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Intercultural Communication and Administration

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Experiences of Acculturation

Chinese Student Sojourners at the University of Macerata in Italy

Master's Thesis

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ABSTRACT

There has, and continues to be, a dramatic increase worldwide in the number of students traveling abroad for study purposes in higher education. OECD statistical reports show that students from Asia, particularly those from China, constitute the largest incoming group of international students at most universities around the world.

Chinese students studying Italian at Chengdu Institute, Sichuan International Studies University (CISISU) came for one full academic year, August 2015 – July 2016, to live and study abroad at the University of Macerata (UNIMC) in Central Italy. The aim of this research is to discover and understand the students' psychological and sociocultural experiences of acculturative adjustment to changes in academic and daily life during their cross-cultural exchange.

This short-term longitudinal study uses Ward et al.'s affective, behavioural, and cognitive (ABC) model of acculturation as a conceptual theoretical framework to analyze the holistic view of the students' cross-cultural transition. Following the ABC theoretical model, in-depth qualitative research looks into understanding the students' affective feelings of stress and coping, behavioural experiences of cultural learning, and cognitive thoughts of sociocultural identification between their home society in China, and the host society in Italy.

Analytical results from the qualitative semi-structured interviews determined that despite challenges in cultural difference, the Chinese student sojourns experienced a positive exchange that will benefit them for the future. Balancing a bicultural identity, learning the language, dietary acculturation, social support, independence, and the lack of convenient services in the smaller and slower paced sociocultural environment of Macerata are all important factors that affected the students' sojourn.

KEYWORDS: Chinese exchange students; UNIMC; higher education; cross-cultural transition; acculturation; ABC framework of acculturation

1 INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of higher education students, Chinese students especially, are living abroad now as international/exchange students to further their education, and experience another cultural environment. The beauty, but also the challenge, of the world in which we live in, is that it is both environmentally and culturally diverse. People who grow up in different social, cultural, and physical environments have different life experiences, which shape their overall cultural perspective, behavioural practices, and personal identity. By living and studying in a foreign community for an extended period, international students are able to experience and understand the beauty of the foreign local culture as a local resident, but they are also likely to experience challenges during their cross-cultural transition.

Moving to a new and unfamiliar environment is both exciting and stressful as it challenges a person in ways never experienced before. After leaving familiar comforts and cultural routines, individuals will experience new encounters and ways of living, thinking, and behaving. The overall experience is rewarding, but also challenging in both psychological and sociocultural ways. First-hand continuous contact with a different culture causes adjustment changes to take place within the individual in a process known as “acculturation” (Ward et al. 2001: 99). As international students transition to a new community and educational system, they go through a psychological social identification and coping adjustment process to affective feelings of acculturative stress. They also experience a sociocultural adaptation process that involves learning the social and cultural behaviours of the host society. (Ward et al. 2001: 42)

1.1 Literature Review

Along with the drastic increase of students going abroad to live and study, there is an increase in the number of research studies pertaining to the acculturative adjustment process of their sojourn, as well as a demand for further research. Since China is the leading source for students studying abroad at most Western universities, the

acculturation process of their sojourn is consequently focused upon in a growing number of research studies worldwide (Brigugli & Smith 2012: 17). This section describes research findings, gaps in the research, and recommendations for future studies from previous research on international students, particularly from those from China, that have had an influence upon this current study.

Previous research, on the acculturation process of Chinese international students indicates that they struggle with both psychological and sociocultural issues of living “an entirely different life pattern” abroad (Gu & Maley 2008: 232). Chinese international students report an imbalance between their social and academic expectations and their actual outcomes in previous studies (Song 2013; Gu & Maley 2008; Redmond and Bunyi 1993 in Zhou et al. 2008; Lin 2006). Lee et al.’s research study on the dietary acculturation of Chinese students studying in South Korea indicates that the Chinese students’ dietary practice became less uniform as the amount of food and regular time spent eating was altered and their nutritional health status was negatively affected (Lee et al. 2015: 310). Qualitative research on the academic and personal life adaptation experience of Chinese students in England, Canada, and Australia reveals that language difficulties, academic learning and teaching styles, identity issues regarding changes in the self, social interaction, and food habits are all major themes of acculturative stress (Brown & Holloway 2008: 37; Wang 2012: 368; Brigugli & Smith 2012: 31). Results from the studies also shows that all these acculturative stress factors are causes of changes amongst the student sojourners. Myths from previous research that Chinese learners are “passive” learners, prefer teacher-directed methods of learning, prefer rote learning, and are not interested in mixing with local students were all disproven in Briguglio and Smith’s qualitative study in Australia (Brigugli & Smith 2012: 30).

Many study reports conclude that the more similar the host country’s culture and environmental conditions are to the sojourner’s country of origin, the less acculturative stress and challenges will be encountered (Ward & Kennedy 1996 in Brown & Holloway 2008; Sorrentino & Yamaguchi 2008; Samnani et al. 2012). With a loss of

familiarity and comforts, the move to a new environment is cited as one of the most traumatic events in a person's life (Brown & Holloway 2008). Due to increased cultural dissimilarity between Eastern and Western countries, previous research states that students who sojourn from Asia to Western countries may constitute a useful "extreme case" for research purposes in relation to student sojourners in general (Zhou et al. 2008: 73). There is a need for future research studies to provide concrete evidence of this cross-cultural interrelation, and the influence a students' cultural and demographic background has on their acculturation experience (Tran & Vu 2016: 13).

When conducting cross-cultural research, it is important to be objective and understand that there are individual differences in the degree of cultural dissimilarity and the amount of stress experienced amongst cross-cultural travelers from and to Eastern and Western nations. Dervin makes valid points in his *Plea for Change in Research on Intercultural Discourses: A 'Liquid' Approach to the Study of the Acculturation of Chinese Students* as he criticizes and cautions theoretical writers to not stereotype and present Asian, particularly Chinese, students as members of a large homogenous culture (Dervin 2011). Gu and Maley explain that even though Chinese nationals may have certain identifiable characteristics related to their culture of origin, individuals also learn and behave in unique ways that relate more towards their personal needs and the situational demands of each environment (Gu & Maley 2008: 227). Therefore, according to Dervin (2011) and other researchers, it is best to follow a "liquid" approach when conducting research in order to avoid false stereotypes and assumption biases.

Szabo et al. (2015) recently did a short-term longitudinal research on the stress Western and Asian international students studying in New Zealand experience after being uprooted from their home cultural environment. Results from survey data show that separation from their familiar home environment is not the main psychological problem student sojourners experience (Szabo et al. 2015: 13). The important result is the knowledge and understanding of how students respond to cultural difference stress during their transition (Szabo et al. 2015: 13). Congruent with previous research

findings is the fact that secondary strategies, of positive acceptance and the readjustment of beliefs, interpretations, and expectations, have the most beneficial effect on reducing stress and aiding the acculturation process. Primary coping strategies, of eliminating culturally dissimilar stress provoking factors and maintaining daily contact with people from home, have no effect upon the psychological adjustment of international students. The best solution, as discussed by Szabo et al., would be for international students to keep positive about their different situation in the foreign environment, accept the fact that their separation from familiarities and loved ones is temporary, and focus on making new friends and exploring life within the host society (Szabo et al. 2015: 14).

Comprehensive longitudinal studies are limited, but recommended for conducting future research on the acculturative adjustment experience of student sojourners. Cao et al.'s (2016) exploratory study reveals that their questionnaire method did not cover and measure all aspects that relate to understanding fully the inter-relationships of acculturative stressors experienced by Chinese students in European countries. They recommend that future research should investigate the topic with a more comprehensive measurement (Cao et al. 2016: 17). For a more comprehensive research method, it is recommended that future researchers conduct in-depth interviews to uncover a deeper understanding of the personal meanings international students have surrounding their transitional experiences (Glass & Westmont 2014: 114). It is also recommended that future research be conducted over a longer period of time, as there is a shortage of longitudinal studies examining the impact factors, like acculturative stress, have on acculturation process of international students throughout their whole study abroad (Brigugli & Smith 2012: 31; Smith & Khawaja 2011: 710).

