cultural context.

Social communications, including interpersonal communication and mass communication, provides chances for the sojourners to strengthen their communication competence. In particular, the host interpersonal communication is the primary way for those newcomers to get involved in the new environment. Also, by exposing themselves

to the host cultural mass media, sojourners can get to know the new environment as well as the culture in which it is embedded.

## **2) Host interpersonal communication.**

Communicative actions with native speakers can help the newcomers to affirm or to abandon the perception of meanings and intentions within native speakers communications; therefore, host interpersonal communication could help the newcomers modify the stress and hardship that they endure. Examining the sojourners' personal networks (also called interpersonal networks, or social networks, etc.) could provide information about their interpersonal communication. McKinlay, Pattison and Gross (1996) pointed out that international students could benefit from their close connections with their friends to learn their way around new culture.

To understand newcomers' adaptation, Kim identified that there are correlations between the size/proportion and strength of host ties and host interpersonal communication. Many studies (Zimmermann, 1995; Selltiz & Cook, 1962; Shah, 1991) have found that there are correlations between the numbers of native speakers in strangers' networks and their acculturation.

## **3) Host Mass Communication.**

Gordon (1965) and Lasswell (1987) suggested how mass communication could serve a greater function in the adaptation process. While mass communications convey major events happening in the host society, they also spread the cultural norms,

mainstream values and perspectives of the culture; therefore, they help the newcomers know their environment. As Kim (2001) pointed out there is a theoretical linkage between host mass-media use and development of host communication competence.

The acculturation processes take place through the immigrants' direct and indirect interactions with the acculturation agents (Lee & Tse, 1994). Among all the agents such as family and peer groups, media play influential roles in the whole acculturation process (O'Guinn, Lee & Faber, 1986). Media help immigrants learn their surroundings and blend into the new culture.

A study by Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter and Espinoza (2008) found that there are growing numbers of people, especially young adults, using social networking sites to stay in touch with others. This study also found that young people's online worlds and offline worlds are interconnected: they might talk about offline world issues and interact with people they know from offline when they are online; while they use online interactions to reinforce their offline relationships, they would act within the online context. Therefore, the authors concluded that SNSs are places for people to bridge, bind and maintain their interpersonal relationships. Yan et al. (2010) also pointed out that sojourners involvement in the SNSs will help them maintain relationships with their peers as well as engage themselves in the host culture.

At the same time, SNSs also brought revolutions to the way people communicate. The development of technology allows the message to be transmitted among different

media and the media content can be converged (Baldwin, McVoy & Steinfield, 1996). While traditional media influence the formation of new media, the new media had also impacted traditional media in many ways (Lehman-Wilzig & Cohen-Avigdor, 2004): traditional media cannot merely rely on their own ways to distribute information in current era; they are converging with new media.

Many traditional media corporations incorporate social media as one of their outlets to inform and engage their audiences (Dwyer, Hiltz and Passerini, 2007). Media agencies like The New York Times, CNN and NPR also have their presences on social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Audiences can receive information and interact with those traditional media on SNSs. Study conducted by Ye (2005) found that sojourners would regard using English-language Internet as a way for them to deal with their unpleasant feelings of acculturation.

Therefore, to study the sojourners' social communications within the realm of social media, it is worth looking at both interpersonal communication and the mass media communication, to get a comprehensive view about the roles that communications on social networking sites play in sojourners' cross-cultural adaptation processes.

Throughout the process of "stress-adaptation-growth adaptation," sojourners will experience a certain degree of intercultural transformation that is corresponding with their interactions with the host environment. According to Kim (2001, p. 183), the "cross-

cultural adaptation may be seen as a continuum along which individual strangers show differential rates or levels of intercultural transformation, from minimal to maximal.”

In Kim’s theory, three relevant constructs can help describe the intercultural transformation: psychological health, functional fitness and intercultural identity and two of them will be studied in the current research.

#### **4) Psychological Health.**

As Kim (2001) stated, the psychological health of sojourners is demonstrated through one’s internal and external life, that is to say, one achieves internal balances and has meaningful relationships with the new environment. Internal balances can be demonstrated by the presence of traits such as positive self-image, high self-esteem, high morale, feeling part of the society, satisfaction with life in general and holding a positive attitude toward being a newcomer in the environment. Sojourners who lack internal balances during the cross-cultural adaptation process go through “culture shock.” Culture shock is not always a bad thing to sojourners, according to Kim (2001), for they might find those uncomfortable imbalances could become a force to encourage them to make changes and to adapt into the culture. Kim (2001) suggested that a sojourner’s psychological health, which is demonstrated by their happiness and satisfaction, is highly correlated with how stressed they are when in the new culture, which can be indicated by whether they feel alienated or not. A study conducted by Berry et al. (2006) assessed young immigrants’ satisfaction and alienation, which provide practical support for Kim’s

conclusion. Therefore, this study is going to look into sojourners' satisfaction and feelings of being alienated or belonging to obtain further understandings about the psychological health situation of those international students.

### **5) Functional fitness.**

When entering a new environment, sojourners will instinctively try to fit into the surroundings. Studies in the past have found that functional fitness was demonstrated through the capability of sojourners to meet the external challenges (Ward, Okura, Kennedy & Kojima, 1998; Kim, 1990). Therefore, sojourners' ability to carry out their daily life in an easy and relaxed way during the socializing process could prove that they possess high host communication competence and feel comfortable conducting host social communication in the new environment.

At the same time, a lack of functional fitness of sojourners can be demonstrated in various ways. Researchers have looked into "social alienation," a sense of being "left out" as a trait of insufficient functional fitness (Weiley, Sommers & Bryce, 2008; DeVos & Suarez-Orozco, 1990). Meanwhile, socioeconomic status, as Kim (2001) pointed out, is also relevant with functional fitness. For young adults, schools are the primary place for them to learn and to interact with others in the new culture (McKay-Semmler, 2011). For international students who will just stay in the host culture and study for a short period of time, as McKinlay, Pattison and Gross pointed out, will have somewhat different to are the host university culture and then the host culture. The academic tasks always come as

the priority to them. As a result, while they are dealing with the difficulties of cultural adaptation, which include depression, loneliness and cultural shock, the additional stress from academic study will make cross-cultural adaptation harder for the international students. Therefore, this study examines the school adjustments of sojourners to assess their functional fitness status.

By examining the process of cross-cultural adaptation, Kim established ten axioms that are regarded as ground rules for the adaptation process. For the present study, there are three axioms that will be applied:

- Intercultural transformation is manifested in increasing functional fitness, psychological health and intercultural identity
- Intercultural transformation facilitates and is facilitated by host communication competence.
- Intercultural transformation facilitates and is facilitated by participation in host social (interpersonal and mass) communication activities.

In her theory, Kim utilized 21 theorems (2001, p. 91-92) to measure and monitor various degree of cross-cultural adaptations that occurred to different people and situations. For this study, three theorems will be focused on to explain the interrelationships among the five constructs:

- The greater the host communication competence, the greater the host interpersonal communication and mass communication. (Theorem 1).

- The greater the host communication competence, the greater the intercultural transformation (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity) (Theorem 3).
- The greater the host interpersonal and mass communication, the greater the intercultural transformation (functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity) (Theorem 5)

### **SNSs and Cross-cultural adaptation**

Websites like Facebook, Flickr and Twitter are referred to as Social Networking Sites (SNSs). Boyd and Ellison (2007) define the major characteristics of SNSs: Users of SNSs construct public or semi-public profiles within the bounded system to articulate a list of other users with whom they share connections, and to view and traverse the list of connections and those made by others within this system.

Previous studies about SNSs as a medium of cultural collaborations are limited in their primary focus on the cultural differences that influence users' behaviors and attitudes (Chapman & Lahav, 2008; Marshall, Candon, Norris, Goreva & D'Souza, 2008; and Guo, 2009). Few studies tapped into the issue of how SNSs may influence users' culture learning and change of attitude.

Among all these SNSs, Facebook is one of the most popular social networking sites in the world and especially among university students. According to Student Affairs Leader (2006), 90 percent of students use Facebook to communicate with others. Findings like

these would suggest that SNSs like Facebook would have a huge impact on the students' socialization process, which includes acculturation, and that would have great influence on the students' adaptation within the university community (Yan, Wen, Douglas & Chi-Wai, 2010).

Most Chinese students either have not had a Facebook account or have had few social networks on Facebook; it is banned in China. Therefore, in this study, Facebook is regarded as an extension of the host environment, and the sojourners might build their social networks on Facebook correspondently with building their social networks in the host environment.

Facebook can also be regarded as a tool used to practice cross-cultural communications (Wang, 2012), since it is a perfect virtual space for interaction. For the Chinese students who study in America, Facebook provides a platform for them to communicate with their new friends in the United States. Furthermore, these Chinese students could adapt to the new environment by using Facebook. In this study, the communication activities of Chinese international students will be examined to get a better understanding about the cross-cultural adaptation process using social networking sites like Facebook.

Previous studies have found that new media communication will facilitate the newcomers' adaptation in the host environment. Chen (2011) found that international students' interactions on social networking sites help them build interconnections with

the people in host and home countries, and these sites also serve important functions such as assisting the sojourners in conquering the challenges in their adjustment processes and building the sense of being a part of the new community. Meanwhile, Chen (2010) found that a crucial factor of immigrants' intercultural adaptation is communication through the Internet within the host environment. Therefore, based on the results of these previous studies and using Kim's integrated theory, the present study is examining the influences of Facebook communication on Chinese international students' adaptation into the American culture.

The big cultural differences between China and the United States create an interesting realm to study Chinese international students' cross-cultural adaptation. This study will look into this issue and try to uncover how social media may help Chinese international students learn about American culture.

**Research question:**

How do Chinese international students use Facebook to learn about American culture?

In order to answer the research question, the current study used Kim's (2001) theoretical framework. According to the structural model that analyzed factors, which influence the cross-cultural adaptation, five important factors affecting the outcome of

sojourners' learning the new culture are examined within the realm of Facebook in this study. By reviewing previous studies, the following five hypotheses were generated:

**Hypothesis:**

- H1. Greater host communication competence would be associated with higher involvement with Facebook communication among Chinese international students.
- H2. Higher involvement with Facebook communication would be associated with greater psychological health of Chinese international students.
- H3. Higher involvement with Facebook communication would be associated with greater functional fitness of Chinese international students.
- H4. Greater host communication competence would be associated with greater psychological health of Chinese international students
- H5. Greater host communication competence would be associated with functional fitness of Chinese international students.

