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Bridgers in the Third Space: An In-Country Investigation of the Leadership Practices
of US-Educated Chinese Nationals

A Dissertation by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

May 2016

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April 2016

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my parents, Ramon and Conchita, thank you for being the reason why I started this Ph.D. journey. It is due to your upbringing that I value education, take pride in the fruits of my hard work, and do not get discouraged by unexpected challenges that life presents to me. To Jim, who has been the ‘wind beneath my wings’, I share this scholarly achievement with you. Throughout this journey and our incredible adventure in China, you have learned as much as I have about the Chinese culture, human behavior, and life in general. Thank you for your support, patience, and continued love. To my sons, Jeff and Neil, I dedicate this work to you. I hope this work inspires you to actively engage with the world and be *bridgers* between cultures and ages.

I am excited to share this completed project with Anneli, because it is due to our common passion for international education and concern for the international students that I was inspired to take on this ambitious China project. I also want to share this accomplishment with my Leadership Studies family: Anat, Chris, Ed, Greg, Jillian, and Justin. It has been so much fun going on this 4-year journey with you. To Lisa, Bill, Howard, and the nameless others who took the time to connect me with my research participants, I will always be grateful for your help. Special thanks go to the faculty of Chapman University, particularly my committee members Penny, Whitney, and Kris. You are all amazingly knowledgeable, supportive, kind, and full of love. Since the first day of the first Ph.D. class, it has been a wonderful journey for me. Finally, to my new friends in China—thank you for spending some time with me and sharing your stories. I hope our paths cross again. Xiexie. 谢谢

ABSTRACT

Bridgers in the Third Space: An In-Country Investigation of the Leadership Practices of US-Educated Chinese Nationals

by Maria L. Martinez

This in-country grounded theory study examined the lived experiences of 24 Chinese returnees who completed advanced degrees in the United States. The study found that the four types of organizations in mainland China determine the social context of the application of Western education of the Chinese returnees. Returnees working in multinational corporations apply their Western education more than the returnees working in the other types of organizations. Themes that revolved around the international educational experiences of the Chinese students, including the development of cultural intelligence and new understanding of the ‘other’, and their realization of the differences between their home and host cultures, are included in the findings of this study. The relationship between these themes has led to the construction of a new concept concerning their self-cultivation that, in the Chinese perspective, is integral to Chinese leadership. This study introduces the concept of the *bridger* as a role that some Chinese returnees take on within their Chinese organizations and the third space that *bridgers* occupy.

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Chapter One: Overview of the Study

Many who return find that cultural adjustments back to life in China are difficult. “[My work unit] regarded me as part American, and I started to feel that way myself. That’s funny, because when I was in America, I always felt very Chinese . . . I started to feel suspended between the two places, as if I would always be half-and-half.” (Biehler, 2004, p. 356)

The death of Mao Zedong in the late 1970’s heralded the re-opening of China’s doors to the West, allowing the Chinese to go overseas to learn about life outside their country. Desperately in need to catch up with the Western world’s advancements in science and technology, hundreds of thousands of Chinese from the People’s Republic of China (hereafter called “China”) traveled to developed Western countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada to study (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2013). China’s commitment to develop its human capital was evident in its passing of the Chinese educational policy called *twelve-character principle* which supported study abroad (Biao & Shen, 2009; Shuzhen, 2003). Due to this Chinese initiative to develop human capital, universities across the United States became training grounds and cultural hosts to the Chinese. Over the past four decades, more than fifty thousand Chinese students decided to stay in the United States (Zweig, 1997) to join the American society while others returned home. It became evident from research studies on US-educated Chinese (Biao & Shen, 2009; Li, 2006, 2009) that those who possess Western degrees hold important leadership positions and have a significant degree of influence on Chinese policy making.

Indeed, over the past two decades, the world has witnessed the rapid modernization and commercialization of China. The proliferation of commercialism in the country requires a new set of knowledge, skills, and abilities. To compete in the global market, the Chinese have had to learn Western business concepts and skills needed to relate to the Western-centric business world. To this end, thousands of Chinese students have come to Western countries such as the United States to learn the English language, pursue an advanced degree such as the Master's in Business Administration (MBA), and earn valuable Western-based work experience. The rapid modernization of China evident in the newly constructed skyscrapers that the world saw during the 2008 Summer Olympic Games can be attributed to foreign-acquired expertise that the Chinese has developed. Still, even with the backdrop of ultra-modern glass skyscrapers, the culture of the Chinese remains distinctly different from the culture of the Western world.

Conceptual Underpinnings of the Study

The economic, social, and political orientations of human beings shape their lifeworld and experience of life events (Habermas, 1981/1987). This constructivist approach to the understanding of human existence can be applied to the study of how leadership is enacted by individuals who have different lifeworlds. For international students, the extraordinary experience of being exposed to and engaging with other cultures and philosophies causes the disruption of their native lifeworld (Habermas, 1981/1987). Going to the United States to obtain professional training where the culture is significantly different entails the difficult task of adopting to a different lifestyle. When they return home, the process of re-adjusting back to their native culture can be just as difficult (Chuang, 2011; Huang, 2012; Molinsky, 2013). While this study focuses on the

experiences of Chinese returnees, the initial propositions I have on this phenomenon are based on my own experiences as a new immigrant to the United States three decades ago. My experiences lead me to believe that individuals who participate in American education and experience the American way of life will naturally adopt certain aspects of the American identity. These propositions serve as sensitizing concepts, explained later in this paper, which include the following: (1) It can be emotionally challenging for human beings to learn to exist alongside different value systems; (2) Being exposed to different perspectives causes a human being to reflect on one's native perspectives; (3) Just as immigrants do, international students, knowingly and unknowingly, adopt certain behaviors exhibited by members of their host country; (4) It is difficult to return to one's 'original state' because acculturation requires a degree of deconstruction and reconstruction of the social self, involving experiences of intentional and unintentional shedding of native behaviors and values (Hurley, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

The Western approach to leadership is based on knowing one's strengths and being able to confidently lead team members using these strengths (Rath & Conchie, 2008). Having *crucial conversations* is a strategy advocated by leadership scholars in the Western world (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzer, 2012) to effectively address problematic situations. While these behaviors may be considered appropriate or effective strategies by the Western-based organizational leadership field, it should not be assumed that members of non-Western societies, in professional and social arenas, will adopt these practices. In order to provide education that best fits the needs of its various stakeholders, organizations involved in the delivery of education must be cognizant of how

international students from the East utilize their Western education. The lack of empirical studies on this phenomenon weakens these efforts. This study aims to address this issue.

With the influx of students from Asia in universities in the West, scholars in the field of leadership (Adams, 2013; Dickson, Castano, Magomaeva, & Den Hartog, 2012) have begun to question the applicability of Western leadership theories in the study of leadership across cultures. The manner in which Chinese leaders engage with the Internet (Wong, 2015), protect intellectual property (Zhai, 2014), and address environmental issues (Wong, 2013) are likely areas of incongruence between the type of leadership advocated by American MBA programs and the leadership enacted by the Chinese in China. Given the significant participation of the Chinese in higher education in the U.S., it behooves scholars and practitioners to understand the manner in which the Chinese graduates of master's or doctoral programs in the U.S. operationalize what they learned in the Chinese context.

Along with providing subject-specific information and technical skills, graduate programs, particularly MBA programs, also develop in their students 'soft skills' that include "oral communication, high level learning skills, problem solving, decision making, and affective skills and traits" (Crossman & Clarke, 2010, p. 602). Through this education, the MBA student from China is trained to develop the values of responsibility, ethics, self-motivation, a positive attitude, interpersonal skills, and independent or team work. But what *if* these Western values that are acquired over time while in the United States are not shared by the people in China? Incongruence between the acquired and native values and norms of Chinese nationals can result in psychological and social conflict (Molinsky, 2013) which can have a critical effect on their practice of leadership.

Although theories associated with transformational leadership (Burns, 2003) and emotional intelligence (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002) inform practitioners about the important competencies required to effectively lead in a non-Western context or multicultural environment, these theories do not adequately explain leadership when practiced by US-educated Chinese nationals in their native Chinese environment. Studying how Western-centric transformational competencies are incorporated in the Chinese context will contribute valuable knowledge to the leadership field.

The interest of the academic community in the intersectionality of Eastern and Western cultures is evident in the amount of work conducted on social phenomena involving Chinese students or East Asian students as a whole. The implications of the differences between Western and Chinese cultures have been widely discussed in the literature across disciplines, including education (Chuang, 2012; Chung, Eichenseher, & Taniguchi, 2008), communication (Chen & An, 2009), management, and leadership studies (Gao, Arnulf, & Kristofersen, 2011). As the Chinese continue to participate in Western education and return to China with Western-oriented concepts and Western-based experiences, there is a need to understand how the merging of the East and West through international education affects human beings and social systems around the world. In the case of US-educated Chinese leaders, the Chinese application of leadership strategies that have been developed from Western leadership theories in an Eastern context is problematic and needs to be explored. As an unexplored terrain, there is a limited amount of information about this phenomenon found in the literature. This study strives to address this gap in the literature.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the role that Western education played in the leadership of Chinese nationals who earned graduate degrees in the United States. The study investigated the experiences of Chinese returnees in terms of how they negotiated disparate concepts or orientations as a result of their Western education. The study aimed to understand how Chinese returnees navigated the path toward leadership when societal norms did not align with professional training. Specifically, this study investigated how immersion in the American culture through international education affected the Chinese returnees' experiences of leadership.

This study aimed to provide answers to questions that included: How do Chinese nationals with a graduate degree from the United States enact leadership in China? Does Western education align with the expectations of Chinese organizational leaders? In what ways do US-trained Chinese nationals negotiate emergent differences between their perspectives and the perspectives of those who were not Western-educated? In what ways do they experience and react to different value sets?

Additionally, the study explored the existence of gender-based differences in the returnee's experiences in China. While emphasis of the study was on the returnees' experiences, the study asked about the former international students' experiences while studying abroad. The study examined the relationship between the students' experiences abroad and their experiences of re-adjusting to their native environment. It also asked the question: What is the Chinese national's overall experience of international education in terms of ways of engaging with the Western world? It was also interesting to know

whether they kept in contact with the individuals with whom they studied or worked while in the United States.

These questions aimed to illuminate the intersectionality between Western education, Chinese culture, and leadership. The questions covered the different dimensions of the lives of the Chinese returnees, thus providing insight into their lived experiences post-graduation. With these questions, the study strived to discover liminal spaces distinctly occupied by US-educated Chinese nationals.

Significance of the Study

This investigation of how Chinese graduates of US-based advanced degree programs operationalize leadership in China offers various insight to providers of graduate programs as well as prospective employers of Western-educated job-seekers. First, it provides information about how U.S. graduate programs affect the way the Chinese experience leadership, thus, expanding literature in cross-cultural studies, global leadership, and international education. Insight into the human and cultural capital possessed by Western-educated Chinese nationals can be gleaned from this study by leaders of organizations with multi-national stakeholders, including organizations based in China. Second, although limited to the study of Chinese nationals, information about how other Asian ethnic groups, including students from South Korea, India, and the United Arab Emirates, experience the intersectionality of their international education and culture can be obtained from this study. The study can serve as a template for future investigations of the role that Western education plays in the leadership practices in other Asian countries. Third, findings from this study may help organizational leaders and policy makers interested in maintaining stable and positive diplomatic and trade relations

between the two countries understand how US-based graduate programs affect how the Chinese lead their organizations.

Definition of Terms

Chinese nationals are individuals who are citizens of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The term "Chinese" is used in this study to refer to individuals from the PRC, excluding people from Hong Kong and Taiwan who share the same ethnic heritage. For this study, the term "Western" is used to refer to cultural, political, and philosophical systems in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. The terminology "international students" refers to students who, through student visas, cross national borders specifically to attend a higher education institution in the host country. Two of the four types of organizations discussed in this study include the multinational corporation and the state-owned enterprise. A multinational corporation refers to a for-profit or non-profit organization that operates and has facilities in at least one other country other than its home country. A state-owned enterprise refers to a legal entity that has been established by a government in order to engage in commercial activities on the government's behalf.

Organization of the Paper

This paper discusses a research project that explored an area in leadership and international education that had not been closely examined on an empirical basis. It describes the investigation of the effects of Western education on the leadership experiences of the US-educated Chinese. Chapter Two discusses what was found from the literature review for this study, including general and global leadership theories, historical developments in the participation of the Chinese in U.S. education, the political

and social context of this Chinese participation, and the behavioral dimensions of the Chinese experience of international education. The concept of liminality is also introduced in this section to help in understanding its relationship to the findings. Chapter Three re-states the research questions and describes the application to this study of the grounded theory and culturally responsive methodologies, as well as the role that a co-researcher plays in the researcher's positionality. Chapter Four describes the study's findings through the remarks made by the participants. As the last section, Chapter Five contains the analysis of this study's findings, including how these findings connected to other concepts about leadership and how they compare with the findings from a similar study conducted on 20th century returnees. This final chapter also discusses the concept of the *bridger* and other related concepts that emerged from the relationship between the themes of this study's findings. The paper concludes with a discussion on the study's implications and researcher's recommendations for future studies.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The normalization of US-China relations in 1978 led to the signing of the bilateral agreement called *Understanding on Educational Exchanges and Agreement on Cooperation in Science and Technology* (Biao & Shen, 2009). This agreement marked the beginning of the surge in Chinese student participation in higher education in the United States of America (U.S.). Since then, from not having any Chinese student attend U.S. universities, China became a major sender of international students to the country (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2013). Due to this rapid growth in Chinese student presence in the U.S. and in other developed nations as well, scholars and practitioners in host countries such as the U.S., Canada, and the United Kingdom, sought to understand how Chinese students experienced western education. This interest spawned discussions and scholarly investigations in many areas related to the Chinese educational ventures. As early as December 1987, the presence of Chinese MBA students had been discussed in “Chinese MBA students in Buffalo compare U.S. and Chinese industry” in *Business America*. The academic and professional communities continued to be curious about how this nascent phenomenon would evolve in the 21st century given the political and economic implications that the rapidly increasing Chinese economy has on the American national interests (Paulson, 2015).

This chapter contains five major sections. The first section discusses the concept of transformational leadership and other concepts related to the practice of leadership. The second section discusses the competencies that global leaders possess to effectively lead in today’s globalized world. The third section traces the historical development of the Chinese participation in education in the United States, including (1) literature written

since the early years after the Mao Zedong era, (2) the trend in Chinese participation in graduate schools in the U.S., (3) the timeline of historic events impacting the Chinese participation in U.S. education, and (4) shifts in political relations and economic developments that affect this educational participation. The fourth section, which explains the political and social context of this phenomenon, includes a discussion on how US-trained Chinese students embody China's human capital, the marketization of American higher education, and the US-China diplomatic relations. Finally, the fifth section discusses challenges within the behavioral dimension of the Chinese experience of international education, including culture shock, intercultural adjustment, different learning styles and language skills, and gendered experiences, as well as the limitations of current models addressing these challenges.

Understanding Theories of Leadership

Engaging in the study of leadership involves understanding conceptualizations included in Trait Theories, Leadership Styles, Leadership Competencies, and other emergent leadership theories (Gill, 2011). In today's globalized world, where the interactions of leaders extend beyond their organizations and involve multicultural settings, the study of leadership requires that culture be recognized as a critical component of the practice and process of leadership. For example, three constituent elements have been identified in paternalistic leadership observed in Chinese organizations: authoritarianism (requiring strict adherence to rules), benevolent leadership (being kindhearted), and moral leadership (emphasizing the importance of having a moral character) (Farh & Cheng, 2000). Paternalistic leadership reflects a mindset that the leader takes on a father-like figure and knows what is best for everyone

in the organization. While this explication of paternalistic leadership in the Chinese context is an exemplar of culturally contextualized leadership, paternalistic leadership as a conception of leadership is not part of the curriculum of MBA programs in the United States. It is therefore not an appropriate framework for this study. In contrast, transformational leadership is incorporated in leadership and business education programs in the United States. Given that the subject of interest of this study involves the Chinese students in the United States, a discussion of transformational leadership serves as an appropriate starting point for this study.

Transformational leadership

Laissez-faire, transactional leadership, and transformational leadership comprise the Full Range Leadership Model (Gill, 2011). Laissez-faire refers to a leadership style that is loose and not based on any particular leadership style. Transactional leadership refers to leadership that is primarily based on set objectives and performance standards; it rewards organizational members on the basis of these measures. The success of transactional leaders depends on the leader's power to reinforce subordinates, using material or symbolic means, for their successful completion of the task at hand. In contrast, transformational leadership focuses on positively impacting the members or the group, providing empowerment, motivation, and morality. Transformational leadership uses "a combination of skills and unique worldviews that combine to allow leaders the flexibility to create new conditions, to move the hearts and minds of others, and to manifest reality that would not have emerged otherwise" (Evans, 2009, p. 24). As explained by Bass (1997), making a positive impact on members is achieved using one or more of the following four components of transformational leadership, also referred to as

the four 'Ts': individualized consideration (leaders attend to followers' individual needs), intellectual stimulation (leaders incite new perspectives in followers), inspirational motivation (leaders provide vision and encouragement), and idealized influence (leaders emphasize trust, purpose, and display conviction). These actions reflect the leader's focus on providing the support that members need in order to realize their full capacity to succeed. The leader's supportive role in the professional development of followers supports the idea that transformational leaders engage in 'nearby' as opposed to 'distant' leadership (Gill, 2011). As the terms imply, 'nearby' leaders have a closer contact with the subordinates whereas 'distant' leaders tend to be more aloof. Through this more person-oriented leadership, the leader's passion to see others develop their capacity to act as positive change agents becomes apparent to the followers. Providing inspiration to the organization, the leader's passion motivates individuals to take action and propel the collective toward positive change. Transformational leadership is therefore a shared experience of social influence "with an emphasis on openness, connectedness, empowerment, humility and humanity" (Gill, 2011, p. 89).

The ethics of leadership and the standards and criteria of ethical behavior frame the discourse of authentic leadership (Avolio, 2009; Bass, 1997). Amidst the cultural relativities of leadership in different parts of the world, "foundational moral discourse rests upon polarities found in both *moral intention* (egoism versus altruism) and in *moral consequences* (benefits and costs for self and others)" (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 183). The behavior of transformational leaders in terms of these polarities, including their moral character, motivation, values, and agenda, renders their leadership as either authentic or inauthentic. Whereas inauthentic transformational leadership reflects self-

promotion, “authentic transformational leadership provides a more reasonable and realistic concept of self—a self that is connected to friends, family, and community whose welfare may be more important to oneself than one’s own” (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 186). Authentic transformational leaders provide followers the motivation “to work for transcendental goals that go beyond immediate self-interests . . . for the good of the group, organization, or country” (Bass, 1997, p. 133). Their concern is the common good as opposed to goal achievement for themselves.

Authentic leadership is reflected in how leaders enact the four components of transformational leadership—the four I’s. In terms of providing individualized consideration to followers, authentic leaders desire their followers to become leaders themselves rather than maintain their followers’ dependence on them. In the area of intellectual stimulation, the difference between authentic and inauthentic or pseudo-transformational leaders, as Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) referred to them, lies in how the former persuade followers on the merits of issues at hand and how the latter would use knowledge and authority and “feed on the ignorance of their followers so that their followers will accept more ambiguities and inconsistencies” (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 188). On the basis of how they provide inspirational motivation, authentic leaders focus on the best rather than the worst in people. Authentic leaders focus on the positive outcome that can be achieved for the group for which they are responsible rather than project negativities such as insecurities, danger, confusion, or conflict. Finally, when exerting idealized influence, authentic leaders advocate for universal brotherhood and do not highlight differences between individuals (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). As change agents, authentic transformational leaders strive for positive change.

According to Evans (2009), there are five areas of competency that help leaders transform their organizations: (1) envision a compelling future, (2) commit to the future, (3) exude energy and inspiration, (4) set high-performance goals, and (5) enable inspired action through teams. Three competencies pertain directly to what the leader must possess as an individual: First, vision indicates having a mental picture of the future, a place where one aspires to be. This competency requires the leader's imagination of a better state of being, for one's self and organization. Second, commitment as the next competency following vision is directly related to action. "When we create a vision of a more desirable state, we next must take the action to do something different than we have done up until now" (Evans, 2009, p. 91). Embodying this competency requires a leader to make an assessment of internal elements that enhance or inhibit action towards the desired state, including the structure and physical environment of the organization and one's skills to take action towards the desired state. Third, the competency referred to as 'presence' refers to the transformational leader's capacity to exude energy and inspiration. For Evans (2009), this competency is embodied by a leader who gives the sense of direction, shows the energy to follow that direction, and enjoys the pursuit of this goal.

The fourth and fifth competencies reflect the leader's relationship with the followers. The competency to set high-performance goals involves providing the necessary framework for followers to achieve the organization's vision. It means providing guidelines for the work toward the accomplishment of the stated vision of the organization. Then, the competency for team building is important for the teams that comprise organizations. Teams become effective in their work when they are led by

someone who creates an environment that fosters collaboration, trust, and pathways for communication that are emotionally non-threatening to team members. Cohesive teams share and effectively work toward the same vision. These five competencies enable leaders to move their organizations toward continued progress.

Literature on leadership also includes thematic discussions involving vision, purpose, values, strategy, and empowerment (Gill, 2011). Among these themes, values are considered most relevant to this cross-cultural study of leadership. Values are defined as reflections of the standards of conduct that are acceptable to one's self and society (Rokeach, 1973). Values "are concerned with people's belief systems, their cultural identity, ideas and behaviors that are intrinsically desirable" (Fua, 2009, p. 117). They exist within individuals and institutions and differ across cultures. For example, Americans value autonomy significantly more than community and divinity compared to non-Westerners who place equal value on autonomy, community, and divinity (Vasquez, Keltner, Ebenbach, & Banaszynski, 2001). Other leadership scholars have studied the relationship of values in the different styles of leadership. One particular study, which will be discussed next, revolves around Chinese leadership.

For Farh and Cheng (2000), the paternalistic leadership of the Chinese has an element of moral leadership that emphasizes good moral character. Given Vasquez et al.'s (2001) findings, it is arguable that what constitutes good moral character varies between cultures. The relationship of culture with the values held by human beings underscores the point of this study. That is, there is a question about the universality of the Western thought. Autonomy as the primary guide to moral thought in the United States is based on justice and focuses on the concepts of individual rights and freedom to

pursue one's preferences and happiness; the same is not necessarily true in other countries. As shown by Vasquez et al.'s (2001) study, non-Westerners value community more, indicating "themes of duty, status, hierarchy, and interdependence . . . to protect the network of social roles and relationships, with the self viewed as "office holder" in the greater community" (p. 95). Global leadership as a discipline that deals with the intercultural dimensions of leadership tackles the question of the role that culture plays, and the value sets associated with this culture, in the practice of leading organizations. The relationship of global leadership with culture is discussed in the next section.

Leadership in the Globalized World

The term globalization has taken prominence in discussions among industry professionals, scholars, and higher education administrators as the world has witnessed the blurring of boundaries between nations-states. Globalization has been defined as the *process* which occurs when societies around the world connect with each other and have an exchange of ideas and goods, thereby establishing transnational communities and relationships (Berry, 2008). Using Berry's (2008) definition, it can be said that societies retain their characteristics while interacting with other societies. There is however a contrasting view about globalization. That is, globalization is seen as related to world systems and involving homogeneity (Crossman & Clarke, 2010). The latter meaning attached to this term alludes to societies becoming increasingly less different from each other. In either case, the concept of globalization is important because it highlights the interconnectedness of people in different countries. International education as a field greatly relevant to this study contributes to the interconnectedness of people around the globe.

Advanced technologies in telecommunications, information systems, and transportation have enabled multinational corporations to conduct business globally. The expansion of business enterprises across seas and cultures brings complexities to various aspects of business operations, such as how to navigate the Chinese *guanxi* (Liu & Gao, 2014; Panggabean, Murniati, & Tjitra, 2013; Paulson, 2015). *Guanxi* which refers to the close-knit personal relationships between Chinese friends and family or with individuals who have common interests and identities (Panggabean et al., 2013). The interaction between stakeholders with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds is a concern of global leadership. How does one operate effectively in a different cultural and political setting? How does one know the behavior expected in different environments?

The nascent field of global leadership has developed the concept of a ‘global leader’, defined as an individual “who inspires a group of people to willingly pursue a positive vision in an effectively organized fashion . . . in a context characterized by significant levels of complexity, flow, and presence” (Mendenhall et al., 2013, p.75). Global leaders understand that there are multiple ways of operating and that needs and perspectives vary due to culture, geography, or time. With this mindset, global leaders effectively relate to multicultural stakeholders because they are able to adjust their ways to meet the conditions of their international constituents (Alon & Higgins, 2005; Bucher & Poutsma, 2010; Creque & Gooden, 2011; Levy, Beechler, Taylor, & Boyacigiller, 2007).

As is true in general or localized leadership situations, global leaders must possess cultural intelligence, defined as “an outsider’s ability to interpret unfamiliar and ambiguous gestures the way that person’s compatriots would” (Earley & Mosakowski,

2004, p. 140) and “an individual’s capability to function effectively in culturally diverse contexts” (Ng, Van Dyne, & Ang, 2009, p. 512). They also possess social intelligence (Gill, 2011) which gives them the social awareness necessary to have empathy and the ability to “sense the shared values and priorities that can guide the group” (Goleman et al., 2002, p. 49). These attributes enable global leaders to navigate the world effectively.

Global leadership involves understanding the cultural context wherein the leadership occurs (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2012; Earley & Mosakowski, 2004; Ng et al., 2009). Fifteen global leadership competencies identified by Mendenhall et al. (2013) fall under three main categories, as shown in Table 1. Leaders with these attributes are able to address the complex international and multicultural issues that exist in today’s globalized world, and can at the same time promote positive organizational change in culturally different contexts.

Table 1.

A Framework of Nested Global Leadership Competencies

Business and Organizational Acumen	Vision and strategic thinking Leading change mindset Business savvy Organizational savvy Managing communities
Managing People and Relationships	Valuing people Cross-cultural communication Interpersonal skills Teaming skills Empowering others
Managing Self	Inquisitiveness Global mindset Flexibility Character Resilience

Note. Adapted from “Global Leadership: Research, Practice, and Development,” by M. E. Mendenhall, J. S. Osland, A. Bird, G. R. Oddou, M. L. Maznevski, M. J. Stevens, and G. K. Stahl, 2013, p. 96. Copyright 2013 by the Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

MBA programs that many aspiring business leaders attend, including the Chinese nationals who participated in this study, purport to teach students ‘soft skills’ related to the fifteen global leadership competencies suggested by Mendenhall et al. (2013). As prescribed by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) that grants the accreditation of business programs, MBA programs provide their students general and management-specific knowledge which encompass abilities that business school graduates use in their professional lives (AACSB International, 2016). General knowledge learning goals include abilities in communication, problem solving, and ethical reasoning. Management-specific learning goals include knowledge of specific areas in business, such as accounting, marketing, human resources, and operations.

In relation to the current study, business schools also provide programs that address the global nature of today’s business environment. Built into the curriculum of business programs are lessons on cross-cultural interpersonal skills, international operations, and management of cultural, ethnic, and gender diversity in the workplace (AACSB International, 2016). Other topics that the AACSB finds in general management business programs include individual and organizational ethics, environmental issues, political issues, legal issues, and regulatory context for business. It may be safe to assume that Western students attending an MBA program in the United States are able to apply these soft skills in their Western milieu, but the same assumption should not be made about the Chinese MBA student who returns to China. The juxtaposition of these Western-centric lessons against the Eastern context is an area worthy of investigation. Given the significantly different cultural and political background of the US-educated

Chinese national, it is important to ask whether the Western-centric soft skills advanced by graduate programs in the United States are utilized by repatriated Chinese nationals.

Gao et al.'s (2011) study indicated that Chinese managers attending China-based MBA programs "are interested in leadership, willing to reflect on this issue, and . . . are profoundly embedded in Chinese philosophy" (p. 62). For these Chinese managers, leadership was embodied by a virtuous person, transformational leader, charismatic hero, relationship-based leader, or an autocratic decisive leader; these attributes are listed in descending order. Gao et al.'s (2011) study supported the Chinese Model of Leadership Competence that Chen and An (2009) proposed, suggesting that self-cultivation, context profundity, and action dexterity constitute Chinese leadership competence. This model also suggested that "self-cultivation is a process of transforming . . . to the higher level of the developmental ladder of leadership competence (Chen & An, 2009, p. 200). With the exception of the autocratic decisive leader, Chen and An's (2009) process of becoming a Chinese leader paralleled the process of development of the Western leader.

Findings from Tourish, Craig, and Armenic's (2010) study provided an interesting twist to investigations involving MBA programs. Tourish et al.'s (2010) study of the websites of 21 leading business schools in the United States indicated that, although schools providing MBA programs purport that their programs develop transformational leaders, this leadership style is still "depicted as a process by which leaders exert a 'top-down' influence over the activities of others, while simultaneously asserting that their organizations have a common purpose and pursue a collective interest" (Tourish et al., 2010, p. 40). Although there was no similar textual analysis of marketing materials conducted on Chinese MBA programs, based on the results of Tourish et al.'s (2010) and

Gao et al.'s (2011) studies, it could be argued that, on the surface, the leadership orientation of students from Western and Eastern MBA programs differed. Juxtaposing Gao et al.'s (2011) study, which was conducted in mainland China, against Tourish et al.'s (2010) study, begged the interesting question of whether MBA programs in China differed significantly from those provided in the U.S. or other Western countries.