There is a limited amount of in-depth research on the acculturation process of Chinese and Asian international students in non-Anglophone European countries. Wang & Hannes (2014) did research recently on the academic and sociocultural adjustment of Asian international students in Belgium. They mention that it would be worthwhile to include psychological aspects of adjustment and extend their research to involve life

experiences in other non-Anglophone European countries in order to reveal a more holistic picture of the study abroad experience of Asian international students (Wang & Hannes 2014: 79). Mostly all of the theoretical research and findings on the acculturative process of Asian international students comes from English speaking countries, like the USA, Canada, U.K., and Australia, where intake for international students is the highest (Zheng & Berry 1991; Gu & Maley 2008; Zhang & Zhou 2010; Brigugli & Smith 2012). While in Europe, especially within non-English speaking countries, there is a lack of research on the adjustment process of Chinese and Asian international students (Wang & Hannes 2014: 66; Cao et al. 2016: 2).

Song (2013) did research on the social and academic integration of undergraduate and graduate Chinese students in Rome, Firenze, Milan, Bologna, and Verona through survey questionnaires. Since the number of Chinese students in Italian universities is increasing, Song explains that more measures need to be taken to reduce cultural and social gaps so that a stronger mutual understanding between Chinese students, Italian students, and professors can be achieved. Their research study reveals that integrating international students is a new challenge Italian universities are currently facing. Chinese students come to Italy, as the requirements for studying abroad are easier than other Western countries. Overall, their report shows that they are happy with their decision, but are not prepared enough linguistically before leaving China for living and studying in Italian (Song 2013: 23). In conclusion, more understanding and communication is needed so that students, teachers, and administrators can provide a more rewarding atmosphere for Chinese students preparing to study abroad in Italy and other countries around the world (Song 2013: 24).

Within Italy, and especially at the University of Macerata (UNIMC), there is little to no research done on the acculturative process of Chinese Bilateral exchange students. Trentin, a professor at UNIMC who coordinated the bilateral agreement with Chengdu Institute, Sichuan International Studies University (CISISU) and other Chinese universities, explained that he is unaware of any previous research on the acculturative experience of Chinese international students, especially any involving students from

CISISU to UNIMC. He furthermore emphasised how longitudinal research on their acculturative sojourn would be interesting and useful knowledge for both universities. (Trentin 2016)

Theoretical and empirical research for this current study is largely influenced by Smith & Khawaja's (2011) *Review of the Acculturation Experiences of International Students*. Their research presents a review of current acculturation models and discusses the impact acculturative stressors, coping strategies, and social support have on the acculturation process of international students. Smith & Khawaja's research states that international students not only face the same general life and academic stress as other regular university students, they also have to deal with the cultural and academic transitional challenges of studying with a different language in a new educational system (Smith & Khawaja 2011: 702). Findings from their review suggest that Ward et al.'s 2001 theoretical model is suitable for understanding the acculturation of international students, but more research needs to be done to explore the theory with this subject group (ibid. 709). They state in their chapter on "future directions for research" that there is still considerable gap in the literature dealing with international students, and that future qualitative research is needed to explore the lived experiences, and attitudes, of international students in order to enhance academic knowledge and understanding of their acculturation (ibid. 31).

Further research needs to be done to fill gaps in research literature in order to develop a more holistic view of the acculturative adjustment experience that student sojourners go through when on a university exchange. The knowledge and understanding of first-hand experiences of acculturation is important for university administrations faculty members as well as international educators who must help support students during their study abroad (Glass & Westmont 2014: 114). There is conflicting evidence and a need for further research on the relationship between academic, sociocultural, and psychological experiences of acculturation (Wang & Hannes 2014: 69). It is important that research holistically looks into understanding all areas of their life when abroad (Wang 2012; Bertram et al. 2014; Wenhua & Zhe 2013). It is also imperative that more research is

done to develop a deeper and better understanding of the adjustment process international students experience with social networks (Rienties & Nolan 2014: 179).

1.2 Research Aims, Significance, Questions, and Methodology

This study aims to explore, understand, and critically analyze the psychological and sociocultural acculturation process that Chinese international university students experience when they leave their country for the first time, and come to study and live in Central Italy. The research questions and methodology used follows the advice of previous research, and aims to fill research gaps described in the literature review. The student subjects for this research study are female Chinese international students from 20 to 23 years old. They are all studying Italian language and culture at Chengdu Institute, Sichuan International Studies University (CISISU), and have come for one full academic year (2015 – 2016) to study at the University of Macerata (UNIMC).

The empirical research of this study is supported by Ward et al.'s (2001) affective, behavioural, and cognitive (ABC) theoretical model of acculturation. The ABC model explains how sojourners go through psychological and sociocultural adjustment periods of stress and coping, cultural learning, and sociocultural identification during their cross-cultural transition. Ward, Bochner, and Furnham state in their book, *The Psychology of Culture Shock*, that their ABC model of acculturation provides a solid conceptual base for empirical research on sojourners (Ward et al. 2005: 50). The ABC model is significant and useful as it considers acculturation as an active process that occurs over time to deal with environmental and cultural change, rather than a passive reaction to problematic situations (Zhou et al. 2008; Bochner 2003). Previous researchers support the ABC theoretical framework as it provides the most comprehensive insight into the acculturation process that sojourners go through when adjusting to a new environment (Yun & Le 2012; Lombard 2014; Zhou et al. 2008; Sorrentino 2008; Jindal-Snape & Rienties 2016).

The research aims of this research study are to address the following questions according to the ABC framework of acculturation over the course of the students' academic year abroad:

1. During a yearlong academic transition to the University of Macerata in Italy, what are the affective stress issues, coping strategies, and behavioural changes experienced by the CISISU student sojourners at university?
2. What are the affective stress factors, coping strategies, and behavioural changes CISISU Chinese sojourners experience when adjusting their daily life routines to environmental and sociocultural differences in Macerata, Italy?
3. How do Chinese student sojourners from CISISU socially and culturally identify themselves and feel attached over the year towards their home and the host society in Macerata, Italy?

Since this research study aims to understand more about the personal experiences student sojourners have during their cross-cultural transition, a qualitative research process is used. Qualitative research facilitates a better understanding of lived experiences and the cultural meanings negotiated by those transitioning to another sociocultural environment (Leech & Onwuegbuzie 2007: 560). Research data in this study is collected directly from the Chinese CISISU students through in-depth face-to-face interviews throughout their exchange year. The longitudinal research on their acculturation process is "short-term", as only three interviews take place during a single academic year. The first interview takes place upon their arrival in August of 2015, the second after four months in December, and the final interview at the end of their exchange in July of 2016. Interviews are recorded, written, and analyzed by the researcher with preceding ethical permission from the CISISU participants.

This is a cross-language research study that uses English as the main language throughout the empirical research process. The term "cross-language research" was first used by Temple (2002), and is now regularly used to describe qualitative research that

involves a language barrier between the researcher and their participant informants (Squires 2009: 278). A language barrier exists in this study between the native English speaking researcher and the Mandarin Chinese speaking students. However, the study is able to overcome the language barrier by using English as a common language, or “lingua franca”, between the researcher and the student subjects during the empirical interview process. Jenkins explains that “English as a Lingua Franca” (ELF) may include conversational interactions with native speakers (NSs) of English and non-native speakers (NNSs) as well as interactions between non-native English speakers (Jenkins 2007: 2).

An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is well suited for analyzing the longitudinal data results received during the qualitative research process of this study. IPA is a qualitative approach that focuses more in-depth on examining how individuals make sense of their personal experiences and situations (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014: 1). Since 1996, growth in IPA based publications have continued, but are lacking studies based in non-English speaking countries (Smith 2011: 12). Smith et al. state in their book, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method, and Research* (2009), that IPA research suits well for those interested in looking into detail at how someone makes sense of a major transition in their life (Smith et al. 2009: 3). IPA is useful in understanding clearly about participants’ cognitive and affective reaction to what is happening to them (Smith 2011: 10). Therefore, IPA fits well with the research questions, and the ABC theoretical framework of this research study.