**Predicted Relationship**

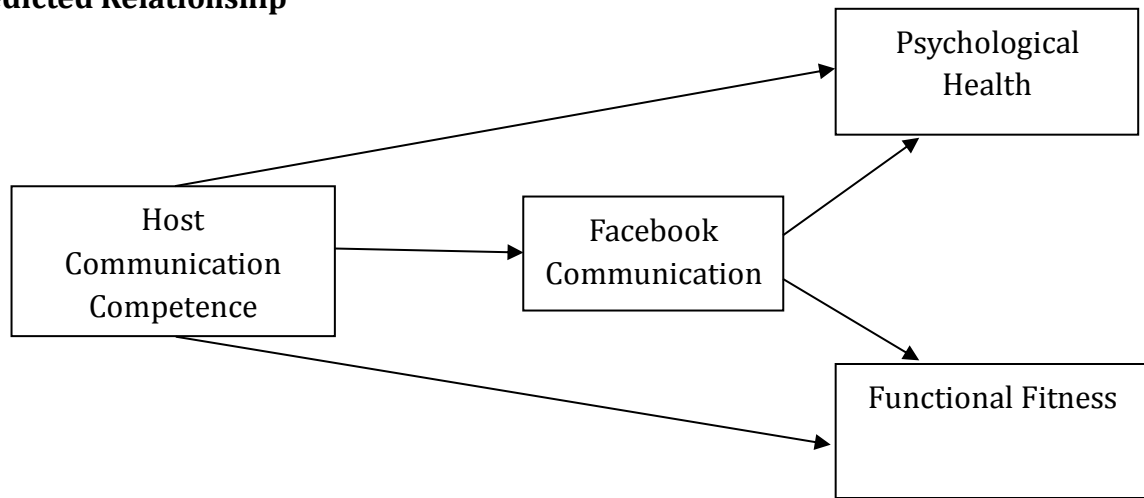


Figure 1: Predicted Relationship among Kim's (2001) theoretical constructs.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

This chapter will discuss the research method for the current study. The main instrument to collect the data applied in this study is the survey questionnaire. All the variables in this study will be defined, and the way they were assessed will be addressed. Finally, the data collection process will be discussed.

#### **Variables for the study**

In this study, five theoretical constructs of Kim's study were employed to assess the adaptation of Chinese international students. They were host communication competence, the sojourners' interpersonal involvement with native speaker friends on Facebook (host interpersonal communication), the sojourners' involvement with American mass media on Facebook (host mass communication), functional fitness, and psychological health. For this study, Facebook interpersonal communication and Facebook mass communication were unified as one variable, Facebook (social) communication, and together with other three constructs, formed four research variables for this study.

In the study, the host communication competence was regarded as exogenous variable; Facebook communication, functional fitness and psychological health of

sojourners, functioned as factors affected by the outcomes of adaptation, and are endogenous variables in this study.

### **Exogenous variable**

The exogenous variable in present study was host communication competence, which was composed of three dimensions: language ability, adaptive motivation and behavioral competence.

The measuring of language ability utilized the scale originally developed by Iwao and Hagiwara (1987). The scale included questions like “How comfortable do you feel using English to take care of simple, everyday tasks in academic and daily life;” “How often do you use English to write a Facebook post or send a Facebook message to American friends;” “How comfortable do you feel understanding class lessons in English;” “ How comfortable do you feel using English to write research papers and do other homework for class;” “How often do you have trouble in understanding English in the U.S.,” and “How often do you have trouble expressing yourself in English.” Each question was measured by 5-point Likert scale with the range from “Rarely/not at all comfortable” to “Very often/very comfortable.” Negative items were reverse coded. All the items are conceptually associated with language ability ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ); therefore, they were combined into one single variable—language ability. In addition, the respondents who reported they had trouble with English (chose scales “often/very often” when answering the “how often do you have trouble in expressing yourself in English) were

asked: “if you have trouble with English, when do you feel you have most trouble?” The respondents were provided with 5 options and additional text-entry to answer this question based on their own situation. The choices included “in class with multiple speakers,” “with native speakers,” “with school assignments,” “watching TV or movies,” “listening to the radio,” and “other, specify.” This question allowed the researcher to get a deeper understanding about what challenges sojourners’ most when they learn new cultures with regards to language.

Adaptive motivation was assessed by the revised scale developed by Kim (1976), which included questions such as “How interested are you in improving your ability to read, to speak and to write in English;” “How interested are you in wanting to feel that you belong in the larger American culture;” “Do you feel pressure from others to adapt to American culture;” “Overall, how much do you enjoy doing things that are considered to be mainstream American things to do;” “How interested are you in watching U.S. American movies;” “How interested are you in watching U.S. American TV shows;” “How interested are you in listening to U.S. American music;” “How interested are you in listening to U.S. American radio.” All the items are measured based on the 5-point Likert scale ranging from “not at all interested/ not at all enjoyed/ not at all” to “very much interested/ very much enjoyed/ very much.” A reliability test about the eight items was relatively high ( $\alpha = 0.778$ ) thus all the items were incorporated into one single item—adaptive motivation. One additional question, “Can you list something you enjoy to do to

feel belong to mainstream American things to do,” was asked to help the researcher get an idea about how participants defined the mainstream American culture and their eagerness to be a part of it. Text entry was provided for the researchers to collect the responses.

Behavioral competence evaluation was accomplished by the modified scale originally designed by Tamam (1993). Items included “How often do you feel that you are a good communicator in your native language,” “How often do you feel that you are a good communicator when you communicate with Americans in English,” and “When you communicate with Americans, how often do you understand their jokes and sense of humor.” A 5-point Likert scale was employed to measure each question, with the range from “Rarely” to “Very often.” Reliability tests on those three items were marginally acceptable ( $\alpha = .688$ ); therefore, all the items were included into one item—behavioral competence.

## **Endogenous Variables**

### ***EnV#1: Facebook (social) communication.***

The variable was measured by two scales: the modified version of Stephan and Stephan (1985) and Gao and Gudykunst (1990), which is about the interpersonal communication aspect and the modified scale of Kim (1976), which helped identify the mass communication aspect. The following seven items were included: “To what extent do you think Facebook communication helps you get to know more about your American

friends,” “Compared with the actual number of people you know (met in class or spend time together) in U.S., do you think the number of your Facebook friends is (smaller or larger than the real people I know in the U.S.);” “For your Facebook informational subscriptions, to what extent do you value it as a source to know about American culture;” “Approximately, how often do you spend time on Facebook on a typical day;” “How often do you use English to post information/comments on others on Facebook;” “To what extent do you value Facebook as a major source of information;” and “How often do you participate in clubs or play sports with Americans.” All questions are measured by a 5-point Likert scale with the range from “Rarely/not at all important/much smaller than the real people I know” to “Very often/very much important/ much larger than the real people I know.” Factor analysis showed that one question, “how often do you participate in clubs or play sports with Americans” demonstrated low correlation with other items, therefore this item was removed from this scale and the reliability resulted as fairly acceptable ( $\alpha = 0.775$ ). In addition, respondents were asked to provide the number of their Facebook friends, the number of Facebook information subscriptions (“Like” on public page) and the type of their favorite Facebook information subscription. At the same time, they were asked to identify the nationalities of their three best friends, the percentage of close friends and American friends in their Facebook networks. In addition, they were asked about “Among all the information subscriptions, which kind of subscription is your favorite?” and were provided with five answer options: “public

figures (celebrity, athletes etc.),” “brand fan pages (Starbucks, Apple etc.),” “informational sources (The New York Times, CNN etc.),” “Organizations (University of Georgia, WWF etc.),” and “others, specify” with text entry option.

***EnV#2: Psychological health.***

The psychological health was measured through two aspects: belonging and satisfaction. The measuring of belonging was achieved through utilizing the scale that was originally designed by Ruben and Kealey (1979) and was modified for context appropriateness. The items about belonging included “How connected to the United States do you feel you are;” “Do you feel the American teachers in your school like you;” “How often do you feel awkward, or out of place when living in the U.S.;;” “In general, how often do you feel awkward, or out of place when living in the U.S.;;” “Do you feel the American students in your school like you;” “Do you ever wish you could permanently leave the United States;” and “Do you feel that your American friends care about your Facebook posts and actions.” Each question is measured by a 5-point Likert scale with the range from “Rarely/not at all felt connected/ not at all like me” to “Very often/very much felt connected/ very much like me.” Negative items were reverse coded. A reliability test was conducted and one item—Do you ever wish you could permanently leave the United States—was found to be poorly correlated with other items. After deleting this question, the result was acceptable ( $\alpha = 0.732$ ). Thus all the questions were combined into one item—belonging.

Satisfaction was measured by the modified scale originally developed by Gao and Gudykunst (1990). The items included “How satisfied do you feel interacting with Americans on Facebook;” “How comfortable do you feel using Facebook to communicate with your American friends;” and “Generally, how satisfied are you about your academic life in the U.S.” Each question is measured by a 5-point Likert scale with the range from “not at all comfortable/not at all satisfy” to “Very comfortable/ very satisfied.” A reliability test that included all three items was marginally acceptable ( $\alpha = 0.685$ ); so all the items were incorporated into one item—satisfaction.

***EnV#3: functional fitness.***

The functional fitness was measured by respondents’ school adjustments. The modified scale was originally constructed by Sam (1994) and was revised by Berry et al. (2006). Items included: “How do you often finish your school assignments on time;” “ Generally, to what extent do you like your class;” “Do you feel safe at school;” “To what extent do you feel you belong in this school;” “Overall, how well do you get along with other students in your school;” “Do you enjoy participating in school activities, like sports, clubs, or other student activities in this school;” “Have you ever thought seriously about quitting school;” “How often do you skip class;” “Overall, how well do you get along with your teachers in your school;” and “How satisfied do you feel about your academic performance based on your overall GPA.” Each question is measured by a 5-point Likert scale with the range from “Rarely/not at all/ not at all felt belong” to “Very often/very

much/ very much felt belong.” Negative items were reverse coded. A factor analysis showed that three items, which included “Do you enjoy participating in school activities, like sports, clubs, or other student activities in this school;” “Have you ever thought seriously about quitting school;” and “How often do you skip class” were poorly correlated with other items. To increase the reliability of this variable, those three items were deleted ( $\alpha = .775$ ).

### **Demographic Variables**

The demographic information was asked at the beginning and at the end of the survey to help identify the characteristics of respondents. The demographic variables included gender, age, area of study, time lived in the United States, education level, and time since opening the Facebook account.

### **Survey Pretest**

Before the actual survey was launched, a pre-test was conducted to test whether the survey could be easily carried out without ambiguity, confusion and error. In total, 10 respondents participated in this pretest. Among them there were 7 females and 3 males: three Korean international students, two Taiwanese international students studying at a major southern university, and five Chinese international students studying in other universities in the United States. On average it took 11 minutes for the participants to complete the questionnaire. Respondents provided feedbacks, that in general the survey was clearly constructed. However, one respondent reported the item “time lived in the

U.S.” was somewhat confusing; therefore it was altered to “how many years have you lived in the U.S.”