Cultural Dimensions of Leadership

Hofstede's (1980) conceptualization of culture as a "collective mental programming" shared by a group (Hofstede, 1980, p. 43) and his subsequent model of national culture consisting of six dimensions informs this study's exploration of the intersectionality between leadership, culture, and Western education. These cultural dimensions signify the areas in which nations differ which, in turn, influence the way organizations operate: individualism versus collectivism (IDV), uncertainty avoidance (UAI), masculinity versus femininity (MAS), power distance (PDI), and long-term versus short-term orientation (LTO). Indulgence versus Restraint, a dimension that was added in 2010, represents the sixth dimension (geert-hofstede.com). These cultural dimensions are defined as follows:

- IDV – reflects the difference in how members of the society consider themselves as individuals. As such, individualists take care of their own needs whereas collectivists operate as members who operate within a group to which their loyalty is directed
- UAI – reflects the degree of discomfort that members of the society feel about uncertainty and ambiguity. This dimension indicates whether societies tolerate ambiguity and or prefer more rigid codes of belief and behavior.

- MAS – reflects the degree of assertiveness and competitiveness of the members of the society; leaning toward achievement and material rewards for success. In comparison, a feminine society prefers cooperation and has modest and caring ways.
- LTO – reflects the inclination of societal members to invest in the future and be thrifty versus having a focus on quick results and less concern for saving for the future.
- PDI – reflects the degree to which individuals with less power accept and expect power to be unequally distributed
- IND – indicates the society's proclivities for enjoyment and gratification of basic natural human needs as opposed to practicing restraint by means of strict social norms

Although Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions have been validated and used in cross-cultural studies (Dickson et al., 2012), it is not without critics. For example, Collard (2009) considers Hofstede's (1980) model as using broad strokes to explain a very complex social phenomenon, and thus fails to recognize that cultures are constantly changing and adapting to events that surround them. Still, the Hofstedian notion of how cultures influence human behavior and organizations provides a starting point in gaining an understanding of leadership within the context of the Chinese culture. In order to establish a conceptual framework for understanding how Western organizational values compare with those of the Chinese, it is helpful at this junction to juxtapose the Chinese to the American culture, with the latter representing the context of the MBA program attended by this study's participants. Using an interactive tool available in The Hofstede Centre website (retrieved from <http://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html>), Figure 1 is

provided at the end of this section to illustrate how China's scores compare with the U.S. scores in terms of Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

In summary, this discussion of the theories of transformational leadership, global leadership, and national culture highlights potential points of divergence of leadership development provided by MBA programs and the cultural environment where leadership is enacted. It cannot be taken for granted that undergoing management or leadership education in the United States guarantees that those who received this education will operationalize what is learned. As shown in Figure 1, the cultural dimensions of the United States and China differ. The differences seen in these cultural dimensions raises the question of whether the concepts of leadership that Chinese nationals learn in the United States take on a different form once the students are back in China. This study provides an answer to this question.

Figure 1.

Comparison of U.S. and China Country Scores Along Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Note. Generated through Cultural Tools on *The Hofstede Centre* website. Retrieved from <http://geert-hofstede.com/united-states.html>

Historic Developments in the Participation of the Chinese in US Education

The U.S. involvement in educating the Chinese can be traced back to the early 20th century when many American teachers went to China (Starr, 2010). In discussions about the American participation in Chinese education, John Dewey is often cited for his work to transform Chinese education in the two years between 1919 and 1921 (Biehler, 2004). Signs of Dewey's teachings and advocacy for a community-based school system, a fundamental principle of American education, are however largely absent in the Chinese educational system. Modeled after the Japanese and Russian teaching practices, the Chinese government employs a national curriculum instead (Starr, 2010). "The current version of that national curriculum is fairly restrictive at the primary and secondary levels, allowing for very little local innovation" (Starr, 2010, p. 270). The difference in approaches to education between the Eastern and the Western systems prevails to this day. For example, as recent as 2010, Chinese classrooms are still characterized by the submissive behaviors of students. Also, Chinese students have been observed to attentively listen to the instructors "with their hands tucked under their thighs" (Starr, 2010, p. 270). Despite the Chinese rejection of Dewey's participative approach to education in favor of a more authoritative approach to pedagogy, with the exception of the restrictive years during the Cultural Revolution, China has continued to encourage its people to participate in American education. It would be of interest to American educators to know how the Chinese participation in international education is utilized in the Chinese context.

Literature Written During the Early Post-Mao Years

A review of the literature reveals that the proliferation of journal articles discussing Chinese *liuxuesheng*¹ in the U.S. started in the early 2000's (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2013; Huang, 2002). These studies have different theoretical and methodological approaches. Studies pertaining to the economic implications of the Chinese educational venture in the U.S. (Zeithammer & Kellogg, 2013) are generally quantitative in approach; those that explored various facets of their intercultural experiences are qualitative in nature. Theoretical frameworks used in these studies include intercultural learning, supply and demand, symbolic power, neo-classical economics, cultural capital, and grounded theory. Huang's (2002) study of the professional lives of the first group of returnees in the late 19th century to early 20th century provides an excellent reference to this study of the 21st century returnee. Spanning more than two decades, the body of literature on this ethnic student group in American universities reflects the ebb and flow in the socio-political and economic conditions in either the U.S. or China. For example, the focus of many studies conducted soon after the establishment of the Chinese Student Protection Act of 1992², the American political response to the dramatic Tiananmen Square incident in June 1989, is the 'stay rate' of Chinese students in the United States (Lan, 2012).

To understand the impact of the academic exchanges established between Chinese and American universities that included Yale University, Johns Hopkins University, and Oberlin College, the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic

¹ Chinese term for a foreign exchange student

² The Chinese Protection Act of 1992 allowed Chinese nationals who entered the United States before April 11, 1990 to apply for permanent resident status. This Act was established to prevent Chinese students from being politically persecuted by the Chinese government following the Tiananmen Square event.

of China³ sponsored two studies. Lampton, Madancy, and Williams' (1986) seminal work entitled *A Relationship Restored: Trends in U.S.-China Educational Exchanges, 1978-1984* seemed to be the first concerted effort to understand the Chinese student migration to the United States. Two years later, Orleans' (1988) work on Chinese students in American universities provided information about the policy implications of the first wave of Post-Mao sojourners. The questions about the future that Orleans (1988) posed in this book in the 1980's remained relevant 35 years later:

What impact do returned students make on their work unit and on China's modernization in general? What role do they play in the diffusion of the knowledge that they gained abroad? How do the roles of foreign-trained specialists differ among universities, research institutes, and production-related enterprises? These and scores of questions are of vital interests to people in the US : [sic]to government agencies involved in exchange programs, to universities that have trained these individuals, and to anyone concerned with China's economic development and US-China relations in general. At this juncture the answers are at best preliminary and at worst premature. (p. 57)

Controversially titled *Patriots' or 'Traitors'?* (Biehler, 2004) described the experiences of Chinese students and scholars in the U.S. before the resumption of the US-China diplomatic relations. Its Epilogue pointed to the arrest and eventual release by the Chinese government of US-trained Chinese scholars in 2001. This event resulted in the creation of new Chinese "systematic regulations on overseas students' rewards,

³ Founded in 1966, the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China (CSCPRC) was a sponsored by the US National Academic of Sciences, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Social Science Research Council. Its mission was to promote scholarly communication between the US and China.

intellectual property rights protection, leaving and entering China, and services for talents” (Biehler, 2004, p. 359). While slight variations in the translation of this Chinese directive have been observed across the literature, this liberalizing educational policy was consistently called the *twelve-character principle*. This Chinese directive’s purpose was to support studies abroad, encourage the students return to China, and provide the Chinese students freedom of mobility (Biao & Shen, 2009; Shuzhen, 2003). The dramatic increase in the number of Chinese students participating in higher education in the U.S. and other western nations could be attributed to this policy.

Upward Trend in Chinese Participation in U.S. Graduate Schools

The number of Chinese students in the U.S. grew tremendously since the early years of the resumption of US-China diplomatic relations. The estimated number of Chinese students in the country in the 1980’s was 7,000. In 2004, this number rose to more than 64,000. Roughly 52,000 students (82%) of this population were in graduate programs (Yan & Berliner, 2011). Data from the Institute of International Education (IIE) indicated that the U.S. hosted the highest number of Chinese graduate students in 2008, with large numbers of them attending schools in California, New York, and Texas (Constant, Tien, Zimmermann, & Meng, 2013). Data from the Ministry of Education of the PRC indicated that the U.S. was the most popular destination for Chinese students in 2008 (Constant et al., 2013).

The *Open Doors 2015* report (Institute of International Education, 2015) indicated that, out of 974,926 international students in the U.S., approximately 304,040 of them are Chinese. Currently comprising 31.2% of the international student population in the country, this report indicated that China has been the leading country of origin of

international students in the U.S. since the academic year 2009-10 and continues to have double digit percentage increases annually over the last eight years. In terms of graduate education, *Open Doors 2015* reported that there were 120,331 Chinese graduate students in the country. This meant that Chinese students attending graduate schools comprised approximately 41% of the Chinese student population and 33.2% of the international graduate student population in the country (Institute of International Education, 2015). Relative to the percentage of the total international student population in the U.S., it could be gleaned from various reports that there were fewer Chinese graduate students in year surrounding this study compared to early post-Mao years and that, over the last three decades, the percentage of Chinese graduate students making up the international student population in the U.S. had fallen from a high of 82% in 2004 (Yan & Berliner, 2011) to 33.2% in 2015 (Institute of International Education, 2015).

In terms of their programs of study, the Chinese government's technical orientation has influenced the academic choices of Chinese students. Based on China's stated goal for Chinese students "to learn about the sciences related to army, navy, mathematics, engineering, etc." (Lampton, 2014), hard sciences and engineering have been their primary fields of study in the United States. The Chinese student's participation in sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics, popularly known to academics and practitioners as STEM, have indeed been phenomenal. According to the 2006 National Science Board report, "Chinese students represent the single largest source of foreign born doctorate level scientists and engineers" (Kellogg, 2012, p. 84). These Chinese STEM Ph.D.'s are likely college graduates of two prestigious universities in

China, namely Tsinghua University⁴ or Peking University⁵ (Gaule & Piacetini, 2013).

Other notable Chinese universities that send students to the U.S. are eight universities located in Beijing: Qinghua University, Beijing Medical University, Beijing University of Technology, Beijing University, Beijing Normal University, Chinese People's University, Beijing Institute of Technology, and Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics (Shuzhen, 2003).

Events Impacting Chinese Participation in U.S. Education

Several national policy changes in either China or the U.S. were influential to the participation of Chinese in American higher education. These changes outwardly established the commitment of the state to support the burgeoning need of the Chinese to expand their knowledge and training in various disciplines. As provided in Table 2⁶, there had been events discussed in various studies illustrating how significant events in history played a role in the Chinese participation in U.S. education. Although not represented in Table 2 as a national program, the terrorist attacks to three U.S. cities, particularly New York City, which occurred on September 11, 2001 also had an effect on the number of Chinese and other nationalities who attended higher education in the country. The consequence of this tragedy to Chinese students was in the form of more stringent rules affecting international students. Immediately following this national tragedy, the U.S. government implemented tighter procedures to closely monitor students from abroad.⁷

⁴ In 2016, Tsinghua University was ranked #59 in the Best Global Universities category of the U.S. News & World Report.

⁵ In 2016, Peking University was ranked #41 in the Best Global Universities category of the U.S. News & World Report.

⁶ Contents of Table 2 were obtained from different sources which are all listed in the References section of this paper.

⁷ The USA Patriot Act was enacted, including the creation of SEVIS, an electronic system to record and track all student exchange and visitor information.

Table 2.

Significant Events Influencing the Chinese Participation

Year	Event		Chinese Students in the US
1966-1976	Cultural Revolution	A period when Maoist communist ideology constrained higher education in China, shutting down the majority of universities	Non-existent
1972	President Richard Nixon's visit with Mao Zedong in China	Signaled China's intentions to re-establish its educational agreements with universities in the United States	Non-existent
1977	Resumption of <i>gaokao</i> - China's National College Entrance Examination	An estimated 5.7 million students aspiring to go to college took the test to compete for 272,971 admissions	42,503
1978	<i>Gai Ge Kai Fang</i> or 'opening-up policy' <i>Understanding on Educational Exchanges and Agreement on Cooperation in Science and Technology</i>	Deng Xiaoping reformed a number of policies that encouraged more students and scholars to go abroad Marked the beginning of the surge in Chinese student participation in higher education in the U.S.	Less than 1000
1990	The Fund for Returnees to Launch S&T Researchers	Chinese Ministry of Education initiated national effort to encourage overseas students to return to China	39,600
1992	Chinese Student Protection Act	U.S. reaction to the June 1989 Tiananmen Square incident	45,126
1997	Return of Hong Kong to mainland China	Chinese and Western universities started cooperatives	46,958
2001	Chinese <i>Twelve Character Principle</i>	Chinese policy supporting studies abroad; provided Chinese students freedom to go in and out of China	63,211
2003	Chinese Government Award for Outstanding Self-Financed Students Abroad	An academic-merit based scholarship annually provided to 500 self-financed Ph.D. students	61,765
2009	<i>100,000 Strong Initiative</i>	U.S. effort to increase the number of American students attending schools in China in order to equalize "intellectual trade" between the countries	127,628
2014	U.S. Visas Issued to Chinese Re-characterized	Policy change extended length of U.S. visas issued to Chinese nationals to ten years	274,439

Possibly a result of the new immigration policies and the tense atmosphere in the country after the terrorist attacks, there were fewer Chinese students in the U.S. in 2002 than the previous year.

Shift in Political Relations and Economic Developments

Participation of the Chinese student in higher education in the U.S. is strongly influenced by changes in US-China diplomatic relations and the economic environment in each of these countries. For example, the ratification of the Chinese Student Protection Act of 1992 has affected the number of Chinese postdoctoral students in the United States (Lan, 2012). Analysis of census data from the National Science Foundation's Survey of Earned Doctorates from the years 2001 and 2005 indicates a negative relationship between holding a permanent resident visa and participation in postdoctoral employment.

As it relates to Chinese students, relaxation of U.S. visa policies to allow them to remain in the country after the Tiananmen Square incident in China "decreases the probability of postdoctoral participation among temporary visa holders by 24 percent" (Lan, 2012, p. 637). No longer bound by temporary visa restrictions, permanent visa holders turn their backs to academic positions that are normally the occupational destinations of Ph.D. holders. Instead, they seek employment as industry practitioners or become entrepreneurs. The impact on the American labor market of this shift in employment preferences of thousands of Chinese post-doctorates underscores the importance of understanding the socio-political forces that influence the job preferences of thousands of Chinese students in the United States.

Changes in policies continue to be made. A new visa policy that took effect in November 2014 now provides US-bound Chinese citizens visas that last for ten years.

According to the remarks made by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry at a U.S. Visa Event, this change to the visa policy represents the Obama administration's investment in the US-China diplomatic relations (US Department of State, November 12, 2014). While there is no change in the nature and restrictions of student visas, this policy change enables Chinese students in the country to travel back and forth without the need to reapply for U.S. visas. This change in the bilateral agreement concerning travel between these two countries heralds a change in the landscape in student mobility. Although the manner in which this policy affects the Chinese participation in U.S. higher education remains to be seen, based on studies on factors that influence the selection of academic destinations, this liberalized visa policy is likely to be attractive to prospective Chinese international students.

On the economic front, the fast and dramatic improvement of the Chinese economy in early 21st century, coupled with the *twelve character principle* instituted by China in 2001, is enticing more Chinese to return to China. The *China opportunity theory* conceptualized by Constant et al. (2013) indicates a positive correlation between China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the number of Chinese students returning to China. This double positive, supplemented by the sense of nationalism observed among most Chinese citizens (Rizvi, 2005; Xu, 2006 as cited in Yan & Berliner, 2011) has helped China be successful in its efforts to entice Chinese students to return home. This nationalism is even apparent in the literature. For example, according to Chinese scholar Shuzhen (2003), "their roots are in China, that their interests and future are closely bound with their country's strength and development, and they wish to make contributions to their motherland" (p. 61). This nationalism is also embodied by a Chinese alumnus of a

US-based MBA program. “China will be my future, and hopefully I’ll be part of China’s future” (Minter, 2003).

Indeed, reports from 2008 Chinese records indicate that the number of students returning to China is on the rise (Zeithammer & Kellogg, 2013). Over 272,000 Chinese nationals returned to China in 2012, representing a forty-six percent increase from the previous year (Wangshu, 2013). Based on information provided by the National Bureau of Statistics in China, Figure 2 is provided to illustrate the number of Chinese returnees since 1995. As with other events related to China, this new trend portends another shift in the focus of scholars and analysts. Yet, analysts in American think tanks report a slowing down of the rise in the number of Chinese returnees, and argue that this upward trend is merely due to the continued increase in the overall number of Chinese students attending higher education institutions abroad.

Figure 2.

Number of Chinese students abroad that have returned to China

Note Adapted from *Seeking Modernity, Brain Gain, and Brain Drain: The Historical Evolution of Chinese Students’ Overseas Education in the United States Since Modern China* (A Master’s Thesis), by D. Luo, 2013. Available from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses database. (UMI No. 1551171)

In summary, this section illustrates how national events in the social and political arenas affect the Chinese returnee rate from the United States. As the number of Chinese returnees continues to grow, it becomes even more important to investigate the Chinese students' post-graduation experiences in China. The upward trend in the number of Chinese returnees calls for a closer look at the experiences of these US-educated master's and doctoral degree holders. As described in this paper, this study answered this call and took this investigation overseas.

Political and Social Context of Chinese Participation in U.S. Education

The death of Mao Zedong is a marker in Chinese history that foreshadowed the ability of the Chinese to explore the world outside the walls of China. Yet, there are other events in the lives of the Chinese that also influence the Chinese engagement with the world. This section explains the major forces that push or pull the Chinese westward across the Pacific, particularly to the United States.

Social, Economic, and Political Drivers

The low level of economic and political development in China that resulted from the restrictive Maoist regime 'pushes' Chinese students to look overseas for advancement (Yan & Berliner, 2011). At the same time, positive economic conditions and ample supply of academic opportunities in the U.S. 'pull' them into U.S. higher education institutions (Biao & Shen, 2009). While it is true that Chinese STEM students are prominent in the American higher education system, Chinese students are also attending programs in other disciplines, including accounting and business doctoral programs. Their increased participation in the American Accounting Association Doctoral Consortium in 2002, 2003, and 2004 indicates an upward trend in the attendance of

Chinese students in the business and related fields (Cho, Roberts, & Roberts, 2008).

Precipitated by China's need for human capital development, the participation of Chinese students in business programs, particularly in the MBA, enables the country to participate in the highly competitive global business environment in the 21st century.

Human Capital and the Decision to “Stay or Not to Stay”

Mao Zedong's legacy to China could be seen in the lack of good quality schools and insufficient supply of current knowledge and technology (Biao & Shen, 2009).

Funding the education of students in developed countries such as the U.S. was China's way of developing its human capital. Employers were also later able to finance the international education of their employees, with the requirement that these employees would rejoin the employer at the completion of their studies (Biao & Shen, 2009). When the Chinese economy started to flourish in 2001, students began to self-fund their education overseas as well. Constant et al. (2013) found from their qualitative study of the Chinese investment on human capital that government funding for the overseas education of Chinese students increased dramatically again in 2005. Their research finding was consistent with Shuzhen's (2003) conclusion: Many self-funded students from Beijing applying for graduate admission in universities abroad were granted by the Chinese government waivers of educational fees that they would normally pay as students going overseas. China's role in the Chinese student's education in the U.S. was evident in these findings.

A new phenomenon began to take place several years after Chinese students poured into the higher education institutions of Western countries such as the United States. Biehler (2004) reported that this trend was already apparent in the 1980's. “At a

national conference in China in November 1984, it was announced that 70 percent of the returned students ‘were not being fully used because of a shortage of advanced facilities and unsuitable work assignment’. . . . Two students who came to the U.S. with the prestigious Chemistry Graduate Program set up by William Doehring at Harvard University and China’s Ministry of Education returned to China in 1985 with their Ph.D.’s in organic chemistry and were given jobs teaching English rather than science” (Biehler, 2004, p. 356).

As with the dramatic increase of participation of the Chinese in the U.S. higher education, their continued stay in the country caught the attention of scholars and practitioners. Lan’s (2012) study suggested several reasons for the Chinese reluctance to return to home: One, US-educated Chinese graduates did not want to return to a workplace that lacked modern facilities for research and development. The American-trained Chinese wanted to be able to utilize the skills and knowledge they acquired. To return to China meant not being able to accomplish this objective. Two, it was doubtful that they would have employment or income in China that were commensurate to their advanced skill sets. While their income in the U.S. as postdoctoral students were not at the level of the salary garnered by domestic Ph.D.’s, the potential income of the Chinese student in China would still be lower. Three, the instability in the Chinese political climate, exemplified by the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, made it even more difficult for Chinese students to return home. And four, the Chinese Student Protection Act of 1992 that was instituted by the American government to protect American-educated Chinese students from any persecution by the Chinese government finally attracted them more to stay in the United States. Compared to China, the U.S. offered them a chance to

make a decent living and a stable political environment. These push-pull factors served as the driving factors in the migration decision of the Chinese students.

The decision of many Chinese students to stay in the U.S. in the first decade of the 21st century shifted the focus of scholars and analysts toward the study of the human capital that the Chinese students embodied. In contrast to the ‘brain drain’ that China experienced, think tanks such as the National Research Council viewed this phenomenon as “brain gain” for the United States (Kellogg, 2012). Noting the large number of Chinese STEM doctorates, scholars investigated the implications of their participation in American STEM programs. Gaule and Piacentini’s (2013) quantitative analysis of the Chinese student’s scholarly output showed that, in terms of quality, the level of quality of publications produced by the Chinese Ph.D. student was higher compared to the quality of work produced by non-National Science Foundation domestic Ph.D. students. The human capital for advanced research and development projects embodied by the Chinese student, coupled with their quandary *to stay or not to stay* in the U.S. therefore became the focus of attention of analysts in both the U.S. and China. On the one hand, the U.S. welcomed their stay. On the other hand, the Chinese government worked hard in developing programs that attracted them back to China.

Incentives offered by the Chinese government to encourage outstanding overseas students to return to China and contribute to the nation’s development included higher salaries, attractive positions, housing incentives, and tax-free educational support for their children. More than 160 government-funded industrial parks composed of thousands of businesses have been established to provide jobs to Western graduates (Thomas, 2012). Taken from various studies or articles on the Chinese government’s effort to entice

returnees, Table 3 shows the programs that China created to bring the students back home and the reported number of returnees they gained.

As observed in past trends, this competition for the Chinese talent stimulated several academic investigations. To inform policy makers and managers on how to market employment opportunities to new Chinese STEM Ph.D. holders, marketing analysts Zeithammer and Kellogg (2013) surveyed postgraduates' preferences of job location: U.S. versus China, U.S. east coast versus U.S. west coast, inland China versus coastal China, and city size (because size predicts levels of social networking). They also measured other variables: age, gender, marital status, length of stay in the U.S., nationalism, preference for managerial or staff position, and anticipated salary.

Findings from Zeithammer and Kellogg's (2013) quantitative study indicated that, if faced with more job offers and higher salaries than what China could provide, US-trained Chinese graduates would prefer to work in their host country for five to seven years after graduation. Better career prospects clearly served as the strongest predictor for the decision of Chinese nationals to stay or not to stay in the U.S., indicating that those who believed that China could offer them better salaries and more prestigious jobs would likely return home (Kellogg, 2012). However, due to their strong sense of nationalism, Zeithammer and Kellogg (2013) also suggested, "if salaries were the same everywhere, most Chinese STEM Ph.D.'s (approximately 70%) would prefer to return because they strongly prefer locating in their hometowns or in a large coastal Chinese city to locating anywhere in the US" (p. 660).

Table 3.⁸*Returnee Incentive Programs Established by the People's Republic of China*

Year of Inception	Program Name	Purpose	Number of Returnees
1990	The Fund for Returnees to Launch S&T Researches		10,926
1993	Program for Training Talents toward the 21st Century	Targets outstanding young teachers	922
1996	The Chunhui (literally, Spring Bud) Program	Targets those returnees with doctoral degree and with outstanding achievements in their respective fields	more than 8,000
1998	Changjiang Scholar Incentive Program	Provides financial support to young and middle-aged leading scholars of certain disciplines who have studied abroad and are invited by Chinese HEIs as Special Professors or Lecture Professors	537
2001	Program of Academic Short-return for Scholars and Research Overseas	Finances outstanding overseas Chinese scholars studying or doing researches to lecture or research in 28 key HEIs during their short trips to China	104
2008	Thousand Talent Scheme	Offers monetary incentives, (i.e., housing assistance, tax-free education allowances for children) to entrepreneurs/researchers who hold professorships in reputable university or research institutions	3,000 estimated
2010	Talent Development Plan ⁹	Offers tax, housing and children and spouse resettlement incentives to prospective high-caliber Chinese returning scientists	

⁸ With the exception of the Talent Development Plan, this table was compiled from information from *The Overall Situation of Studying Abroad* webpage of the Ministry of Education of the PRC. Retrieved from <http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/s3917/201007/91574.html>

⁹ Information obtained from article by Thomas, D. in *The Pie News*, March 21, 2012.

The desire of Chinese students in the U.S. to return to China is further explained by the premium placed on Western degrees. In possession of an American academic credential, Chinese students are bestowed cultural capital by their co-nationals (Cho et al., 2008). For example, Chinese accounting Ph.D. students who were interviewed for a research project stated that participating in the American academic community helped in building connections in China and finding better jobs there (Cho et al., 2008). Thus, the symbolic potency of overseas education is realized when Chinese students return home to China (Findlay, 2010). Notwithstanding the improvement in English language proficiency gained during their stay in the U.S., returnees to China are considered to have obtained the skill set to help China compete in the global economy (Damast, 2011). “China’s accession to the WTO makes skills, such as foreign trade, legal knowledge, accounting and possession of an international MBA particularly useful. . . . Changes in the government policy and attitudes towards overseas students and scholars contributed to a reverse brain drain in the 1990s” (Zweig, Changhai, & Rosen, 2004, p. 738).

Marketization of American Higher Education

The popularity of the American educational system among the Chinese, and the systematic marketization of this system through institutional recruitment efforts incited a number of critical analysis. From a socio-political perspective, Cho et al. (2008) suggested the existence of neo-classical economic themes in the participation of Chinese students in doctoral programs in accounting and business in the United States. They also questioned the hegemony of American Ph.D. programs in accounting and characterized American universities to “participate in a global socio-political movement that spreads Anglo-American curriculum” (Cho et al., 2008, p. 199). Although they lived stressful

lives in the U.S. due to the differences between the Chinese and American learning and teaching methods, Chinese students were found to willingly adopt to and internalize this “narrow, dominant, neo-classical based research paradigm” (Cho et al., 2008, p. 212) in American universities. Although Cho et al. (2008) were not alone in challenging the hegemony of higher education in the U.S. (Altbach, 2004; Kim, 2012) there was hardly any empirical studies found in the literature for scholars to use in theorizing about the impact of Western MBA’s on emerging markets and modernizing societies.

“Strategic Mistrust”: The Platform of US-China Diplomatic Relations

According to Van Fleet (2012), there is currently an imbalance in “intellectual trade” between these two countries. China is sending many more Chinese to the U.S. than the U.S. is sending American students to China. From a sociopolitical perspective, the implications of this imbalance are immense. The Chinese know more about the American philosophy and way of doing business than the Americans know about the Chinese ways. With the goal to increase the number of Americans studying in China, the *100,000 Strong Initiative* between the U.S. and China has been established to address this intellectual trade imbalance. At the same time, the Initiative will also build human bridges between these two wary diplomatic partners.

It is also important to note how long the Chinese students stay in the United States. Based on data from the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education, 92 percent of Chinese Ph.D. holders in science and engineering stay in the country for five years before they return to China (Regets, 2008). Immersion in the American society over these five years makes the Chinese American-savvy. Using to their advantage the ‘Chinese face’, which is “closely intertwined with one’s public image based on judgment of the

community” (Shi, 2011b, p. 27), they are able to work through business negotiations with their western counterparts (Shi, 2011b). McGiffert’s (2014) remarks reflect the status of US-China diplomatic relations:

The US-China relationship stands at a critical juncture. Long marked by competition and contention, today the relationship is being tested in new ways. With China’s growing economic and military strength come new fears about Beijing’s true goals. . . . “Strategic mistrust” – now a cliché in think-tank circles—remains very much the predominant theme in the US-China narrative (McGiffert, 2014, p. 8).

Information about the basis of the Chinese national’s decision to go overseas for graduate education and continue living abroad or the decision to return home provides a backdrop to the Chinese students’ potential aspirations as repatriates. As shown by this study, the relationship between these internal and external forces conjointly shapes the Chinese returnees’ behaviors.

The Chinese Experience of American Education

Foreign-born students who come to the United States or other Western countries to obtain advanced degrees face not only the task of learning new academic and professional concepts but also psychological and social challenges associated with adapting to a new culture. These students must learn to adapt to their new and unfamiliar environment in order to succeed in their academic endeavor. The process that international students go through, beginning with the initial shock of being in an unfamiliar environment, to being able to effectively navigate the host society, provides an

educational experience that goes beyond the campus setting. How smoothly they go through this process influences their overall experience of the international education.

Literature in international education and cross cultural studies reveals the centrality of and acculturative stress in the experience of international students from China. The experience of Chinese students attending universities in the West is shaped by how well they acculturate to the host environment. In broad terms, acculturation refers to an immigrant's process of cultural, psychological, and social adaptation to the culture of the mainstream society; the difficulties these immigrants experience in adjusting along these dimensions is called acculturative stress (Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac, & Elsayed, 2013). Acculturation issues also arise from disparate professional ethics found in different countries (Newberry, Austin, Lawson, Gorsuch, & Darwin, 2011). Acculturative stress experienced by Chinese students largely stems from their struggle to communicate in the English language. Beyond the classroom setting where use of English is an obvious requirement, lack of proficiency in the English language negatively impacts the sense of physical security of the Chinese students (Sawir, Marginson, Forbes-Mewett, Nyland, & Ramia, 2012). Perceived or actual, limited communication skills can lead to the feeling of insecurity, which then discourages international students to participate in culturally unfamiliar activities. Rather than strive to interact with members of the host country, international students take the more comfortable route of socializing with their co-nationals.