Analytical results from this research study aim to be of significant assistance to future Chinese students planning to studying abroad, as well as to university international relations office (IRO) administrators. A growing number of Chinese students, particularly those from CISISU and other universities in China, are venturing abroad to live and study at the University of Macerata (UNIMC). In depth qualitative research into their acculturative sojourn has not been conducted, and would be valuable in understanding the yearlong acculturative process that they go through. It would also be worthwhile for Chinese students studying or planning to study abroad to know and

understand the acculturative adjustment process experienced by other Chinese international students. Furthermore, it is important that IRO staff members have a clear understanding of experiences and patterns of acculturation amongst Chinese students as it is their job to support the adjustment process of both incoming and outgoing international students, and the majority of incoming international students today are Chinese citizens (Bertram et al. 2014: 107; OECD 2016; IECF Monitor 2015).

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

Following the introductory information provided in this first chapter, proceeding chapters discuss background information on student sojourners and their acculturation process. The second chapter of this research paper introduces and provides worldwide statistical data on study abroad patterns of university student sojourners, particularly those from China. Important topical issues that affect the psychological and sociocultural acculturative adjustment process of student sojourners are also discussed in chapter two. The third chapter defines and provides detailed examples on Ward et al.'s affective, behavioural, and cognitive (ABC) theoretical framework.

Information on methodology and empirical results are presented in the final chapters. Chapter four discusses the qualitative methodology, and analysis process used during the empirical research process. Details on the location, subject participants, researcher, and interview process related to the data collection are explained in chapter five. An analysis of the empirical results is given in chapter six under categorical themes and subthemes. Finally, a conclusion is provided in chapter seven with findings, implications, limitations, and advice for future directions of related research.

2 UNIVERSITY STUDENT SOJOURNERS

This chapter provides information about university student sojourners worldwide, and the major factors affecting their acculturation. Background knowledge and statistical data regarding the growing number of university students studying abroad is provided in section 2.1. Particular reference is given to Chinese university students studying abroad given their standing as the main group of outbound international students recorded worldwide, and their relevance as the subject group for the empirical research of this research study. The main factors that affect the psychological and sociocultural acculturation process of student sojourners are discussed in section 2.2.

Accurate and current statistical information on university student sojourners worldwide was limited and difficult to find due to worldwide discrepancies in the defining an “international” and a “foreign” student at tertiary education. Higher education, or tertiary third stage education, is a higher level of education that builds upon secondary high-school education (OECD 2015: 26). According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), there is a difference between “international” and “foreign” students at tertiary education. The important distinction between an “international” and a “foreign” student is in regards to the specific time that they spend abroad. A “foreign student” is a non-citizen of the country that comes to study either for exchange or for their full degree, and is not necessarily a mobile student as there is a high possibility that they will remain in the host country to find work and start a new life. An “international student”, on the contrary, is a non-permanent foreign resident of the country who comes to study for only a specific short-term period from another country. (OECD 2015: 361; OECD 2016: 330)

International students studying abroad are commonly referred to today as “exchange students”. The word “exchange” implies that an official agreement has been previously completed between two different universities to exchange students for short-term study abroad purposes. In order to send students to study abroad at a foreign university, the home university must first have an official signed agreement in place to accept students

from a partner university. International students that go on a university exchange within Europe through the Erasmus+ Mundus Programme are known as “Erasmus+ students”. “Bilateral students” are international students that come to study in Europe according to specific university bilateral agreements from outside the European Union or Erasmus+ Programme, like Chinese students studying in Italy for example. (UNIMC IRO 2016)

International/exchange students are also referred to, like business expatriates, as “sojourners”. Since a “sojourn” means a temporary stay, a person who is a temporary resident in a foreign region is regarded as a “sojourner” (Ward et al. 2001: 21). Sojourners are classified as people whose residence and involvement in the foreign community is more than that of a tourist, but less than a citizen, immigrant or refugee (Ward et al. 2005: 142). Their residence in the foreign country is temporary because they have an intention and legal agreement to return to their home culture, country, and institution of origin once the purpose of their visit, or their study exchange, has been completed (Ward et al. 2005: 6, 124, & 142).

2.1 Mobility and Hosting of Student Sojourners Worldwide

The world that we live in today is more interconnected than it has ever been before, leaving students with international experience in a good position for future work employment. Globalization, involving the large internationalization of companies, has linked the world closer together and intercultural skills are important to have in today’s interconnected world, especially for those planning to work in the international business market. Tertiary education is emerging as a more diverse venue for students to improve their understanding of global languages, cultures, and business methods. (OECD 2016: 328) Governments and institutions around the world have come to realize the major value international students have in establishing social and business links between their home country, and the host country where they study abroad. Increased efforts are thus continuing to be done, through an internationalization process, to promote and support the

incoming and outgoing flow of international students for cultural, academic, social, economic, and political reasons. (OECD 2015; ICEF Monitor 2015; OECD 2016)

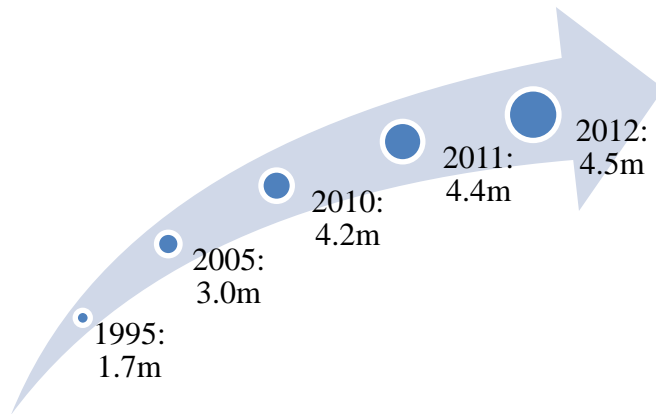


Figure 1. Long-Term Growth in the Number of Students Studying Abroad. Growth in the internationalization of higher education is shown in the millions. Data comes from both the OECD and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (adapted from OECD 2015: 360)

There has been, and continues to be, a dramatic increase over the years in the mobility of students in higher education to foreign countries for study exchange purposes (see Figure 1). This is due to the high demand worldwide for obtaining tertiary education abroad and perceived value of studying at prestigious institutions in OECD countries (OECD 2016: 328). Students today are traveling further and more frequently than ever before. Statistics in the 2015 report state that the number of students going outside their country of citizenship to study between 2005–2012 increased by 50%, and that over the past three decades, the number has risen dramatically from 0.8 million in 1975 to 1.7 in 1995, then to 4.5 million in 2012 (OECD 2015: 360). The OECD 2016 report states that the number of mobile students in OECD countries increased, with variation among the countries, by five percent between 2013 and 2014, and is continuing to increase (OECD 2016: 329). ICEF Monitor, a market intelligence resource for the international education

industry, estimates that more than five million students traveled abroad in 2014, which is more than double the 2.1 million reported in 2001 (IECF Monitor 2015).

Studying within higher education and living abroad as an international student is no longer an occurrence reserved for the wealthy elite. With the global growth of a large middle class, and a wide range of funding opportunities available, studying abroad within higher education has become open to masses. (IECF 2015) This mass movement is also due largely to the ease and reduced cost of foreign travel, as well as to the demanding interest worldwide of receiving an education abroad. Students from underdeveloped countries are looking to improve their future by studying abroad. Governments in “developing” and fast growing economic countries are encouraging and supporting students through scholarships to study abroad, and then return home to develop cross-border partnerships that improve their country’s situation in the world (IECF 2015).