### **Data collection**

All the participants for this study were Chinese international students who are studying in one public university in the southern part of the United States. Participants were recruited through convenient sampling: the researcher first distributed recruitment letters and flyers through the Facebook group page of the university’s Chinese Students Association and Chinese International Students Association listserv three times in a week. At the same time, the researcher also obtained, through several international students’ events, the email addresses of 130 Chinese students who offered to participate into the survey. A week after the mass distribution, the researcher started snowball sampling by sending out the survey links to acquaintances who are Chinese international students through Facebook and one instant message program (QQ).

The survey was launched on February 20 and closed on March 1. In total, there were 169 responses and 148 participants finished the questionnaire (survey completion rate is 88 percent). Among all 148 participants, 5 participants did not have a Facebook account until the day they participated in the survey; therefore, the total number of effective responses for analysis is 143. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 33 years old ( $M=24.53$ ,  $SD=2.629$ ). A majority of the participants were female ( $n=97$ , 68.3%), while male participants comprised 31.7% of the sample. The time that participants have

lived in the United States varied from 1 year to 7 years ( $M=2.5$ ,  $SD=1.455$ ). Among participants, 45.5% of students were pursuing their Masters degree ( $n=65$ ), 35% of students were pursuing their Doctoral degree ( $n=50$ ), 15.4% of students were working on their Bachelor's degree ( $n=22$ ), and 1.4% were classified under the "Others" option ( $n=6$ ).

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### **Descriptive Analysis of Variables**

##### **Host Communication Competence**

The host communication competence of respondents in this study was assessed by three factors: language ability, adaptive motivation and behavioral competence. Those factors will help researcher understand the extent of the sojourners' level of comfort with English, life organization and the receptiveness towards the host culture.

##### **English language ability**

In total, six items were utilized to assess respondents' English language ability. The following table provides the descriptive summary about means and standard deviations of each item ( $M=3.46$ ,  $SD=.721$ ). In general, the scores of the items indicated moderately high language abilities among all the participants.

Respondents reported high degree of comfort with understanding class lessons in English ( $M=4.02$ ,  $SD=.866$ ). In terms of using English in their school life, participants showed that they were comfortable with using English to take care of simple, everyday task in academic and daily life ( $M=3.83$ ,  $SD=.89$ ) and they were comfortable with using English to write research papers and do other homework for class ( $M=3.7$ ,  $SD=.96$ ). At

the same time, participants in general responded moderately when evaluating their language abilities in terms of expressing themselves in English (M=3.03, SD=1.08) and understanding English in the United States (M=3.38, SD = .98). In terms of them using English to write a Facebook post or send a Facebook message to American friends, they in general showed a moderately low score (M=2.87, SD= 1.469).

Table 1  
**Means and Standard Deviations of English Language Ability Items (N=142)**

Item	M	SD
1. How often do you have trouble expressing yourself in English?	3.03	1.07
2. How often do you have trouble in understanding English in the U.S.?	3.38	.97
3. How comfortable do you feel using English to take care of simple, everyday tasks in academic and daily life?	3.83	.89
4. How often do you use English to write a Facebook post or send a Facebook message to American friends?	2.87	1.47
5. How comfortable do you feel using English to write research papers and do other homework for class?	3.70	.96
6. How comfortable do you feel understanding class lessons in English?	4.02	.85

*Note.* Items are scaled on 5-point Likert scale: (1="Rarely, or not very comfortable", 5="Very often, or very much comfortable"), and item 1, 2 were reverse coded.

In addition, participants who identified themselves as having trouble with English also responded to the question "when do they feel that they have the most trouble." The

following figure shows the distribution of the answers. Thirty two percent of the participants who responded to this question indicated that when they were in class with multiple speakers, they felt they were having trouble with English. The next most frequent answers were “watching TV or movies” (23.7%) and “with native speakers”(23.1%).

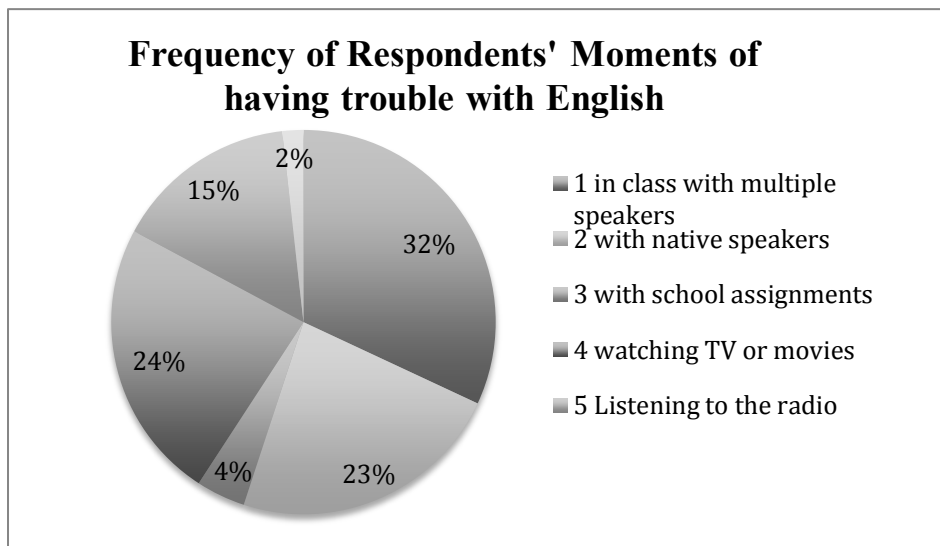


Figure 2: Frequency of Respondents' moments of having trouble with English

(N=169)

### **Adaptive Motivation**

Eight items were employed to measure the respondents' adaptive motivation, which helped assess respondents' interest in being a part of American culture. The means and

standard deviations of each individual item utilized in this study to assess the adaptive motivation of participants are stated in the Table below (M=3.62, SD=. 662).

Table 2

<b>Means and Standard Deviations of Adaptive Motivation Items (N=142)</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
1. How interested are you in improving your ability to read, to speak, and to write in English?	4.3 4	.84
2. How interested are you in wanting to feel that you belong in the larger American culture?	3.3 5	1.06
3. Do you feel pressure from others to adapt to American culture?	3.2 0	1.01
4. Overall, how much do you enjoy doing things that are considered to be mainstream American things to?	3.0 3	.95
5. How interested are you in watching American movies?	4.1 2	1.05
6. How interested are you in watching American TV shows?	3.9 0	1.16
7. How interested are you in listening to American music?	3.8 5	1.14
8. How interested are you in listening to American radio?	3.1 5	1.19

*Note.* Items are scaled on 5-point Likert scale: (1="Rarely, or not very comfortable", 5="Very often, or very much comfortable")

In general, as the high mean score demonstrates that participants collectively reported feeling high levels of adaptive motivation across all the items. They showed high interest in improving their ability to read, to speak and to write in English (M=4.34, SD= .84). It can be noticed that participants commonly enjoyed American media: they

have great interests in watching American movies ( $M=4.12$ ,  $SD=1.05$ ); they also like American TV shows ( $M=3.9$ ,  $SD=1.16$ ) and American music ( $M=3.85$ ,  $SD=1.14$ ); they have moderate attitudes towards American radio ( $M=3.15$ ,  $SD=1.19$ ). Respondents showed moderate interests in wanting to feel that they belong to the larger American culture ( $M=3.35$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ). They commonly did not feel too much pressure from others to adapt to American culture ( $M=3.2$ ,  $SD=1.01$ ). Commonly they somewhat enjoyed doing things that are considered to be mainstream American things to do ( $M=3.03$ ,  $SD=.95$ ).

To get a further understanding about the sojourners' perceptions regarding mainstream American culture, the question about listing things they enjoyed doing to belong to "mainstream American things to do" was asked. In total, 82 out of 140 respondents of this question reported that they could list items and provide answers with text entry. Analysis of the answers reveals that sports, spiritual life and mass media were most frequently considered as mainstream American things to do. They generally regarded watching football and other sports, attending church and watching movies and other TV shows as ways to participate in the American culture. At the same time, it is also interesting to look at individual answers. For example, the lifestyles Americans enjoyed were also regarded as parts of American culture, such as going to parties, participating in holiday traditions, eating fast food and tailgating. Participants also noticed things that were different from what they have in China, like their clothes, individualities and transportations.

## Behavioral Competence

Three questions in this study were utilized to evaluate participants' behavioral competence. The following table summarizes the means and standard deviation of each item ( $M= 3.47, SD = .72$ ).

Table 3

<b>Mean and Standard Deviation of Behavioral Competence Items (N=142)</b>		
	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. How often do you feel that you are a good communicator in your native language?	4.17	1.00
2. How often do you feel that you are a good communicator when you communicate with Americans in English?	3.08	1.04
3. When you communicate with Americans, how often do you understand their jokes and sense of humor?	2.79	1.08

*Note.* Items are scaled on 5-point Likert scale: (1="Rarely", 5="Very often, or very much comfortable")

Participants indicated that they were likely to feel they are good communicators in their native language ( $M=4.17, SD=1.00$ ), but somewhat less confident about whether they are good communicators in English ( $M=3.08, SD=1.04$ ). Respondents reported that to some extent, they understand Americans' jokes and sense of humor, but not very often ( $M=2.79, SD= 1.08$ ).

The reliability test was conducted among the language ability, adaptation motivation and behavior competence variables and was found to be relatively high (Cronbach's

Alpha=. 80); therefore, these three items were grouped together and created one index, host communication competence.

### **Facebook Communication**

Looking into the communication activities that participants have on Facebook has allowed the researcher to get a better understanding about Chinese international students' interpersonal communications and mass communications in the host culture.

Six items were used to assess respondents' Facebook communication. The table below presents the summary of the means and standard deviations of each item (M=2.83, SD= .77).

The mean score of the scale indicates that respondents overall did not participate in Facebook very often. A closer look at each item showed that respondents somewhat thought Facebook communication helped them know more about their American friends (M=3.24, SD=1.14), and to some extent they valued their Facebook information subscriptions as a source to know about American culture (M=3.19, SD=1.02). At the same time, they regarded their Facebook friends as the same as or slightly less than the actual people they know in the United States (M=2.92, SD=1.02). They moderately liked using English to post information/comments to others on Facebook (M=2.92, SD=1.38). Respondents were generally not spending much time on Facebook in a day (M=2.55, SD=1.27).