Satisfaction in the international education experience largely rests on the ease in which international students adjust to the host environment. According to the multicultural personality construct, students who experience a better adjustment process

to their foreign environment are those with high levels of assertiveness and academic self-efficacy (Lee & Ciftci, 2014), or those who perceive less differences in the physical and social aspects between their home and host environments (Tan & Liu, 2014), or those with a universal-diverse orientation, personal growth initiative, and hardiness (Yakunina, et al., 2013).

The value system that shapes the Chinese students' interaction with the internal and external environment also plays a role in the overall satisfaction of the international education experience. For example, the self-efficacy construct, made up of the values of respect for self and from others, self-fulfillment, belongingness and a warm relationship with others, security, and a sense of accomplishment influence student satisfaction (Arambewela & Hall, 2013). Participation by international students in on- or off-campus leisurely activities have also been linked to acculturation and adjustment to college (Gomez, Urzua, & Glass, 2014). Attendance at social events where they interact with host nationals or other international students provides Chinese nationals the sense of belonging and security that can further motivate them to venture outside their comfort zones and engage in unfamiliar activities (Glass, 2012). Yan and Berliner's (2011) study indicates that Chinese students rarely interact with Americans and confine their social interactions within their co-nationals, thus resulting in further distancing and isolation from the mainstream. The following sections discuss areas where Chinese students have had to make significant adjustments to succeed during their sojourn.

Culture Shock and Intercultural Adjustment

Culture shock refers to the initial significant discomfort experienced by an individual who arrives at an unfamiliar environment (Lin, 2006). Discomfort arises from

not knowing how to behave among individuals with different norms, values, and mindset, and how to go about accomplishing tasks that are suddenly challenging due to one's unfamiliar setting (Dillon & Swann, 1997). Primary causes of culture shock for Chinese nationals studying in the U.S. include the different language, food, social norms, and political system. From interviews and focus groups with Chinese students attending a Midwestern university in the U.S. and from a textual analysis of information available online, the following stressors have been identified: "prearrival uncertainty, anxiety, and stress accompanying the trip to campus, postarrival problems such as housing, transportation, and living expenses, and . . . language barrier, separation from family, political bias from host culture, insufficient living facilities, and boring small town life" (Lin, 2006, p. 131). In addition to these stressor categories, deeper aspects of culture shock will be discussed in later parts of this chapter.

Cultural adaptation may be achieved in various ways. For example, from a study involving foreign-born MBA students in an American university, three individual-based approaches to cultural adaptation have been observed: assimilation, separation, and cultural retooling. Students who go through the assimilation process let go of their native cultural heritage and embrace the culture of the new environment. In assimilation, their host culture replaces their native culture (Molinsky, 2013). Students who take the separation approach simultaneously hold on to their cultural heritage while adapting to the new heritage. Individuals who go through cultural retooling successfully adapt to the unfamiliar and sometimes uncomfortable norms and values surrounding them to satisfy the expectations of their social and professional environments. Molinsky's (2013) work is valuable in the current study of foreign-born students in the U.S. because it indicates that

it is possible *over time* for international students to experience a complete transformation in their attitudes and perspectives while in the host country. Molinsky's (2013) work demonstrates the strategies individual students go through to integrate the new culture in their native repertoire of behaviors.

Literature in international relations offers acculturation as another form of cultural adaptation. Acculturation is the phenomenon that occurs when different cultures consistently come across each other, resulting in changes in the cultural patterns in one or both of the groups (Berry, 2008). This construct also indicates "the extent to which an individual does or does not stay connected with one's heritage culture, or the degree to which an individual connects or does not connect with another culture" (David, 2013, p. 139). According to Rudmin (2010), the term acculturation was originally coined by Powell in 1880 and who later referred to it as "2nd cultural learning by means of imitation" (p. 324). The element of imitation in acculturation links it to the learning process. Bandura's (1977) *Social Learning Theory* states that learning is a phenomenon achieved from observing others' behaviors, attitudes, and reactions of people, and is influenced by cognitive and environmental factors that surround the learning process. Hence, modeling behaviors play an important role in the learning process (Bandura, 1977). Based on this theory, it can then be said that immersion in a different culture during one's sojourn as an international student leads to some degree of adoption of the host country's norms and values.

The natural adoption of host country behavior is consistent with the concept of *unconscious acculturative imitation* (Rudmin, 2010) that is attributed to the mirror neurons in human physiology. Linked to the human tendency to imitate other human

beings, mirror neurons represent a type of brain cell that respond equally when we perform an action and when we witness someone else perform the same action (Winerman, 2005). It can be said then that acculturation is, to some degree, inevitable for international students because “human beings have a distinctive tendency to imitate and assimilate observed or represented behavior, which operates at various levels and is often automatic and unconscious” (Hurley, 2006, p. 301). Given that international students can be considered *open to learning to the learning process*, it can also be posited that international education induces acculturation among those who participate in it. It can then be asserted that, through the course of their education, international students attending graduate schools in the U.S. adopt in varying degrees Western values, norms, and communication styles.

Research based on the multicultural personality and assertiveness constructs indicate that personality, assertiveness, academic self-efficacy, and social support play a role in a student’s ability to adjust to the host environment (Lee & Ciftci, 2014). Multicultural personality refers to a set of traits that equips an individual to effectively negotiate and take part in environments different from their own. An international student who possesses a multicultural personality is able to accept cultural differences and is able to behave in culturally adaptive ways in the host culture (Lee & Ciftci, 2014). This multicultural competency is also positively related to the academic competency, assertiveness, academic confidence, and amount of social support received by the international student (Lee & Ciftci, 2014). With a significantly different cultural and political background, the Chinese students’ multicultural proclivities, or the lack thereof,

determine their ability to succeed academically in the U.S. and, on the socio-cultural side, how they interact with the host society.

Lin (2006) pointed out the limitation of current models of culture shock and intercultural adjustment. One, culture shock as it pertained to international students would vary according to the location of the student's university. Coming from modernized Beijing, Chinese students in rural U.S. would experience more culture shock than those attending universities in large cosmopolitan American cities such as New York and Chicago. Two, the financial capacity of the sojourner would affect the degree of culture shock. Yesterday's 'poorer' Chinese students had much less purchasing power than today's more affluent Chinese students. Third, adjustment strategies to the host environment would be impacted by technology. Yesterday's students did not benefit from today's online communities, such as the Chinese Students and Scholars Association that make networking with other Chinese students in the U.S. easier (Zhu, 2012). Thus, Lin (2006) argued for future studies on the Chinese student that took into consideration the different contexts in which the Chinese students were situated.

Encountering New Learning Styles

In the cognitive dimension, differences in how Chinese graduate students approach learning have been explored using intercultural learning theory and adult learning theory. Huang's (2012) literature review on the learning experiences of Chinese graduate students is important in that it provides level-specific information for graduate level teaching practices. Huang points to the challenges that Chinese graduate students experience in transitioning to American graduate education. These challenges, based on Huang's review of adult learning literature, is attributed to the difference in how the

Chinese views adulthood from the American way. For the Chinese, adulthood is determined by the existence of adult responsibilities that come with marriage, parenthood, and elder care. In comparison, Americans associate adulthood with age and autonomy in making decisions and lessened parental control. This American view of adulthood is reflected on the andragogy construct which guides the delivery of graduate education. Whereas U.S. graduate programs see their students as adults and expect them to self-initiate their learning process, the Chinese students—typically single, no work experience, in their late 20's or early 30's, and away from parents—view faculty members as the main source of their knowledge because they do not yet view themselves as adults (Huang, 2012). This difference in perspectives on adulthood therefore results in the experience of learning shock by the Chinese international student.

How Chinese students view faculty members is also influenced by the Chinese culture. As members of a collectivist society, Chinese students struggle to adjust to the individualistic orientation of Western pedagogy that is in contrast to how Chinese faculty members relate to their students. That is, Chinese faculty members are readily accessible to their students and provide mentorship not just on academic but on personal matters as well. It is therefore not uncommon in China for the student-teacher relationship to extend beyond the classroom or faculty office (McMahon, 2011). This close Chinese faculty-student relationship is consistent with the traditional Chinese emphasis on working toward the attainment of collective goals and interests. For students with a Confucian heritage who are more accustomed to having a close mentee-mentor relationship, faculty members serve as mentors to them (McMahon, 2011). Unaccustomed to a more distant

teacher-student relationship, Chinese students experience culture shock when they realize that students in their host country have less access to faculty time.

Huang's (2012) study of the experiences of the Chinese student in the U.S. is an example of the deficit orientation of many studies found in the literature. Fortunately, aside from studies conducted by Gaule and Piacetini (2013) and Kellogg (2012), there are studies that show the Chinese graduate student's ability to succeed in American higher education. Based on their study of how Chinese graduate students adapt to the learning style in the country, Zhang and Xu's (2007) article suggests that the Chinese graduate student is an informed, active, and committed learner. Chinese graduate students do well in their studies despite all odds. By overcoming differences in the Hofstedian cultural dimensions of *power distance*, *risk avoidance*, and *long-term orientation*, the Chinese students are able to adjust their traditional teacher-centric and passive mode of learning to the more contemporary student-centric and interactive learning style.

The different approach to learning that Chinese students take does not prevent them from succeeding in their classes. Studies on the influence of Confucian-based values on the instructional preferences of Chinese adult learners show that Chinese students adjust to various instruction styles (Chuang, 2011; 2012). Chinese students are also characterized as open to adopting different modes of instruction, regardless of whether the approach is collectivistic or individualistic in orientation. Chinese students have the flexibility to adjust to group-based projects, discussions, and presentations (Chuang, 2011). The Confucian values that they have, such as harmonious integration, virtuous behavior, and respect for authority, which Chuang (2011) found to intensify rather than diminish with more immersion in the Western culture, make it easier for the

Chinese students to adjust to the teacher's style. With the 'teacher is the master' mentality, Chinese students are able to adopt to variations in teaching styles. This positive assessment of the Chinese student in the U.S. supports Zhang and Xu's (2007) active and committed learner theorization of the Chinese student in the context of American education.

Learning in a Different Language

Also at the core of the discussion of international education concerning East Asian students pursuing academic degrees in the Western world is the role of language. As non-native English speakers, Chinese students have to learn not only subject matter content but also the written and verbal language used in their studies. To make matters worse, students coming from East Asia, which would include Chinese students, "did not have experience of writing in English essays of more than 1000 words" (Coates & Dickinson, 2012, p. 299) and have no report writing experience. There is an ample supply of studies in the literature that attributes negative experiences of Chinese students in the U.S. to the lack of English language proficiency. For example, not being fluent in English diminishes self-reliance (Hung & Hyun, 2010) and linguistic weakness increases perception of discrimination (Karuppan & Barari, 2011). Both of these observations suggest that diminution of self-reliance and a perception of discrimination increase acculturative stress. Although these scholars' work provides valuable insight to the important role of language in the Chinese student experience in the U.S., they do not paint a complete picture of how Chinese graduate students experience their academic program. Other factors need to be considered in assessing the experience of US-based Chinese graduate students.

MBA students, in particular, are immersed in the unique Harvard Business School style of learning, which involves class participation, personal interview, debate, problem-solving, brainstorming, and presentations (Witte, Sequeira, & Fonteyne, 2003). Research on the interactions of diverse cultural groups with the American-centric MBA pedagogy is scarce, and in some cases it is not easily discernable whether Chinese international students participated in the research (Rafferty, 2013). Although several studies on the Chinese MBA emerged during this literature review, many of them have a British, Canadian, or Australian context. Although British in context, Currie's (2007) work closely matches the current discussion and is appropriate to include it in this discussion.

In relation to this study, Shi's (2010; 2011a) and Thompson's (2001) works provided insight to the American context. Based on the intercultural language socialization theory, Shi's (2010) ethnographic study of a Chinese student in an MBA program's negotiation class indicated that Chinese students come to the U.S. with preconceived notions of the American communication style. Specifically, Chinese students who had been exposed to the business environment in China prior to coming to the U.S. believed that success in the business world always required an aggressive stance in negotiations. They therefore experienced learning shock and loss of face when their win-lose aggressive strategy in negotiating was rejected by MBA faculty and fellow MBA students. Shi's (2010) study also suggested that, given that Chinese students wanted to work in the U.S., they adjusted their communication styles to fit their host environment.

Based this time on the theoretical framework of symbolic power of communicative skills as a basis of cultural capital, the second analysis of Shi's (2011a)

study centered more on the effects of language and cultural differences on social and learning interactions. Shi's analysis was also predicated on the idea that power relations shape the social interactions between second-language learners (the Chinese MBA) and native speakers of the English language (the domestic students). This study showed that the combination of the Chinese students' limited linguistic ability and cultural competence diminishes their ability to negotiate symbolic power as second-language learners. These limitations then negatively affected their learning experience of MBA programs in the country. Echoing the Chinese student's voice in Currie's (2007) study, the Chinese experiences of MBA in the U.S. was best described as exceeding their imagination. Despite these challenges, the benefits of participating in graduate education in the U.S. would outweigh the acculturative stress it placed on the student because this international experience greatly improved the students' English skills and gave them a "competitive advantage" (Damast, 2011, Leadership Rising section, para. 21).

Encountering Gendered Experiences

From a long history of discrimination against the Chinese girls and women that comes from the Chinese belief that men hold more economic value, Chinese women are now able to participate in activities they were historically prohibited to attend. China's participation in the 'Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women' and its policy reforms to recognize that women are equally valuable as men are two signs that China's stance on women has been adjusted. These reforms have outlawed gender discrimination in the workplace, which have resulted in improvements in the living and social conditions of the Chinese women (Wexler, 2006). The Chinese law has been adjusted to help transform this gendered Chinese mindset.

Despite this adjustment in how the Chinese collectively views the female gender, Chinese women are hesitant to believe that the Chinese mindset towards them has improved. Empirical studies on the stay rate of Chinese students in the U.S. indicate that the decision to remain abroad or return home differs between Chinese male and Chinese female students (Biao & Shen, 2009; Qin & Lykes, 2006). Chinese female students prefer to stay in the U.S. rather than return home due to gender discrimination in the workplace. Results from a more recent study (Kellogg, 2012) however show no significant difference in the stay/return rate between genders and those with or without children. This change in the decision of Chinese women to return to China is attributed to the Chinese government's efforts to increase gender equality in education and the workplace (McKeen & Bu, 2005).

The long-standing discrimination experienced by the Chinese women provides an interesting context to what the literature states about Chinese women. In terms of ethnic identity, it has been suggested that "Chinese students are strongly attached to China in social, cultural and patriotic terms and there is no change in identity while in America" (Yan & Berliner, 2011, p.178). However, literature on Chinese female graduate students say otherwise. Social interactions of Chinese students with domestic students in the U.S. lead them to accept physical fitness activities as appropriate for women, contrary to their thinking in China (Yan & Cardinal, 2013). They develop a critical understanding of the Chinese culture and themselves as women through a series of self-realization in the context of international education (Qin & Lykes, 2006). "For some this was an 'aha' experience through which they developed critical consciousness. For others the painful transformation of self challenged them to rethink the Chinese self and reweave a new

understanding of self and other” (Qin & Lykes, 2006, p. 194). Further demonstrating the Chinese feminine movement for self-advancement, the ethnic group largely constituting the graduate student population in the U.S. is Chinese women (Qin & Lykes, 2006). On a program-level, this trend is also seen in the MBA programs in the country. Banding together to elevate their role in society, Chinese female graduate students join Forte Foundation’s¹⁰ efforts to increase the number of women MBA’s (Damast, 2011). The increasing presence of Chinese women in the academic and business worlds warrants some examination, yet no studies emerged from this literature review about the Chinese female business professional. It would behoove scholars and practitioners to look into the socio-political implications of the Chinese female transformation and the emergence of the Chinese female business professional in the U.S. and China.

In summary, past empirical studies have shown how cultural, language, instructional, and gender-based relations can influence the Chinese nationals’ international education experience and engagement with the Western society. It is possible that exposure to these different ways of operating will have an effect on the type of leadership they practice in their native environment. As with this study, an empirical investigation of this phenomenon will provide insight to the post-graduation lives of international students and the role of Western education in Chinese leadership.

Understanding Liminality

The concept of *liminality* is used in the social and human relations literature as a state of being in-between. As it applies to identity reconstruction, “liminality can be defined as a reconstruction of identity (in which the sense of self is significantly

¹⁰ Forté Foundation is a non-profit consortium of prominent companies and business schools jointly working to launch women into successful careers through various means.

disrupted) in such a way that the new identity is meaningful for the individual and their community” (Beech, 2011, p. 287). “For Strauss, transformations of identity occur when there is a ‘misalignment, surprise, shock, chagrin, anxiety, tension, bafflement, self-questioning’ and a person is forced ‘to recognize I am not the same as I was, as I used to be’ (1996: 94-95)” (Beech, 2011, p. 289). Although its transient nature indicates ambiguity, *liminality* is “inherently a creative state within change” (McIntyre-Miller & Harter, 2015, p. 4). There is a positive energy surrounding occupants of liminal spaces.

Liminality as a theoretical framework has been largely used to discuss conceptions of the transitional elements of human life, including how they apply to art forms produced by individual with cross-cultural backgrounds (Amor et al., 1998), postconflict community building (McIntyre Miller & Harter, 2015), and organizational structure and behavior (Simpson, Sturges, & Weight, 2009). Liminality has also been used in studies related to intercultural negotiations, particularly involving Chinese nationals that this study is about (Mahadevan, 2015). In Minglu’s (Amor et al., 1998) discussion of the Westernization of Chinese art as a result of globalization, it has been suggested that “cultural differences only appear in a situation of negotiation . . . [and] has produced an acute consciousness of individual disposition” (p. 39). From the literature review on the experiences of international students, it is clear that Chinese nationals attending graduate programs in the West, particularly in the U.S., negotiate the significant differences between their native culture and that of their hosts. For international students who aspire to be business leaders, they also have to contend with the differences in the social norms followed by the professionals in their host society. To this point, Simpson et al.’s (2009) study suggests that the incongruence between the interpersonal skills learned

by Chinese international students from UK-based MBA programs and their Chinese values leads returnees to this liminality.

They value the personal development gained in the form of greater confidence in international relations and in ‘performing’ a managerial role (based on western notions of autonomy, critical analysis and proaction). . . . At the same time . . . new found confidence and abilities can collide with Chinese values back home (Simpson et al, 2009, p. 66).

Understanding the concept of liminality in the Chinese context is important in this study’s examination of the Chinese nationals’ experiences of leadership because it is where “common norms are challenged and a shift in belief, habits, and practices occur” (McIntyre & Harter, 2015, p. 5). It serves as a sensitizing concept to this grounded theory study that aids in gaining an understanding of how Chinese returnees transition from being students of Western degree programs to organizational leaders in the Chinese context. Rather than being constrained by the binary of the East and the West, liminality affords this study a third option in understanding this phenomenon.

What is Lacking in the Literature

The sociopolitical forces surrounding the participation of the Chinese student in graduate programs in the U.S. cannot be overstated. Scholars (Biao & Shen, 2009) have looked into the reasons why Chinese students choose to attend graduate schools in the United States, and what prompts them to either stay in the host country or return to China. Through Zeithammer and Kellogg’s (2013) survey of the Chinese postgraduates’ job location preferences, we know something about the factors that influence the returnees’ professional and personal choices. These factors, such as whether they prefer

inland China versus coastal China, or city versus rural living, do not however help predict the actions and types of interactions the Chinese returnees will have with their co-nationals. Additional studies in this area must approach the investigation in a different way.

Various theoretical frameworks have been used to analyze research findings, including theories on acculturation, adult learning, and intercultural communication. Gill's (2010) investigation of the lives of Chinese graduates from the United Kingdom is an example of a study that used an intercultural identity theoretical framework to explain how the Chinese returnees negotiated changes in their identities after their British sojourn. The reverse culture shock construct is also applied in Gill's (2010) study to show how the Chinese nationals, as returnees, experience social and psychological difficulties as a result of their adoption of foreign norms and values while abroad. While similar to the study presented in this paper, Gill's study (Gill, 2010) is different in terms of its theoretical framework and its focus on UK-educated Chinese returnees. This current study also differs from Gill's UK-based study in terms of its aim to explore critical influences on the Chinese nationals' leadership experiences, including how they enact their leadership in China.

What appears lacking in the literature on Chinese student's participation in U.S. higher education is the in-depth investigation of how Chinese students operationalize their American education in China. Given huge differences between the Chinese and American cultural, philosophical, and political inclinations, it would not be surprising to find that the Chinese student's application of graduate education acquired in the U.S. is hybridized. While this assumption seems reasonable, there is no other means of

validating this assumption other than to conduct a study in the returnees' natural environment. Literature in international education contains a conceptualization of the role of international education on self-formation (Marginson, 2014), the role of the US-educated *liuxuesheng* in the rise of foreign cultural capital in China (Huang, 2002), as well as the effect that studying in the United Kingdom had on Chinese postgraduate life (Gill, 2010). There is room in the literature for a study that focuses on the professional lives of US-educated Chinese returnees. To this end, this study addresses the need to investigate the returnees' behaviors in the professional setting after studying in the United States.

Chapter Three: Methodologies

This is a qualitative investigation using a combination of the Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM), Culturally Responsive Methodology (CRM), and a co-researcher approach. Constructing new knowledge using the perspectives of research participants is an approach shared by GTM and culturally responsive methodologies (CRM). Both of these methodologies listen to and highlight the participants' voices and allow their statements to define their identities. In addition, self-determination, which refers to the ability to define one's identity as opposed to having this identity imposed by an outsider-researcher, is a guiding principle evident in both GTM and CRM studies (Mayuzumi, 2011). This chapter (1) states the research questions and explains how each of these methodologies align with the purpose and research questions of this study, (2) describes the participant recruitment process, (3) illustrates the data collection logistics, and (4) explains steps used to analyze the study's data.

Research Questions

The primary research question and sub-questions of this study are:

1. How do Chinese nationals with an MBA degree from the US enact leadership in China?
 - a) Does Western education align with Chinese organization leaders' expectations?
 - b) In what ways do US-trained Chinese nationals negotiate emergent differences between their perspectives and the perspectives of those who were not Western-trained?
 - c) In what ways do they experience and react to different value sets?
 - d) Are there gender-based differences in the returnee's experiences in China?

While emphasis of the study was on the returnees' experiences, the study also included the following questions pertaining to the former international students' experiences while studying abroad:

2. What is the relationship between the students' experiences abroad and their experiences of re-adjusting to their native environment?
3. What is the Chinese national's overall experience of international education in terms of ways of interacting with the Western world?

The interview protocol (Appendix A) that was developed for this study included probes that delved into more specific aspects of the Chinese nationals' lives. The probes reflected the essence of the research questions and targeted the intersection between Western education, Chinese culture, and leadership.

Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM)

Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) is a qualitative method used in research when social scientists do not find any extant theory that adequately provides a framework for the phenomenon to be studied. Developed by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960's, GTM's acceptance as an approach to research rests partly on major epistemological shifts occurring in the sociological community at the time. GTM's use of qualitative data addresses the concern of social scientists about the over-focus on statistical data gathered from surveys and the lack of the human element in social science research. At the same time, GTM's focus on the collection of data from research participants addresses the question of transferability of findings from GTM studies (Charmaz, 2014). According to Charmaz (2014), Glaser instilled having "rigorous codified methods, emphasis on emergent discoveries, and . . . specialized language that echoes quantitative methods"

(Charmaz, 2014, p. 9) whereas Strauss emphasized the role that human actions played in understanding human agency, emergent processes, the subjective and social meanings, and problem-solving strategies. “For Strauss, subjective and social meanings relied on our use of language and emerged through action” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 9). This study follows the Straussian research orientation.

Researchers who adopt GTM have “an ‘open’ approach in their field of study, thus allowing the development of theory (or plausible relations among concepts) that is grounded in data” (Xiao, Dhaya, & Lin, 2004, p. 42). GTM studies use sensitizing concepts as starting points rather than adopt a specific theoretical framework for the research (Charmaz, 2014). These concepts “draw attention to important features of social interaction and provide guidelines for research in specific settings (Bowen, 2006, p. 3). Researchers use these concepts as tentative tools to develop their ideas about processes that they see in their data (Charmaz, 2014) and not as the basis of data analysis and theorization. For example, Holland’s personality-job fit theory and McGregor’s Theory Y informed Jia, Xu, and Wu’s (2014) investigation of the personality traits of Chinese graduates preferred by employers in China. The sensitizing concepts that inform this study include the following: (1) International students go through a degree or acculturation while attending school abroad and then experience reverse culture shock when they return to their home countries (Molinsky, 2013). (2) Next to the United States, post-Mao China has become the second largest economy of the world and Chinese and American governments have a ‘strategic mistrust’ for each other (McGiffert, 2014). (3) Chinese graduates are motivated to return home after graduation by the promise of advancing their personal and professional status within the post-Mao socioeconomic

structure in their country (Zeithammer and Kellogg's (2013). (4) The Confucian orientation of the Chinese, which stresses the centrality of family affairs (Bodycott & Lai, 2012), saving face (Panggabean, et al., 2013) and maintaining harmony, influences their human interaction and communication (Chen & An, 2009). These sensitizing concepts guide—not constrain—the researcher's attention to critical aspects of the returnees' experiences of leadership in China.

Discovery of new knowledge is possible through GTM studies because researchers suspend their taken-for-granted assumptions about human existence as they enter the research setting (Charmaz, 2014). As a form of qualitative study, the principal tenet of GTM that theory emerges from data establishes the methodology's scientific rigor, which then satisfies the criteria used to establish the trustworthiness of qualitative studies. Theory construction in GTM studies involves a series of steps that include data collection, observation, open and focused coding, inductive and *abductive* analysis, analytic memo-writing, and theoretical sampling. This iterative process is followed until theoretical saturation is reached. For studies that involve interviewing participants, obtaining hardly any new information from additional interviews will indicate that theoretical saturation has been reached. The systematic approach that grounded theory studies follow to investigate social phenomena provides “a foundation for rendering the processes and procedures of qualitative investigation visible, comprehensible, and replicable” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 33).

Objectivist versus Constructivist Orientation

GTM has two divergent approaches to data analysis: objectivist grounded theory (OGT) and constructivist ground theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2014). Both approaches aim to

gain an understanding of processes embedded in the studied phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014). The differences of these approaches are as follows: Objectivists take the epistemological stance that it is possible to discover objective truth and that knowledge generated from the study is verifiable. This objective approach to data analysis removes self-reflexivity from the research process. In conducting OGT studies, focus is placed on the elements of the phenomenon being studied, such as sequence of events in the lives of the participants and the relation of these events to the problem being addressed by the study. Based on this definition, Jia, Xu, and Wu's (2014) study of personality traits of Chinese graduates using 'big data' can be classified as an OGT study. Another example of an OGT study is Cheung and Kam's (2012) investigation of resiliency in older Hong Kong Chinese. In these two studies, resulting theories come directly from the data and uninfluenced by the engagement of the researcher with the data.

In comparison, constructivists approach the research with the mindset that there is no objective truth and that truth is constructed through the interactions of human beings with the world. The CGT approach "permits the researcher to explore the views and comprehension of the different participants within the subject context and recognizes that each may have experienced a different understanding of the same situation" (Taghipour, 2014). Constructivists, which include me as the primary investigator of this study, believe that, because they are themselves human beings with beliefs and value sets, the researcher's subjectivities can shape the interpretation of data.

In rendering an analysis, GTM researchers employ two types of logic: inductive analysis and abductive reasoning. Inductive analysis entails making extrapolations out of separate but common observations to form a conceptual category (Charmaz, 2014).

Abductive reasoning involves “studying individual cases inductively and discerning a surprising finding and then asking how theory could account for it” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 46). To arrive at a generalization, the researcher tests the emerging concepts against participants or cases that were subsequently studied. Whether inductive or abductive, GTM suggests that the researcher perform analysis concurrently with data collection. This strategy calls for the researcher to take a pause in collecting data, analyze what has been collected, and allow emergent concepts to inform the subsequent steps in the study.

For its data analysis, this GTM study adopted the social constructivist approach or CGT. The combination of the cultural differences between the home and host societies of the Chinese international students and my positionality as a researcher from their host country led to the determination that CGT was the best approach for this study. This approach aligned the study with its participants’ and researcher’s social context. As a CGT study, it focused on uncovering tacit meanings that research participants attached to terms, situation, and events in order to understand their lived experiences of leadership. Uncovering the meanings behind their remarks was particularly important because the participants were second language speakers.

This study also focused on the participants’ words as truthful expressions of their experience of leadership, rather than on the elements of these experiences. As such, new concepts that emerged from the study depicted an interpretation of the world based on the participants’ remarks and not an absolute truth (Charmaz, 2006). Conducted in the Chinese context, sensitizing concepts about the Chinese situation served as starting points in analyzing the data from this study and helped in anticipating the culturally-nuanced

‘truths’ shared by the Chinese participants. In addition to the transitional issues surrounding the international educational experiences that were mentioned earlier, these sensitizing concepts included my understanding of the political and economic history of China, the trend in the participation of mainland Chinese in American higher education and various sociopolitical factors that influence this trend, the psychosocial challenges that Chinese students experience as second-language learners in the United States, and the findings from a pilot study¹¹ that I conducted during my third year in the Ph.D. program.

Why Use GTM?