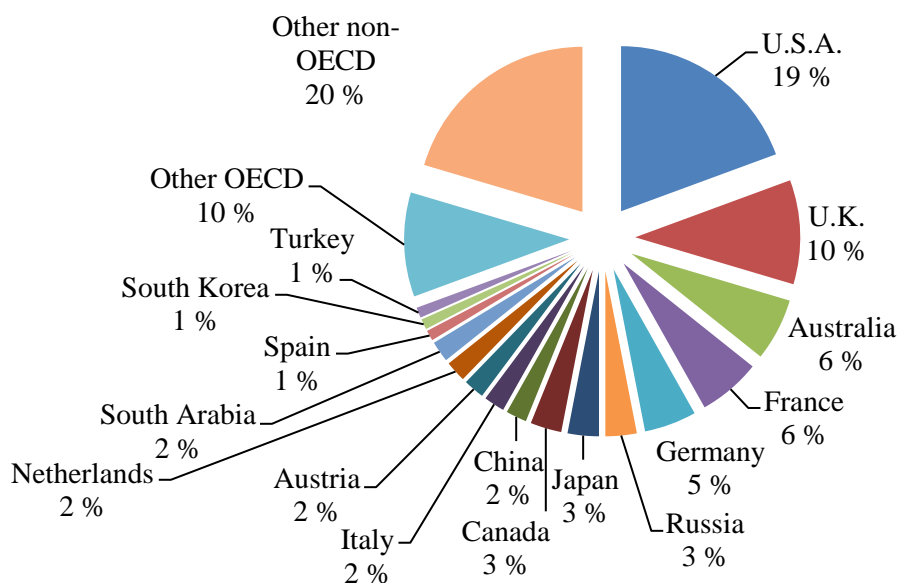


Figure 2. Host Destination Countries for Foreign & International Tertiary Students. Data from Turkey, South Korea, South Arabia, Italy, China and Russia only refers to foreign students as a group rather than international students specifically. Data from Canada comes from 2012, while the rest comes from 2013 (OECD 2015: 356)

OECD nations receive the most number of international students. The OECD is an international economic organization composed of thirty-four “developed” countries that have a high rank on the human development index, and whose citizens receive the highest income. Figure 2 shows the statistical layout of which OECD countries receive the most international students. The United States of America in dark blue is host to the largest number (19%) of these international students followed by the United Kingdom, Australia, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, and then Canada (see Figure 2). Besides these eight main destinations, a significant number of international students were hosted in Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, China, and Saudi Arabia in 2013. (OECD 2015: 356)

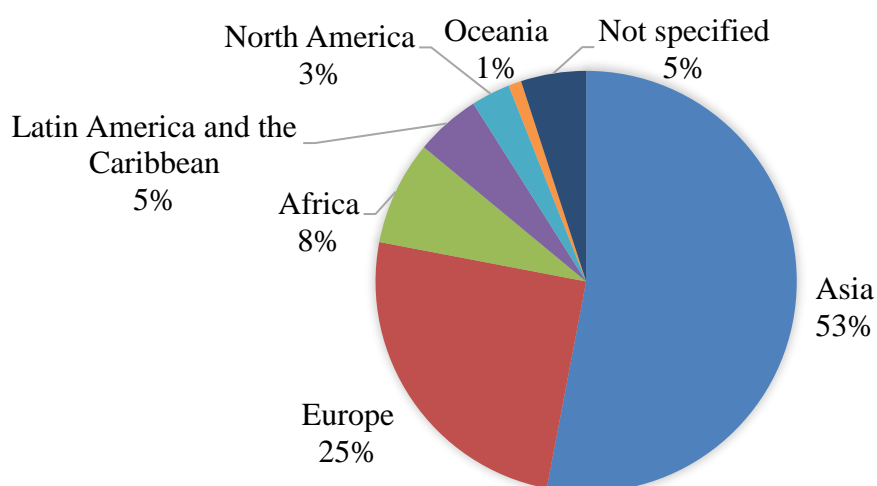


Figure 3. Foreign and International Students’ Home Region of Origin in Tertiary Education (OECD 2015: 360)

It is interesting to note that within the OECD countries more international students are hosted than being sent abroad. Figure 3 indicates the region of origin for those students studying abroad, and is in many ways opposite than Figure 2 that shows the destination countries (see Figure 2 & 3). Europe tends to host just as many students as it sends

away, due largely to the growth of the European Erasmus+ program. However, there is a huge difference when comparing the number of students leaving to the number studying in North America and Oceania. Australia is host to six percent of the world's international students, but the whole region of Oceania only sends one percent abroad. The situation in North America is also interesting as only three percent of students are leaving to study abroad compared to the twenty-two percent that are coming to study from foreign countries. Within North America, OECD statistics show that nineteen percent go to study in the United States, and three percent go to study abroad in Canada. (OECD 2015)

Besides Europe, the data in Figure 3 shows that students from more “underdeveloped” countries in Asia, Africa, and South/Central America are going abroad for higher educational study purposes. For every citizen from an OECD country that left to study abroad in 2013, an additional three international students were hosted, which in total represents around 2.9 million international students in OECD countries (OECD 2015: 359). There is little to no significant data seen in Figure 2 of students going south to study in African, South/Central American, and many Asian countries. The main destination nations for international students are very different and quite opposite from the main nations of students' home origin. Most of the incoming international students at universities around the world come from non-OECD countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (5%), Africa (8%), and Asia (53%) (see Figure 3). As seen in Figure 2, richer OECD destinations with more prestigious universities are host to students from these “underdeveloped”, or fast growing nations, that aim to receive a better education and more opportunities for the future.

Recent data from the OECD shows that students from Asia represent 53% of all international students enrolled worldwide (see Figure 3). From information in OECD's *Education at a Glance* 2015 and 2016 report, the majority of Asian international students studying abroad at universities worldwide are Chinese citizens (OECD 2015: 352; OECD 2016: 328). Chinese students represent 22% of all international students studying in OECD countries (OECD 2015: 359). A high value is placed on knowledge

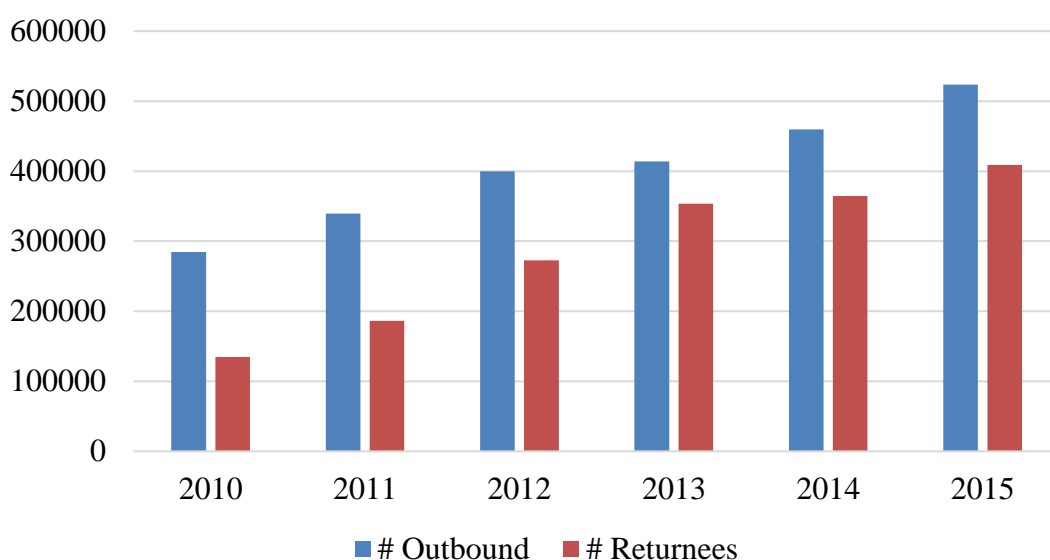
and education, especially on overseas education, in China. According to IECF Monitor, one out of every six internationally mobile students is from China (IECF Monitor 2015). Since 2001, the Chinese government has increased its scholarship support for educational and cultural exchanges abroad (European Commission & Chinese Ministry of Education 2011: 6). More families are also able to now afford to pay for their child to have an education abroad, due to rapid economic growth in China (European Commission & Chinese Ministry of Education 2011: 51).