Table 4:

**Means and Standard Deviation Scores of Facebook Communication Items  
(N=139)**

Items	M	SD
1. To what extent do you think Facebook communication helps you get to know more about your American friends?	3.24	1.14
2. Compared with the actual number of people you know (met in class or spend time together) in U.S., do you think your Facebook friends' number is (smaller or larger than the people you know in the real world)?	2.92	1.17
3. For your Facebook information subscriptions, to what extent do you value it as a source to know about American culture?	3.19	1.02
4. Approximately, how often do you spend on Facebook on a typical day?	2.55	1.27
5. How often do you use English to post information/comments on others on Facebook?	2.92	1.38
6. To what extent do you value Facebook as a major source of information?	2.70	1.10

*Note.* Items are scaled on 5-point Likert scale: (1="Rarely, not at all helpful, or not at all valuable", 5="Very often, very much helpful, or very much comfortable")

In addition to estimating the overall situation of the respondent's Facebook communications, respondents were also asked to provide some relevant information about their usage of Facebook, which included the number of their Facebook friends, number of the Facebook information subscriptions, their favorite type of information subscription on Facebook, the percentage of their close friends and American friends on

Facebook, and the nationalities of their three best friends. The information was not collected for inclusion in the data analysis but for descriptive purposes.

### 1. Number of Facebook friends.

The respondents were asked to provide the number of their Facebook friends they have. The distribution of number of Facebook friends by participants is shown in the below figure. The statistical analysis showed that the distribution of the numbers of participants' Facebook friends is skewed; therefore for the descriptive analysis purposes, the median and mode were reported (Median=170, Mode=100). Most participants have less than 200 Facebook friends. Among the 135 respondents who answered this question, about 61.5% have less than 200 Facebook friends. The maximum Facebook friend count of one participant is 1001, and the minimum number of friends on Facebook for one participant is 2. The 95% confidential interval for the participants' Facebook friends number mean ranged from 176.6 to 236.

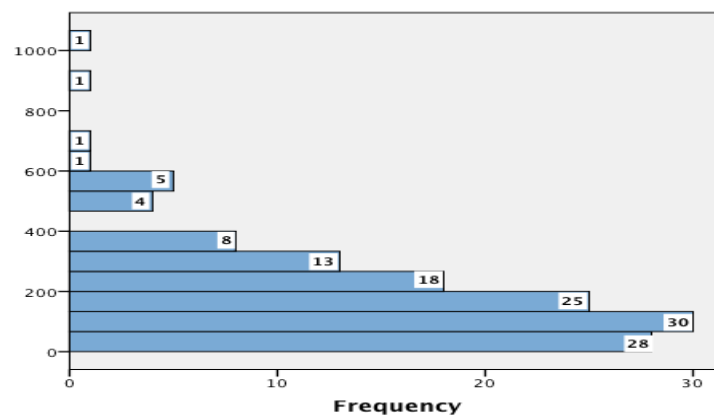


Figure 3: Distribution of Participants' Facebook Friends Numbers (N=135)

## 2. Number of Facebook information subscription

The respondents were asked to provide the number of their information subscriptions (“Like”) to public pages on their Facebook. The chart below displays the distribution of the Facebook information subscriptions by the participants. The statistical analysis showed that the distribution of the numbers of participants’ Facebook friends is skewed; therefore for the descriptive analysis purposes, the median and mode were reported (Median=10, Mode=5). 67.7% of the participants have 20 or less than 20 Facebook informational subscriptions; 76.6% of the participants have 50 or less than 50 Facebook information subscriptions. The maximum number of the Facebook Likes of one respondent is 820, and the minimum number of the Facebook Likes of one respondent is 0. The 95% confidential interval for Facebook information subscription mean ranged from 26.54 to 60.43.

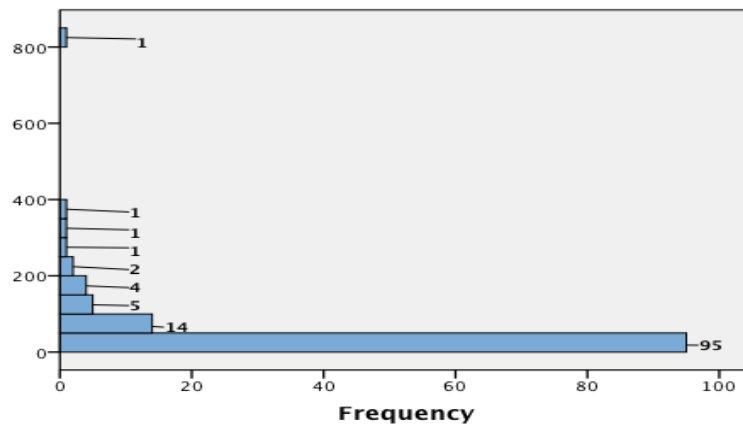


Figure 4: Distribution of Participants’ Facebook “Like” numbers (N=124)

### 3. The type of information subscription on Facebook

The participants were asked to choose their favorite types of information subscription they have on Facebook. The chart below demonstrated the distribution of the responses. The data was collected through a question with five options: public figures (celebrities, athletes, etc.), brand fans pages (Starbucks, Apple, etc.), informational sources (The New York Times, CNN, etc.), organizations (University of Georgia, WWF, etc.), and others, specify. In total, 141 responses were provided. Respondents like organization pages the most: 30.5% of respondents thought organizational pages are their favorite kind of subscription; 26.2% of respondents liked public figures pages most; 19.1% participants preferred brand fan pages than others kinds of subscription and 17% of respondents liked informational sources pages most. Within the “ Others” option, 7.1% of respondents answered that they liked the fan pages of movies and TV shows.

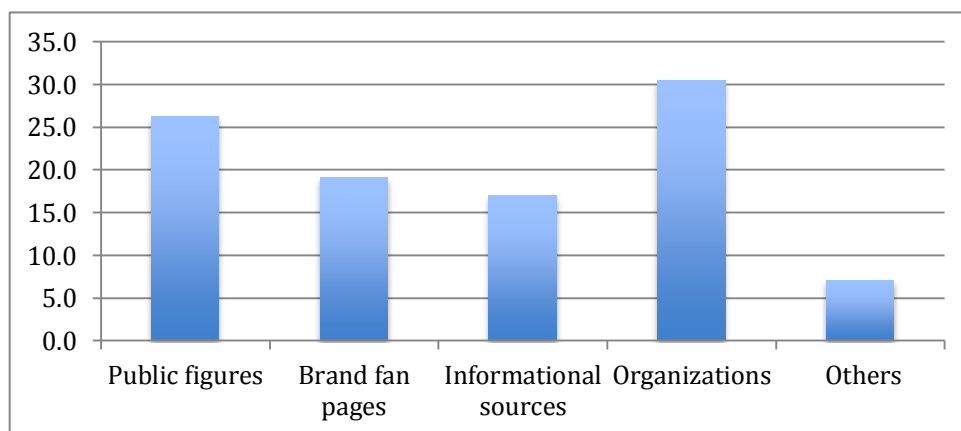


Figure 5: Distribution of Respondents' Favorite Type of “ Like” on Facebook (N=141)

### 4. American friends on Facebook

The participants were asked about the percentage of their Facebook friends who are Americans. The chart below shows the distribution of the number. The data was collected through a 5-point scale, and 1=20% or less, 2= More than 20% but less than 40%, 3=More than 40% but less than 60%, 4=More than 60% but less than 80%, 5= More than 80% (M=2.2, SD = 1.224). In general, respondents tend to have more non-American friends rather than American friends in their Facebook social networks: 37.3 % of respondents have less than 20% of American friends in their Facebook networks; 64.1% percent of the respondents have less than 40% of American friends, and 85% respondents have less than 60% of American friends. The 95% confidence interval for American Facebook friends mean ranged from 2.00 to 2.41, which indicated that the percentage of American friends of respondents' falls within 20 to 30.

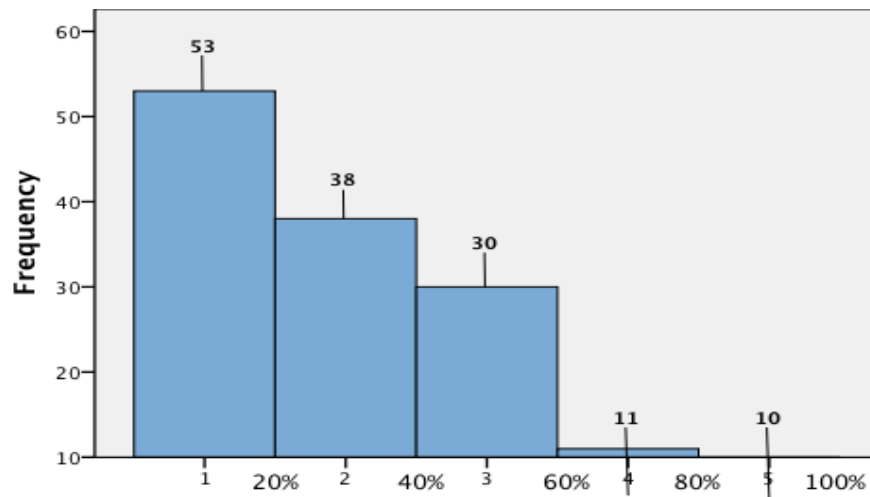


Figure 6. Percentage of Participants' American friends on Facebook (N=142)

## 5. Close friends on Facebook

Participants were asked to answer the question “what percentage of your Facebook friends would be regarded as close friends” and provide the exact number with text entry. The distribution of the answer is presented in the chart below. The statistical analysis showed that the distribution of the numbers of participants’ Facebook friends is skewed; therefore for the descriptive analysis purposes, the median and mode were reported (Median=10, Mode=10). Participants largely demonstrated that they regarded a small number of friends on Facebook as close friends. The distribution of data reflected that about 85% of respondents thought that less than 20% of their Facebook friends are close friends, and 43% of respondents reported about 10% or less than 10% of their Facebook friends are close friends. The minimum percentage of the close friend percentage on Facebook is 0 and the maximum percentage of close friends on Facebook is 80. The 95% confidence interval for percentage of close friends on Facebook of participants’ mean falls between 9.03 and 12.88.