This study aimed to answer the following question: How does a Chinese national with US-based MBA education enact leadership in the Chinese context? This question encompassed multiple dimensions of the Chinese returnees’ life, including education, culture, identity, and position held in their organization in China. While literature in cross-cultural and international education revealed studies on cross-cultural leadership practices, extant theories did not offer adequate explanations about the lived experiences of leadership of contemporary US-educated Chinese nationals. To use only Euro-centric constructs, such as Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory and Burns’ (2003) transformational leadership in understanding the Chinese experience would be tantamount to ignoring the Chinese perspective of the various dimensions of human existence and the complexities of the current sociopolitical environment surrounding the

¹¹This pilot study adopted the GTM approach. Three Chinese nationals attending an MBA program in the United States were interviewed as part of a class project. The research question revolved around the students’ educational experiences, with a particular focus on the skills they hoped to develop during their study. This study found that the Chinese students were particularly interested in developing public speaking skills and presenting to an audience and concluded that Chinese students develop agency as they become comfortable with expressing their opinions.

Chinese returnee. Other theories that had cultural elements were also considered but as the following discussion would indicate, they did not provide the adequate framework either.

The field of global leadership examines the key elements of successful leadership around the world against an extensive list of global leadership attributes (Mendenhall et al., 2013). In its focus on transnational leadership, global leadership as a theory offers a sound framework for this study. Still, it lacks the capacity to describe or predict the Chinese returnees' experience of leadership. The Chinese model of leadership developed by Chen & An (2009) that the literature review for this study discovered does not offer this predictive ability either. Although Chen and An's (2009) Chinese model of leadership is aptly based on Chinese philosophy, it still lacks the context that makes it applicable to this study. It does not take Western education into consideration. The sociopolitical environment of this 21st century phenomena—the return from the United States to China of the Chinese graduate degree holder—is much too complex and different than the environment upon which existing constructs were developed.

Given the shortcomings of existing theories in answering questions about the recent phenomena involving the Chinese returnees, the GTM is considered to be the most appropriate approach for this study. It is noteworthy that the rationale for adopting GTM for this study is in line with Yin and Zhang's (2012) rationale for using GTM for their research on the corporate and social responsibility of companies in the Zhejiang province in China. For Yin and Zhang (2012), there is not enough exploration related to their research topic in the Eastern context. The similarity in the rationale behind the decision to adopt CGT for these two studies validates this study's methodological approach.

Understanding the Leadership Process

GTM as an approach to research helps understand the processes comprising leadership. Leadership as a human activity involves processes (Parry, 1998). Among many tasks, leaders conduct environmental scans, invite others to reflect on the organization's needs, facilitate the articulation of organizational missions and values, determine how best to accomplish organizational goals, and motivate their membership to enact productive change (Gill, 2011). Based on these processes, leadership can be considered a social influence process (Parry, 1998) involving a transformation in the organization's members' views, attitudes, and motivations toward change. The study conducted by Su, Jenkins, and Liu (2011) of nurses' perceptions of leadership styles in hospitals is an example of GTM's data-driven approach in investigating lived experiences of leadership where hierarchical leadership was found to influence the leadership style of hospital managers and nurse managers. As exemplified by Su et al.'s (2011) study, following the leads provided by the data collected from grounded theory studies allows the researcher to identify distinct leadership-related behaviors in the participants that can later be theorized as ways that individuals experience leadership. For this study, GTM's focus on the collected data will help this study in illuminating the social influences that are involved in the process that Chinese nationals follow to become leaders.

Culturally Responsive Methodology (CRM)

Central to the practice of Culturally Responsive Methodology (CRM), as the nomenclature implies, is the awareness of the cultural setting of the research and the acknowledgment that this culture is integral to how research participants experience life and construct knowledge (Nodelman, 2013). CRM researchers "resist essentialism and

generalizations to holistic contextualization. They take into account that many ideas and phenomena cannot be reduced to simple schemas of understanding, rather they must be understood instead through a wider lens of contextualization” (Berryman, Soohoo, & Nevin, 2013, p. 17). CRM researchers respect multi-logicality and strive to demonstrate this respect in how their studies are conducted. CRM invites researchers to embrace pluralism in their approach to understanding human existence. To accomplish this goal, studies that have a CRM approach are conducted as partnerships between the research and the research participants. Research agenda are co-constructed and data analysis and final report are agreed upon by both parties (Nodelman, 2013). This focus on culture, and two other considerations characterize CRM studies.

Do No Harm

A key principle of CRM is that research studies do not cause harm to research participants. According to Berryman et al. (2013), adherence to this principle is achieved when researchers approach the study with the mindset that they are researching *with* the research participants and not *on* them. Berryman et al. (2013) also argue that “the ultimate protection of human subjects is not when they are studied by others but in the co-joined exploration of meaning where both agendas are transparent and both individuals/groups agree on the ethical treatment of others” (p. 34). Proper entry into the research setting before data collection must be achieved by respectfully seeking permission to enter the lives of the research participants. Without this permission, the study may be experienced by participants as an imposed and domineering activity where the researcher takes the authoritative stance and the participants become subservient research objects. This CRM tenet guides this study’s methodology.

Respecting the Participants

This study of the 21st century US-educated Chinese nationals was conducted with ancient Chinese history and the past Mao Zedong regime in mind. Adhering to a key tenet of the methodology--to respect the participants as individuals--was at the core and the first step of this CRM study. For me, this meant obtaining a basic understanding of Chinese history. To accomplish this, I viewed 1,440 minutes of the video recorded lessons entitled *The fall and rise of China* by Richard Baum (2010). This extensive self-study of Chinese history helped me understand how China's past has shaped the contemporary Chinese. That is, until the 1970s, China was closed to the outside world due to the political machinations of Mao Zedong, leaving much of its citizenry ignorant of and against the Western culture. Incorporating the lessons on Ancient to Modern China into my preparation for this research not only adhered to the tenets of CRM but also gave me the sense that earned the privilege to engage in the study of the Chinese people. Thus, it was through this non-trivial exercise that I embraced cultural responsiveness toward the study.

Reading Biehler's (2004) book about the history of the participation of the Chinese in American higher education also increased my appreciation of the ordeal that the US-educated Chinese experienced in the past. I learned three important points about the Chinese participation in American education: 1) The Chinese who went to the U.S. to study in the early 1900's later faced political persecutions because of their Westernized ideologies (Biehler, 2004). 2) Despite these persecutions, the Chinese people recognized their need to learn from the U.S. new technologies in science and military services. 3) The Chinese was ambivalent about their disposition toward the United States, thus

affecting the participation of Chinese nationals in higher education in the United States during the early half of the 20th century. These lessons made me appreciate more the sociopolitical background of Chinese international students.

Current literature reflected the tension between the Chinese nationals' strong sense of nationalism and the pressure to learn about other ways of thinking and operating to further boost China's competitive edge in the global market (Kellogg, 2012; Zeithammer & Kellogg, 2013). In conducting this study, I had to keep in mind the sociopolitical context surrounding the Chinese returnees' practice of business leadership in China. While collecting data in China, it was crucial that I was aware of any changes to China's political position in current world affairs, particularly in relation to the United States. Notwithstanding the strategic mistrust shaping the diplomatic relations between the U.S. and China (McGiffert, 2014), embarking on this investigation of the professional lives of US-educated Chinese returnees required me to carefully design the research project in a manner that was respectful and sensitive to the Chinese mindset. It served me well as a CRM researcher to remember the following advice from Berryman et al. (2013):

We avoid naïve expectations that participants will be freely forthcoming, welcoming, and necessarily honest with us; instead, we acknowledge preliminary preparatory planning is necessary. For example, before engaging with the field, we make three important distinctions: (1) the plan is initially co-constructed with the participants, (2) methods are consciously and collectively shaped according to the shared ideologies (worldview, beliefs, values) and epistemologies ("ways of knowing" and "ways of sharing what one knows") of the participants and researcher, and (3) the methods and lines of inquiry are expected to change as the

researcher and participants become better acquainted and the research begins to be more responsive to the participants' directions throughout the course of inquiry. (p. 34).

Heeding CRM's caution that researchers do not possess the inherent right to study the lives of their participants (Berryman et al., 2013), I entered the research setting with respect for the Chinese lives that I set out to examine. This disposition toward the research contributed to the authenticity of this study.

Employing a Co-Researcher

Although Gill's (2010) study provided insight into the lived experiences of Chinese returnees, its focus was not on the experience of practicing leadership. Neither was it a study involving Chinese nationals returning from their graduate studies in the United States. Studying the experiences of US-educated Chinese nationals was important given the current focus of the American and Chinese governments on improving their diplomatic relations. Having learned about the ambivalence of the Chinese toward their relationship with the Americans dating back to the early 1900's (Biehler, 2004) and the strategic mistrust characteristic of the current US-China diplomatic relations (McGiffert, 2014), I made no predictions of what would take place in China. No assumptions were made in terms of what, how, and to what degree the Chinese research participants would share privileged information during the study. To ensure a successful study, I followed certain steps that would enhance my positionality and trustworthiness. As discussed in the next section, these steps included employing a co-researcher.

Enhancing Positionality

My positionality in this study is an outsider. Not only do I not live in China, I am not of Chinese origin. This outsider positionality may present barriers to my accurate understanding of the collected data. Unlike insiders, I may not “understand the nuances of language and behavioral expectations, and possess analytic insights into the working of the setting” (Bailey, 2007, p. 38). Research investigations using the constructivist grounded theory approach, such as this study, are subjective acts where researchers “construct research processes and products, but these constructions occur under pre-existing structural conditions, arise in emergent situations, and are influenced by researcher’s perspective, privileges, positions, interactions, and geographical locations.” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 240). It is therefore important that my positionality as outsider be addressed. One way to address this limitation is to have a co-researcher.

Employing a Chinese co-researcher for a significant portion of this GTM study helps in ameliorating my researcher positionality as an outsider. A co-researcher is an individual who takes an active role in the study, including personally introducing me to the research participants or being present at interviews or field observations. Building an authentic and transparent relationship with the co-researcher also helps in enhancing rapport with research participants (Glesne, 1989). Additionally, the co-researcher is able to coach the researcher in managing my appearance and behavior which helps build rapport (Glesne, 1989). This physical consideration is important for this cross-cultural study. Establishing this rapport with research participants enhances access to information, so that they will “tell me their true feelings and beliefs, and they trust that in taking their words I will do them no harm” (Glesne, 1989, p. 46). This study addresses these issues

that come with my outsider positionality by having a Chinese co-researcher. The co-researcher provides me as the primary researcher “the benefit of access and credibility” (Given, 2008, p. 5). In addition to this access that the co-researcher brings to the study, there is a second benefit to this methodological approach.

Analytical Support

Another benefit from a co-researcher comes from the assistance this individual provides in data analysis. In this study involving a society, culture, and language different from the researcher’s, there exists the potential for misinterpreting the data collected. While sharing the Asian ancestry with the participants and knowledgeable about some aspects of the Chinese culture, I am not familiar with life in China and do not speak Mandarin, the language predominantly spoken in mainland China. Having a co-researcher who can help clarify, point out, or correct misinterpretations of data specific to the Chinese context avoids faulty analysis of culturally nuanced data. Given these benefits, employing a co-researcher is a valuable element of this research.

Understanding the principles of these three methodologies—Grounded Theory Methodology, Culturally Responsive Methodology, and Co-Researcher—was important in determining the specific methods for this study. As described in the next section, these methods enabled me to gather rich data about the participants’ lived experiences as US-educated Chinese returnees and perform analytic work that focused on these data. As described in the next section, following these methods entailed specific steps in order to carefully align this study with its cultural context.

Methods

The emergent nature of the Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) provided the analytic space to use various ways to collect information. Having this analytic space was critical to this study because it allowed me to capture data as they became available in China. Conducting this study in China provided the extraordinary opportunity to observe the participants in their native milieu. The vastness of China played a significant role in determining the geographical locations from where the targeted research participants would come. Finding participants located in close proximity to each other made logistical sense as well as reduced the environmental factors that may generate nuanced data. There were also practical reasons—cost of travel and time allotted for the data collection—for limiting the selection of the participants in certain areas. This project’s logistics included not only the practical tasks of setting up interviews but also the more delicate tasks of engaging with the Chinese participants. I described in the following sections the steps I took in completing this study.

Engaging with the *guanxi*

The *guanxi* refers to the close-knit personal relationships between Chinese friends and family or with individuals who have common interests and identities (Panggabean et al., 2013). This Chinese social norm permeates all facets of Chinese social and business networks and heavily influences the information shared with outsiders and what outsiders are allowed to do (Liu & Gao, 2014). It is “characterized by implicit rules, obligations, and reciprocity. . . and is often considered to represent Chinese networking due to its symbolic meanings of power, social status, and resource transmission” (Liu & Gao, 2014,

p. 88). Taken as a form of social influence, the *guanxi* is an integral part of the data collection process

Given the idiosyncrasies of the Chinese social network system, it was to this study's benefit to obtain support from a 'sponsor' who could assist in establishing the credibility of the study and the researcher to the Chinese community. Three individuals served as sponsors in this study: a Chinese colleague from the same university where I worked, a former colleague who moved to China and was working in a joint US-China university, and an alumnus of the university that I was attending. These sponsors were hugely instrumental in recruiting multiple participants for this study and coordinating the logistics involved in the data collection process in China. Success of this research project was due partly to the researcher's credibility that these sponsors helped to establish in the eyes of the Chinese participants.

Engagement with the Chinese *guanxi* started with Elizabeth (pseudonym), a current colleague who introduced me via email to Sibbo, a former Chinese international student whom she helped a decade ago. Sibbo, who attended an MBA program in the U.S. was the 'group leader' to a cohort of Chinese nationals who were sent by a Chinese provincial government to complete MBA degrees. Sibbo's leadership role with these former international MBA students paved the way for my overseas participant recruitment to take place and ensured the participation of at least ten returnees for this study.

Participant Recruitment

Following the purposive sampling strategy, my Chinese connection Sibbo shared my recruitment letter (Appendix B) with other prospective participants. Based on

tentative interview dates and locations, the returnees who responded positively to my recruitment email were requested to meet me in a mutually convenient location in their respective areas in China. In addition to Sibbo's colleagues, other research participants were located through three other means: (1) university websites that published a directory of their faculty members, (2) LinkedIn, an online community primarily used by professionals to share information about their professional interests, credentials, and opinions, and (3) acquaintances of colleagues who were connected with Chinese returnees. Four faculty research participants were located through searches of university websites; four participants were recruited through professional connections via LinkedIn, and the rest were located through local professional connections. Each of these prospective candidates were invited to participate in the study via email.

Research Participants

A total of 24 Chinese nationals were interviewed for this study. Fourteen participants were male and ten were female. With the exception of one returnee who was a housewife, the participants represented seven sectors and each of the types of organizations existing in China, as shown in Table 4. The positions of the returnees within their organizations included junior as well as top executive positions. Listed in Table 5 were the participants' positions. Several of the position titles were slightly modified to protect the identity of the participants. Their ages ranged between 24 and 49 years old and the length of their stay in the United States ranged from one year to 13 years. The participant who stayed in the U.S. for 13 years arrived as a high school international student and stayed in the country to continue with his undergraduate and

graduate education. Only three among the 24 participants had visited a country outside Asia before coming to the United States.

Table 4

Participants by Organization Type and Gender

Sector	Organization Type							
	Government		State-Owned		Local Chinese		Multinational	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Education	2	2				1	2	1
Entertainment				1				
Finance/Trade	1		3				2	2
Legal							1	
Marine			1	2				
Technology					1			
Transportation			1					

Table 5¹²

Positions Held by Participants by Organization Type

Multinational Corporation	State Owned Enterprise	State University	Public / Government	Private Entrepreneur
Assistant Director	Chief Executive Officer	Dean and Professor	Department Chief	Testing Coordinator
Assistant Vice President	Chief of Finance	Assistant Professor		Software Developer
Associate Manager	General Manager	Assistant Professor		
Administrative Office Director	Vice General Manager	Professor		
HR Manager	Sales Manager			
Product Manager	Sales Manager			
Project Leader	Trader			
Sales Director				
Test Coach				

¹² Table 5 does not include the housewife.

Attendance of the participants in either a Master's or Doctoral program was distributed among fourteen public and four private universities in the United States. Thirteen states were hosts to these Chinese nationals, representing all the regions of the United States with the exception of the northwest: three in the west, three in the southwest, five in the mid-west, three in the southeast, one in the northeast, and three in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

Intensive Interviews

Semi-structured intensive interviews comprised the data collection method used in this GTM study. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed me to ask each participant probing questions and explore their responses and identify certain points for clarity. Broad, open-ended questions were asked to encourage participants to share their lived experiences of leadership.

Being culturally responsive. As alumni of American graduate programs, the research participants were expected to be able to speak and read English. As such, the interview protocol (Appendix A) and consent form (Appendix C) were written in English. Thirteen open-ended questions and probes and four demographic questions consisted the interview protocol. The protocol was developed in a manner that allowed for flexibility when identifying themes and offered interpretations of the data that generate inductive inquiry (Jenkins & Cutchens, 2011). In conducting the interviews, as Charmaz (2014) suggested, care was taken to ensure that the interviews did not become too leisurely, because elite participants would tend to be concerned with their public image and would not appreciate engaging in activities that appeared to be unproductive. Such was exactly the case for a busy top-ranking university official who generously

shared his valuable time to provide an interview for this study. Another culturally-based element that had to be considered in the interview process was the appropriateness of audio recording the interviews. In order to ensure that I was being respectful of their cultural norms, I had to assess how a request for permission to tape record the interviews would be received by the participants, rather than take for granted that such a request would be expected and welcome. As cautioned by Xiao et al. (2004), there was almost the possibility that recording the interviews would be offensive or threatening to the Chinese participants, thus a risk of losing that interview. In the case of this study, I was given permission to audio record the interviews with the participants.

Cultural relevance of interview questions was an important element of the data collection process. To ensure that the questions were appropriate and efficacious, current Chinese international students in the United States were consulted during a pre-dissertation pilot study. This step was reflective of CRM that kept the study focused on the participants lived experiences. Suggestions made by these current Chinese MBA students were incorporated in the interview protocol for this study. Following their suggestions accomplished two things: First, it increased the efficacy of the interview guide because it included questions that the Chinese MBA students felt were relevant to them. Second, it decreased any likelihood of asking disrespectful questions to the Chinese participants.

Culturally responsive also meant being cognizant of the possibility that the participants would provide inauthentic or superficial responses to research probes because of certain social norms or political forces embedded in the Chinese milieu. To enhance my chances of obtaining rich and culturally nuanced data, a ‘situational’

question related to leadership was asked. This question was the ninth question in the interview protocol (Appendix A). This question aimed at eliciting responses that reveal the participants' true stance on leadership.

The questions asked during the interviews pertained to the Chinese experience of Western education as well as their experience in incorporating this education in their current leadership practices. Open-ended questions were developed to evoke deep thoughts about similarities and differences in worldviews and value systems between the Chinese and the Western worlds and in a manner that applied to the East-West experiences of the participants.

Location of the interviews. This study involved 24 initial interviews and eight follow-up interviews that served as the study's theoretical sampling. Three modes were used to conduct the initial interviews: twenty in-person, three over the telephone, and one via email. The interview completed via email, which was the first interview, was conducted before I travelled to China for this research project. The rest of the initial interviews were conducted in China. The in-person interviews occurred in various cities in the eastern region of China: Shanghai, Hangzhou, Kunshan, Qingdao, and Jinan. Using Shanghai as the hub, I travelled to these cities using different modes of transportation in China, including high-speed trains, taxi cabs, subway trains, private cars, domestic flights, and long-distance bus. (See Appendix D for a graphical³³ illustration of the locations of these cities.) I met the participants at mutually convenient locations. I interviewed seven participants in their offices whereas eight participants were willing to go to the hotel where I was staying. The rest designated a local hotel or quiet spot in a restaurant for the interview. The telephone interviews were conducted to accommodate

last-minute changes to the participants' schedules. These interviews were completed in my hotel room and interspersed with the in-person interviews in Shanghai, China.

Transcription of Recorded Interviews. Transcription of the recorded interviews followed the denaturalized approach that is appropriate to GTM studies (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). This step efficiently captured the stories of the Chinese because, as non-native English speakers, the participants' had utterances that were sometimes difficult to discern. These cultural nuances in the communication process were anticipated and addressed by the study's focus on the overall content of and meanings behind the participants' statements.

In-Country Field Observations

Cross-cultural qualitative research studies conducted in the country of the participants offer great opportunities for the collection of rich data about the participants and their native environment. In order to realize these benefits, in-country researchers must prioritize the task of introducing themselves to the participants who most likely responded to their call for research participation from a distance. Responding to the participants' request of "Tell me who you are" (Jankie, 2004, p. 87) authentically and explaining the nature, purpose, and importance of the research project paves the way for meaningful conversations. After data collection, it is important to "acknowledge that interview research . . . only provides a limited basis for generalization. Findings cannot be generalized to populations or even national categories" (Collard, 2009, p. 33). Following Collard's suggestion, this study should be seen as a means "to understand the subjective worlds of the subjects and articulate patterns and links within a bounded scope" (Collard, 2009, p. 33).

As an in-country study, data gathered from the interviews were supplemented by other sources of information that were accessible to me in China: (1) casual conversations with non-research participants who went to the U.S. for graduate school, (2) casual conversations with non-Chinese expatriates who were either colleagues or supervisors of some of the returnees; and (3) field observations while visiting some of the local sites and participating in a local event with some of the returnees. In addition, insight gathered through a pre-dissertation pilot study that was mentioned earlier and several pieces of extant literature that were reviewed as part of this study's theoretical sampling were also incorporated in this study's findings.

Data Analysis

A multi-step process that included initial coding, focused coding, categorical coding, memo writing, and theoretical sampling was completed to analyze the data collected during this study. Initial coding, in the form of line by line coding, was accomplished using Microsoft Word, the same computer application used to transcribe the recorded interviews. Following Charmaz (2014), gerunds were used for this GTM study to bring focus on the behaviors of the participants and to avoid the application of taken-for-granted assumptions to the study. Several *in vivo* codes were also used to clearly depict the Chinese participants' perspective of their experience. Approximately 1,100 initial codes were generated from the transcribed interviews.

Next, focused coding and categorical coding schemes were completed to hone in on the patterns. Emergent relationships between patterns observed in the collected data were also captured through these focused codes to reach beneath the surface of the statements made by research participants. To complete this step, the initial codes were

transferred to a Microsoft Excel worksheet. This enabled me to easily organize, compare, and modify the codes until I felt that the essence of the data had been fully captured. Sixty-seven focused codes and thirteen categories emerged from this phase of the data analysis process.

Memo-writing, described as the “pivotal step between data collection and writing drafts of papers” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 162) was simultaneously performed during initial and focused coding. This step helped me find connections between emerging concepts. Capturing fleeting thoughts quickly in written format through various means crystallized my ideas about social structures and processes that were latent in the data. This step helped my analysis reach category creation. Memo-writing also helped develop my theoretical sensitivity, defined by Charmaz (2014) as “the ability to understand and define phenomena in abstract terms and to demonstrate abstract relationships between studied phenomena” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 161). As the final step to this GTM study, theoretical coding was performed after focused coding for the purpose of reaching theoretical saturation. This entailed “applying a variety of analytic schemes to the data to enhance their abstraction” (Glaser, 2005 in Charmaz, 2014, p. 150).

Theoretical sampling, a step characteristic to GTM that involved “empirical checks into the analytic process . . . and makes the collected data progressively more focused and the analysis successively more theoretical” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 1) was conducted. For this study, theoretical sampling was accomplished by performing a second round of literature review. Through this review I was able to compare the new concepts arising from this study against existing data and concepts (Charmaz, 2014). This

review revealed several studies that were relevant to the concept that this study would finally propose.

Another approach to theoretical sampling for this study was in the form of requesting eight participants to answer three follow-up questions (Appendix E). The follow up questions aimed at eliciting feedback on my emerging concepts surrounding the returnees' leadership practices in China and how I was conceptualizing their perception of themselves as US-educated returnees. The questions were asked and answered electronically, via email or WeChat¹³, the Chinese mobile phone application akin to the Western 'text messaging'. The participant responses to these follow up questions addressed inaccuracies in several minor assumptions made during data analysis and provided insight into the liminal space occupied by the participants that would not emerge otherwise.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Member checks established this study's trustworthiness. This involved the systematic solicitation of feedback from the participants about the data collected from the interviews and the conclusions that were being made from these data was an important part of this study (Maxwell, 2013). Additionally, as a GTM study, validation of data was built into the iterative data collection and analytic processes of this research project. Beyond the steps prescribed by GTM, the research setting itself, which for this study was China, was an important consideration in establishing the trustworthiness of the study. Providing thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) or contextually rich descriptions of how the study was conducted would enhance any study's trustworthiness (Ferguson & Ferguson,

¹³ WeChat is a mobile phone application that allows the exchange of text and voice messages. It is widely used in China and can be utilized internationally by individuals outside mainland China.

2000) and support conclusions drawn from data gathered from the study. For this study, a select number of participant remarks were included to describe their lived experiences and to depict the liminal spaces they occupied. Ferguson and Ferguson (2000) provided the following advice for outsider researchers in building trustworthiness for their studies:

One of the ways interpretivist researchers persuade the reader about their believability and accuracy is by recounting the research context and the relations the researcher had with the people in that context. In a methodology where knowledge and meaning are constructed through social interaction and understanding, the relationships that occur between researchers and participants are critical (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2000, p. 183).

Given the overseas nature of this study, the researcher-participant relationship I shared with the Chinese returnees was limited by my brief and temporary stay in the various cities in China. Asking eight participants via email three follow-up questions (Appendix D) was a way for me to expand my engagement with some of them. Discussed earlier as a way to perform theoretical sampling, these follow-up questions also served as the study's 'member checking' and data triangulation that enhanced its trustworthiness.

Following the methods that have just been described led to the successful data collection for this study. Through the detailed work involved in capturing these data in written form, I have been able to present this study's findings in a clear and concise manner. Chapter Four presents these findings, followed by the discussion about the analysis of these findings in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four: Findings

This study finds that there are nuances to the application of Western education in the Chinese context. The different social norms found in the various organizations in which US-educated Chinese returnees work influence their professional behaviors. In its aim to answer the research questions revolving around the leadership experiences of US-educated Chinese returnees, this study has revealed certain salient learning outcomes to this ethnic group's participation in graduate education in the United States. These learning outcomes increase the students' critical thinking and communicative skills, including their proficiency in the English language, gain confidence because of these enhanced skills, and adopt certain Western social norms which they apply strategically in the Chinese context. This chapter focuses on the three overarching themes that emerged in the analysis of the data gathered from the interviews with the returnees. These themes center on the returnees' (1) experiences in the U.S.; (2) repatriation in Chinese society; and (3) leadership practices in the Chinese context. The relationship between these themes leads this study to the conceptualization of the *bridger*—a role that US-educated Chinese returnees voluntarily take on. This chapter includes specific passages from participant interviews that reflect these themes and sub-themes.

While acknowledging existing understanding about the phenomenon surrounding their participation in U.S. higher education, the discussion of the three themes highlights new areas of insight about the lived experiences of US-educated Chinese returnees. Nuances in how they apply their Western education in China are presented in separate sections discussing each of the primary types of organizations existing in the country. In anonymizing the participants, pseudonyms that reflect the type of organization in which

they work are used to further show this relevance. The relevance of the type of organization in which the returnees work is discussed throughout this chapter.

Educational Experiences in the U.S.

The following sections describe the learning experiences of the US-educated Chinese returnees. These learning experiences are in the areas of social relations, thinking processes, and individual behaviors. The returnees' participation in graduate education in the United States was motivated largely by their personal desires to experience the world outside China. As such, while the purpose of going abroad was education, a large component of their educational experiences involved learning about the Western people, culture, and systems. In conjunction with their advanced academic education, these learning experiences have shaped how these returnees operated as professionals in China.

Twenty of the 24 participants had not been outside China prior to coming to the U.S. for graduate education. Immersed in a significantly different environment, the Chinese nationals learned lessons that extended beyond the university setting. They were attentive to some aspects of their host country's social norms, value systems, and physical infrastructure. They were constantly comparing the way of life in the United States with their life in China. They gained not only new theoretical knowledge but also practical knowledge about the West. Marvin (personal communication, August 14, 2015), a mid-level administrator in a joint US-China university, said that he would describe his experiences in the U.S. in the following way:

I always tell people that, actually I get much more of my tuition than other American students because, if you can imagine, every student when you go to a business school in [a city in a southeastern state in the United States] what you

get out of that tuition, you get very good business training, you get very good faculty, then you get very good career service so you can find a good job. But that's it. For international students, in addition to this, you get the opportunity to experience the culture, to experience the country, to know a lot of different, a lot of people who grew up in a different environment or culture.

Another participant in the higher education field, Dr. Ube (personal communication, August 12, 2015), attributed much of his professional successes to his education in the United States. His appreciation for his “life changing” experience abroad was representative of the appreciation displayed by twenty other participants. Due to their positive and culturally enriching experiences as international students, they developed a certain degree of affinity with individuals from their host country. Being granted an interview by Dr. Ube, who was a Dean of a highly respected Chinese state university, member of a Chinese advisory board, and former Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a MNC in China, demonstrated this affinity to the United States.

Social Relations

The engagement of the Chinese nationals with the American society exposed them to a different approach to interacting with others. Lessons on Western social norms came from inside and outside the classroom. These new experiences left significant impressions on the Chinese students. Educational experiences in this dimension came from their relations with others and through group work.

Understanding the concept of the other. They learned what Song (personal communication, August 21), a General Manager in an SOE that earned his MBA degree from a state university in the southern region of the U.S., called the “concept of the

other”. This lesson was reflected in how Marvin (personal communication, August 14, 2015), a business office director who earned the MBA from a university in the southeast region of the United States, described his off-campus experiences:

I felt, the biggest impression on me was people here is so friendly even though they don’t know you. But at the supermarket, the cashier will kind of have a short chat with you. They greet you, of course. ‘How are you doing today?’ and something like that. It’s very friendly. And when you walk on the streets, when you pass someone on the streets, even though they don’t know you, usually they will say ‘hi’ or they will give you a smile. That’s very nice.