Growth in the number of Chinese students studying abroad started from 1978 when a new government in China began opening up its educational sector through reform initiatives and international cooperation agreements. Then in 2001 when China joined the world trade organisation, further growth in international education began to take off to the high level that we see today. Since 2001, Chinese universities have opened up more to international cooperation agreements with foreign institutions. The expansion and development of these agreements with foreign countries has taken place largely within higher educational institutions in Europe. In 2007, the EU ranked first in the world for being the largest importer of Chinese students with the UK, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Italy, Finland, Austria, and Ireland receiving the highest intake (European Commission & Chinese Ministry of Education 2011: 31). Now all EU member states have established, and are continuing to renew and establish more, bilateral educational cooperation with China for the mobility of students and staff (European Commission & Chinese Ministry of Education 2011: 70). According to Italian reports by the European Migration Network in 2012, Chinese students have obtained the largest number of residence permits for study purposes in Italy (IDOS Study & Research Centre 2012).

Data published from the Chinese Ministry of Education shows a record level of outbound Chinese international students in 2015 (see Table 1). The Chinese government report, published on March 25th 2016, indicates that the number of Chinese students that went to study abroad in 2015 increased by 13.9 percent from the previous 2014 year to a total number of 523,700. Table 1 shows this increase in the number of Chinese students

studying abroad clearly from 2010 to 2015. The report states that the majority of Chinese students currently studying abroad are self-funded, and spend just under two years abroad. Since 1978, the number of higher education students leaving China to study abroad has reached around four million. This number of outbound Chinese students is particularly high compared to other countries around the world, leaving China to remain as the world's leading source of international students today. (Huang 2016; ICEF 2016)

Table 1. Outbound and Returning Chinese International Students (Chinese Ministry of Education in Huang 2016; ICEF 2016)



The number of Chinese international students returning from studying abroad, referred to in slang terms as “Haigui” sea turtles, to look for employment and a settled life back in China has increased over the years (see Table 1). The Chinese Ministry of Education shows the steady increase in the number of outbound Chinese students returning home from 2010 to 2015 (Huang 2016). According to the head of the Ministry’s Overseas Study Department, the increase in returnees is largely due to economic improvements in the job market in China for qualified students with international experience (ICEF

2016). With the importance of international relations and global business in today's modern world, efforts have been made by the Chinese government since the 1990s to have high-qualified individuals with international experience back in China to further their country's development (European Commission & Chinese Ministry of Education 2011: 40; ICEF 2016).

2.2 Factors Affecting the Acculturation Process

The cross-cultural transition student sojourners experience can be challenging and often stressful as international students confront psychological and sociocultural challenges that hinder their smooth integration into the new academic and sociocultural environment. Research has demonstrated that psychological and sociocultural adjustment issues and coping strategies are conceptually and empirically distinct, but overall inter-related (Ward et al. 1998: 279; Ward et al. 2001: 42). Cognitive identity issues as well as daily stress and coping issues to differences in the sociocultural environment affect the psychological acculturation process. Behavioural difference factors in the foreign cultural environment affect the sociocultural acculturation process of the sojourner. (Ward et al. 2001: 42)

Ward et al. explain that the psychological and sociocultural affective distress student sojourners experience during their acculturation process reduces and becomes variable over time. Psychological adjustment difficulties have reported to be the highest during the initial stages of transition (Ward et al. 2005: 82; Brown & Holloway 2008: 45). As students are exposed directly to cultural differences upon arrival to the foreign cultural environment, psychological stress continues and sociocultural issues arise. International students must face cognitive pressures regarding their cultural identity, and role of being a "foreign ambassador" when interacting with members of the host culture (Ward et al 2005: 153). After four to six months, psychological and sociocultural experiences of stress are reduced, but are still prevalent overtime as the sojourner adjusts to new experiences, and learns the cultural behaviours of the foreign environment. Following

around six-months of the adjustment stage, the sojourner has learnt more of the sociocultural behaviours and feels more adjusted to the foreign lifestyle. Class work, exams, job, relationship difficulties, and other issues unrelated to cultural difference then become the top stressors affecting sojourning students. (Ward et al. 2005: 82)

Academic objectives and goals distinguish student sojourners from other intercultural sojourners. Not only do international students face the same general life and academic stress as other regular university students, they also have to deal with the cultural and academic transitional challenges of studying with a different language in a new educational system (Smith & Khawaja 2011: 702). Significant challenges to success during the transition to a new university environment arise from academic cross-cultural differences in student and teacher expectations, patterns of classroom interaction, and even perceptions and definitions of intelligence (Ward et al. 2005: 166).

2.2.1 Language and Communication

A major part of the sociocultural adaptation process to a new cultural environment is overcoming the language barrier (Zheng & Berry 1991; Lin 2006; Smith & Khawaja 2011; Cao et al. 2016). The ability to communicate effectively in a foreign cultural environment largely depends on the language proficiency of the sojourner. Ward et al. (2005) explain under their affective and behavioural approach the importance of knowing the local language of the host community. This importance is based on evidence from a number of previous research studies, which report a link between language fluency and the psychological well-being and satisfaction of sojourners during their acculturative adjustment (Ward et al. 2005: 91). Not being proficient enough in the foreign local language can cause sojourners to become isolated, confused, and helpless when it comes to expressing their needs and interests towards others (Cao et al. 2016). By learning the language fluently, the foreign sojourner will be able to become more self-sufficient, confident, and will experience a more successful acculturative adjustment to the foreign cultural environment.

Competency in the language of the host country and university is especially important for international students academically. Reports in previous research state that international students perceive language proficiency and their limited language skills as the most significant aspect of their academic problems and performance (Ward et al. 2005: 155; Glass & Westmont's 2014; Wang & Hannes 2014). Failure to communicate and understand the university system and academic work required affects the student's overall academic results, and success at university.

When a language barrier and cultural differences in communication patterns exist between the sojourner and those within the local host community, more difficulty will occur in the establishment of mutually satisfying relationships. Cross-cultural misunderstandings and friction are due largely to the sojourner's lack of knowledge in the hidden language of interpersonal interaction within the host community (Ward et al. 2005: 70). Being skilled in the language and communication style of the host community is important as it allows the sojourner to facilitate communication and interact effectively with locals, who in return can effectively assist and support the cultural learning and acculturation process of the sojourner (Ward et al. 2005: 234).

2.2.2 Dietary Acculturation

Dietary acculturation is a significant challenge in the daily life acculturation process student sojourners experience when living abroad. Everyone needs food to survive, but what and how we eat on a daily basis differs culturally. Food is an important component of a society and culture as it expresses the relationship people have with their surrounding environment (Ma 2015: 195). Dietary change can have positive, negative or neutral physical effects on sojourners' overall nutrition and health (Lee et al. 2015: 304). Ward et al. explain how "getting used to the local food" is an adaptive skill that causes sociocultural difficulty amongst cross-cultural sojourners (Ward et al. 2005: 66). The adjustment process of getting used to the local food, and maintaining a traditional home culture diet is known academically as "dietary acculturation". Dietary acculturation is an emerging interdisciplinary field of study from humanities, social science, and science disciplines that observes the intricate relationships between food,

culture, and society. Research studies that focus on dietary acculturation reveal a lot of information about the what, where, how, and why of food choices and food habits among people transitioning from their home region to a foreign sociocultural environment. (Almerico 2014: 1).

Almerico (2014) focuses on the food habits of those who follow a Mediterranean Diet and live in Naples, Italy in her research study on *Food and Identity: Food Studies, Cultural, and Personal Identity*. “Food is more than just nutrients,” Almerico explains as she writes about her family’s heritage and culture in Italy. There is a sense of belonging and ethnic pride found in food (Almerico 2014: 6). What a person, or group of people, choose to eat or not to eat expresses aspects of their personal and cultural identity in comparison to others, like the familiar saying “you are what you eat” (Almerico 2014: 3). In her study, Almerico explains that bread is an important element of the meal in Italy, and other European cultures. From the Christian religion, bread has strong cultural symbolism as it is known as the staff of life and body of Christ (Almerico 2014: 5). However, bread is not the most important element of the meal in all cultural societies around the world.