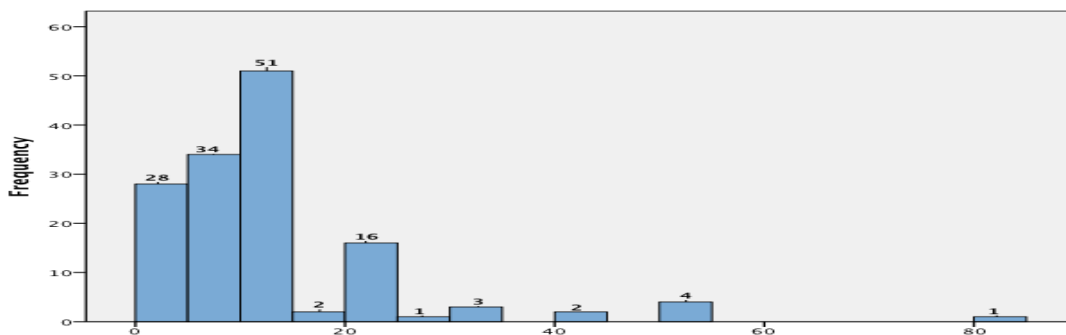


Figure 7: Percentage of Participants’ Close friends on Facebook (N=142)

## 6. The nationality of three best friends

In addition, respondents were asked to report the nationalities of their three closest /best friends. As shown in Figure (N=424), Chinese were most frequently represented among participants' three best friends (N=344) and there was a huge discrepancy between Chinese and the other two categories: Americans (N=52), and then Non-American but non-Chinese (N=28). Three respondents indicated that they have fewer than three identifiable "best/closest" friends.

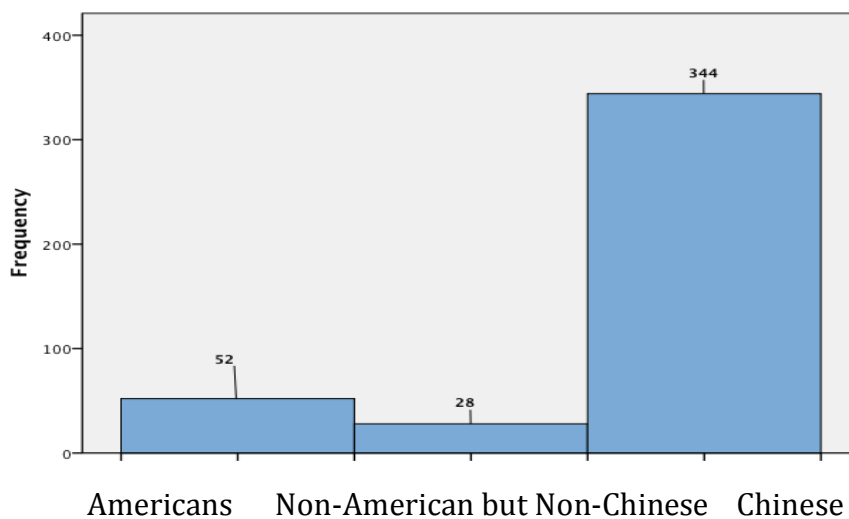


Figure 8: Nationality of participants' three closest friends (N=424)

### **Relationship between Facebook Communication and Facebook Usage Factors**

The purpose of this study is to test and also to explore the theoretical interrelationships of Kim's theoretical frameworks within the realm of social media; therefore, the data relevant to participants' usage of Facebook were collected to help get

a better understanding about the sojourner’s Facebook social communication. Before the analysis was conducted, the nature logarithmic transformation was applied to the data of number of participants’ Facebook friends, the number of Facebook information subscription and the percentage of close Facebook friends for normal distribution. Those data were only analyzed for finding the correlation purposes but were not reported in this study.

Table 5:

**Correlations Matrix of Descriptive data and Facebook communication**

	<b>FBC</b>
Close friends on FB percentage	.003
Facebook "Like" Number	.529**
Number of FB Friends	.434**
Percentage of American FB friends	.285**

Note: \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation test was conducted between the four descriptive items mentioned above and the Facebook communication index. The question “Favorite type of Facebook information subscription” and “closest friends’ nationality” provided categorical data; therefore, they were not analyzed in this section. It was found that the item regarding the number of respondents’ Facebook friends has a strong positive correlation with the

overall Facebook communication index ( $r = .44, p < .01$ ). It was also found that the item for the percentage of respondents' American Facebook friends was to some extent, positively correlated with the Facebook communication index ( $r = .29, p < .01$ ). The item about the respondents' Facebook "like" (information subscription) number had strong positive correlation with the Facebook communication ( $r = .53, p < .01$ ). The item close Facebook friends percentage was found to have no correlation with participants' Facebook communication.

### **Psychological Health**

The psychological health of Chinese international students who participated in this study was operationalized by two factors: "belonging" and "satisfaction." Those two factors will assess in participants' satisfaction states and their sense of belonging in American culture.

#### **Belonging**

Six items were employed to measure participants' degree of feelings of belonging to American culture. The table below demonstrates a summary of the 6 items ( $M = 3.35, SD = .59$ ). The scale was examined to assess the normality of its distribution of scores, and it was found to be sufficiently normal distribution, but slightly negatively skewed. The ratio of skew to its standard error indicated the skew of the scale is marginally acceptable, however, as being close enough to zero to be considered normal: The distribution of

scores was slightly skewed to the high end of the continuum of belonging, although not significant.

Table 6

**Mean and Standard Deviation of Belonging Items (N=142)**

Items	Mean	SD
1. How connected to the United States do you feel you are?	3.06	.88
2. Do you feel that your American friends care about your Facebook posts and actions?	2.86	1.10
3. Do you feel the American teachers in your school like you?	3.67	.78
4. Do you feel the American students in your school like you?	3.55	.78
5. How often do you feel awkward, or out of place when living in the U.S.?	3.49	.89
6. In general, how often do you feel stressed out or frustrated when in the United States?	3.43	.97

*Note.* Items are scaled on 5-point Likert scale: (1="Rarely, not at all like me, or not at all ", 5="Very often, very much like me, or very much "). Item 5,6 were reversely coded.

Respondents in general felt that the American students and teachers they met in school like them (M=3.55, SD=. 78; M=3.67, SD= .78). When they were in the U.S., they sometimes feel stressed out or frustrated (M=3.49, SD=. 891); they also sometimes felt awkward, or out of place (M=3.48, SD=. 89). They thought they did connect to the United

States to a certain degree (M=3.06, SD = .88). When it comes to others' interest in their Facebook actions, they tended to think that their American friends somewhat care about their posts and actions (M=2.86, SD=1.10).

### **Satisfaction**

Three items were employed to estimate respondents' level of satisfaction with their life in the United States. The summary of the means and standard deviations of each item is provided in the Table (M= 3.34, SD= .79).

Table 7:

**The Mean and Standard Deviation of Satisfaction Items (N=142)**

Items	M	SD
1. Generally, how satisfied are you about your academic life in the U.S.?	3.65	.84
2. How satisfied do you feel interacting with Americans on Facebook?	2.96	1.06
3. How comfortable do you feel using Facebook to communicate with your American friends?	3.39	1.11

*Note.* Items are scaled on 5-point Likert scale: (1=" not at all satisfied, or not at all comfortable ", 5="Very much satisfied, or very much comfortable ").

In a larger sense, participants were satisfied with their present life in the United States: they were satisfied with their academic life (M=3.65, SD= .84); they were comfortable communicating with their American friends through Facebook

communication ( $M=3.39$ ,  $SD= 1.11$ ); and they were satisfied when interacting with their American friends on Facebook ( $M=2.96$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ).

The scale “Satisfaction,” combining with the previously described scale “Belonging,” assess the psychological health in present investigation, for the reliability between the two scales is fairly acceptable (Cronbach’s Alpha= .71); therefore, the psychological health index was created.

Participants who indicated that they often felt stressed also answered the question “what do you think makes you feel stressed” to help the researcher get a deeper understanding of the reason that might make them feel less satisfied about their life in the United States. In total, 120 responses were collected. Among all the responses, 31.7% of participants indicated that the schoolwork and academic life in the U.S. made them feel stressed and 29.2% of participants felt the loneliness of being away from home as a reason for their frustration, 24% of participants thought that interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds can be stressful and the remaining 20% implied that economic-related issues were the reason. Three participants indicated there were other reasons: two of them said it was the stress of finding a job, and the other one said that language abilities were causing the frustration.

When participants were asked if they could recall one recent event where they felt like they could “fit-in”, or in other words, felt as though they belonged to the American culture, 61 respondents provided answers through text entry. The answers can be

divided into two categories: interacting with others and individual actions. For the interactions with others categories, participants reported that they felt they experienced a feeling of belonging when they were interacting with Americans, which included joining holiday celebrations, watching/attending sports games, joining religious activities, joining parties and hanging out with others. For the individual actions category, participants gave examples such as participating in internships, traveling, academic achievements, etc.

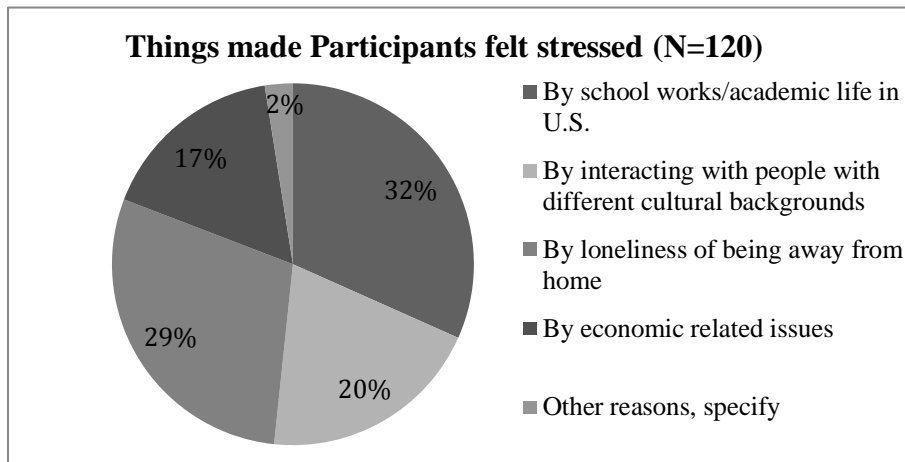


Figure 9. Things Made Participants felt Stressed (N=120)

### Functional Fitness

The last construct examined in this study is functional fitness, which is correspondent with the general understanding about the positive adaptation of individuals to a new environment. In this study, the Chinese international students'

school performance, which included school adjustment and academic performance, was measured.

In total, eleven items relevant to participants' competence in academic life in the United States and their feelings towards their school were measured. A summary of the means and standard deviation is presented in the table below ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = .53$ ). The distribution of the mean, median, and mode of the scores were not considerably different from each other.

In general, respondents showed relatively high degrees of functional fitness in terms of responding to the items in the scale: they rarely skipped class ( $M=4.50$ ,  $SD=.90$ ); they thought about quitting school once in a while ( $M=4.47$ ,  $SD=.96$ ); they commonly felt safe at school ( $M=4.11$ ,  $SD=.89$ ); they often finished their school assignment on time ( $M=4.48$ ,  $SD=.86$ ); and they generally liked their classes ( $M=3.84$ ,  $SD=.82$ ). Participants thought that overall the teachers and other students in their school got along with them well ( $M=3.85$ ,  $SD=.75$ ;  $M=3.73$ ,  $SD=.95$ ). They also felt that the American teachers and the American students in the school liked them too ( $M=3.67$ ,  $SD=.78$ ;  $M=3.55$ ,  $SD=.78$ ). To some extent, they felt as though they belonged to their school ( $M=3.42$ ,  $SD=.88$ ). As to their academic performance, they were satisfied based on their overall GPA ( $M=3.63$ ,  $SD=1.02$ ).