These neighborly experiences were significant for the returnees, because they were in stark contrast to how the Chinese would interact with each other. In China, strangers often did not acknowledge each other and could not be trusted easily. This comparison in social relations between strangers in the U.S. and between strangers in China was consistent with my in-country experiences. That is, during my three-week stay there for this study, there was not a time that a local Chinese acknowledged me with a smile or subtle hello except when I entered a restaurant, hotel, or a store.

Six of the Chinese returnees who participated in this study also said that they were warmly received by their host communities and supported in their personal needs. Faculty members and advisors in the universities also made a positive impression on these Chinese nationals. Two of the three returnees that were teaching undergraduate classes spoke highly about their professors in graduate school. Professor Uling (personal communication, August 13, 2015), an English faculty member who completed a master’s degree in Education, said:

According to my experiences, I think I am very impressed by the teacher's patience. Secondly, I am impressed by their kindness. Everyone's trying their best to help us students to get every knowledge and they make it understandable to us. So they didn't make it as complicated as they could be but instead they tried to use the most effective way or most efficient way for us to learn something better. They combined the theory and the practical knowledge. We participated in the field experiences.

Professor Uyen (personal communication, August 18, 2015), who was a junior Economics faculty member in a top-ranking state university in Shanghai appreciated the closeness of the faculty-student relationship in the United States:

One thing that works for most professors from the U.S. is that we are close to students, because in the US the professors treat students like co-authors and not like... you know, especially in Asia, we respect the professors.¹⁴ The professors and the students have a very big difference here. When we were there we can feel it's more equal. I don't think it's like a friend but more like a co-author.

Non-faculty participants such as Sam (personal communication, August 26, 2015), who attended a state university in the western region of the U.S., felt that the hard work of the faculty made it possible for them to succeed in their classes. Sam said, "They were really good. They prepared very carefully. . . .Those professors really worked hard."

Lessons on good behavior toward other individuals were also passed on to the Chinese nationals, in a way that Mike (personal communication, August 15, 2015), a Sales Director who attended a university in the southern region of the U.S., experienced:

¹⁴ The word 'respect' would normally be used by the Chinese to mean submission to authority.

When I had my master's degree I had a very good supervisor. He taught me not only how to do my master but also how to be a good person and how to work right. And this habit makes me deal with my colleagues now. I used it a lot from what I learned from my supervisor when I was in the United States, like giving them freedom and being a gentleman to them, like never to rush and to push also.

In this same conversation Mike also described the lifelong lesson he learned from his graduate coordinator: "My concept of a good person is for yourself you do the right thing even though your definition of the right thing might be different. For example, to the society don't get harm to other people for your own purpose." Through these engagements with their American host society, the Chinese nationals witnessed and experienced the social norms followed in a Western context.

Engaging in group work. More accustomed to a classroom environment where the individual work was emphasized, the Chinese nationals had to adopt to engaging in group work activities in the United States. Learning to engage in these activities benefitted them as professionals in China. Recognizing this benefit, the returnees attributed their ability to work with occupational teams to their experiences of group work as international students. Melody (personal communication, August 10, 2015), a manager for an information technology unit in a finance corporation, described how this new learning experience.

I think the most important thing is team work because in China we do not teach how to do the team work. So every homework the teacher would say 'finish your homework by yourself. Don't ask any people.' But in the U.S., it's different. They like the team work. So, that helped me to do my current job because it's related to

team work because we have UI¹⁵ we have developed. I needed to coordinate all these people and make them work together. I think that helped me a lot.

The experience of working in groups exposed them to diverse ideas. Mark (personal communication, August 17, 2015), who had just earned his graduate degree in Finance and was undergoing management training, recalled his student days:

When I was the leader of a homework group I will always at first lay out some basic outlines of what we would be doing and have some general opinions on the topic and then I would stop talking and then ask them if they had any comments or if they have anything creative to add. Very interestingly, they always had something I haven't thought of. That is the magic of team work. So, I've learned to stop talking after a while and listen to others. It's a way for the two sides to learn.

Their experiences of engaging in the multiculturalism in the U.S. enhanced their interpersonal skills along multiple dimensions. First, they witnessed how it was possible for people who did not know each other prior to entering the class could work together. Second, they realized that people came from different backgrounds could cooperate. And third, different perspectives and abilities strengthened the work of the group. These were experiences that unique to them as Chinese nationals who studied abroad.

Thinking Processes

Exposure to diversity in culture, ethnicity, and systems in the United States made the Chinese nationals realize that there were multiple ways of thinking and operating. More importantly, they were immersed in an educational system that encouraged them to

¹⁵ UI refers to 'user interface', a phrase commonly used in the information technology field.

apply their personal perspectives on what they were learning. Marvin (personal communication, August 14, 2015), the University administrator, aptly defined the purpose of international education in terms of this aspect:

The point of international education is not about knowledge but to let people experience different things so people understand and build their awareness that people think in different ways, and people behave in different ways.

They became aware of the multiplicity of perspectives and ways of being through the lessons they learned in the classroom and as a result of the thinking processes they went through while they explored the different aspects of their host society. These were valuable lessons about the world outside of China that were available to them as international students. Based on their motivation to see the Western world, they were receptive to new information and new ideas.

Constant Comparisons. The Chinese nationals were profoundly interested in understanding the differences between China and the United States. Returnees such as Sibó (personal communication, August 21, 2015), a CEO of a large state-owned enterprise, who had aspirations for becoming a Chinese government official prior to going overseas, focused on understanding how China could be improved by the systems that were in place and working well in the United States. Now a top executive of an SOE, Sibó (personal communication, August 21, 2015), reflected on his experiences:

As I mentioned, the most important thing in [a city in the western region of the United States] is not in class, it's outside. When we went to [a city in the western region of the United States], there are gaps in China, there is a big gap, especially in the economy. The culture is totally different . . . totally different. When we

went there, we think this is what we call America. Different. We thought America is so good. We asked why there is a gap. When we went there it gave me the opportunity to see this is America, and this is American culture. It was totally different from what we were thinking. . . .China is communist party and America is . . . democratic. It's a different political system. Before we went there, we think it's very totally different. But when we went there, in my opinion, I think it's almost the same. Most people, maybe they don't get the same impression like me but I think so. China is a single national country. In the States, there are many different nationalities together. As a democratic country, there are different people with different rights. They struggle together for other things. But I think for most people, they just want one thing, a country that is better, make everyone better. In China, it's the same thing. Here it's just CPC, here the goal is the same. Here there are different people in CPC have different interest, minus different parties. In the party, there are different sections.

Marvin (personal communication, August 14, 2015), also described his thoughts while he was in the U.S.

Every day you experience something different and you're able to compare everything with China, everything you see in the United States and China, and why do they offer in different ways. Why it's working very well in the States. Will it work in China? Probably not. So you keep on having these kinds of comparisons and thinking and it's a very interesting thing.

Every aspect of their sojourn exposed them to diversity in perspectives which they learned to appreciate. Shao (personal communication, August 21, 2015), a Vice General Manager who earned his MBA a decade ago, reflected on his one-year American sojourn:

Going abroad, not just the United States but also other countries, will help you understand a lot in the way different people do different things. Sometimes you go to the area and you stay there, you travel with different people, you can understand them better just staying home watching TV or computer. So sometimes it really helps to communicate more efficiently to understand the different point of view. That's the thing I can say from my stay in America. I know sometimes that they do things a certain way because that's their style and not to do some different things purposely. So that helps you understand why.

Being away from China for the first time provided the Chinese nationals the opportunity to see their country from a distance. The returnees who were funded by government scholarships shared a common focus beyond expanding their skill sets. To help in China's progress, they focused on learning about Western systems. As a government scholar who was expected to contribute new knowledge to the country, Sibó (personal communication, August 21, 2015) came to some realizations about China from a different vantage point: "When we went there, we had the opportunity to think about China as an outsider."

Indeed, the participants reported always comparing the systems in China with what they saw in the United States. While in the United States, they would frequently think about how they could help improve China's physical and social systems. In particular, three MBA returnees spoke about the need for more professional ethics

training while three other MBA returnees mentioned their concerns about an aspect of the Chinese economy. For example, Song (personal communication, August 21, 2015), a General Manager of a maritime-based SOE who earned his MBA from a state university in the mid-west region of the United States said:

In my spare time I was focusing on issues in the rural economy. I tried to figure out what the U.S. is doing. Everybody knows that China has a lot of farmers and they are not very educated and lacking behind society. I thought whoever can make this group of people change for the better, can have a better understanding, that guy who can have a solution for Chinese farmers, this guy should have a Nobel Price for that. So, at that time, I'm not that kind of academic, but I started to think why in the U.S. there is a system like that. What about our system?

Thinking the non-standard way. Exposure to diversity in people's perspectives was a significant learning outcome for the Chinese nationals who were more accustomed to gaining mastery of "standard answers" (Marvin, personal communication, August 14, 2015) in China. Professor Uling (personal communication, August 13, 2015), who earned a graduate degree in Education, described returnees as "capable of thinking differently". To further illustrate this point, the following participant passages were selected to represent three different ways that the Chinese returnees described their development of critical thinking. First, Marvin (personal communication, August 14, 2015), pointed to the typical singular thinking of the Chinese:

They teach you how to think and there's no standard resolution. There's no [what] we call in China *standard answers*. When we grow up in China we face a lot of exams, elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school, high

school to college, is all determined by exams. In those exams there's always standard answers. This is the right answer and all other answers are wrong. So, but in the MBA classroom, there's no right answer. And that's also my confusion because at the very beginning, when we talk about, we spent all the time studying those business school cases, we spend one hour to discuss in the classroom, in the second hour the professor will talk about a new thing, teach new thing. At the very beginning I was confused because we talked about the case, we discussed the case and ask questions, and the professor will ask questions and when one hour passed and the professor will say 'Ok, that's all for this case discussion and we're going to have a break and after we come back we will do the new module or something.' I was a little confused. What's the answer? What's the resolution? . . . Then, I asked this question and the professor said there's no right answer in case studies. We discuss case studies only to provoke thinking, to drive you to think and to learn.

Second, Mimi (personal communication, August 21, 2015), talked about how she felt that American pedagogy eradicated this singular thinking and replaced it with critical thinking:

In the US the education is very structured, the knowledge is well planned. You not only understand the knowledge but you also understand how the different knowledge connect and how they are structured. Like C and B [compensation and benefits], collective bargaining, how different things work together for human resources. So that really helps me because I recently interview a lot of the Chinese HR VP and that's something that's very different from them. So they actually do

a lot of tasks but they didn't see a structure. They didn't see how each one influence each other. How, what's really behind this phenomenon. So, that's something I was trained in the U.S. That helps me a lot because if you just see things spot and spot like scattered, you never can organize and find the root cause. You may address that spot, actually it's a train. You need to address it differently, you need to see how these things can work together and that comes to this outcome. That's something I found I gained that's very special. Most of the Chinese local HR interns don't have that.

Third, IT Product Manager Melody (personal communication, August 10, 2015) said that she was selected by her MNC employer because of qualifications she obtained in the United States.

So I think the most thing I benefit from the study is not just from the works and lessons in the class itself but more about other things. The way of thinking has also influenced me. Because I think the American people are more creative than China people. So, the job I work now is like a creative chores. . . . So I think my boss picked me because he felt I was suitable for this kind of job.

Becoming open-minded. Eight participants described themselves as more open-minded as a result of their education in the United States. Although not all of the participants used the phrase 'become open-minded' to express how they believed their educational experiences in the U.S. affected their way of thinking, their description of their experiences reflected this change. Shao (personal communication, August 21, 2015), an SOE Vice General Manager who attended a university in the western region of the United States, said:

So, international education—the most valuable thing is to teach people, you should not use your own perspective or the perspective you learn, the way you grow up to look at other things, to look at different things. I am not saying that the perspectives in China are all negative, or all bad, or that American perspectives are all right, or I learned I had a lot of bad behaviors in China and I become good when I went to the States. But I think it's just this experience just teach you that always you have to double check your perspective, your thought. I think that's very helpful.

Recognizing this open-mindedness, returnees distinguished themselves from their domestically-educated peers. In her role as a team leader for a technology unit in her MNC organization, Melody (personal communication, August 10, 2015) described herself as “the most open-minded people in the company.”

Several other participants mentioned the link between diversity and open-mindedness. Sales Director Mike (personal communication, August 15, 2015) said:

Because the United States has a diverse people, from different areas in the world and every people have their own culture, they have their own mind. Open-minded. So that helps me a lot.

Even those whose stay in the United States was only for one year also reported benefiting along this dimension. General Manager Song (personal communication, August 21, 2015) said: “When we think about something, we are more open.” Likewise, Professor Uling (personal communication, August 13, 2015) said: “It made me more open-minded and can accept more opinion instead of stubbornly be persistent with my own opinion.

That's the benefit I got from the one-year program." Based on these remarks, it was clear that open-mindedness was a major learning outcome for these Chinese nationals.

Macro-level perspective. There was a shared realization among the participants that there is a world outside of China and that China co-existed with other countries. An SOE General Manager, Song (personal communication, August 21, 2015) described this aspect of his international education experience:

Because when I stayed there for one year, it made me think differently. For example, for what we are in this world, for China now, for America now in the world, the living condition for the individual, what's the direction we will go. And also, we think more about that.

On a more academic level, three graduates of business graduate schools recalled learning Macroeconomics for the first time. This new knowledge expanded their outlook regardless of whether they were developing or seasoned business professionals. Sheng (personal communication, August 18, 2015), a financial trader in an SOE, shared how he felt about learning Macroeconomics:

A lot of courses are very useful, like Economics, Macroeconomics. For Microeconomics, it's very similar because in China we use exactly the same GAP. The accounting method as in the U.S. so it's just the translation. My mom was an accounting teacher so it shouldn't be any problem for me and for a lot of kids. So, it's basically the same thing. But for macro, for a lot of eco-politics, it would be very helpful because in China there's too much focus on the micro things, like some of the data things. But we should care about other things, like

the macro things. Every country, the currencies, the welfares, everything is going to be linked together. It will have the butterfly effect, like all the changes.

This expansion of their thinking processes that they characterized as “open-minded” was the significant outcome for these Chinese returnees. As US-educated Chinese, the participants believed that they possessed this distinction when compared with their domestically-educated peers. This self-assessment on the part of the Chinese returnees was validated by a non-Chinese MNC executive who supervised one of the participants. In my conversation with this female Vice President of Human Relations, she said that, in her opinion, Chinese nationals who studied abroad had better critical thinking skills and were more open-minded than those who did not participate in international graduate education.

Learned Behaviors

Going overseas provided the Chinese participants opportunities to be solely responsible for their own affairs. Given that most of them had not been in a foreign country before, learning how to navigate the various systems in the United States was not a trivial task. Their growth in this area stemmed from seeing how others behaved inside and outside the classroom.

Learning to speak up. Unlike their experience in classrooms in China where instructors did not invite students to share their ideas, the participants learned that expressing one’s opinion during classroom discussions was encouraged in American classrooms. During their stay in the United States, the Chinese nationals became more proficient in English. As they became more proficient in language skills, they gained the confidence to verbally express their thoughts. Monica (personal communication, August

17, 2015), a test coach with a bubbly personality, said she gained confidence after overcoming this communication challenges:

I used to be very shy. I'm shy to talk to people. In China you know, in my age people don't speak very often. They can write well. They can read well but they cannot talk in English. We learn British English instead of American English—some of the schools. Right now some of the international schools it didn't matter. You can speak British or English whatever. But we used to don't talk. We study and read. So you have to talk, even if your pronunciation is not good, and your grammar is not good whatever, you have to talk. You have to be brave. You have to ask. You cannot like stay there. In Chinese, most Asian people are very shy. They don't like to present themselves, not like Americans, they want to talk. They want to share. But Asian usually they are shy. It's ok. Blah blah blah blah blah. I can't do it. You have to do it.

Confidence grew as their communication skills became more proficient, later benefitting them in the workplace. Mark (personal communication, August 17, 2015), the management trainee said:

I think English speaking and those presentation skills are really important as well as the confidence to raise your hand. That is also something I learned in the US. Here I am training with the other associates from the other five countries so I'm training with the Singaporeans, Indonesians, people from Hong Kong and Taiwan and India, so you can see that a lot of newly graduates from those Westernized countries like Singapore, they are very active in reflection or in answering questions from the speakers. But the Chinese students tend to, we need

more time to speak, and then we speak. We don't speak before thinking. In the US, I kind of learn to speak as I'm thinking, so I raise my hand more here in Singapore with the other people. I think that's also something I learned in the US. Thinking before speaking is what Chinese graduates do. Learning to speak up and more critical of what is being taught to them.

To verify my understanding of Mark's statement, I performed member checking at this point. Mark elaborated:

Yes, that is correct. I think the reason for that is our education does not promote question raising or challenging that much. So we tend to listen to our professors and thinking that he's right or if he is wrong, then we won't speak up. But in the US, a lot of my professors encourage challenge, so I kind of learned that along the way.

Accessing information. More than half of the 24 participants spoke about learning how to research information while studying abroad and appreciated the access they had to information. They were impressed by the expansive libraries in their universities and the knowledgeable people they met. Cholong (personal communication, August 26, 2015), an officer in China's Central Bank, said he missed the libraries and Transportation Department Manager Guang (personal communication, August 26, 2015) fondly recalled being able to request for inter-library loans. Having learned how to access information through the Internet and knowing where to go for more information gave them the advantage over their domestically-educated peers. Business Developer Matthew (personal communication, August 14, 2015) shared his confidence in research:

It's surprising, I've forgotten almost everything that I learned in school regarding stuff like supply chain management, stock models. And I cannot remember how to do discounted cash flows or how to do multiple company evaluation. These kinds of things I've forgotten. But the important part I feel is that I know where to find it. I know when I need those kinds of skills or knowledge. First of all, I have the material and I can teach myself. That's one thing. And the other thing is that I know the right people to talk to when I face certain problems, and I can easily find the person who is good at those kinds of subjects, and how to come to the solution.

For these returnees, knowing how to access information was a prominent aspect of their educational experiences in the United States. It was apparent in my interviews with them that they considered themselves at an advantage over their domestically-educated peers in this regard. It was clear that they appreciated this aspect of their international education. This finding was in line with the results of a recent investigation by magazine *Foreign Policy* which stated that "Chinese students' encounter with freedom of information often proved profound" (Tea Leaf Nation Staff, 2015, December 7). These experiences of freedom of speech, thought, and information highlighted to the Chinese students the differences in the Chinese and American societies. As presented in the next section, several aspects of their life experiences as Chinese returnees were explored in this study.

The China Space

The repatriation of the US-educated Chinese nationals brings to light the differences between the ways the Chinese and the Americans operate. This study has

found significant differences in the areas of communication, gender-based relations, and relationship-building. Each of these differences are discussed in this section to provide context to what has been found by this study and the manner in which the returnees negotiated the use of their Western skill sets. These findings will be presented according to the type of organization in which the returnees work.

Chinese Communication Style

The Chinese way of communication was described by the returnees as an absence of frankness or its aversion to being straightforward. To describe this social norm, multiple participants, including Melissa (personal communication, August 10, 2015), Dr. Ube (personal communication, August 12, 2015), and Marvin (personal communication, August 14, 2015), made the snake-like arm gesture. Some participants also referred to this style as ‘beating around the bush’, an idiomatic expression used in the United States that meant that an individual was not speaking directly to the point. The subtle approach to speaking in the Chinese society was a significant difference from the Western way. Actions that went against this social norm were offensive to the Chinese. Using “open minded” to describe frankness, Monica (personal communication, August 17, 2015), a Test Coach who worked with Chinese students, described her interview with a prospective Chinese employer as an example of how Western communication style did not fit the Chinese context:

Open-minded is not good in China because most people are shy. Do you know what I mean? And maybe when I talk I am very straight because in Chinese way, they like to do this [motioning a snake]. American way is always very straight.

In addition to this indirect, subtle approach to communication, the Chinese were also uncommunicative, posing a challenge to those working with them. Mark (personal communication, August 17, 2015), a recent MBA graduate who was undergoing management training with an international bank said:

I think it's very different to lead up people in the United States. Over there, everyone speaks their mind. But here, the most difficult part of managing is knowing what the people are thinking because they don't speak up, so you'll need to have some techniques to know your colleagues better.

These returnee remarks indicated that there was limited application of the Western style of communication in their home country.

Gendered and Age-based Social Norms

According to Chi-Chi (personal communication, August 17, 2015), the Chinese culture considered Chinese women to be physically and mentally weaker than men and that activities for physical fitness were not appropriate for the female gender. One of the male participants reiterated this same perception. Sheng (personal communication, August 18, 2015) said: "Girls in Shanghai they don't like sports." However, among the ten female returnees, four participants mentioned that they 'worked out' in the United States and continued to engage in physical fitness in China. These four physically active female returnees were associated with different organizational types: two in MNC, one in a state university, and one private entrepreneur, showing that there was no particular link between the type of organization and the adoption of the Western notion of physical health.

Sheng, the Trader (personal communication, August 18, 2015) also added that women in his workplace held middle or back office positions, unlike his position as a financial trader. This inferior perception of women was reflected in the belief of the traditional Chinese that women should not be educated beyond college. The Chinese society also had an expectation that women would be married by the time they reached their mid-twenties. These Chinese beliefs were manifested in employment practices. Two female participants described their job interviews in China: Melissa (personal communication, August 10, 2015), who returned to China when she was about 27 years old, recalled being asked whether she was married and had children. Monica (personal communication, August 17, 2015), who was also in her mid-twenties when she returned home, faced a similar personal scrutiny:

The interview between the boss and me is not very pleasant because she asked me, you like so defense [being defensive]. It's like, she can ask me: 'Now that you're back, do you still are single, right?' I said yes. 'Do you want to date with American guy or Chinese guy?' During the interview, she asked me about this. I feel so weird. How can you ask... this one is not related to the job? I feel so defended. And she also asked me, 'So now you just came back, right, in a couple of years do you want to stay in [a city in China] or some other city, or do you want to go back to [a state in the U.S.]? Blah blah blah.

Gender-based beliefs and practices embedded in the Chinese society were experienced by the Chinese female when they interacted with the traditional Chinese. There was no evidence that MNC employers held the same pejorative beliefs about women. In terms of

physical exercise, the type of organization in which they worked did not have any connection to their participation in this Western activity.

Application of Western education

The application of Western education differed between the returnees in terms of the skill set they demonstrated and the context in which their skills were used. The type of organization in which the returnees worked generally set the context for Western education application. The organizations in which the participants of this study worked were classified as one of the following: multi-national corporation (MNC), state-owned enterprise (SOE), Chinese government, state university, or private entrepreneurship. For the sake of simplicity, organizations that were jointly owned by Chinese provincial governments and a foreign entity were classified as multinational corporations. There were differences in state-owned enterprises that determined whether a foreign skill set could be utilized.

Multinational Corporations (MNC). Eight of the participants worked in multinational corporations. Multinational corporations fundamentally differed from domestic organizations in terms of operational needs and organizational culture. Due to the global nature of their organization, those working in MNC's benefitted more from their Western educational experiences on a normal basis. Marvin (personal communication, August 14, 2015), a director in a joint US-China university described this environment well:

We have a lot of foreigners in the organization. We know how they would react. You know what they are thinking. You don't know exactly how they will react but at least you'll have an idea of usually how they think. And the cultural

difference will not be so hard to overcome after you have to this [multiple times].

So that is what I think that changed me in those two years [I spent in the United States].

Interestingly, this study found that it was only after repatriation that the US-educated Chinese would realize that they had adopted certain Western soft skills.

Matthew (personal communication, August 14, 2015), the Business Developer in the joint US-China university said:

I think that one of the things I really enjoyed a lot in the United States is the social part, how you interact with recruiters, classmates, how you find your network, how to identify the connections. It's a very powerful skill. After I came back to China I realized that not all the people know about those skills, which makes me very competitive in China.

Melissa (personal communication, December 7, 2015) also had a similar post-US education realization. She explained that, although she knew of this change in herself, her adoption of Western social norms became pronounced only when she started working in a MNC in China. Referring to her soft skills as her abilities to get along well with her co-workers, practice team work, recognizing others' contribution to one's success, and allocate work to her team members, Melissa (personal communication, December 7, 2015) reflected upon her post-US education experiences:

It was while I was in the U.S., but it made the change more obvious after I return to China. Currently I am using both Chinese and Western soft skills when working with people because in the company I have both Chinese and foreign colleagues.

Western communication and presentation style. US-educated Chinese nationals in MNC's generally used Western communication styles. Melissa (personal communication, August 10, 2015), an assistant vice president in a financial institution, described this approach as "direct but polite". In addition to adopting a more direct style in communicating, being able to communicate in English and having presentation skills were also pointed out as significant and valuable in the MNC environment.

Returnees started applying their Western communication skills the moment they began interviewing for employment with the MNCs. Their ability to communicate in English left prospective employers with a positive impression. Matthew (personal communication, August 14, 2015), who managed the business development programs in a joint US-China university, highlighted the importance of this skill:

I would say communication skills with people. Interview skills and how to make an impression for the people. These kinds of skills, especially in this fast paced world, are very important. . . . Those are the skills I learned in the United States that I know are useful right now in this world.

MNC returnees would routinely use their US-acquired presentation skills to facilitate discussions between members of their organization and its non-English speaking stakeholders. Associate Manager Mark (personal communication, August 17, 2015), exemplified a returnee who was hired by an MNC because of these Western skills:

My presentation skills, also my English speaking improved in the United States, I think that's the main reason I got my job. . . . Those interviews are not easy to overcome. So, I kind'a used my analytical skills learned especially in the corporate finance area and then I did well in those interviews and presentations.

They were able to address a multicultural audience. Mark (personal communication, August 17, 2015), a junior manager in an international bank, described one of his normal tasks:

Sometimes your boss would need you to do some summaries, for example, how you have done, how the team has done this month. . . . A lot of times, the boss of my boss, they are foreigners. They may be Indians, so you cannot do this in Chinese. You have to prepare a presentation in English so you won't have to do them again if your boss passes it on to this boss.

Knowing that they could present information in English boosted their confidence level and led to the sense of self-efficacy. Referring to this as “independence”, Melody (personal communication, August 10, 2015), a team leader for an IT unit, felt that the ability to conduct presentations in English helped her confidently perform her job.

What I learned a lot from there [US] as you mentioned is independence. That's very important to me, I think. Because now I need to do some demo to clients and I don't know why, when I'm back from the US, when I do the presentations based on stats, I look very confident but actually maybe I'm not still confident myself but only I know that. Other people don't think, they can't see that. When I do a presentation, maybe I'm not so familiar with this part. I just give others the impression that I'm very good at that part.

Presenting information in China using Microsoft PowerPoint¹⁶ was subject to cultural nuances. The perception about what qualified as an effective presentation differed between the domestically-trained Chinese professionals and those trained in the

¹⁶ Microsoft PowerPoint is a widely used computer application for creating and conducting slide presentations.

West. Whereas students and professionals in the United States were trained to be succinct and to minimize the use of heavy text on presentation slides, the expectation and basis of good work was the opposite in China. Maxwell (personal communication, August 18, 2015), a consultant for a U.S. consulting company operating in China pointed to this culturally-nuanced aspect of his job. He described this situation in terms of the Chinese focus on quantity over substance.

Here people value more on material. Over there it's more value. ...So for example, when we are doing work, and there's a deliverable that needs to be done, the U.S. approach, you do a PowerPoint. You present your information and present to an audience. U.S. way. Simple. Get your key bullet points written on the slides. So, normally you will have boom boom boom three bullet points. The heading basically describing what's the general idea. You present it through verbiage, words, communication. China. Three points no good. Write everything on the slide. . . . Their impression is that I need to show a lot of stuff on this PowerPoint. I want to demonstrate to the audience that I prepared a lot into this slide. It's perception versus substance.

Being an employee of an MNC and not a domestically-owned organization, Maxwell (personal communication, August 18, 2015) felt he could create his presentations the way he was trained in the United States:

When I do the presentation in China I will never write anything, even for a suggestion. I don't write a lot of stuff for our clients to let them know that we spent a lot of time. I want to demonstrate to them that whatever I say is a demonstration of my experience. It's never about how much I wrote.

Yet, there were returnees such as Monica (personal communication, August 17, 2015), who was working in a Canadian company that provided test preparation tutoring to Chinese students aspiring to study abroad, would have to curtail directness in her communication style in order to work well with her domestic clients. She said, “Sometimes you cannot speak very, very direct because if it’s too directly, the kids will say ‘Oh, you are too strict’.” The subtlety in communication pervasive in the Chinese society meant that actions contrary to it would not be received well by the traditional Chinese. Returnees still had to match their communication style with the type of individuals with whom they are communicating.

Trust-based social relations. Returnees working in multinational corporations, particularly those who interacted with the local constituents of their organizations, were subject to the trust-based social norms in China. Returnees who were away from China for an extended period of time faced the challenge of diminished social connections. For this group of returnees, they quickly realized that they lost their *guanxi* or professional connections when they left for the United States. Having to rebuild a social or business network was a challenge that many of the participants of this study faced when they repatriated. They worked on establishing themselves as US-educated Chinese. Monica (personal communication, August 17, 2015), who once tried to establish her own business, recalled what she felt during the early days of her return:

I found that I may have stayed there for too long so I never get used to the society here. So I feel like no relationship. In China you have to have strong connection with *guanxi*. So I found out that I lost some *guanxi* here.

Maxwell (personal communication, August 18, 2015), who had been in the United States since high school, had difficulties being accepted by the professional community where he was tasked to build business partnerships. The domestic Chinese did not initially see a direct fit between his Western education and the local needs. Through “time and patience”, Maxwell (personal communication, August 18, 2015) was able to penetrate the Chinese market after a year of building his professional and social credibility with his Chinese clientele. Maxwell’s (personal communication, August 18, 2015) story underscored the importance of building relationships in China:

And because they didn’t trust me I won’t be able to do anything so I’ll turn around. Give me an offer, bring a client to talk about. So I initially for the first year I didn’t have the support. And that mainly attributed to the mindset of the local people here is that even though he’s from the United States, we don’t know how he can do this. So let’s not even risk putting him out. After a year, I first have to make friends first with the couple of persons from a personally stance. It’s like... From the get go I, nobody really cared, but I know I have to have a breakthrough somewhere. I have to make a personally friend with one of the company partners of the client. Convince him for a year and say ‘listen, this is who I am. You can trust me from a personal stand point. You can also trust me on a professional stand point. So you go through that with a lot of discussion and a lot of networking.