In moving to a new sociocultural environment, international students are confronted with a dissimilar food environment and need to make changes in their dietary behaviour (Lee et al. 2015: 304). Dietary acculturation changes are not so simple to make if the food and dietary culture in the new cultural environment is different from the student’s home culture. People from China, especially those from the southern regions, have rice, not bread, as their daily staple food (Ma 2015: 196). Ma (2015) explains that even when traveling or after years of migration, Chinese people find it very difficult to change their eating habits to that of those in foreign countries (Ma 2015: 196). Maintaining their original home cultural diet in the foreign country is also a challenge. Therefore, it is important that student sojourners try to maintain a balance diet abroad that includes cuisine from their home culture as well as the host culture.

2.2.3 Friendship and Social Support

Friendship, social support and a sense of belonging to a local social network are all important aspects that influence an individual's psychological well-being and sociocultural adaptation. Humans are social creatures by nature as they enjoy sharing experiences and having the comfort of others. Perceptions of discrimination and lack of inclusion and belonging within the host community negatively affects the psychological wellbeing and sociocultural success of an individual's acculturation (Ward et al. 2005: 152; Brunton & Jeffrey 2014: 321). Support from family, friends, and acquaintances is viewed by Ward et al. as a major influence in coping to stress experienced during the cross-cultural transition (Ward et al. 2001: 85). International students report frequently their need for social support more than local students (Ward et al. 2001: 150). Theoretical research proves that the establishment and maintenance of quality intercultural relationships breaks barrier stereotypes and facilitates a cultural understanding (Hendrickson et al. 2011). Student sojourners with more local ties are consistently found to be psychologically better adjusted and have a greater knowledge of the host culture (Kashima & Loh 2006; Zhou et al. 2008; Campbell 2012). Therefore, the greater the social support, the more positive the psychological and sociocultural adjustment will be.

International students form friendships commonly with three different groups. Classification of these three distinct friendship networks derives from Bochner et al.'s (1977) functional model of friendship patterns among overseas students. One group consists of co-nationals, another of host-nationals, and the third group consists of individuals, particularly those who are students similarly on exchange, from other countries. According to previous research and Bochner's functional model of friendship networks, international students rely on each social group for a specific and slightly different reason. Host nationals are preferred for tangible cultural learning assistance during the acculturation process. Friendships with those of the same nationality are maintained to rehearse and affirm home culture values and practices. Friendships with other nationalities experiencing a similar cross-cultural transition are valued for socio-

emotional mutual support, and recreational fun. (Ward et al. 2001: 147 – 149; Furnham & Alibhai 1985: 711; Hendrickson et al. 2011: 281; Ward & Rana-Deuba 2000: 166; Tran & Vu 2016: 12; Bochner et al. 1977: 291 – 292)

Although little theoretical research has been done, peer mentoring of international exchange students to universities has become increasingly popular in recent years. Peer mentoring involves local students supporting new students' adjustment to academic and daily life through a tutor, peer mentor, or buddy program. Having a friend as a mentor from the host culture for guidance during the acculturation process is the most beneficial factor for the cultural learning process of behavioural skills (Ward et al. 2005: 59). Peer-pairing interventions of international students with domestic students are effective in aiding international students' social, daily life, and academic adjustment (Ward et al. 2001: 148; Yeh & Inose 2003: 26; Smith & Khawaja 2011: 708; Woods et al. 2013).

3 ABC FRAMEWORK OF ACCULTURATION

The cross-cultural transition, or acculturation, process to a new and unfamiliar sociocultural environment affects an individual's feelings, thoughts, and behaviours and requires affective, cognitive, and behavioural (ABC) changes to adjust. Ward, Bochner and Furnham have combined major contemporary theories and research that best describes the psychological and sociocultural acculturative adjustment process sojourners go through into their ABC theoretical model of acculturation. This chapter provides background knowledge on definitions of culture, adaption, and acculturation. It also elaborates upon the affective, behavioural, and cognitive (ABC) stages of Ward et al.'s theoretical framework with associated theories from previous researchers.

There are many ways in which culture is traditionally fixed and passed on from generation to generation, while there are other ways in which it is fluid, evolving, and changing over time due to changes in the cultural environment of the individual (Oyserman & Lee 2008: 237). A person's home physical and social surrounding environment influences their implicit and explicit culture. Language, religion, knowledge, values and beliefs are internalized as implicit culture, while external factors from the climate, economic situation, education, social institutions and practices, as well as contact from outside sources influences the individual's explicit outside culture (Berry et al. 2011: 6).

Adaption and acculturation are terms commonly used to describe cultural changes individuals experience during their cross-cultural transition to a new sociocultural environment. According to Berry, "adaptation" deals with changes in the individual due to environmental demands, while "acculturation" deals with changes in the patterns of the individual's culture when they are faced first hand with a culture different from their own (Berry 1997: 7 & 13). Ward et al. support Berry's definitions and clarify that acculturation is a dynamic process, as opposed to a static condition, of changes that occur in a wide variety of circumstances upon an individual from first-hand contact with people from a different cultural origin (Ward et al 2005: 43). For instrumental benefits

of cultural learning and an overall successful acculturation and adaptation, changes in cultural values are not required (Ward et al. 2005: 215). Acculturation changes can be observed in alterations in the sojourner's cognitions, cultural identity, outside attitudes, and behaviours (Zheng & Berry 1991: 452; Berry 2005: 698 – 701; Ward et al. 2001: 99; Ward et al. 2005: 31).

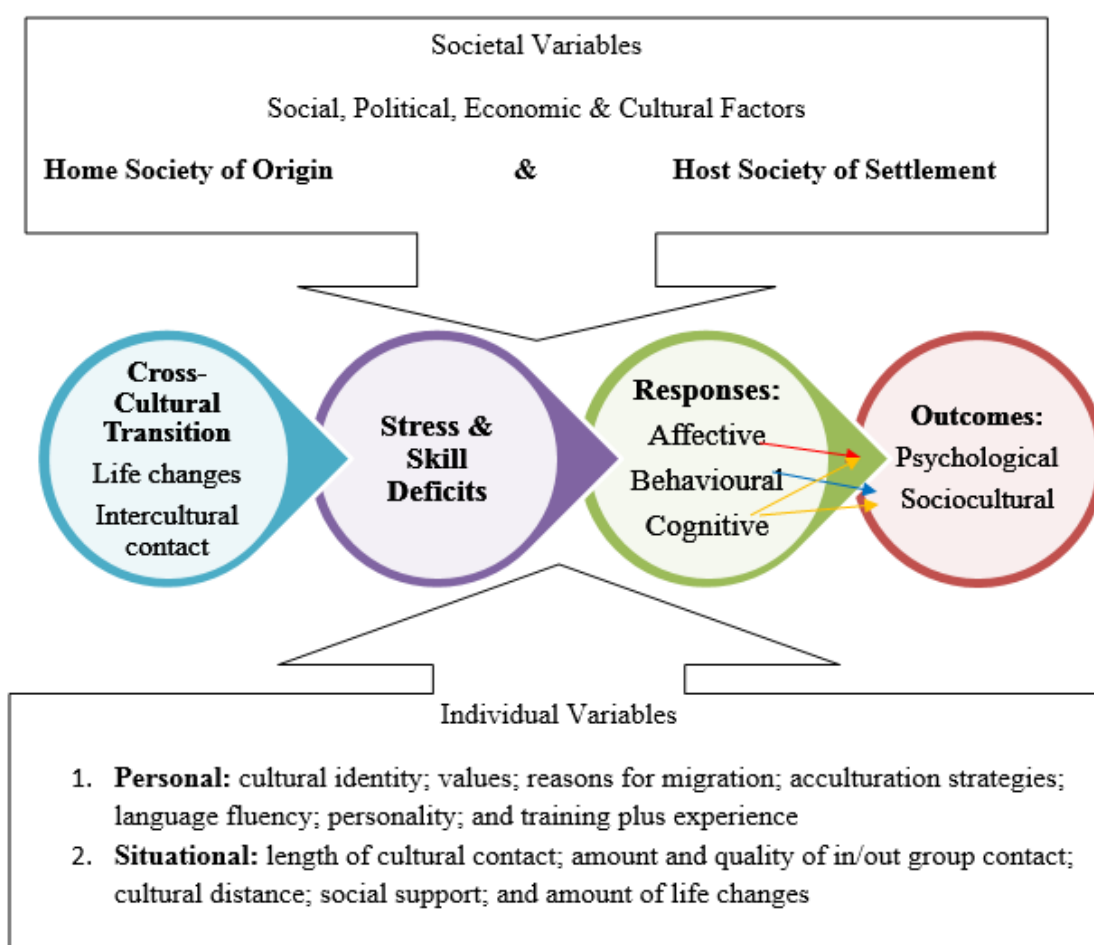


Figure 4. The Acculturation Process (adapted from Ward et al. 2001: 44)