Table 8

<b>Mean and Standard Deviation of Functional Fitness Items (N=143)</b>		
<b>Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
1. How often do you skip classes?	4.50	.90
2. Have you ever thought seriously about quitting school?	4.47	.96
3. Overall, how well do you get along with the other students in your school?	3.73	.95
4. Overall, how well do you get along with your teachers in your school?	3.85	.75
5. Do you feel the American teachers in your school like you?	3.67	.78
6. Do you feel the American students in your school like you?	3.55	.78
7. How often do you finish your school assignments on time?	4.48	.87
8. Generally, to what extent do you like your classes?	3.84	.82
9. To what extent do you feel you belong in this school?	3.42	.88
10. Do you feel safe at school?	4.11	.88
11. How satisfied do you feel with your academic performance based on your overall GPA?	3.63	1.02

*Note.* Items are scaled on 5-point Likert scale: (1=" not at all," "rarely/never," or "not at all satisfied," 5="Very much," "very often," or "very much satisfied"). Item 1,2 were reverse coded.

Therefore, all the research variables are established for the current study, they are host communication competence, Facebook (social) communication, psychological health and functional fitness.

## Relationships between Demographic Variables and Research Variables

Table 9

### Correlation Matrix of Demographic Variables and Research Variables

	HCC	FBC	PH	FF
Age	-.185*	-.007	.006	.051
The degree pursuing	-.283**	-.215*	-.113	-.036
Major	.152	.101	.057	.008
Gender	-.169*	-.044	-.157	-.052
The Time (Year) created Facebook profiles	.331**	.205*	.275**	.276**

*Note:* \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Correlation coefficients were tested among the demographic information variables and the research variables to find the potential relationships. For the purpose of analysis, the data of gender and age of participant were recoded. The gender was recoded to male=1 and female =-1, and the major was recoded to art major=-1 and science majors= -1 to provide directions for the data which will help better understand the correlations between the demographic variables and research variables.

In general, it can be noticed that the education degree respondents pursuing was somewhat negatively correlated with their host communication competence and their Facebook communication: respondents who are pursuing higher degree tend to have smaller host communication competence ( $r = -.283$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and smaller Facebook communication ( $r = -.215$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The time of respondents creating Facebook profile

was found to somewhat correlated with all the research variables: the longer time respondents have their Facebook profile, they tend to have larger host communication competence ( $r = .331, p < .01$ ), better Facebook communication ( $r = .205, p < .01$ ), greater psychological health ( $r = .257, p < .01$ ) and greater functional fitness.

Table 10

**Degree Differences on Research Variables**

Degree	HCC		FBC	
	M	SD	M	SD
1 Bachelors	3.82	.58	3.33	.67
2 Masters	3.51	.61	2.92	.78
3 Doctoral	3.36	.60	2.83	.88
4 Others	3.19	.54	2.47	.85

One-way analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was operated to help get a deeper understanding about the effects of degrees respondents pursuing on the research variable host communication competence and Facebook communication. The data showed that sojourners who are pursuing their Bachelors degrees tended to have the greatest host communication competence and Facebook communication among all the participants ( $M=3.82, SD=.58; M=3.33, SD=.67$ ); sojourners who are pursuing their Master degrees had less host communication competence and Facebook communication than the Bachelors candidates ( $M=3.51, SD=.61; M=2.92, SD=.78$ ). The doctoral students demonstrated lower host communication competence and Facebook communication comparing with the first two groups of respondents ( $M=3.36, SD=.60; M=2.83, SD=.88$ ),

and the “Others” group, which is composed of visiting scholar and exchange students, has the lowest scores on the two variables (M=3.19, SD=.54; M=2.47, SD=.85).

From the correlation table it can also be noticed that gender and age differences have minor effects on the host communication competence (age:  $r = -.185$ ,  $p < .05$ ; gender:  $r = -.169$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The negative correlation can be understood in the way that female were more likely to have greater host communication competence than male, and younger respondents were more likely to have greater host communication competence than older respondents. One sample t-tests were conducted to get a better understanding about the gender and major differences’ effect on the host communication competence. The data showed that female respondents (M=3.56, SD= .59,  $t(94)=58.32$ ,  $p < .01$ ) tend to have greater host communication competence than male respondents (M=3.33, SD=. 65,  $t(43)=33.97$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Table 11

<b>Gender Differences on Host Communication Competence</b>		
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Female	3.56	.59
Male	3.33	.65

The statistical test also conducted to find out the major differences effect on the host communication competence. The data showed that science major respondents (M=3.37, SD=. 59, t (65)=46.48, p< .01) have slightly smaller host communication competence than art major respondents (M=3.56, SD= .64, t (69)=46.19, p<. 01).

Table 12

**Major Differences on Host Communication Competence**

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Major	Mean	SD
Science	3.37	.59
Art	3.56	.64

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### Hypotheses Testing

Path analysis was used for testing the model and hypothesis. Before conducting the analysis, since each construct was identified by multiple indicators, therefore the reliability of each research variables were examined and Cronbach's alpha value for each was as follow: `the host communication competence ( $\alpha =.796$ ), Facebook communication ( $\alpha =.775$ ), psychological health ( $\alpha =.712$ ), and functional fitness ( $\alpha =.775$ ).

In addition, a bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to examine the statistical relationships between the research variables (see Table 13). All hypothesized correlations are sizeable, significant, and in the predicted direction. Host communication competence was significantly correlated with Facebook communication ( $r=. 557$ ,  $p<. 01$ );

Facebook communication and psychological health were highly correlated ( $r=.577, p<.01$ ); Facebook communication was moderately correlated with functional fitness ( $r=.279, p<.01$ ); host communication competence was found to be notably correlated with functional fitness ( $r=.503, p<.01$ ); host communication competence and psychological health were also correlated ( $r=.538, P<.01$ ).

Table 13

<b>Correlation Matrix of Research Variables</b>				
	<b>HCC</b>	<b>FC</b>	<b>PH</b>	<b>FF</b>
Host Communication Competence	1	.557**	.647**	.503**
Facebook Communication		1	.577**	.279**
Psychological health			1	.538**
Functional Fitness				1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

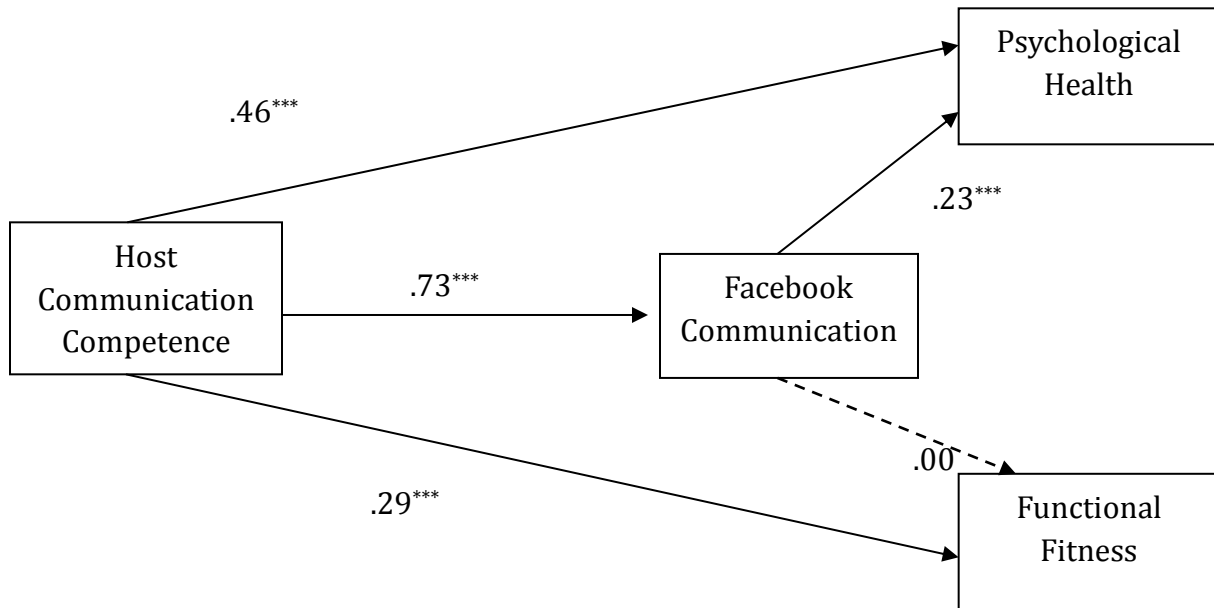
The proposed model comparing assumed effects between host communication competence and Facebook communication (H1), Facebook communication and psychological health (H2), Facebook communication and functional fitness (H3), host communication competence and psychological health (H4), as well as host communication competence and functional fitness (H5), was fitted to a covariance matrix contracted from the correlations and standard deviations in Table 13.

Path analysis testing the proposed model resulted in the following fit statistics: this model was not rejected in  $X^2$  goodness-of-fit test,  $x^2 (df=1, N=143) =17.97, p<.01$ ,

CFI= .916, IFI =. 918. Although the RMSEA= .345 (RMSEA varied with sample size and Kenny, Kaniskan, and McCoach (2011) argued that RMSEA is not appropriate for low df models), the summary statistics indicate that the path model represents a moderately good fit of the model with the data.

The parameter estimates showed that the host communication competence had a positive significant effect on the Facebook communication ( $\beta = .729$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This supported H1. The Facebook communication was found to have a positive effect on the psychological health ( $\beta = .234$ ,  $p < .001$ ); therefore H2 was supported. However, the Facebook communication was found to have influence on the functional fitness of Chinese international students as predicted in H3 ( $\beta = -.001$ ,  $P = .985$ ), thus H3 was not supported. The host communication competence was found have effects on the psychological health of respondents ( $\beta = .458$ ,  $P < .001$ ), and H4 was supported. At the same time, the host communication competence was found to have significant relationship with functional fitness ( $\beta = .294$ ,  $P < .001$ ); therefore H5 was supported.