Once their social network in China was established, the US-educated returnees became valuable assets in the MNC’s. The combination of their knowledge of Western systems and social norms and profound understanding of the Chinese culture enabled

them to develop programs that involved local Chinese and international constituents.

Mimi (personal communication, August 21, 2015), who had work experiences in two MNC's said:

In this organization I find it very interesting as I'm playing the role of putting the conference. . . . I'm always able to connect with all the different stakeholders.

Some of them come from States, some are very local, some of them from [a US-based entertainment company]. For example, I'm having a discussion about the different policy of the company and everyone has so many different ideas. I'm able to organize the discussion. Everyone will come to the conclusion that 'Ok, we want to go.

These participant remarks showed that, with time and patience, the US-educated returnees were able to work through the complications that different cultural backgrounds bring to their professional lives.

Inclusive Leadership. New professionals and experienced leaders embodied the increasing belief in the value of inclusive leadership in organizations in China. The desire for this type of leadership was encapsulated in this recent MBA graduate's statement:

Mark (personal communication, August 17, 2015), said, "If you are a leader . . . you should be open to ideas, up from you and under you." This study found that US-educated returnees in MNC's practiced inclusive leadership in two ways: mentoring their staff and lessening the power distance between them and their staff members.

Mentoring. Helping others reach their full potential through mentoring was a goal that five out of ten returnees in MNC's mentioned in their interviews. Mimi (personal communication, August 21, 2015), the HR professional in the entertainment sector, felt

that it was important for leaders “to give that exposure, give that opportunity” to team members who showed potential, and not to “hold them back”. As a trained Life Coach, Mimi also emphasized her strong belief in staff development during this same interview:

I want to have my star to go towards their potential. To push their comfort zone. I’m very authentic. I’m going to give hard feedback but with good intention. So I’m the one who cares about them.

For Matthew (personal communication, August 14, 2015), a mid-manager in a joint US-China university, staff development meant to giving more power to those he led:

I especially like the words when talking about leadership style are ‘empowering’ and also ‘enabling’. I feel like empowering, you really need to give people more power make and sure that they have the motivation to try new things, take risks, and make bigger progress in a short or limited time span. That’s empowering. Enabling as a leader, you need to not only make sure that they have the willingness to do things, but also have the skills that enable them. For example, I’m discussing with my boss this morning regarding potential opportunities to provide project management skill training to our employees. One employee already came to me. She wanted to learn project management. . . . So those sorts of things, that’s enabling our employees to do a good job. I’m kind of an easy to approach person, so whenever people have questions they’ll always approach me.

Melissa’s (personal communication, August 10, 2015), belief in “grooming others to replace her when she moved on” from her mid-management position in a technology-based department served as a second example of this inclusive leadership. A third example of mentoring came from Monica (personal communication, August 17, 2015).

She would provide “positive encouragement” to Chinese children learning under her tutelage. Monica’s approach to human development was a departure from the traditional Chinese approach of making sarcastic remarks to encourage better performance in students. The mentoring behavior of these returnees reflected the value they placed on the growth and development of others.

Lessening the power distance. Treating subordinates as equal to them and being approachable toward their staff indicated that returnees shared their authority with their staff. Five of the returnees in MNC’s believed that their positions in their organizations did not make them better people than their staff. This mindset differed from the distant leadership emanating from traditional Chinese hierarchical organizations. Marvin (personal communication, August 14, 2015), the administrator in a joint US-China university, described how he would try to change this mindset within his university:

In China it’s very hierarchical. If I am hired because of my title, the members will actually work in fear. . . . So they always felt that they need to always show respect to the managers. There’s not a direct communication between the superior and the subordinates. But I’ve been trying to change that from a mental side. I kept telling them that, if I asked you to do some work, you won’t have to say yes. You can say no depending on the situation. Say you have family issues and you can’t do overtime right now. We can iron out our differences and still work together. The worst thing is that if you can’t work with me I’ll find someone else who can do the project. But at the same time, if I ask you to do work, I am asking you to do me a favor. Don’t think that because you get paid, therefore you have to work for me.

Matthew (personal communication, August 14, 2015), who worked in the same joint US-China university, also believed in developing the Chinese ‘voice’. Awakening the public voice meant enabling the Chinese to provide feedback to the government. To this end, Matthew was, at the time of the interviews, collaborating with American educators to author a case book to be used in training professionals.

We’re trying to promote that we need to give a voice to the Chinese people. And the reason I feel that is the government is also very sophisticated. You cannot simply label it as bureaucratic. Sometimes they do try to solve some issues. But think about it, about how difficult it is to make just one person change, and then the whole country, the whole organization.

State-Owned Enterprise (SOE). Receiving advanced Western education in a field where the Chinese economy offered numerous career opportunities directly benefitted the Chinese returnees. The opportunity to apply acquired Western soft skills in SOE’s was however dependent on the SOE’s engagement with individuals from the West. This resulted in nuances in how information was presented to members of the organization.

Chinese communication style. Four of the seven returnees working in SOE’s that solely served the Chinese community were not using presentation or communication skills they learned abroad. Sheng (personal communication, August 18, 2015), an MBA graduate working for an SOE as a financial trader, did not find much use for his Western soft skills. He said:

There's a bit of cultural differences, so for soft skills, they are useful in the States.

But back in China, to be honest, I haven't thought it's useful for a typical Chinese company. They are more useful for multinational companies.

Shao (personal communication, August 21, 2015), who had been back in China for over ten years and was leading an SOE as a Chief Executive Officer, could not use the more direct approach to communication used in the West.

In China I cannot speak frankly with them. They think it's too strong. I could not say directly. I would need to find a different way to say the same thing so I think the background of each country is different. If you want to make things happen, you need to use your mind in a way that they can accept.

Maintaining US-based social networks. Comprising a cohort of government scholars sent by a provincial government in the eastern part of China, six of the returnees had remained good friends since they met as US-bound international students over a decade ago. (There were other returnees that belonged to this cohort of scholars that I met in China but did not have the opportunity to interview.) In addition, there was also an expressed desire to continue staying in touch with the alumni associations of their universities. For example, Song (personal communication, August 21, 2015), who attended the MBA program in a state university in the mid-western region of the U.S., said it would be beneficial to have professional connections abroad. The important point here, as I personally observed it while in China, was that these returnees shared a special bond which they nurtured through annual reunions or get-togethers.

Western Approaches to leadership. Five returnees with executive responsibilities in SOE's focused on their responsibilities as leaders to improve their team's performances. They worked toward accomplishing these goals by engaging in team building activities and creating an atmosphere that fostered increased productivity. As a new professional in an SOE and an aspiring leader, Sheng (personal communication, August 18, 2015) valued leadership capable of creating organizational cultures that provided a "family" atmosphere. This newer type of leadership found in the mindset of the younger Chinese generation was what Song (personal communication, August 21, 2015), who was from an earlier generation of US-educated returnees, was striving to provide. In his role as a SOE General Manager, Song (personal communication, August 21, 2015) spoke about how he approached leadership for his group of young workers:

I think most of the time I'm tough but also I am actually good, particularly for Chinese younger generation. Given that all those guys are younger . . . you can't use the way you used to treat the 60's or 70's to treat them. . . . I have to use the way they accept to manage people. So I have to balance my toughness with my kindness to them in order for them to have the incentive to work harder.

Inclusive leadership was evident in how the highest ranking SOE returnee described his relationship with his team. Sibó (personal communication, August 21, 2015), a 43-year old male CEO of a large SOE, exhibited a very polite, kind, and gentle demeanor throughout the time that he helped me navigate parts of China. Sibó shared that he did not find his in-classroom education in the U.S. significant. What was significant for him was his experiences in the U.S. and how they changed him as a leader:

Maybe before I went to the United States, in China before I became a government official, there are different ranks. It's like order and do. Just like this. When I come back, maybe we can discuss. Maybe discuss more. Discuss with the lower level. Before I went there, what I want to do I just told them. When I came back, discuss. Brainstorm, then we do.

Comparing the shift in leadership style of returnees from a decade ago to any change in the leadership of younger returnees who may have had lessons in contemporary leadership theories (such as inclusive leadership, adaptive leadership, etc.) would render the former more significant. For the returnees in the SOE's, their adoption of Western leadership styles was even more significant because, although they did not work directly for the government, they were operating within the parameters developed by the Communist party.

State Universities. The higher education field, particularly in urban China, provided US-educated Chinese faculty members many opportunities to utilize their Western education and soft skills. With numerous US-educated faculty members preceding them in their organizations, following a Western-based curriculum was not problematic. In this social context, two findings were particularly interesting.

Use of Double Language. The language used in the classrooms of highly ranked Chinese state universities was described as “double language”. Uyen (personal communication, August 18, 2015), a professor of Economics, explained her teaching methods:

What I'm teaching for the Ph.D. level is like double language. The slides are in English but we talk in Chinese. For the undergraduate teaching, all are in English

so what we use is the same material and the same slides. Basically I don't see much difference. . . . I follow the former teacher [in China]. The course I'm teaching are in English. The former teacher was also a former student from the US so basically what they do is using the textbooks all over the world. I can't see much difference especially for the undergraduates. But for the graduate level, because of the difficulty of the content, we still use the English slides but we explain that in Chinese. It's better.

Two parallel educational systems. This study found that top ranking universities in China consisted of two parallel academic faculties: the domestically-educated faculty and the Western-educated faculty. These two groups of instructors did not have significant interactions with each other. While returnees teaching in highly ranked universities had continuous opportunities to engage in Western-based teaching and research methods, their domestically-educated peers were primarily using traditional Chinese teaching styles. For the latter group, this would mean non-participatory and top-down approach to education. In comparison, the returnees who occupied the Western-educated side of the organization would usually inherit the curriculum and teaching methods of their predecessors who were also educated in the West. Additionally, they expanded their Western education by attending academic conferences abroad and associating with alumni of other Western universities. Uyen's (personal communication, August 18, 2015), environment in the state university was a good example of this:

My colleagues especially now, all the new faculty members are overseas students. I think especially for some good universities in China, we stopped recruiting local faculty recently, in the last five years. So all the faculty members are overseas

students. . . . Most of us had undergraduate in China, but for the Ph.D.'s it's either US or Hong Kong or Singapore. Yeah. I think now it's mostly from the US.

The teaching environment in provincial colleges was not as conducive to the application of Western pedagogy. Older and more traditional Chinese faculty members did not appreciate the use of group-based projects in the classroom, according to provincial college Professor Uling (personal communication, August 13, 2015) who earned his Ph.D. in Education in the United States. He presumed that incorporation of Western based pedagogy in the classroom “pissed off” some teachers while “younger teachers are more acceptable of this type” of teaching. In addition to this issue, this 10-year returnee, was also concerned with his inability to fully apply Western pedagogy to his teaching practices:

I cannot fit some curriculum design from the U.S. with the curriculum design here in China. I'm not talking about the formulaic style but also about the essence of the teaching—the aims of the teaching here. Specifically, both of the two educational systems have something to learn from each other.

These US-educated faculty members desired to continue with their professional development and maintain their Western teaching skills. This normally entailed attending international academic conferences each year, which Professor Uyen was able to do. This opportunity was available to Professor Uyen because of her association with a first-rate university, but was not the case for Professor Uling who was employed in a provincial college.

Inclusive leadership in higher education. The most experienced and senior of the participants, Dr. Ube (personal communication, August 12, 2015), embodied transformational leadership. With more than two decades of industry experience in the field of economics, Dr. Ube exuded confidence and presence of a strong leader. His Western education was apparent in the way he spoke and dressed. Based on his remarks, Dr. Ube presented himself as a visionary who imagined a China that had a “good system” with more institutional rules and organizational members who would “play by the rules”. As University Dean of a world-class Chinese university and former CEO of a MNC, Dr. Ube stated that he believed in inclusive leadership. He also valued an employee with ambition and desire to success. Showing a Western-centric stance on leadership, he said that his employees did not have to obey him. He also said:

I am not really, my major is not really about leadership or organizational behavior but my experience about transformative leadership is that, when the people around you are looking lost, lost in terms of the direction in terms of where the organization is heading, you need someone who can almost revolutionize the way people think about the future. About how they can get together to rally the people around the same vision that you want to share with them. I was fortunate enough in the 20 years in the industry, I was able to see a little bit further down the road. I was able to work with various stakeholders, team members so that we are able to actually transform the organization.

Private entrepreneurs. Two of the twenty-four participants were private entrepreneurs. While they were not financially impoverished, neither one presented themselves as successful business people. Neither one considered themselves as leaders

in their own right when they were asked about leadership practices in their profession. Cao (personal communication, August 24, 2015), was one of the entrepreneurs. With less time constraints than his peers in the corporate world, he offered to show me around his city. It was during this time that it became apparent to me that Cao had authentically adopted certain Western social norms. His demeanor was not rushed unlike the normal Chinese demeanor and it was very natural for him to let women pass first. Cao also spoke several times about his appreciation for the traffic rules and practices in the United States. It was during our travels around the city that Cao revealed that he lost his SOE job when the organization took a financial downturn. At this point, he decided to be an independent businessman.

Chi-Chi, the “educational agent”, was the other entrepreneur. She spoke about how she had enjoyed being independent and been able to choose when she would work. She said that she wanted to work independently and “didn’t want to do something based on others’ regulations” (Chi-Chi, personal communication, August 17, 2015). Although Chi-Chi did not fully describe to me what she did, it later became apparent in our conversation that she was part of a private company who provided tutorial services to Chinese children that had plans for international education. In her role, Chi-Chi used her Western knowledge of what was included in college admission tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) in helping her tutees navigate the Western educational testing system.

Lack of occupational support. The lack of connection with an established organization meant that private entrepreneurs such as Cao had to independently develop their professional connections in China and heavily rely on their *guanxi*. It also meant

that they had no easy access to the career opportunities that were abundant in the flourishing enterprises owned by the ruling party. The consequences of not being associated with the state were evident in the socioeconomic status of these entrepreneurs. This lack of occupational support was evident in Cao's case. Cao was not in a lucrative occupation when compared to his US-educated peers working in the SOE's. He drove around in his old modest car. In comparison, Sibao and Song, and other Chinese returnees holding executive positions in the SOE's had newer and more expensive cars and employed drivers to take them around. In my interactions with Cao, including having a meal at a local restaurant, I sensed that he was watching his expenses. Although he was not acting destitute, I could tell that he wished he was doing financially better. For Cao (personal communication, August 24, 2015), there was a sense of regret with how international education did not result to a more successful career. In spite of this disappointing outcome, Cao's future plans included sending his only daughter to the U.S. because he believed in the value of his international education and experience.

Gendered consequence of Western education. Chi-Chi's (personal communication, August 17, 2015) social relations as a private entrepreneur and as a female US-educated returnee was marked with a degree of regret. Her 6-year sojourn in the U.S. led to her strong sense of independence which then resulted in her departure from the traditional Chinese gendered social norms. At the age of 39 years, she had become too strong-willed for the traditional Chinese men. In her words, Chi-Chi was either too "unChinese" to the Chinese men, or they were too Chinese for her. Considering herself as "not charming anymore" to her male peers, Chi-Chi considered her single marital status as the unpleasant consequence of her Western education.

The two participants representing the private entrepreneur category of this study showed that in the state-run Chinese society, the life of a private entrepreneur was different from those in the SOE's. Their chosen path appeared liberating on the one hand because they did not answer as much to state demands, yet constricted on the other because of the lack of organizational and financial support. According to Chi-Chi (personal communication, August, 17, 2015), establishing a business in China required an enormous amount of money. Unless the returnees came from very affluent families, it was almost impossible for them to make huge financial investments to fully launch a business in China. In terms of the application of their Western education, the multiple and prolonged engagements I had with Cao during this study provided enough opportunities for me to see how, as an entrepreneur, he could not find opportunities to use what he learned in the U.S. because he was operating within an organization. There was no opportunity to take on leadership roles. This observation of the Chinese private entrepreneurs' life pointed to the prominent role that the Chinese government had in the professional successes of US-educated Chinese nationals.

The Chinese 'Bridger'

The phrase "I'm a bridger" emerged from my interview with Mimi (personal communication, August 21, 2015), an HR Manager. Mimi epitomized the returnee who acted deliberately to connect individuals and value systems from the East and the West so that they could work well together. Mimi's application of her Western skills was different from what was anticipated that catalyzed the interpretation of the responses of other participants in a particular way. Mimi and other participants of this study used their U.S. education not to displace the practices and social norms that existed in China but to

bridge the differences between the Western and Eastern practices. From this perspective, behaviors directed toward achieving harmonious relationships between the Chinese and individuals from the West were gleaned from the responses of multiple participants. The behaviors of these participants, as they described them during the interviews, also indicated that they were working toward a balance between following local social norms and adopting certain Western skills that they learned in the United States. The remaining sections of this chapter would highlight the significance of this finding.

Bridging behaviors

Seventeen of the 24 participants had bridging behaviors which were gleaned from their responses to questions about their experiences of leadership in China.

These responses reflected the following bridging behaviors: incorporating U.S. ways with local practices; facilitating the exchange of accurate information between the Chinese people and foreign constituents; translating culturally-nuanced social norms; and maintaining US-based relationships. Based on the presence of any of these bridging behaviors, the participants were classified as *bridgers* or *non-bridgers* (Table 6).

The returnees had the ability to ‘bridge’ because of their experiences of American culture and the various systems in the United States. In addition, during theoretical sampling, six of the seven participants who responded to follow-up questions generally agreed with the notion that they had the distinctive ability to apply certain Western concepts and practices to their workplace because of their international education. Discussed in the following sections were the various ways in which the Chinese returnees exhibited the bridging behavior.

Table 6¹⁸.*Distribution of Bridgers and Non-Bridgers*

	Returnee	Position	Organization Type	Age	Years of Repatriation	Years in U.S.
Bridger	Cao	Software Developer	Private Ent	49	10	1
	Chi-Chi	Testing Coordinator	Private Ent	39	5	6
	Mark	Associate Manager	MNC	24	2	2 years
	Marvin	Administrative Office Director	MNC	36	9	2
	Matthew	Assistant Director	MNC	36	1	3
	Maxwell	Project Leader	MNC	35	2	13
	Melissa	Assistant Vice President	MNC	39	1	8
	Melody	Product Manager	MNC	32	5	3
	Mike	Sales Director	MNC	28	3	3
	Mimi	HR Manager	MNC	31	7	2
	Monica	Test Coach	MNC	31	5	3 years
	Sheng	Trader	SOE	27	2	5 years
	Shing-shing	Sales Manager	SOE	28	4	2
	Song	General Manager	SOE	40	10	1
	Ube	Dean, Professor	State University	45	21	4
	Ursula	Assistant Professor	State University	32	4	6
	Uyen	Assistant Professor	State University	30	2	5
Non-Bridger	Cholong	Department Chief	Public	44	10	1
	Guang	Chief of Finance	SOE	41	10	1
	Shao	Vice General Manager	SOE	39	10	1
	Shi-shi	Sales Manager	SOE	28	2	5
	Sibo	CEO	SOE	43	10	1
	Uling	Professor of English, University	State University (Provincial)	36	10	1

¹⁸ The presence of bridging behavior could not be assessed in the returnee housewife based on her responses. As a result, she was not included in this table. Private Ent refers to private entrepreneurs.

Incorporating US ways with local practices. Bridging required the ability to envision how Western concepts could benefit the local environment. An excellent example of what *bridgers* do was Matthew's project. At the time of this study, Matthew was actively collaborating with colleagues in the U.S. in authoring a book China. Prior to this collaboration, Matthew had already translated a book from English to Chinese to provide professional development materials to Chinese employees. These bridging activities entailed intentionality. Mimi (personal communication, August 19, 2015), the Human Resource professional in an MNC and Life Coach who put the *bridger* label upon herself during her interview, described this cognitive process:

I can easily connect how US work and then understand this leader. Most of them are coming from the US. Their mindset or working model really follows the US thing. But when it comes to China, there's a lot of difference in how the union play out there. So I can connect, helping them understand their perspective to what works in the US, what's not working here, and what can work here. So I can like bridging them from their experience to the local needs. So I think it's something interesting. I didn't think about this before, but now I realize that I'm a *bridger*—a bridge for them because I understand the local practice and I also understand how US work. Then I can help bridge them to help them understand their side and the China side.

Younger professionals who were not in leadership positions showed the *bridger* potential. In his position as a trader in a Chinese investment company that had international clients, Sheng (personal communication, August 18, 2015) had ideas related to Western leadership and organizational culture. In speaking about the leadership style

he favored, Sheng described the business culture of an online retail company which made employees feel “they’re like a whole family. They have different festivals, different celebrations. A lot of company culture events every week, so it’s going to be very fun. So the company is not like a company.” This reflected the 21st century notion of leadership.

Melissa’s bridging was in her way of communicating with her co-workers.

Melissa (personal communication, August 10, 2015), the Associate Vice President (AVP) of an IT Unit, differentiated herself from her domestic counterparts in terms of the way she related with people in her organization. She said that she was direct in her manner of speaking and polite at the same time. Melissa’s communication style reflected a fusion of the Western way of communication with the Eastern subtleness to avoid frankness.

Bridging two disparate methods was not always possible. For example, the provincial college faculty member Professor Uling (personal statement, August 13, 2015) could not connect the pedagogical systems followed in U.S. and in China. He said:

I cannot fit some curriculum design from the U.S. with the curriculum design here in China. I’m not talking about the formulaic style but also about the essence of the teaching—the aims of the teaching here. Specifically, both of the two educational systems have something to learn from each other.

This comparison between Professor Uling’s situation and that of Mimi’s and Melissa’s showed how it was not always feasible to connect Eastern and Western systems even with Western education.

Facilitating the exchange of information. Another type of bridging was in the form of liaison work between individuals between the East and the West. Melissa (personal communication, August 10, 2015), who worked in an American financial

company, said that she facilitated communication between Easterners and Westerners.

HR Manager Mimi (personal communication, August 19, 2015), also talked about communication between individuals from these two worlds and described what it took to ensure the smooth flow of information between her organization's Chinese and international constituents:

It takes time. It's not a one single deal. It takes mutual understanding, a lot of conversations to put things forward. I think it's a very interesting perspective because how you operate in China is actually very different. It's the same but it's also very different from the U.S. So for them, that's also a learning journey and you accompany them in this learning journey. You give information. You cannot overwhelm them at one time. You need to feed them when their actual position need to be made and you need to establish that it's a journey. You need to have to... otherwise it will be very awkward.

Bridging was clearly evident in the work of those in MNC's. Colleagues Marvin (personal communication, August 18, 2015) and Maxwell (personal communication, August 18, 2015) who worked in the same joint US-China university, also described themselves as *bridgers*. Marvin provided an excellent description of this behavior:

So for me, I can understand and I put myself in the shoes of different people. How to facilitate. So when people get confused, 'why did they say that', then I explain that it's the typical Chinese way. So, if they want you to do something they will tell you, do this. Maybe they'll tell you, if they want you to do A, they will not say Do A. Maybe they will tell you that doing B is acceptable, but doing B is not a perfect solution, so I, or something. So you will be confused about what they

want us to do and then, but the Chinese can understand the nuances. They'll explain. Tell them. Sometimes when people use a word, it's very common in Chinese but it may sound a little bit rude in English. You also explain. So, in Chinese it doesn't mean that they're getting hot or hostile or something. It's just cultural difference.

However, the act of bridging was not exclusively performed by the returnees in the MNC's. Returnees in SOE's that held positions of authority acted as *bridgers* as well when they applied Western business concepts (i.e., capital management models, international educational trends) or infused the Western style of leadership in their work. This was apparent in the work that Mimi performed in her position as HR Manager.

Bridging was also not exclusively associated with organizational responsibilities. The Chinese returnees acted as *bridgers* among their Chinese peers who had no international experience when they dispelled rumors or corrected inaccurate beliefs about the United States. Shing-shing (personal communication, August 21, 2015), a soft-spoken sales manager in an SOE felt that, as a US-educated returnee, she had a particular role to correct certain misconceptions about international education:

I can share what I thought in the US. For example, some people say Chinese students spend too much time to study and American students don't need to study hard and they have a lot of time to play, to do whatever they want.

Certainly, providing information about the United States or the Western culture in general was a function of education that returnees in higher education easily performed. Western concepts and pedagogy were widely used, but only to the extent that the faculty members had the support of the organization. In the case of three of the four faculty

members who participated in this study, their employment in top-ranking Chinese universities provided them the environment to apply their Western skills because the top leadership of these universities were educated in the United States.

Translating culturally-nuanced social norms. The *bridgers* translated culturally-nuanced messages for individuals from the West. Melody (personal communication, August 10, 2015), explained this in detail:

People don't express exactly what they were thinking, like their parents. They have to be very nice. Maybe they want to apply for A, but they will say B. So you have to guess what their parents and what the kids like. Because sometimes they don't tell you the truth. Sometimes they also want another plan. . . . So you have to know what they really want and sometimes you cannot speak very, very direct because if it's too directly, the kids will say 'Oh, you are too strict'.

As well, Marvin (personal communication, August 18, 2015), provided this example of what he would say to Westerners:

When we meet important guests, or visit the government agency, sometime people, we're talking. On the Chinese side, maybe suddenly someone's cell phone will ring. Then they will say excuse me, sometime they will not. . . . For foreigners, very unacceptable particularly for those people who travel to China for the first time. . . . So I say, I tell you what, this is very common in China. They don't mean to be mean, to be rude. It's just that way so don't be offended.

In terms of helping the Chinese understand Western norms, this was Marvin's way of bridging. In preparation for an event, Marvin said that he would tell his fellow Chinese the following:

In this meeting, make sure you dress up because for Americans this is a very formal occasion. So we should dress up a little bit, so we should wear a long sleeve shirt than short sleeved shirts. Americans think short sleeve shirts are so weird. But in China, if you look at all the government officials, they all wear short sleeved shirts. . . . That is not weird. So sometimes you need to facilitate people's understanding to avoid unnecessary misunderstanding about that. So, that will offer a lot of value.

Maintaining US-based relationships. Their continued effort to connect with the West was clearly evident in the way the returnees intentionally chose to work in certain occupational settings. Many of the returnees targeted MNC's for their employment after graduation. For those working in SOE's, returnees such as Song (personal communication, August 21, 2015) would also take steps to maintain this Western connection. Song was very interested in finding out how university alumni associations could benefit them even though they were overseas. Indeed, through their social networks with individuals they knew as international students, they were able to maintain a US-China relationship.

Reasons for bridging

There was the realization among *bridgers* that “the world is really small . . . [and] to have certain opportunities, you really need to have the right network” (Matthew, personal communication, August 18, 2015). Marvin (personal communication, August 18, 2015), who attended the same Research 1 university as Matthew, expressed the same thought: “Working in a global environment is more important when you have these Western perspectives.” This was true not only for the business people in both the MNC's

and SOE's but also for the returnees who taught in higher education institutions. The Chinese professors valued their ability to connect with colleagues in the West with whom they could potentially co-author journal articles.

The voluntarily acts of bridging found in the US-educated returnees were possible because of their inherent desire to share with their fellow Chinese what they learned in the United States. Maxwell (personal communication, August 18, 2015) explained this well:

Because I already worked in the United States before coming back to take on this job but I don't believe that just because they're Chinese and they are trained differently, therefore I can no longer work with them. It really depends on how I adapt, how I understand what they mean and to find a common place and try to strike a balance in between us. I think at the end of the day, we are all human and we all understand what we are saying and what you mean about what. But if I can bridge those gaps, that's how we will achieve business success.

As depicted by the participants, these acts of bridging were distinguishable in the behaviors of US-educated Chinese returnees and could perhaps classify them as global leaders. Along with the insight obtained from this study about their international education experiences, the bridging behaviors of these participants served as building blocks to the conceptualization about the US-educated Chinese returnee. As discussed next in Chapter Five, this study contributed new concepts to several fields, including global leadership, international education, and cross-cultural studies.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This study looked at the role that Western education played in how US-educated Chinese nationals practiced leadership in China. A review of literature in international education, cross-cultural studies, and leadership revealed a limited number of studies on how leadership was being practiced by post-Mao Chinese returnees. Given the cultural context of the phenomenon to be explored, existing theories of leadership, including the more nascent global leadership concepts of global mindset (Story & Barbuto, 2011), cosmopolitanism (Levy et al., 2007), and the culturally endorsed implicit leadership theory (Javidan, Dorfman, de Luque, & House, 2006) were deemed not a good fit as a theoretical framework for this study. This resulted in the decision to employ the grounded theory methodology for this study. As a grounded theory study, analysis of the findings of this study generated a new understanding about the professional practices of the US-educated Chinese nationals who returned to China, including the role of social context in how they apply their Western skill sets and the formation of the *bridger* role. This study also obtained data that support existing concepts surrounding the Chinese participation in Western education as well as certain attributes of global leadership.

Review of Methodologies

This study utilized the Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) with a constructivist orientation. The literature review for this study revealed a limited amount of empirical studies on the post-US professional life of the Chinese nationals. The literature review also indicated that existing theories in fields related to international education and repatriation did not offer an adequate theoretical framework for the question that the study aimed to answer. This research question entailed understanding

their lived experiences as Chinese returnees. Grounded Theory Methodology's flexible approach to data collection and systematic approach to data analysis allowed this study to hone in on emergent themes. Closely following the steps prescribed for data analysis of grounded theory studies, which included open and focused coding and theoretical sampling, resulted in the construction of a new concept which is discussed in this chapter. Adopting this methodology proved to be a wise choice for this study.