Ward et al.'s ABC theoretical framework illustrates that sojourners will experience periods of sociocultural and personal psychological conflict as they engage in new experiences and transition to the foreign host cultural environment (see Figure 4). The framework is an evolving model that has been influenced by Lazarus and Folkman; Berry; and Furnham and Bochner from the field of cultural psychology (Ward et al. 2005: 43; Berry 1997: 14–15). John W. Berry clarify that acculturation involves the interaction of two main cultures, society of origin (home) and society of settlement (host), and that through this interaction both positive and negative forms of stress, not “cultural shock”, are experienced (Berry 2005: 708; Ward et al. 2005). Ward et al. expand on Berry's framework by adding and explaining how the three ABC perspectives have an important connection to the psychological and sociocultural adjustment process of acculturative stress (Smith & Khawaja 2011: 701).

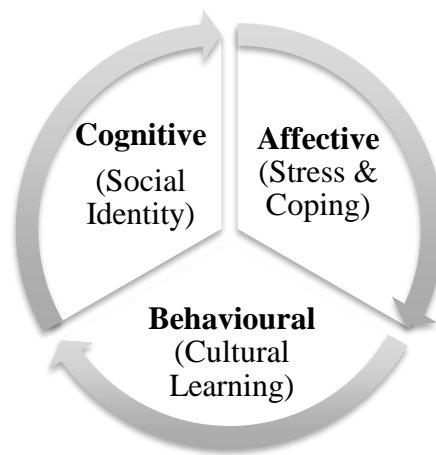


Figure 5. ABCs of Acculturation (adapted from Ward et al. 2001)

The acculturation process experienced by sojourners is a result of a combination of affective, behavioural, and cognitive (ABC) elements working together (see Figure 5). By looking into how people feel, think, and behave when transitioning to a foreign sociocultural environment, the ABC model of acculturation conceptualizes the sojourn

as an active life-changing event (Bochner 2003; Ward et al. 2005; Brown & Holloway 2008). Sojourners are expected to go through affective, or emotional, periods of stress and confusion as they try to live in a new and foreign environment. After realizing that the environmental and sociocultural way of life of the host society is different from their own, they will need to develop affective coping strategies to adjust and improve their psychological state of stress and confusion. During this adjustment stage, sojourners will begin to learn more about the local foreign culture through periods of behavioural cultural learning, which will influence their actions and interactions. These emotional periods of stress, coping, and cultural learning will affect them cognitively as they begin to think deeply about their cultural identity, and make critical decisions about their association to particular in-groups. (Ward et al. 2001: 48)

3.1 Affective: Stress and Coping with Stress

The affective stress and coping approach of the ABC model of acculturation derives from the theoretical works of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as well as Berry (1997). It is influenced by Lazarus and Folkman's stress, appraisal, and coping theory from 1984 (Ward et al. 2005; Bochner 2003; Yun & Le 2012: 137). Lazarus and Folkman define acculturative stress as a relationship between the nature of the environment and the characteristics of the person (Lazarus and Folkman 1984: 21). According to Lazarus and Folkman's transitional model of stress and coping, stressful experiences arise from the demands exerted by the foreign environment upon the balance of the sojourner's psychological functioning and overall well-being (Szabo et al. 2015: 2; Lazarus and Folkman 1984: 21). Berry's framework for acculturation considers the acculturative experience as a major life event that involves cognitive assessment, and coping strategies to overcome stressful situations (Ward et al. 2005: 72; Berry 1997: 15). The framework indicates how cultural and individual variables affect the process of acculturation and final adaptation of the individual experiencing the cultural transition (see Figure 6). According to the framework, the degree of stress felt by the sojourning individual depends greatly upon the strength of the changes demanded, and the amount

of cultural difference felt within the foreign sociocultural environment of the host society.

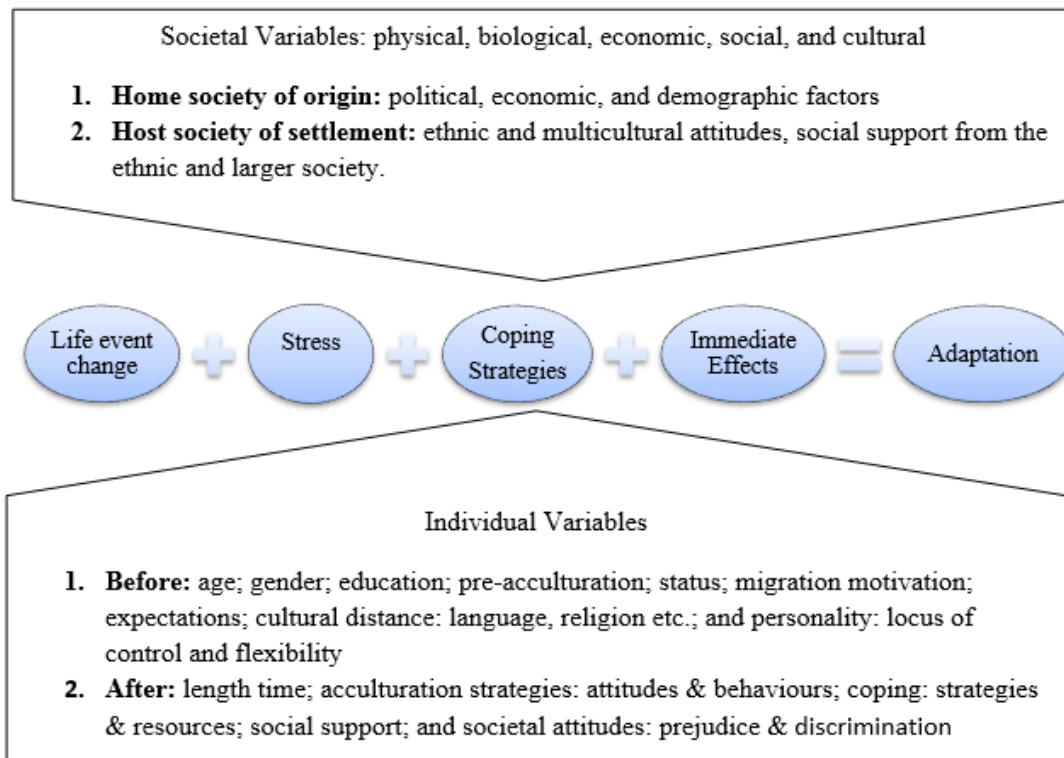


Figure 6. Stress and Coping Framework of Acculturation (adapted from Berry 1997: 15; Ward et al. 2005: 73)

The affective, or emotional, approach of the ABC model of acculturation conceptualizes the cross-cultural transition sojourners make as a series of stress provoking life changes that require coping responses to adjust comfortably (Ward et al. 2001: 73). It is a major conceptual aspect in understanding the psychological well-being and feelings of satisfaction a person experiences during their transition and adaption to a new foreign environment (Yun & Le 2012: 137; Ward et al. 2001: 71; Szabo et al 2015: 2). According to the ABC model of acculturation, the acculturative stress and confusion experienced by sojourners comes from psychological and sociocultural changes that

they experience in the foreign cultural environment (Ward et al. 2001: 42). Acculturative stress also comes from being separated from familiarities and comforts in the homeland and home culture (Szabo et al. 2015: 2). Reactions and adjustments made after encountering acculturative stress are emotional, which is thus the reason why the approach is “affective”. Emotionally sojourners must learn to find satisfaction with new circumstances, and cope with the anxiety caused by the absence of familiar places, items, social networks and practices of the past. (Ward et al. 2001: 247) Less psychological stress and confusion will be experienced and less sociocultural coping strategies will be needed to adjust if the sojourner goes to live and study in an environment culturally similar and familiar to their own (Ward et al. 2005: 148; Cao et al. 2016).