## Path Coefficients of Research Variables



Notes: Sample in this model (n=143)  
 $\chi^2(df=1, N=143) = 17.97, p = .000,$   
CFI = .916,  
IFI = .918,  
RMSEA = .345

\* path significance  $p < .05$

\*\* path significance  $p < .01$

\*\*\* path significance  $p < .001$

Figure 10. Path Coefficients of Research Variables

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This study helped test and provide further support to Kim's (2001) theoretical frameworks regarding cross-cultural adaptation. With the emphasis on the structural mode, this study looked into the relationships among the five theoretical constructs, which included host communication competence, host interpersonal communication, host mass communication, psychological health and functional fitness. The relationships of the four variables—host communication competence, Facebook (social) communication, psychological health and functional fitness—were examined.

The hypothesized relationships had a mixed result and the path analysis demonstrated the coefficients of research variables. The following hypotheses were supported that greater host communication competence would be associated with higher involvement with Facebook communication among Chinese international students; greater host communication competence would be associated with greater psychological health of Chinese international students; greater host communication competence would be associated with functional fitness of Chinese international students; and higher involvement with Facebook communication would be associated with greater psychological health of Chinese international students. The hypothesis that higher involvement with

Facebook communication would be associated with greater functional fitness of Chinese international students was not supported. It can be seen from the model that the growing host communication competence of Chinese international students can help encourage increases in their Facebook communication, psychological health and functional fitness.

As Kim (2001) pointed out communication is embedded in all forms of human development. Through communication people learn to function in their life and become a part of their communities. The socialization process of individuals is carried out through communication activities. Those Chinese international students whose responses were used in this study demonstrated that they possessed relatively good language ability and showed that they have high levels of adaptation motivation, which is coherent with the finding of the previous study conducted by Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide and Shimzi (2004). That study found that the competence of a student is strongly associated with his/her willingness to communicate in a foreign language.

However, challenges of learning and using English do not pose the main difficulty for sojourners who are pursuing their higher education degrees in becoming competent in the new culture. The culture behind the language seems to be a bigger problem: respondents indicated that they are less likely to understand the jokes and humors in the English-language communication. Joking helps demonstrate how individuals can get involved in the conversation, especially for Americans (Davies, 2002), for it can demonstrate the understanding of knowledge of culture as well as the ability to understand and refer to the

cultural context. This context may be very different in America than that to which sojourners have been accustomed in their home country.

Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions compared the different aspects of cultures. China, as one typical collectivist culture, is very different from the United States, which is representative of individualist cultures. Despite the fact that people in China now are more individualistic than their forebears, there are still huge differences between those two cultures in regard to how they approach and understand beliefs, attitudes and values. For the sojourners who only spend a few years in the new culture, to grasp a more thorough understanding about the social context rooted deeply within the culture might require long-term efforts.

Although the cultural differences can pose significant barriers to Chinese international students on their way to achieve better cross-cultural understanding and adaptation, the sojourners are eager to learn the culture. In general, they are highly interested in American mass media, which include movies, TV shows and music. In this study, the sojourners' perceptions towards social media, an increasingly important element of American communication and culture, were also examined.

Facebook communications are regarded as a way for the Chinese international student to develop a broader understanding about their American friends, the American culture and the ongoing trends within the American society. The engagement of sojourners in the

SNSs can help them build relationships with their peers and also will assist them to involve themselves in the U.S. culture, which supports the finding of Yan et al. (2010).

The different amount of Facebook communications was found to be negatively related to the education degree the Chinese international students were pursuing. The higher degree they were working towards, the less Facebook communication they tended to have. The study conducted by Park, Kee and Valenzuela (2009) also noticed this phenomenon, which they explained by suggesting that the higher education levels students are working on cause those students to likely experience more stressful studies. Therefore, this finding supports the notion that there might be conflict between the pursuit of academic achievements and greater social life experiences in the host culture.

Meanwhile, those sojourners who have made more friends in the United States are likely to have a greater Facebook communications index. The increase in activities on Facebook is also associated with the number of American friends they have. Findings of McKinlay, Pattison and Gross (1996) supported that for international students to learn their way around in the new culture, it is important for them to establish close connections with friends and “fit in” with others in this environment. The friends the sojourners have on their Facebook also know them in person in the offline world. For young adults, the online and offline social worlds are becoming more connected (Subrahmanya et al., 2008).

This study also supports the finding that with the increasing involvement in communicating with people from the host culture, sojourners tend to have higher

satisfaction in interpersonal relationships and better adjustments in their lives (Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide & Shimzi, 2004).

The path coefficient analysis also supported the hypothesis that Facebook communication would help predict Chinese international students' psychological health, but it did not suggest that Facebook communication can help predict international students' functional fitness in the host culture.

The significant cultural differences between Chinese and American culture will likely demand more stressful cultural adjustments for Chinese international students studying in America, since previous studies have found that the greater the cultural differences, the more stress sojourners experience in adjusting (Kim, 1991; Ye, 2005). Using English-language Internet has become a way for sojourners to deal with their unpleasant feelings of acculturation (Ye, 2005). The utilization of social media communication to learn more about interpersonal contacts and the main stream American cultures could help Chinese international students to develop greater emotional satisfaction and do decrease cultural shock. The current findings supported Kim's (2001) conclusion that the increasing satisfaction level of sojourners would help reduce stress, and it also can increase sojourners' abilities to operate their life better.

Although the prior correlation test found there are moderate correlations between Facebook communication and functional fitness, looking at this relationship in the big model shows that Facebook communication has minor effect on functional fitness.

The measurement of functional fitness in the present study was accomplished through assessing the school performance of Chinese international students. Social communication within school is important for sojourners to adjust themselves to the school environment and therefore smooth their educational experience, which coincide with previous findings that developing social contact with the host culture would help sojourners to better adjust themselves to the new environment (Kim, 2001). Maintaining Facebook communications with other students and teachers in school could be a way to get to know and to socialize in the school culture. However, when looking at the factors that might affect sojourners' functional fitness with regards to school performance from a broader view within the model, the influence of Facebook communication is diminished. Therefore, we can conclude that Facebook communication can help sojourners socialize with friends and to learn more about American culture but does not have great influence on assisting sojourners' school performance other than helping them maintain and develop interpersonal relationships and become more socialized.

Along with all these findings, it is important to keep in mind that international students who, as sojourners, will just stay in the host culture and study for a short period of time, will need to deal with the host university culture as well as the host culture. The academic tasks always regarded as the priority to them; therefore the stress from study can make the cross-cultural adaptation harder for the international students.

As Kagan and Cohen (1990) pointed out in their study, adjustments to a new culture is the result of multidimensional adaptation models because of the various factors' interactions and collaboration, which include behavioral, personal and social network elements. To get a deeper understanding about how Chinese international students learn the American culture through Facebook communication, it is important to look at the entire cross-cultural adaptation structural model to grasp the idea of how each construct affects the outcome of culture learning.

The host communication competence acts as the engine that drives cross-cultural adaptation. The language ability, adaptive motivation and behavior competence would affect sojourners' social communication and their intercultural transformation outcomes, which are demonstrated by psychological health and functional fitness.

This study looked into the five theoretical constructs of Kim's (2001) cross-cultural adaptation model, and tested their relationships within the realm of social media. The result demonstrated that with the increasing language ability, interest in the host culture, and the ability to carry out their life well, sojourners would be more likely to use Facebook communication to maintain and reinforce their interpersonal contacts in the host society. They would also be more likely to value Facebook as an information source for them to learn the norms, values and trends of the host culture. The sojourners' psychological health and functional fitness levels would also be expected to grow. Meanwhile, the increasing Facebook communication was found to be helpful in envisioning the growing

levels of sojourners' psychological health. Although current research did not provide direct support to the relationship between Facebook communication and sojourner's functional fitness, overall the research model helped answer the research question, that in order to learn more about the host culture and achieve successful intercultural transformation, it is important for international students to be more competent in the host language and culture and utilize the media to maintain and reinforce their social communications.

### **Contribution and Practical Implications**

#### **Theoretical Contribution**

Numerous scholars and researchers have explored the field of cross-cultural adaptation for decades with different approaches. Kim (2001) developed an integrative communication theory, in which she established a structural model to address the cross-cultural adaptation. To understand how cross-cultural adaptation happens in today's world, it is important to see how it works with social media.

Today, information technologies are booming and people's communication behaviors have been changed: people utilized different forms of media, particularly SNSs, to maintain their connections with their communities and the society. SNSs enjoy especially great popularity among young adults, for whom the SNSs have become major platforms for them to keep in touch with friends and families and to keep up with society. The international students who study abroad and live in the host culture as sojourners, therefore, should make use of social media as a way to maintain and explore the culture they moved to.

Understanding about the role that social media plays in sojourners' cross-cultural adaptation is ready to be examined.

The current study explored Kim's (2001) theoretical framework by looking into the effect of Facebook communication on the cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese international students, and also tested the relationships of the theoretical constructs in that theory. Findings help support the cross-cultural adaptation theoretical framework and prove that it is still relevant to the current social context.

This research provided an inter-disciplinary perspective on social networking sites and cross-cultural adaptation, and offered a new perspective towards the study of media effect and culture learning. The findings suggest that the increasing host communication competence of sojourners will help predict greater SNSs communication, and this is relevant in anticipating the psychological health of those international students. The findings also supported Kim's (2001) theory that the growing host communication competence would anticipate the greater psychological health and functional fitness of the sojourners.

### **Practical Implications**

The researcher hopes that the current study about international students' Facebook communications and cultural learning will help provide some insights into smoothing the cross-cultural adaptation of sojourners.

Testing the correlations among host communication competence, Facebook communication, psychological health and functional fitness of sojourners helped demonstrate the importance of language ability, positive attitude towards the new culture and knowledge about the host culture in the process of international students' intercultural transformation. At the same time, it helped address the importance of utilizing media to help sojourners to achieve the goals of cross-cultural adaptation. Therefore, for international students, they need to keep in mind that while they are focusing their efforts on pursuing educational achievements in the schools of the host society, it is also important for them to maintain and strengthen their social connections through social media for their general well-being.

The balances between academic and social life is important and will help those international students acquire greater and fuller experience when they are exploring their life in the host cultures.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Study**

The design and execution of the study pose some limitations. First, the survey was conducted within one university in the United States and employed convenient sampling. Therefore, to what extent the sample population accurately represents the characteristics of the Chinese international students studying in the whole country remains unknown. The future study might incorporate more sampling population, which could help produce a stronger argument.

Furthermore, due to the limited time and resources, this study only selected five constructs from Kim's (2001) theoretical framework and examined their relationships with Facebook communications. Therefore, the other constructs' connections with social media communications remained untouched. Future studies might examine the other variables within the theory and thus present a more complete picture about the cross-cultural adaptation and social media communication can be drawn.

Additionally, the variable of Facebook (social) communication tested in this study is a combination of two constructs from the original theory. The researcher merely did some exploration about it. To further ground this variable and support the relationship founded in this study, more research will need to be conducted. To develop a better understanding about Facebook communication and its influence on sojourners' cultural learning, the characteristics of Facebook communication as well as social media communication should be examined.