Given the anticipated culturally rich and nuanced data that this study would collect, Berryman, Soohoo, & Nevin's (2013) Culturally Responsive Methodology (CRM) was also adopted. CRM paved the way for me to establish the rapport I needed to develop with the Chinese participants. Techniques of CRM were invaluable in earning the trust of the participants so that they would share their time and personal stories with me. With the exception of one virtual participant's interview conducted through email and three follow up questions electronically sent to and answered by eight participants, I completed the data collection portion of this study entirely in China.

Interviewing this study's participants in-country resulted in the effective integration of GTM and CRM. In addition, investing the time and effort to travel to their locations demonstrated to the Chinese participants my commitment to and passion for the study, and by doing so, earned their attention and participation. They were also intrigued and honored by the attention focused on their shared experiences. The in-country nature of the study contributed to its trustworthiness and validity. Meeting the participants in person also provided richer data to the study and a more personally meaningful experience for each of the participants. In my role as a researcher, the authentic fusion of GTM and CRM made this study's data collection personally fulfilling.

Review of Research Questions

The following research questions aimed to illuminate the intersection between Western education, Chinese culture, and leadership and discover the liminal spaces occupied by these Chinese returnees. The questions that informed this study were: (1) How do Chinese nationals with a graduate degree from the United States enact leadership in China? (2) Does Western education align with Chinese organization leaders' expectations? (3) In what ways do US-educated Chinese nationals negotiate emergent differences between their perspectives and the perspectives of those who were not Western-trained? (4) In what ways do they experience and react to different value sets? Answers to these questions were gleaned from the participants' remarks. These findings and the concepts that this study generated from the collected data are discussed in the following section.

Overview of Findings

The aim of this dissertation was to investigate the intersection between the experience of Western education, leadership, and the Chinese culture. In discussing this study's findings, I strived to explain how each of these elements, and their relationship with each other, shape the Chinese returnees' professional lives. To start this section, I selected Marvin's remark (personal communication, August 14, 2015) to highlight the role of international education in their lives as US-educated Chinese nationals.

The point of international education is not about knowledge but to let people experience different things so people understand and build their awareness that people think in different ways and people behave in different ways.

The decision to attend graduate school overseas was in itself testimony to the Chinese national's willingness to learn about the world outside China. While their stated goal was to pursue advanced degrees, the underlying motivation to participate in international education was these returnees' desire to experience the Western culture in general, and American culture in particular. With this mindset, these international students were equally attentive to the education they were receiving inside and outside the classroom. Challenged with new methods of learning, including group work and class presentations, their classroom experiences honed their Western soft skills. Their participation in extra-curricular activities that were significantly foreign, such as Bible study sessions and travelling across the U.S., further indicated that they came ready to learn about the different aspects of the Western culture. Described by the returnees as enjoyable, positive, and life changing, their engagements with their host society left an indelible mark on their lives and served as the blue-print for their future relationships with people and organizations from the United States.

Whether it was over a period of one year or more than five years, the participants gained enough insight about the different systems in place in their host country. They also had enough experiences in engaging with the American culture that would influence future intercultural engagements. Returnees who aimed at launching a career within a multinational corporation were the immediate recipients of the benefits of this international endeavor. State-owned enterprises with international stakeholders and highly-ranked state universities with international programs were also sites of employment for these returnees. Private entrepreneurs and employees in state-owned organizations that had limited international business relationships found rare

opportunities to practice their Western education. For those who targeted a global arena for their careers, their acquired Western skills sets, comprised of a higher proficiency in the English language, Western industry-based knowledge and organizational skills, creative and critical thinking, open-mindedness, and the ability to operate effectively in an international arena, were instrumental in their successful searches for employment in China. As a whole, the returnees presented themselves as confident US-educated professionals among their domestically-educated peers in China.

Chinese nationals that undergo this learning process develop, in varying degrees, cultural and emotional intelligence. Cultural intelligence is manifested cognitively, behaviorally, or motivationally. Growth in this area contributes to the overall capacity of US-educated Chinese returnees to utilize their education in their leadership practices. Emotional intelligence is manifested through cross-cultural code switching that is other-focused and provides the empathic ability necessary to recognize the unique dynamics involved in cross-cultural human interactions.

This study found that Chinese returnees work in one of the following types of organizations: multinational corporations, state-owned enterprises, state universities, or private entrepreneurship. The manner in which they applied their Western education in China was based on the social norms prevalent in these various types of organizations. Returnees in organizations that dealt mainly with domestic constituents had limited application of their Western education beyond the conceptual aspects of their job, compared to those working within multinational corporations. To this point, returnees employed by multinational corporations with responsibilities to engage with foreign constituents had an environment conducive to the *bridger* behavior. Still, regardless of

the social context of the organization, various degrees of inclusive leadership were evident across the organization types.

Findings from this study, as discussed below, indicate a relationship between (1) the educational experiences of the Chinese nationals in the U.S., (2) their repatriation as professionals in China, and (3) how they apply their Western education in the social context within their Chinese organizations. As described in the following sections, each of these elements contributes to the construction of the *bridger* role in the Chinese nationals' leadership practices that this study has come to understand. These elements scaffold the Chinese returnees' unique role and lead them to a space that they occupy as US-educated individuals. As an outcome of international education, the concept of the *bridger* arises from the understanding that certain aspects of the Chinese nationals' international education experiences converge with the Chinese mindset on leadership. This convergence provides the skill set for these US-educated Chinese returnees to be leaders in their respective organizations.

Chinese Leaders as *Bridgers*

This study proposes several concepts regarding the *bridger*, which are discussed in the following sections: (1) definition of *bridger*; (2) empathy's role in bridging; (3) path to being a *bridger*; (4) bridging behavior; (5) factors affecting the bridging behavior; and (6) liminal space of the *bridger*. Following these sections is a discussion on how existing theories on leadership are linked to these study's findings. Finally, the discussion about the *bridger* ends with a brief note about the social networks they comprise that appear to be emerging in China.

Defining the *bridger*

An interesting finding of this study included one of the participant's self-definition using the word "bridger". This word served as an *in vivo* code in the analytical process of this study. In addition, another participant used the word "bridge" to describe his behavior when interacting with individuals that differ in cultures. Given the significance of this finding, the term *bridger* was adopted in this study to describe a person who uses internationally-acquired skill sets to influence individuals from different cultural backgrounds to arrive at a common understanding.

The ability to approach an Eastern condition using Western strategies, or Western conditions using Eastern strategies is common among *bridgers*. In this role, the *bridger* occupies a multi-dimensional third space, interacts with other *bridgers*, and provides a type of leadership that promotes change in cross-cultural settings. How a *bridger* practices leadership is largely shaped by the *bridger's* social context. In the context of this study, the term *bridger* is used to refer to US-educated Chinese nationals that have returned to China and who exhibit a bridging behavior. Each of this concept's elements is explained more as the findings about the Chinese returnees are discussed in this chapter.

Empathy's Role in Bridging

This study has found that the Chinese returnees developed empathy through their international experiences in the United States. The concept of 'other'—empathy—that the Chinese returnees developed while in the U.S. reflects an important element of a model of Chinese leadership competence discussed earlier in Chapter 2 (Chen & An, 2009). Chen and An's (2009) model states that the Chinese leadership competence includes self-cultivation, which they defined as the following:

Self-cultivation is a process of transforming and moving the leader from the lower to the higher level of the developmental ladder of leadership competence. It is the process of unceasingly edifying, liberating, and purifying personal attributes of the self. These attributes are ruled under the umbrella of ‘great empathy,’ which dictates the unity is integrated with diversities, and particularly is identified with universality. This interfusion and interpenetration of human multiplicities ‘formulates the ideal of fellow-feeling by expanding the self-consciousness to the consciousness of one’s fellow persons’ and is dependent on the two human abilities of sensitivity and creativity” (Chen & An, 2009, pp. 200-201).

That “unity is integrated with diversities” (Chen & An, 2009, p. 201) is an important connection that the Chinese leadership model has with the Chinese *bridger’s* ability to facilitate harmonious relationships between Eastern and Western peoples. As a result of their educational experiences abroad, the Chinese returnees in this study are more likely to achieve self-cultivation, thus empathy, than those who have limited exposure to diversity. Chen and An’s (2009) leadership competence model offers a cultural-behavioral frame that supports the new concept regarding the development of a *bridger* that this study proposes. That is, US-educated returnees who have been equipped with empathy take on the *bridger* role when they strive for harmony in their interactions with different cultures.

Recognizing the convergence of Chen and An’s (2009) model of leadership with the role of empathy, this study found that this human element played a pivotal role in the leadership practices of the Chinese returnees. This realization of this conceptual convergence propelled my data analysis to a new level of abstraction that I strived to

attain in this GTM study. In this respect, this aspect of my data analysis served as the theoretical sampling step that is characteristic of GTM studies. It was on the basis of this theoretical sampling that I conceptualized the path toward being a Chinese *bridger*, as discussed in the next section.

Path to Being a Chinese Bridger

The path to the development of the bridger role begins with the international education experience. This path is illustrated in Figure 1. Through their exposure and experience of other cultures and systems, US-educated Chinese returnees develop a new understanding of the concept of the ‘other’. As international students in the United States, they see diversity in culture, thoughts, and ways of being. From the combined forces of positive engagements with American society as their host culture, practical lessons of group work learned in the classroom, and for some, mentorship from faculty advisors and supervisors, the Chinese nationals develop empathy for those who are different from them. As strangers who receive support from their hosts while sojourning abroad, they begin to see a value in empathy. This is not a surprising outcome of their experiences; it reflects the achievement of the general objective of education.

Figure 3

Development of a Bridger

From the Chinese cultural perspective, the development of empathy contributes to the self-cultivation needed to become good Chinese leaders (Chen & An, 2009).

Combining their acquired knowledge of other systems and cultures with empathy equips the Chinese returnees with a skill set that enables them to discern how best to apply their Western education. This cross-cultural application of Western education elicits their bridging behavior. Their ability to connect disparate value systems is what characterizes them as *bridgers*. In comparison to the previous century when China had limited engagement with the international community, the Chinese *bridgers* exhibit leadership that is important in the globalized world of the 21st century.

Using more than their increased proficiency in the English language, international education is manifested in the Chinese returnees' ability to effectively relate with people from the West. Conversely, they are able to help Westerners understand and navigate the Chinese culture. In this regard, Chinese returnees play a vital role in promoting healthy business and social relationships between the East and the West. Equipped with cultural intelligence (Alon & Higgins, 2005; Creque & Gooden, 2011), Chinese returnees from the U.S. are able to facilitate communication between the Eastern and Western stakeholders of their organizations. They can anticipate misunderstandings that could arise from cultural differences and act on clarifying areas of concern by translating for each side culturally nuanced cues. They act as East-West ambassadors within their spheres of influence so that culturally diverse individuals remain respectful to each other. Through bridging behaviors, they are able to influence others to reverse or prevent judgment from taking place. Thus, they naturally place themselves in positions where they act as *bridgers*.

The Bridging Behavior

This study suggests that the experience of international education expands the Chinese nationals' repertoire of behaviors in relation to other cultures. This new concept is based on the key finding that returnees actively assess when it is that they will apply the set of knowledge and skills they acquired through their international education experience. Here are three examples of these Western-based behaviors: (1) as the Associate Vice President of an IT group, Melissa had a more straightforward communication style as opposed to the subtle Chinese communication style; (2) in her role as HR Manager, Mimi coordinated discussions about local practices with her organization's international constituents; and (3) Mark had the ability to actively participate in group discussions during his management training. Similarly, the conceptualization of the bridging behavior in relation to the repatriated Chinese answers the research questions about their experience of leadership in China.

This study's findings, exemplified by Mimi's pronouncement of "I'm a *bridger*", converge with Rienties and Jindal-Snape's (2015) proposition that the bridge building behavior germinates from the cross-cultural learning environment of international students in their host country. As suggested by Rienties and Jindal-Snape (2015), the challenges in social relations involved in the interactions with different cultures and upbringings during study abroad experiences lead to the development of coping skills in Chinese nationals. As exemplified by several of the returnees, including Mark, who spoke about the value diversity; Monica, who said she forced herself to speak up; and Melody who spoke about learning the value of team work, these coping skills comprise the tool kit that returnees use in interacting with cross-cultural others. Once repatriated,

the returnees take up an adaptive social behavior that is parallel to Molinsky's (2013) concept of "cultural retooling" although the two concepts are different in that cultural retooling is an adaptive strategy taken up while in the host country while bridging occurs in repatriation. In their repatriation, the Chinese nationals take with them the value of positive working relationships and find that it behooves them to contribute to the creation of harmonious social relations. This investment in relationship-building between people from the East and West is best seen in the bridging behaviors of Marvin, Matthew and Mimi. The motivation behind their bridging behaviors is not solely based on accomplishing the transaction they have set to perform but to bring harmony to the social relationship. According to the data, they advocate for continued understanding between different cultures. The outcome of their educational experiences in the U.S. is the development of cultural intelligence, which is manifested by their use of their knowledge about the West in making adjustments to their behavior. Ways in which cultural intelligence is manifested in the bridging behavior are discussed in the following section.

Manifestations of Cultural Intelligence (CQ). Cultural intelligence is a concept that has been widely investigated by scholars in the global leadership field (Creque & Gooden, 2011; Earley & Mosakowski, 2009; Ng, Van Dyne, & Ang, 2009). This study has found a link between cultural intelligence and the bridging behavior. Having a bridging attribute indicates possession of cultural intelligence, an attribute that enables individuals to function well in multicultural settings. As US-educated returnees, the participants of this study displayed cultural intelligence in the cognitive, behavioral, and motivational dimensions that reflect the constructs proposed by Earley and Ang (2004). The expansion of knowledge about the West as a result of their educational experiences

in the U.S. exists in the cognitive dimension while their acquired skill and desire to engage with the international community is in the behavioral and motivational dimensions, respectively. The Chinese nationals' educational experiences in each of these dimensions are discussed in the following sections.

Cognitive dimension of CQ. The Chinese international students in the United States had the proclivity to compare their way of life in China with what they saw it to be in the United States. They took every opportunity to reflect upon the differences they saw in the socio-cultural, physical, and educational systems existing in their home and host countries. In particular, they were interested in understanding why certain systems seemed to work better in their host society than in their home country. Two examples of systems that several participants mentioned were the traffic rules and economic system in the United States. They also experienced group work in their classrooms and learned the importance of citations to prevent plagiarism when they wrote papers for their classes. This opportunity to witness how other societies operated and the resources used to support these societies were valuable lessons to these aspiring leaders.

Past the time when China's focus was in the STEM programs that helped in building its physical infrastructures, the country's next agenda was to learn about new financial and economic systems. Learning these different systems was important to the Chinese government scholars who were sent to the U.S. because they were expected to lead SOE's and Chinese government agencies after they graduated. They were sent to school to learn new principles and strategies for improving China's economic infrastructures. In addition to in-classroom education, their international education experiences allowed the Chinese nationals to critically view China from the outside and

to see China's role on a macro-level. They realized that the countries around the world, including China, are interconnected and that China is part of a bigger whole.

Juxtaposed to the traditional Chinese mindset, which Marvin referred to as the “one-standard answer”, recognizing the value of multi-logicality could be considered as the most valuable learning outcome that emerged from the Chinese participation in Western education. The Chinese national learned that there was value to having different perspectives and approaches, and more importantly, that these differences were acceptable. This would explain why the Chinese participants all described themselves as open-minded or their personalities “open”. Unlike assimilation, becoming open-minded for these returnees did not mean letting go of their Chinese values and preferences. As Professor Uling said (personal communication, August 13, 2015), it meant expanding their abilities to think beyond the normal thinking processes of the traditional Chinese. This expanded cognitive functioning were manifested in the way they began to accept other ways of operating and the possibility that they would adopt these alternate ways. Being open-minded meant not insisting that everyone operated the same way—the way in which those who grew up during the Mao Zedong era were required to function. As leaders or potential leaders of Chinese organizations, having this open-mindedness enabled these returnees to allow the exchange of ideas to take place in the workplace. As Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Sibbo and Dr. Ube described it, they would encourage brainstorming and constructive dialogue the way. In the higher education arena, returnees that were in teaching roles worked toward developing the critical thinking skills in their students.

Behavioral dimension of CQ. In addition to seeing differences between the American and Chinese societies, Chinese nationals who went to the West for the first time experienced cultural diversity in a large scale. Unlike living in China, they were surrounded in the U.S. with multi-culturalism in and outside the classroom. They were amazed by the emphasis the faculty members placed on eliciting student participation for the purpose of exchanging different perspectives. They were even more amazed with how freely and quickly individuals in the U.S. could express their personal opinions. Public discourse as a way of exchanging ideas was a dramatically new experience for them because voicing one's opinion was not a normal practice in China. Learning to speak up was a challenge to these Chinese nationals who, prior to going to the U.S., quietly listened to their teachers in the classroom, supervisors at work, and parents at home. The public expression of different thoughts was even more foreign because what was being instilled in them, as Marvin described it, was one acceptable style, one correct solution to a problem, one answer to a question, and one approach to accomplish a stated objective. This approach to social relations was drastically different from their behavior in China.

Partly because they were required by their professors to participate in their classes, the Chinese nationals gradually gained confidence in public speaking. They also gained experience in presenting information using Microsoft PowerPoint¹⁹. Back in an environment where this behavior was not commonly displayed, the confidence to offer their opinions and present information to an audience was an asset that the returnees

¹⁹ Public speaking and presentations using Microsoft PowerPoint was a skill that students from mainland China looked forward to developing, according to three Chinese MBA students I interviewed as part of a pre-dissertation class research project.

utilized in their organizations particularly for those who worked with international constituents.

Using this cognitive element of cultural intelligence, the returnees are able to identify areas in multicultural settings within their organizations that could lead to conflict, misunderstanding, or awkwardness. With the combination of their ability to navigate the Chinese business culture, their knowledge and experience of Western social norms, and the acquired behavior of speaking up to express their opinions, the US-educated returnees working in MNC's are equipped to facilitate smooth interactions between the Chinese and Western stakeholders. Similarly, when returnees in SOE's and state universities are in social settings, they are able to use their voice to participate in discussions and appropriately represent their Chinese organizations.

Motivational dimension of CQ. The Chinese nationals were taking note of Western social norms that pleasantly surprised them. These social norms included the neighborly smiles and casual 'hellos' they received from strangers while shopping in community stores or when walking around their neighborhoods and campuses. They also received help from community members they did not know. Such acts of kindness from strangers, who would be considered external to their *guanxi* if they were in China, were positive and impressive experiences of the West. This open environment also provided the encouragement to those who wanted to establish a professional or business network in the U.S. to build these connections.

Through their warm and friendly experiences in their host country, they developed the concept of the other. The consciousness they developed about 'others' enhanced their sensitivity to differences in people's perspectives, needs, and ways of

being. Essentially, the concept of the other developed their empathy toward individuals from a different culture. This lesson from their international sojourn would serve as the motivating force that led to their active role in facilitating good social relations between culturally-diverse individuals. Empathy, combined with group work experiences in the U.S., developed their potential for intercultural facilitative behavior. Empathy as a key ingredient in bridging leads to the conceptualization of the *bridger's* emotional intelligence.

Manifestations of Emotional Intelligence and Cross-Cultural Code Switching.

The role that empathy has in this study's findings connects the study to the theory of emotional intelligence and cross-cultural code-switching. Emotional intelligence refers to "how leaders handle themselves and their relationships" (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002, p.6). Code-switching is the "act of purposefully modifying one's behavior . . . to accommodate different cultural norms for appropriate behavior (Molinsky, 2007, p. 623). The premise of cross-cultural code-switching is that foreigners adjust their behavior "to successfully produce the required appropriate behavior" (Molinsky, 2007, p. 623) in another country. As such, code switching does not reflect the Chinese returnees' engagement with the foreign culture.

In its common link to empathy, cross-cultural code-switching is conceptually connected with the bridging behavior. That is, in order for any behavioral adjustment to be authentic and be congruent with the person's emotional makeup, the action must be based on the person's understanding of the perspective of the other person. As it pertains to this study, the Chinese returnees are capable of cross-cultural code-switching because they have learned the concept of the other and all that this concept involves, and thus are

authentically striving for a harmonious relationship with other cultures. In terms of being a leader, “empathy makes a leader able to get along well with people of diverse backgrounds or from other cultures” (Goleman et al., 2002, p. 255). These harmonious interactions are not only universally good; they are deeply congruent with the Chinese philosophy.

Impact of Social Context on Bridging

This study finds that several factors influence the bridging behavior—type of organization, position within the organization, and age of the *bridger*. As represented by this study’s participants, the organizational types that exist in China include the multinational corporations, state-owned enterprises, state universities, and private entrepreneurships. The social norms prevalent in the US-educated returnees’ social interactions in China determine whether they can use their Western education there. Grounded philosophically to maintain harmony—the yin and the yang—they strive to strike a delicate balance between operating according to their Chinese traditions and using their Western education for professional advancement. Given that the social context of the interactions they have with their co-nationals vary, the appropriate use of their acquired Western skills in their professional life varies as well. This means that their use of their Western skills must be selective and strategic. For example, while they may be confident English communicants, or see the value of frank conversations, they do not indiscriminately adopt this communication style amidst the traditional Chinese because it is important that their behaviors are in alignment with the Chinese social norms. This social alignment is critical in the collectivistic society of China and is integral to the

Chinese *bridger* role. The extent to which returnees take on the *bridger* role in their respective social contexts is illuminated by this study.

In general, returnees working in MNC's are in environments that either require or support the use of these Western professional qualifications. In her role as HR Manager in a large MNC, Mimi is routinely working with her international constituents; Melody is leading a male-dominated IT team; and Marvin is collaborating with his colleagues in universities in the United States. Those working in SOE's that have international constituents use their Western education in varying degrees while those with only domestic interactions have very little opportunity to do so. Song represents the former type of SOE employee and the latter type is represented by Sibö. Representing a different sector and organization type, returnees in higher education operate according to the stature of the institution in which they are teaching. For example, an internationally acclaimed university follows a more Western system of education, as in the case of the universities of Professor Uyen and Dr. Ube, while the system followed by provincial colleges are more traditionally Chinese, as in the case of Professor Uling. Private entrepreneurs Chi-Chi and Cao operate according to the needs of their clients. These nuances in the professional practices of the Chinese returnees are centered mostly in the areas of communication, social relations, including gender relations, and leadership and two factors that influence the ability to lead.

Impact on Communication. Chinese returnees working in multinational corporations and state universities have much more opportunities to use the English language than any other US-returnees. Although they can be speaking in Chinese with fellow Chinese-speakers, they have frequent opportunities to speak in English. More

importantly, it is not problematic to speak in English any time they wanted to. There is, however, one distinctive difference found in MNC's. That is, returnees in MNC's can speak in a more straightforward manner, as they learned in the U.S., than returnees in other types of organizations. MNC organizations welcome this Western approach to communication because a Western mindset prevails in these organizations. Adopting the Western style communication enables returnees to effectively lead teams that involve people with different backgrounds, particularly those located outside China.

Along with having more opportunities to speak in English, MNC employees also have more opportunities to use their Western soft skills due to team projects and staff development programs that are common in MNC's. In comparison, the degree to which returnees use their Western soft skills in interacting with others are more limited and vary across SOE's. SOE organizations that interact with stakeholders from other countries, such as a maritime-based international trading company wherein three of the participants worked, benefitted from the English communication skills of US-educated returnees. Even then, these returnees' use of the English language is culturally-nuanced. While speaking in English, they employ the subtle or indirect Chinese communication style when relating with their co-nationals. Again, this points to the strong influence that social context has on returnees' behaviors. This limiting role that social context has in the use of Western skills becomes even more prominent when combined with years of repatriation and lack of opportunities for international relations. How this is seen in this one of the participants is discussed next.

The length of time that the returnees have repatriated appears to have a negative impact on their ability to communicate in English. The degradation of the proficiency in

the English language is significant for those who do not have any occasion to speak the English language. High-ranking executives in SOE's who interact mostly with their domestic colleagues, and delegate work with the international community to others, are the most affected by this lack of foreign language usage. As an example, Sibó, the CEO of a large SOE who had not returned to the U.S. since his international studies more than a decade ago, informed me at the beginning of our interview that he had not spoken a single word of English in over five years. In comparison, other US-educated returnees that occupied positions much lower than his but had responsibilities of communicating with international clients spoke English fluently. As part of the Western skill set, the ability to speak a foreign language impacts an individual's ability to act as a *bridger*.

Impact on Social Relations. As previously mentioned, the general social environment in MNC's reflects the Western mindset. As I had witnessed in my social interactions with one of my co-researchers, this Western social environment extends beyond the US-returnees' workplace. US-educated returnees go to restaurants where numerous expatriates frequently dine and they appear to be quite at ease with the international community. These constant social interactions with the international community provide opportunities for trust-building between the East and the West. In the Chinese context where trust was of utmost importance, these social interactions provide the stage for the *bridger's* role to emerge.

The reintegration process of the US-educated Chinese returnees is more challenging for those in MNC's whose occupations primarily involve interacting with the domestic market compared to their peers in SOE's. Faced with the reality that the *guanxi* they had before going overseas is gone, the returnees in MNC's have had to build their

professional credibility and trustworthiness by proving to the locals that they have knowledge about China's affairs and progress and the Chinese people's needs. Unlike their pre-US days when the social connection they had was based on their local experiences, the social connections they have established as returnees are based on their identities as US-educated Chinese. In building this particular social connection, US-educated returnees perform the role of Chinese *bridgers*.

Comparing the returnees in the MNC's with those in SOE's and state universities shows that the two latter groups do not have the added challenge of establishing their professional credibility. They benefit from the credibility inherent in the positions they hold in their state-based organizations. Given this difference in the effort required to operate effectively in China, US-educated returnees in MNC's that deal with the local communities can be considered the strongest *bridgers* among all these types of returnees. Still, it is important to note that there is inequality in gender relations in the Chinese culture which can hamper the effectiveness of female returnees in working with members of local communities. In this regard, the culture in MNC's offer an environment that is more conducive to the professional success of female returnees. This is discussed further in the next section.

Impact on Gender relations. In terms of gender relations, female US-educated returnees in MNC's seem to do better than their counterparts who deal mostly with domestic Chinese leaders. As was the case for Melody, they are recognized for their professional skills and considered for leadership positions in MNC's. The women in MNC's do not have to struggle much against the deeply-seated discrimination against the female gender prevalent in China because equality between the genders was generally

observed in MNC's in China. If these returnees advocated for gender equality, on the basis of which they were able to progress in their careers in China, then they would be providing the bridge for this aspect of the Western world to reach China. This gendered bridging goes beyond the boundaries of corporate world. An example of this gendered bridging comes from Chi-Chi and Monica who advocated for a change in the outlook toward women's capabilities when they informed their parents about their decisions to pursue their careers and not be concerned about finding a husband. Chinese returnees who have realized this social issue since their stay in the West and are reacting to this Chinese social norm act as *bridgers*. This raises the question of whether, in due time, there will be a slow transformation of the Chinese mindset about this social issue as a result of the continued participation of female Chinese nationals in international education.

Assertiveness, in the form of voicing out one's opinions, was not tabooed in MNC's either. In fact, based on my field observations in China, one did not have to be Western-educated to adopt this behavior. Being around assertive individuals would enable an individual to develop this human characteristic over time; this phenomenon applied to both genders in varying degrees. Although there was no occasion to observe the leader-member interactions of my female participants, it could be surmised that they were comfortable with engaging in constructive dialogues with their superiors. In contrast, female US-educated returnees in SOE's were much less assertive even in my presence as a fellow female. This gender-based demeanor even for US-educated female returnees reflected the general disposition of the Chinese culture toward the 'weak' and male-dependent female gender that Chi-Chi (personal communication, August 17, 2015)

described. In this regard, as Chi-Chi did, US-educated female private entrepreneurs who developed a high degree of independence were able to disengage from this traditional Chinese social norm. As a consequence, contrary to bridging where a healthy fusion of Eastern and Western culture was achieved, the regret and loneliness that Chi-Chi said she felt indicated a clash between the Eastern and Western value sets. In this case, Chi-Chi failed to achieve the harmony that *bridgers* would create between the two worlds. This also exemplified the psychological challenges associated with cross-cultural code switching (Molinsky, 2013).

Leadership Strategies. Overall, this study's findings indicated that US-educated returnees in executive positions adopted certain Western approaches in their leadership practices. They had a collaborative style, valued diversity in thought, were less concerned with organizational hierarchy, and supported the development of their staff. Mentorship was largely evident in MNC leaders and those in higher education. In SOE's, returnee leaders practiced inclusive leadership by encouraging their staff to engage in brainstorming activities and constructive dialogue in the subtle ways familiar to their Chinese staff. They did not make explicit recommendations nor did they provide direct feedback. To lead their organization to positive change, they would convey messages in a manner that the Chinese would comprehend. This entailed presenting different options and at the same time dropping hints about what they thought was a better option than others. This was the Chinese way of influencing positive change. In order to operationalize their US-acquired leadership concepts, they would have to fit them in the Chinese context. This fusion of the Western approach to leadership and Chinese communication style for the purpose of attaining a goal is an example of what US-

educated *bridgers* do in China. The next section discusses two other factors that influence the bridging behavior.

Age and Positions in the Organization. In addition to the type of organization in which the returnee works, there are other factors that shape the professional leadership experience of the Chinese returnee. On average, the Chinese nationals begin their graduate education in the mid-twenties and normally return to China two years later. This means that returnees who have been back in China more than a decade ago will be in the forty-years-old age group. After a decade of being back in China, most of these returnees have obtained executive positions and being in such positions give them the benefit of being able to employ their chosen leadership style. Having been back for several years, they also have a wider *guanxi* network than the younger returnees, which implies a stronger support system and a wider sphere of influence. In terms of age, these returnees are also more senior than the more recent returnees. In the Chinese culture where it is the norm that younger generations honor the older generation, Chinese returnees from decades ago are naturally respected, or followed without question, by the younger traditional Chinese workforce. Albeit this study did not delve into the degree of influence these factors have on the bridging behavior, it asserts that the returnees' age, number of years spent in the U.S., number of years of repatriation, and the positions they hold in their organizations collectively play a part in how much they apply their Western skills in their Chinese organizations.

The Third Space of the Bridger

The concept of liminality refers to the condition wherein one is in an intermediate state or condition which is barely perceptible. "From a social construction perspective,

changes in identity imply changes in the meanings associated with . . . the relationship between the individual and the organization” (Beech, 2011, p. 288). Adopting this concept, this study proposes that Chinese *bridgers* occupy a space akin to the liminal—a third space in the Chinese professional world. Actions occurring in this third space do not however represent the transitional rituals or intercultural negotiations associated with liminality (Mahadevan, 2015). Rather, this third space represents a site where specific behaviors take place. Individuals surrounding the occupant of the third space—the *bridger*—exhibit the bridging behavior and this behavior is accepted by individuals outside the third space. This space contains positive energies that emanate from the friction created by variations in thinking processes, social norms, and organizational strategies. As past studies (Li & Gao, 2014; Panggabean, Murniati, & Tjitra, 2013; Paulson, 2015) have explicated, Western expatriates need to develop social relationships in China in a way that is compatible with the values of the Chinese. This implies that somewhere in this third space is the intersection between the elements that removes the “firewalls” (Zweig & Yang, 2014) in Chinese organizations preventing the healthy integration of social norms.

The third space fosters collaboration between culturally different groups and challenges the negative connotations of East-West affairs. The third space is where the *bridger* is able to establish trust with the local Chinese. This trust tempers the threat that Western norms post on “Chinese values, including reciprocity, interpersonal relations, equality, and respect for authority” (Zweig & Yang, 2014, p. 254.) Characterized by Li and Gao (2014) as the “border spanner”, these *bridger*-leaders are able to gain access to

the Chinese *guanxi* through the trust that they have established with the Chinese nationals. From this perspective, the *bridger* is also considered a border spanner.

The *bridger* primarily exists in the third space because it is in this space that friction from culturally nuanced behaviors and expectations arise. The particular spot that *bridgers* occupy in this third space is influenced by several factors: In terms of cultural intelligence, those who stayed in the U.S. longer and frequently engaged with the host society may have more knowledge about Western systems than those with shorter stays and less participation. Organizationally, the *bridgers*' ability to display Western norms is largely determined by their occupational responsibilities. Their positions within the structure of their organizations may also determine how freely they can follow their Western dispositions. In combination, these factors comprise the multidimensional world of the Chinese *bridger* and influence how much space the *bridger* occupies in the third space.

This groundbreaking paper about the *bridgers* highlights the uniqueness in the cross-cultural social relations of these individuals. This paper also establishes the notion that human interactions of Chinese *bridgers* are philosophically rooted in their desire for harmony which was nurtured by their learning experiences in the West. The discomfort felt from being the 'other' yet receiving authentic support from their hosts in the U.S. elucidates for the *bridgers* the value of positive social relationships and the required empathy to have these relationships.

Equipped with agency and voice, Chinese *bridgers* in China are able to initiate actions they believe are necessary to establish lasting understanding between cross cultural groups. Referred here as bridging behaviors, these actions reflect the *bridgers*'

ability to align their behaviors with the cultural and social background of other people. The adaptive element of bridging behaviors makes such behaviors resemble cross-cultural code switching behaviors (Molinsky, 2007), but these two types of behaviors have critical differences. Code switching behaviors are motivated by the actors' self-serving desire to accomplish a goal, regardless of whether the modified behaviors align with their values. Behaviors are modified to fit the social context of the transaction that needs to be completed or negotiated at a particular point in time. In contrast, *bridgers'* behaviors are driven by the desire to align social relations with the values held by the actors involved in the social relationship. Their aim in social relations is to build a permanent relationship with others. In cross-cultural settings, *bridgers* strive to accept and understand others for who they are. Similarly, they want others to understand and accept them and not modify behaviors during social interactions for the sole purpose of being able to convince or manipulate. Given these differences, it can be said that code switchers are transactional while bridgers are transformational leaders. Finally, based on Bass and Avolio's (1997) measures of authentic leadership, *bridgers* are considered authentic leaders while code-switchers are inauthentic leaders.

To complete the portrait of the *bridger*, I revisit Biehler's (2004) passage about the *half-and-half* Chinese.

Many who return find that cultural adjustments back to life in China are difficult. "[My work unit] regarded me as part American, and I started to feel that way myself. That's funny, because when I was in America, I always felt very Chinese . . . I started to feel suspended between the two places, as if I would always be half-and-half." (Biehler, 2004, p. 356)

This passage reflects a socially constructed *half-and-half* Chinese identity which does not match the self-perception of the individual. Being suspended between two worlds indicates that this half-and-half individual occupies a liminal space where personal identity wavers and is contingent upon the perception of others. As such, the liminality of the half-and-half is psychologically challenging and can be socially destructive. In such cases, it is difficult to have an authentic sense of being when one is feeling a ‘half-and-half’ self. As has been established in this paper, the Chinese *bridger* has a stable sense of identity because the *bridger’s* identity is self-defined and not imposed upon by others. The Chinese *bridger* confidently occupies a spot in the ‘third space’ and from that space embraces this identity and relates to society as this person. As a result, the Chinese *bridger* is able to comfortably take actions that transcend the boundaries of the East and West.

Bridgers’ Social Networks

An interesting consequence of international education found by this study is the emergence of coalitions of US-educated returnees in China. Having observed my participants in their natural environment, it has become apparent to me that US-educated returnees actively maintain their Western knowledge and skills through their connections with other US-educated colleagues and peers in China. For example, faculty members Uyen and Ursula who are associated with world-class universities attend academic conferences regularly to present their scholarly work or stay current in their disciplines. These social and occupational relations between returnees that share similar experiences of international education lead to the formation of a *guanxi* specific to the Western-educated Chinese. It is very possible that these Western-based *guanxi* networks are the

sources of significant social and organizational changes seen in China. This phenomenon—the spontaneous formation of US- and other Western-educated returnee social networks—heralds a possible reshaping of the Chinese business environment. Such a possibility calls for a review of the prevailing characterization of the Chinese business culture and is a matter of future investigation.

The Changing Role of Western Education in the Chinese Context

The selective and strategic application of the Chinese nationals' Western education that this study found is reminiscent of Huang's (2002) investigation of the careers and life experiences of the first group of US-educated Chinese returnees during the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. Although conducted a century apart, the findings of these two studies parallel each other in terms of how Chinese returnees operationalize their international education in the various types of Chinese organizations, i.e., MNC, state agencies, and private entrepreneurships. Adopting Huang's words, both studies indicate that "the difference in the achievements of the students can be explained at least partially by the different social contexts in which they made careers" (Huang, 2002, p. 42). Whether it was in the early 20th century during a period in history when China was at the beginning of modernization, or in today's 21st century world when China has become a major global economic force, how Western education is applied in the Chinese context continues to be dependent on the social context of the returnee, which in turn is shaped by the prevailing industries in China.

Returnees in the fields of science, military, and technology advanced the most in their professions during the 20th century. In comparison, 21st century returnees with degrees in business administration, finance, economics, and human resources are more in

demand in the more capitalistic and globalized China because of the new skills and ideas they bring home. Their skills are needed to help Chinese organizations better manage the country's financial and international trade sectors. As pointed out by several of the participants of this study, they learned in their macroeconomics classes that China is part of the global economy, and actions that China takes have implications for the rest of the world. Another difference in social context comes from the proliferation of multinational corporations in China in particular and in the world in general. Whereas multinational corporations were rare in China a century ago, they now provide numerous employment opportunities for Western educated returnees. This change in the landscape of the business sector in China is the push factor that increases the number of Chinese nationals attending business-related graduate programs in the West.

Implications

The implications of this study about the Chinese participation in U.S. education are not limited to the business sector where the majority of the Chinese returnees build their careers. This study also has important implications to programs in international relations, higher education, and existing theories related to cross-cultural phenomena. More importantly, the findings of this study, as well as what other scholars found (Biao & Shen, 2009; Li, 2006) point to the important role that educational exchanges have in developing not only human and cultural capital, but also authentic understanding between countries. Each of these areas of implications is discussed in the following section.

International relations

It is important to recognize that the political clout of Western-educated returnees is growing in China. This is evident in the fact that some of China's top leaders often consult foreign-educated aides and advisors (Li, 2006). In fact, there is evidence that at least one of the participants of this study was a member of an economic advisory board for the ruling party in China. As former students in the United States, the work of these Chinese leaders involve the use of their knowledge about Western systems. More importantly, how they relate with the United States may be influenced by impressions they developed about the country and its people while they were in graduate school. The experience of higher education in the U.S. as international students may therefore have an indirect effect on international relations. From this study we now know that the positive educational experiences of the Chinese nationals in the U.S. lead to the development of the Chinese *bridger*. Given this finding, it is important for leaders involved in international relations to pay attention to the U.S. experiences of these Chinese nationals.

The United States and China follow different political systems and have significantly different cultures. These two countries have a long history of political conflict and mutual distrust due to these differences. Maintaining a stable relationship between these two global economic superpowers (Kamrany & Jiang, 2015) is critical because of the significant impact of US-China diplomatic relations on global peace, economy, and environmental sustainability. Through the participation of Chinese nationals in graduate higher education in the U.S., it is possible to develop a cadre of Chinese sociopolitical ambassadors that strengthen the political and cultural understanding between these two countries. The hope is that during their international

sojourn, the Chinese nationals in the U.S. establish lasting friendships with their American hosts. Then as returnees to China and as leaders of Chinese public or private organizations, they can build human bridges between these two culturally, dialectically, and politically divergent countries. Chinese returnees can contribute to the slow but definite reduction of the “strategic mistrust” (McGiffert, 2014, p. 8) that plagues these two countries. The following remark made by a Chinese accounting Ph.D. student depicts the Chinese sentiment toward their participation in education in the US:

I think this has increased the communication between China and the rest part of the world . . . Chinese students go abroad to study and . . . learn something and apply to China back when they come back. Also, they can bring some good stuff about Chinese education to the world worldwide . . . (Cho et al., 2008, p. 209).

Such a remark provides evidence of how Western education benefits the Chinese society. Given the number of Chinese students attending U.S. universities, this doctoral student’s remark indicates that the message about this benefit is reaching the Chinese population. The stream of Chinese nationals coming to the U.S. for higher education provides an opportunity for continuous improvement in the diplomatic relations between these two countries.

Higher Education

This study also has significant implications for the services that higher education institutions provide to international students. Career centers in universities that host international students can serve these students better by planning programs that bring together recruiters from MNCs with international job seekers. Another implication that this study has involves the work of alumni associations and advancement units of

universities. The returnees I met during this study were genuinely eager to interact with individuals that remind them of their enjoyable and educational experiences in the West. As such, they are potential active participants of events that alumni associations offer. This genuine interest in reconnecting with their alma mater provides universities an excellent basis for institutional strategic planning efforts.

In addition to alumni engagements, there are other benefits to fostering relationships with former students in China. Institutions who maintain connections with their alumni overseas may find themselves in better positions to build partnerships abroad. Multinational corporations that are led by US-educated Chinese returnees could be approached for internships for both domestic and international students in the United States. Universities in China with US-educated faculty could be potential sites for joint academic programs or research projects. These alumni could also offer opportunities for cultural engagements with visiting faculty and be hosts to study abroad programs. These are examples of potential benefits for investing resources to this area of higher education.

Understanding the application in the Eastern context of Western education and, pedagogy in particular, informs the work of purveyors of Western concepts and ‘soft skills’. Given the continued participation of Chinese nationals in Western education, it behooves higher education administrators to incorporate in their strategic planning programs that are global in approach and sensitive to the culture of the students in their classrooms. These programs include off-campus cultural homestay programs that we now know from this study have a significant impact on the development of the bridger postgraduation. Such efforts support Hudzik’s (2011) call for the comprehensive internationalization of higher education. This would be of interest to higher education

administrators in not only the United States but also in Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Continued improvements in this area will contribute to the overall work of global leaders.

Current concepts on cross-cultural phenomena

The participation of the Chinese in U.S. education continues both in the undergraduate and graduate levels. Given the way the Chinese returnees establish their professional and social connections as US-educated professionals, the continued increase in the number of US-educated employees working in organizations in China will at some point begin to have a significant impact on the organizational culture there. The spontaneous organization of US-educated returnees observed during this study heralds a transformation—albeit slow—of the Chinese society. Socio-anthropologists and scholars from other disciplines may wish to investigate the impact that this phenomenon has on other parts of the world. This supposition also includes the Chinese who study in other Western countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. It is important to understand the consequences of the internationalization of education.

Finally, the concept of the Chinese *bridger* that has been constructed from this study raises the question of whether organizational leaders in 21st century China have changed their organizational behaviors over the years. Changes in organizational cultures introduced by US-educated Chinese returnees may influence the general way in which leaders in Chinese organizations relate with their international constituents. Changes in this area has implications for the country clusters purported by the GLOBE project (House, 1991). Organizational scholars may wish to consider reexamining this area of organizational behavior.

Limitations

The researcher's positionality within this research setting was an important aspect of this study. Coming from the United States, my researcher positionality was of an outsider who was looking into the lives of this study's Chinese participants. However, I brought to the research setting experiences of an immigrant, including having to transition to a new culture and language, the feeling of being 'the other' in the United States as a new immigrant from Asia, and the constant hybridization of cultural identity, personal values, and lifestyle. I also brought to the research setting my daily experiences of constantly interweaving western practices and some eastern philosophies native to me in my leadership style as an administrator in an American higher education institution. Consistent with the constructivist approach of this grounded theory study, it was possible that the leadership style I espouse could have shaped my analysis of the data from this study.

In constructing theory from this study, it was important for me to keep in mind my subjectivities and how I may have unwittingly let these subjectivities foreshadow the analysis of data in this study. Incorporating reflexivity in my memo-writing during this study helped me suspend my judgment and avoid inadvertently applying my taken-for-granted values and beliefs to this investigation. The co-researchers who assisted me in this study also helped verify that my interpretations of the data gathered from this study was accurate, albeit a co-researcher was not available throughout the data collection part of this study. As such, there were moments of awkwardness in the beginning of some of the interviews that could negatively impacted the activity. Still, having access to other individuals who were not participants of this study, but were knowledgeable about the

participants in China, gave me an avenue to validate or correct my understanding of my participants' responses. These individuals helped ensure that my data analysis was grounded in this study's data.

China's population is as big and varied as its geographic terrain. The 24 participants in this study cannot be considered a representation of the entire population of US-educated Chinese in the country. Thus, the findings from this study should not be used to form generalizations on all US-educated Chinese returnees. As I have seen with this study's participants, there are differences in the dispositions of people from Shanghai, Qingdao, Hangzhou, and Kunshan. Additionally, while this study's primary strength is in the location of its data collection where there was close and personal engagement with the participants, the capacity to learn greater details about how these Chinese nationals operated in China was limited by the short time spent with each of them. For future research, recommendations for how these data collection limitations can be ameliorated by a different research design is discussed in the next section.

Recommendations for Future Research

This is an unprecedented study in the field of international education and cross-cultural leadership that introduces the *bridger*. The significance of this finding goes beyond this study's primary unit of analysis—the US-educated Chinese business professional. As it applies to Chinese nationals who had not been outside China before embarking on international education, this study informs us of the influence that Western educational experiences have on the development of cross-cultural leadership skills in repatriated students. An exemplar in transnational qualitative study of the role of international education in postgraduation leadership practices, this dissertation serves as

the foundation for numerous future studies involving other groups of repatriated international students. It can also serve as a template in investigating the experiences of Chinese repatriates in various other disciplines, including education, public administration, social sciences, and allied health sciences. Engaging in similar research involving participants in these other disciplines will in fact provide comparative information on the effects of Western education across the different disciplines. For example, a similar study might be conducted involving Chinese educators, either as members of the instructional or administrative team. Such a study will provide valuable insight as to whether or not Western pedagogy and curricula are utilized in Chinese classrooms and how the adoption of Western educational systems can reshape the Chinese society over time.

Similar studies can be conducted involving other nationalities in order to investigate the role of international education in developing leadership in other cultural contexts. Future researchers of this topic might consider conducting a study involving former international students from India and Saudi Arabia, as these students currently also comprise a large portion of the international student population in the United States. When conducting such a study, it is recommended that researchers use Hofstede's cultural dimensions as a starting point for studying other ethnic groups of repatriates to aid them in developing their research questions.

There are several other factors to be considered in the study of the intersection between international education, culture, and leadership. Beyond the effects of culture and type of organization of repatriates, the participants' socioeconomic status and their family's educational background may play a role in their subsequent leadership styles.

The number of years the former international students spent abroad as well as the length of time of their repatriation are also important factors to consider.

Thinking beyond the present state of international education, as student mobility across the globe continues to expand in the 21st century, we realize the myriad of country-pair permutations that may be studied. It is exciting to imagine the possibility of having a team of researchers engaging with former international students around the world. New knowledge gained from such a project has the potential to revolutionize education at multiple levels and bring promise for a deeper and lasting understanding between nations.

For researchers who may want to expand this study, my recommendation is to consider conducting a mixed methods study in order to include a larger sampling size. Future mixed methods investigators may want to consider the use of the Personal Growth Index (Robitschek, 1998) to assess the likelihood of personal growth in some participants and be able to compare the results of that assessment against data collected from personal interviews with a subset of the population. Another survey to consider is Bass and Avolio's (1997) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) that will provide information about the participants' leadership styles. Any of these approaches will provide further data that will expand this study's findings.

To conclude this section of the paper, I recommend that scholars who are planning to conduct a similar study consider infusing their projects with the culturally responsive methodology. One way to accomplish cultural responsiveness is by learning as much about the returnees' culture and national history. In addition to understanding their lived experiences, investing the time to learn first about them as people prior to entering the research setting focuses the study on the humanity of the participants. Future

scholars who aspire to take on cross-national studies will be rewarded by a lifetime of memories of their experiences with their participants and the chance of lifetime friendships with them.

Conclusion

This is a groundbreaking work in international education and cross-cultural leadership studies. This study provides empirical evidence of the benefits of participating in international education. Results from this study inform the work of practitioners and scholars and encourage the academic community to strive for authentic leadership in its praxis. It is inspirational to anyone involved in international education to learn from this study that international students organically take on the role of bridgers connecting cultural divides. Findings from this dissertation not only fill a gap in our knowledge about leadership practices of repatriated international students, but also provide a solid foundation for future investigations about how international education as a whole shapes human behaviors and systems around the world. This study has illuminated the use of “bridging” in leadership, connecting Western education and Chinese culture. It is clear from this study that bridging occurs as a result of international education. The primary learning outcomes—the value of diversity of thought, ability to use their voice, and empathy for the ‘other’—for these Western educated Chinese nationals play a part in their role as Chinese *bridgers*.

The three concepts—the Chinese *bridger*, the path to becoming a *bridger*, and the third space that the *bridger* occupies—suggest a 21st century view of the Chinese leadership style. These concepts are significant as they represent a new image of the US-educated Chinese returnee, point out a specific behavior in their repatriation, and suggest

a new paradigm in global leadership studies. Understanding that *bridging* when used by leaders can influence the evolution of culture is crucial to the work of educators, social scientists, and political leaders. The focus of this work is on Chinese nationals, yet the concepts proposed from this study may apply to other groups of international students. As a groundbreaking concept, *bridging*, as shown here, should be explored further. It should be explored along several other dimensions, including length of stay abroad, length of repatriation, educational background, and familial socioeconomic status. A catalyst for future studies, this in-country dissertation sets a new direction for the study of international education.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. First, please state your position in your organization and describe your duties.
2. Please tell me about your experiences as an international student in the United States. In what ways are they good? In what ways are they bad or unpleasant?
3. What did you do after completing your MBA in the United States? Was that part of your plans after graduation?
4. What role does the education you obtained in the United States play in your work here in China? How does your education background fit in your career plans?
5. Please think back to when you returned to China from the US after graduating from the MBA program. Can you describe your experiences as a returning Chinese in terms of adjusting back to the Chinese lifestyle?
6. In what ways have you utilized the skills you developed in the US in your personal or professional life here in China?
7. Please try to recall the lessons you learned when you were attending the MBA program in the United States. What do you think of the concepts you were learning from the program? Do you recall lessons about transformational leadership or global leadership? What is your opinion on those concepts?
8. What were the most striking or significant learning experience you had in the United States?
9. Please tell me your opinion on the following scenario: An employee in your organization is showing great talent and skills. What do you think needs to take place in order for this employee to be successful and be promoted to a better position within the organization?
10. Please describe your relationship with your colleagues and employees.
11. How would you describe yourself as a leader here in China or in other countries?
12. How does your leadership style compare with the style of other leaders in your organization?
13. Is there anything you would like to add that we have not covered in this conversation?

Demographics

1. What is the exact name of the academic program that you attended in the United States?
2. How many years did you spend in the United States as an international student?
3. Have you been to other countries to study? Where?
4. What is your age?

Appendix B

RECRUITMENT EMAIL to be distributed to potential participants

Subject line: Seeking Graduates of US-based MBA programs from the People's Republic of China (PRC) to participate in a research study

Hello, my name is Maria and I am a Doctoral student at Chapman University. I am working on my dissertation to complete the program requirements of my Ph.D. in Education. I have requested my colleague here in the United States, who works very closely with international students from the PRC, to assist me in finding participants for my research. You are receiving my email via my colleague who has identified you as a former international student from PRC who graduated from an MBA Program in the United States. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study. Your participation will involve meeting with me in China approximately in August 10-25, 2015. This study is completely voluntary and your choice to participate will not affect your relationship with the researcher or Chapman graduate leadership programs.

The purpose of this research study is to explore the overall experience of leadership of a Chinese national who graduated from an MBA Program in the United States. We hope that the findings from this investigation will provide a deeper understanding of the way in which a US-educated Chinese national enacts leadership in China. If you agree to be in this study, I will schedule an in-person or phone interview with you that will take about approximately one hour. If necessary and if time permits, I may request a brief follow-up interview with you to obtain new information or clarification on statements that have been made during the initial interview. I will need to know your contact information in order for me to schedule this interview. Kindly provide me with your contact information at your earliest convenience so I can contact you directly.

To help me find my way around China and facilitate my communication with the local community, there is a possibility that a Chinese-speaking individual may accompany me at this interview. This person will observe the same level of confidentiality that I shall observe during this study.

Please respond to this email within week with your willingness to participate. I look forward to talking with you!

Maria L. Martinez
Doctoral Candidate, Chapman University
marti481@chapman.edu
Cell: (714) 323-9907

Appendix C

Consent Form

CES

CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

"CHANGING EDUCATION. CHANGING THE WORLD."

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL/BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE OF STUDY: Chinese Graduates of US-based MBA Programs: How They Enact Leadership
In China Post-Graduation

CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY
ONE UNIVERSITY DR., ORANGE, CA 92866

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Penny Bryan, PhD
Chapman University
College of Educational Studies
Graduate Leadership Programs
714-744-2134
pennybryan@cox.net

STUDENT-INVESTIGATOR:

Maria L. Martinez
Doctoral Candidate
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CO-INVESTIGATOR:

Kris De Pedro, PhD
Chapman University
College of Educational Studies
Graduate Leadership Programs
714-744-2134
depedro@chapman.edu

You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted by the above research investigators at Chapman University. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

PURPOSE:

This research study serves as the student investigator's dissertation project for the Ph.D. in Education. It aims to gain an understanding of the experiences of leadership of Chinese nationals occupying leadership positions in China after obtaining an MBA degree from the United States.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS & STUDY LOCATION:

You will be one of no more than 30 participants. Individual interviews will be conducted in-person at a time and location previously agreed upon by you and the researcher or if necessary, by telephone.

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Approved by IRB on: 07/09/2015

IRB #: 1516H004

Expiration Date: 07/08/2016

Chapman University FWA#: 00011020, valid through: September 04, 2017

FOR IRB USE ONLY

TITLE OF STUDY: Chinese Graduates of MBA Programs in the US: How They Enact In China Leadership

QUALIFICATION (S) TO PARTICIPATE:

In order to participate in this study, you must have attended an MBA Program in the United States of America as an international student, be from the People's Republic of China (PRC), be currently working in the PRC, and able to read and speak English. Participants must meet these qualifications to participate.

PROCEDURES:

As the faculty advisors of the researcher, Drs. Penny Bryan and Kris De Pedro are considered the primary researchers for this study. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual in-person or phone interview lasting approximately one hour. If you provide your consent, the interview will be audio recorded. The semi-structured interview will be conducted to gather an understanding of your experiences of leadership in China after completing the MBA program in the United States. The interview protocol will be flexible (approximately 10 open-ended questions) to allow for the questions to evolve throughout the study. The list of questions used in this study will not be provided in advance.

The investigator may be accompanied by a Mandarin-speaking co-researcher/cultural guide who will assist the investigator in communicating clearly with you. This co-researcher/cultural guide will also help ensure that local policies and procedures in China are followed. He/she will protect the confidentiality of your identity and any information you share during this study.

BENEFITS:

There is no direct benefit to you for your participation. However, you may benefit from participating in this study by sharing your thoughts on your leadership experiences, specifically in terms of the role that your MBA education from the United States has played in your leadership practices in China, by knowing that you are contributing to any new knowledge that will emerge from this study.

RISKS:

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in our research study, such as loss of confidentiality during the interview process. Minor discomfort may occur during the reflection of your own global leadership during the interview. If discomfort occurs, it should be brief and short-lived.

PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY:

No personal information (i.e. your name) will be saved as a part of this research process. Audio files will be coded in a way that will protect your identity. These files will be stored on the secure Chapman University desktop computer or personal laptop computer with encryption and password protection. Data will be discarded no later than 7 years after publication of this study. Your participation in the study will not be disclosed to any other individuals.

COMPENSATION, REIMBURSEMENT, COSTS:

No compensation, reimbursement, or costs are associated with this study.

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Approved by IRB on: 07/09/2015

IRB #: 1516H004

Expiration Date: 07/08/2016

Chapman University FWA#: 00011020, valid through: September 04, 2017

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TITLE OF STUDY: Chinese Graduates of MBA Programs in the US: How They Enact In China Leadership

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Your participation in this study is voluntary and your participation or lack of participation will in no way influence your relationship with the researcher or Ph.D. in Education, Leadership Studies program. You may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Dr. Penny Bryan, Principal Investigator
714-744-2134
pennybryan@cox.net

Dr. Kris De Pedro, Principal Investigator
714-744-2134
depedro@chapman.edu

Maria L. Martinez
Doctoral Candidate
Chapman University
College of Educational Studies
marti481@mail.chapman.edu

FOR QUESTIONS RELATED TO STUDY or TO REPORT A CONCERN:

If you have comments or questions regarding the conduct of this research, please contact the investigator's listed above.

If you would like to report a concern about the study or the informed consent process, you may contact Chapman University's Institutional Review Board, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs Administration by phone (714)-628-7392 or (714) 628-2805, by email at irb@chapman.edu, or by mail at Chapman University, ORSPA, One University Dr. Orange, CA 92866.

PLEASE SEE NEXT PAGE

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Approved by IRB on: 07/09/2015

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TITLE OF STUDY: Chinese Graduates of MBA Programs in the US: How They Enact In China Leadership

AUDIO RECORDING:

I have received an adequate description of the purpose and procedures for audio recording observation sessions and interviews during the course of the proposed research study. I give my consent to be audio recorded during participation in this study, and for those records to be reviewed by persons involved in the study, as well as for other professional purposes as described to me. I understand that all information will be kept confidential and will be reported in an anonymous fashion, and that the recordings will be erased seven years after the study has been completed. I further understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time without penalty.

____ **Yes**, I agree to allow the research investigator to **audio record** my observation sessions and interview(s).

____ **No**, I do not wish to have my observation sessions and interview(s) **audio-recorded**.

Signature of Participant

Date

You should not sign this consent form until all of your questions about this study have been answered. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any questions or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with Chapman University, student status or employment.

I acknowledge that I have received a signed copy of this form and the Research Participant's Bill of Rights.

I have read the above information and have had any questions regarding the study answered to my satisfaction. I hereby consent to participate in the research.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

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Approved by IRB on: 07/09/2015

IRB #: 1516H004

Expiration Date: 07/08/2016

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Appendix D

Note Adopted from mapsofworld.com. Retrieved from <http://www.mapsofworld.com/china/important-cities.html>

Appendix E

Follow Up Questions Sent Via Email

Hello,

First of, I want to say how much I appreciate your willingness to answer a few follow up questions. I am almost finished with my data analysis of the interviews from China, but have some 'gaps in understanding' that I hope to get clarified. So that you have some context to my follow-up questions, I want to share with you my tentative analysis. Here it is:

"While the Chinese returnees obtained Western skills and understand Western norms as a result of their US education, they retain their Chinese culture and identity. These returnees see their role in China as the facilitators of communication and understanding between the East and the West, and consider themselves as *bridgers*. The Chinese returnees have taken on "an expanded Chinese identity" that consists of the Chinese culture and their Western professional know-how and soft skills, including proficiency in English communication, open-mindedness, and mentorship for those that follow them. This expanded self enables Chinese returnees to transcend certain aspects of the Chinese culture.

My questions are:

- 1) How do you feel about the thesis above? Does it accurately describe you as a Chinese returnee? Do you agree that you have an "expanded Chinese identity"? If not, why not?
- 2) When did you realize that you have more professional know-how than your domestically-educated peers? Was it while you are in the US or when you have returned to China? Or was it a progressive process?
- 3) When did you realize that you have adopted Western soft skills? Was it while you are in the US or when you have returned to China?

My thesis is based on interviews with 24 participants, so it might not be perfectly applying to your situation. Still, please be as candid as you can. I want to really know whether the major themes I picked up from these interviews are accurate.

Again, thank you. I look forward to receiving your responses.

Maria