In addition, the current study employed a previous scale to measure the sojourners' school performance as an important way to understand their functional fitness in the host culture. However, this did not provide a full examination of the functional fitness of those Chinese international students. Indeed a large part of their life in the host culture is involved in the school, but at the same time, they also might have other identities in the host culture such as serving as teaching/research assistant to their professors/departments or interns in American companies. The functional fitness of

respondents as professionals remained unexplored; future study might address the multiple identities of international students and their functional fitness in their roles.

While this research was conducted, many related issues remained unattended. For example this study concentrated on the culture learning of Chinese international students through Facebook, but other international students' cultural learning processes through social media were not explored. Due to different situations and cultural influences, it would be interesting to look into how students from other cultures in general utilize social media to help them know their host cultures.

At the same time, since the sojourners may use the social media at home, it might be interesting to make comparison about the home/host social media communication. While future directions for research have been briefly addressed here, it can be seen that there is still plenty of room for more research about social media in cross-cultural adaptation.

### **Conclusion**

We are living in a world full of changes: innovations in transportation have allowed people to across the national borders and explore lands with different cultures; social media has helped evolve the way people communicate and connect with each other. While it has become easier for people to know the rest of the world, cross-cultural adaptation still remains a significant challenge for sojourners. While there have been many studies that have addressed the issue of cross-cultural adaptation, they have not focused their attention on SNSs, the relatively new and unbelievably popular media, and how they function within

the process of cross-cultural adaptation of sojourners. The current study provides a fresh angle to examine cross-cultural adaptation by focusing on international students learning the new culture through social media. Focusing on Chinese international students, this study collected data about those sojourners' understanding and feeling about the American culture and their Facebook communications through one survey questionnaire.

The findings of this study supported Kim's (2001) theoretical framework and reaffirmed the influence of host communication competence on sojourners' Facebook (social) communication, psychological health, and functional fitness. At the same time, this study also explored the relationship between sojourners' Facebook communications and their intercultural transformation constructs and found that the Facebook communication of sojourners can help predict the level of psychological health of sojourners.

Much still needs to be done in order to get a full understanding about international students' adaptation experience and the role that social media plays in that experience. Future studies can explore the constructs not examined in this study to complete the puzzle. Meanwhile, more qualitative exploration would help provide a deeper understanding about what is behind the influences of social media and cross-cultural adaptation.

As the old saying goes "when in Rome, do as the Romans do." When it comes to cross-cultural adaptation, not only is it important to know the necessity of learning the new culture, but also to understand through what ways can one learn this culture better. This

study provides a fresh angle from a cross-disciplinary angle to understand cross-cultural adaptation and social media, and to demonstrate that social media can change people's lives.

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## APPENDICE

### Survey Questionnaire

Before beginning the questionnaire, please answer the following questions:

1. Do you have a Facebook account (check one)?

Yes No

2. When did you arrive to study in the United States? (Fill in the blank)\_\_\_\_\_

3. When did you create your Facebook profile? (Fill in the blank)\_\_\_\_\_

#### Section 1

**For all the questions in this section, please choose the degree to which you would most likely agree when asking about your feelings towards using English for everyday communication in the United States.**

A. How comfortable do you feel using English to take care of simple, everyday tasks in academic and daily life?

1. Not at all comfortable

2.

3.

4.

5. Very comfortable

B. How often do you have trouble in *understanding* English in the U.S.?

1. Rarely

2.

3.

4.

5. Very often

C. How often do you have trouble *expressing* yourself in English?

1. Rarely

2.

3.

- 4.
5. Very often

[If you did not chose option 4 and 5 in the previously two questions, please answer the following question:]

D. If you have trouble with English, when do you have the most trouble? (Choice all the answers that fit you)

1. In class with multiple speakers
2. With native speakers
3. With school assignments
4. Watching TV or movies
5. Listening to the radio
6. Others, specify \_\_\_\_\_

E. How interested are you in improving your ability to read, to speak and to write in English?

1. Not at all interested
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very interested

F. How often do you think you are a good communicator in your native language?

1. Rarely
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very often

G. How often do you feel that you are a good communicator when you communicate with U.S Americans in English?

1. Rarely
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very often

## Section 2

**In this section, you will be answer questions relevant to your feelings about U.S. culture in general. Please choose the degree to which you would mostly like agree.**

- A. How connected to the United States do you feel you are?
1. Not at all connected
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  5. Very connected
- B. How interested are you in wanting to feel that you belong in the larger American culture?
1. Not at all interested
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  5. Very interested
- C. Do you feel pressure from others to adapt to American culture?
1. Very much feel pressured
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  5. Very much feel unpressured
- D. When you communicate with Americans, how often do you understand their jokes and sense of humor?
1. Rarely
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  5. Very often
- E. Overall, how much do you enjoy doing things that are considered to be “mainstream” American things to do?
1. Not enjoyed at all
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  5. Very much interested
- F. Are there things that you enjoy doing that you think are “mainstream” American things to do?

1. Yes ( Please Specify ) \_\_\_\_\_

2. No

G. How often do you feel awkward or out of place living in the U.S.?

1. Rarely

2.

3.

4.

5. Very often

H. In general, how often do you feel frustrated or stressed in the United States?

1. Rarely

2.

3.

4.

5. Very often

**【If you chose one of the first three options in last question, please answer the following question】**

I. What do you think makes you feel stressed? (Select all the options that fit your situation)

1. School work/academic life in U.S.

2. Interacting with people of different cultural backgrounds

3. Loneliness of being away from home

4. Economic related issues

5. Other reasons, specify\_\_\_\_\_

J. Do you ever wish you could permanently leave the United States?

1. Rarely

2.

3.

4.

5. Very often

K. Open-ended questions

Can you recall one recent event that made you feel like you can “fit-in” or belong to the American culture?

### Section 3

**Please choose the degree to which you would agree most about your mass media consumption in the United States.**

A. How interested are you in watching American movies?

1. Not at all interested
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very interested

B. How interested are you in watching American TV shows?

1. Not interested at all
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very interested

C. How interested are you in listening to American music?

1. Not at all interested
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very interested

D. How interested are you in listening to American radio?

1. Not at all interested
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very interested

### Section 4

**The following section is composed of questions relevant to your own Facebook communication; please answer the questions according to your own situation.**

A. How many Facebook friends (connections with people on Facebook) do you have?

\_\_\_\_\_

B. Approximately what percentage of your Facebook friends are Americans?

1. 20% or less
2. More than 20% but less than 40%
3. More than 40% but less than 60%
4. More than 60% but less than 80%
5. More than 80%

C. What percentage of your Facebook friends would regard as close friends?

\_\_\_\_\_

D. Thinking about your three best, or closest friends, what are their nationalities?

Friend 1

1. American
2. Non-American but not Chinese
3. Chinese

Friend 2

1. American
2. Non-American but not Chinese
3. Chinese

Friend 3

1. American
2. Non-American but not Chinese
3. Chinese

E. To what extent do you think Facebook communication helps you get to know more about your American friends?

1. Not at all helpful
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very helpful

F. Compared with the actual number of people you know (met in class or spend time together) in U.S., do you think the number of your Facebook friends is

1. Much smaller than the “real people I know” in U.S.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Much larger than the “real people I know” in U.S.

- G. How many “likes” (information subscription of public pages) do you have on your Facebook? \_\_\_\_\_
- H. Among all the information subscriptions, which kind of subscription is your favorite?
1. Public figures (Celebrities, athletes, etc.)
  2. Brand fan pages (Starbucks/Apple, etc.)
  3. Informational sources (New York Times, CNN, etc.)
  4. Organizations (University of Georgia, WWF, etc.)
  5. Others, specify \_\_\_\_\_
- I. For your Facebook information subscriptions, to what extent do you value it as a source to know about American culture?
1. Not at all valuable
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  5. Very much valuable.
- J. Approximately, how often do you spend on Facebook on a typical day?
1. I rarely check my Facebook
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  5. I check it very often /spend most of my leisure time on it.
- K. How often do you use English to write a Facebook post or send a Facebook message to American friends?
1. Rarely
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  5. Very often
- L. How often do you use English to post information/comments on others on Facebook?
1. Rarely
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  5. Very often
- M. To what extent do you value Facebook as a major source of information?

1. Not at all important
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very much important

N. Do you feel that Americans care about your Facebook posts and actions?

1. Not at all
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very much

O. How satisfied do you feel interacting with Americans on Facebook?

1. Not at all satisfied
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very satisfied

P. How comfortable do you feel using Facebook to communicate with your American friends?

1. Not at all comfortable
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very comfortable

## Section 5

**Please answer the following questions by choosing the degree you would most likely with when talking about your feelings and situations about the school life in the United States.**

A. How comfortable do you feel understanding class lessons in English?

1. Not at all comfortable
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very Comfortable

B. How comfortable do you feel using English to write research papers and do other homework for class?

1. Not at all comfortable
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very Comfortable

C. Overall, how well do you get along with the other students in your school?

1. Not at all well
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very well

D. Overall, how well do you get along with your teachers in the U.S.?

1. Not at all well
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very well

E. Do you feel the American teachers in your school like you?

1. Not at all like me
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Like me very much

F. Do you feel the American students in your school like you?

1. Not at all like me
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Like me very much

G. How often do you finish your school assignments on time?

1. Rarely
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

5. Very often/All the time

H. Generally, to what extent do you like your classes?

1. Not at all interested
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very much interested

I. How often do you skip classes?

1. Rarely/Never
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very often

J. Do you enjoy participating in school activities, like sports, clubs, or other student activities in this school?

1. Not at all
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Enjoy them very much

K. How often do you participate in clubs or play sports with Americans?

1. Rarely
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very often

L. How often do you work on school projects with Americans?

1. Rarely
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very often

M. Generally, how satisfied are you about your academic life in the U.S.?

1. Not at all satisfied
- 2.

- 3.
- 4.
5. Very much satisfied

N. Have you ever thought seriously about quitting school?

1. Rarely/never
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very often

O. To what extent do you feel you belong in this school?

1. Not at all feel that I belong
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Feel that I belong all the time

P. Do you feel safe at school?

1. Rarely
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very often

Q. How satisfied do you feel with your academic performance based on your overall GPA?

1. Not at all
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
5. Very much satisfied

## Section 6

**Please choose the option according to your own situation**

I am: Male Female

My age in years on my last birthday was (fill in blank): \_\_\_\_\_ years

My major area of study is (fill in black): \_\_\_\_\_ years

The time I have lived in the United States is (fill in blank): \_\_\_\_\_years

The degree I am pursuing is (Check one):

Bachelors Masters Doctoral Others (describe) \_\_\_\_