When encountering situations, behaviours, and things that are different in the foreign cultural environment, sojourners will enter an emotional state of “stress” or “culture shock”. Some of the affective responses consistently mentioned in literature on culture shock and acculturative stress include confusion, anxiety, disorientation, suspicion, bewilderment, and an intense desire to be elsewhere (Ward et al. 2005: 267). Oberg first proposed the idea of “culture shock” in 1960 to explain this confusion and anxiety experienced in a new sociocultural situation (Ward et al. 2005: 81). However, the term “culture shock” is replaced with the term “stress”, as re-defined by Berry, in Ward et al.’s (2001) framework of acculturation. Oberg’s version of “culture shock” lacks a theoretical basis and presents a limited view of cultural contact and change (Ward et al. 1998: 290; Ward et al. 2005: 272). Berry clarifies that the notion of “shock” carries a negative overwhelming tone, while the notion of “stress” can be either positive (eustress) and/or negative (distress). He also explains that there is no cultural or psychological theoretical research associated with “culture shock”, while the notion of “stress” has developed well into the stress and coping theoretical model of acculturation, adaptation, and adjustment. (Berry 1997: 13; Berry 2005: 708)

Once experiencing acculturative stress and confusion, sojourners must discover positive coping solutions to adjust psychologically. Ward, Bochner and Furnham describe the

experience individuals have when adjusting to an unfamiliar cultural environment as “an active process of dealing with change” (Ward et al. 2005: 267). All cross-cultural travelers must manage psychological stress related to the acculturation process and sociocultural stress issues that relate to learning the necessary cultural-specific skills of the host region (Jindal-Snape & Rienties 2016: 24). Individual differences occur as each sojourner experiences different forms of stress, social support and their willingness to change in response differs (Ward et al. 2005: 149). Acculturative stress can be viewed negatively as a threat, or as positively as challenge (Ward et al. 2005: 76). The ease of psychological adjustment and sociocultural changes to cope with acculturative stress depends largely on age, gender, education, and “push” versus “pull” motivations of the individual sojourner (Ward et al. 2005: 104). Since each individual is unique and his/her corresponding culture is different, there is no single solution to cope with stress experienced, nor a single way to fail.

In order for positive affective coping and a state of wellness to occur during the cross-cultural transition, changes in either the environment or the individual must occur (Ward et al. 2001: 78). As stress is due to both characteristics of the individual and the situational environment, so are the coping solutions (Ward et al. 2005: 72). Primary coping strategies deal with changing task-orientated behaviours found to induce stress within the environment, while secondary strategies are more cognitive as they involve changing perceptions and the overall evaluation of events and situations viewed as stressful (Ward et al. 2005: 79). Most often sojourners cope and adjust alone to their new environment through a trial-and-error basis. However, substantial evidence has accumulated to prove that preparation and training on general coping solutions to stress experienced within a foreign culture would be beneficial to support sojourners during their stay abroad (Ward et al. 2005: 245). Therefore, Ward et al. recommend that sojourners prepare themselves before their cross-cultural transition cognitively in acquiring knowledge about the host sociocultural environment, emotionally in understanding how to deal appropriately with stress, and behaviourally in acquiring appropriate interpersonal and social skills (Ward et al. 2005: 247).

3.2 Behavioural: Cultural Learning

The behavioural approach of the ABC model of acculturation deals with the cultural learning process sojourners experience. Theories behind the approach are an extension of the social skills approach, which originates from Argyle's model of interpersonal behaviour (Ward et al. 2005: 37). The core idea adopted from Argyle's model is that societal rules and conventions of verbal and non-verbal communication that regulate interpersonal interactions vary across cultures (Ward et al. 2005: 268). Therefore, sojourners that lack the relevant cultural skills and knowledge of the host cultural environment will have difficulty initiating and sustaining social relations with their hosts, and will need to adjust their behaviours accordingly (Sam 2010; Ward et al. 2005: 65; Bochner 2003; Berry 2005; Yun & Le 2012). Due to lack of local cultural knowledge, even sojourners sensitive to social cues can miss vital communication cues and respond with inappropriate behaviours in the perspective of locals within the host community. Their culturally inappropriate behaviours and forms of communication when engaging in intercultural communication may often lead to problematic misunderstandings, and cause offence (Ward et al. 2005: 268).

The cultural learning approach of the ABC framework follows the stress and coping approach. When stressful situations arise in the new sociocultural environment due to cultural difference, the sojourner needs to make behavioural changes in order to successfully cope and fit appropriately into the new society. Successful cultural learning involves the development of new behaviours required in the new cultural environment (Ward et al. 2005: 70). The amount of behavioural changes required depends upon the individual's length of residency in the foreign environment as well as their level of knowledge and competency in host cultural skills and behaviours, like language and communication style for example (Ward et al. 2005: 37). Successful behavioural adjustment depends upon the quality and quantity of contact the sojourner has with host nationals, their level of support from a social network, and their degree of involvement within the local host community (Ward et al. 2005: 59).

3.3 Cognitive: Social and Cultural Identification

Social and cultural identity, or sociocultural identity, issues individuals face during their cross-cultural transition are examined in the cognitive approach of the ABC model of acculturation. During the cross-cultural transition, the individual's social and cultural identity will be constantly challenged, and changes may occur over time as the sojourner lives and interacts with people from a cultural environment different from their own. The approach analyzes how individuals view their sociocultural identity in respect to others during their acculturation process (Ward et al. 2005: 2). The most important identity questions, in regards to culture contact and change experienced by sojourners, are "who am I" and "how do members of my group relate to other groups" (Ward et al. 2005: 100). The approach is influenced by Berry's acculturation theory, as well as the social identity theory proposed by Tajfel & Turner (Ward et al. 2005: 100). Ward et al. describe the cognitive approach as an assessment of the sojourner's outward perceptions and inward views (Ward et al. 2001: 2 & 3).

Tajfel & Turner's social identity theory is one of the most frequently referenced approaches for exploring the social identity of an individual, and has been particularly important in the development of the cognitive approach in the ABC framework (Ward et al. 2005; Bochner 2003; Yue & Le 2012). The conceptual theory discusses social categorisation and social comparison of group membership in relation to an individual's overall sociocultural identity. It suggests that individuals will evaluate their membership towards certain groups through social comparison and categorisation before determining their social identification towards certain "in" groups, and away from certain "out" groups (Ward et al. 2005: 104 – 106; Tajfel & Turner 1986). Tajfel and Turner explain that from the social-psychological perspective, group membership is defined by both the individual and by all members of the group who perceive themselves to be of the same social category (Tajfel & Turner 1986: 15). Through this social comparison and categorisation process, the defined "in" groups will be recognized as positively favourable, while the "out groups" will have some negative impact on the individual's self-esteem (Ward et al. 2005: 104 & 105). Friendship patterns, acculturation success,

and the wellness of the individual sojourner are all affected by their sense of belonging to “in” groups of the host community. Although Tajfel & Turner’s social identity theory states that individuals strive for positive social identity and belonging within the host community, empirical evidence on acculturation suggests that they prefer to maintain their home cultural identity while belonging and having relationships with members of the host community (Ward et al. 2005: 113). This empirical evidence supports the integration strategy of Berry’s acculturation theory and the bicultural identity strategy, to which Ward et al. (2001) follows.

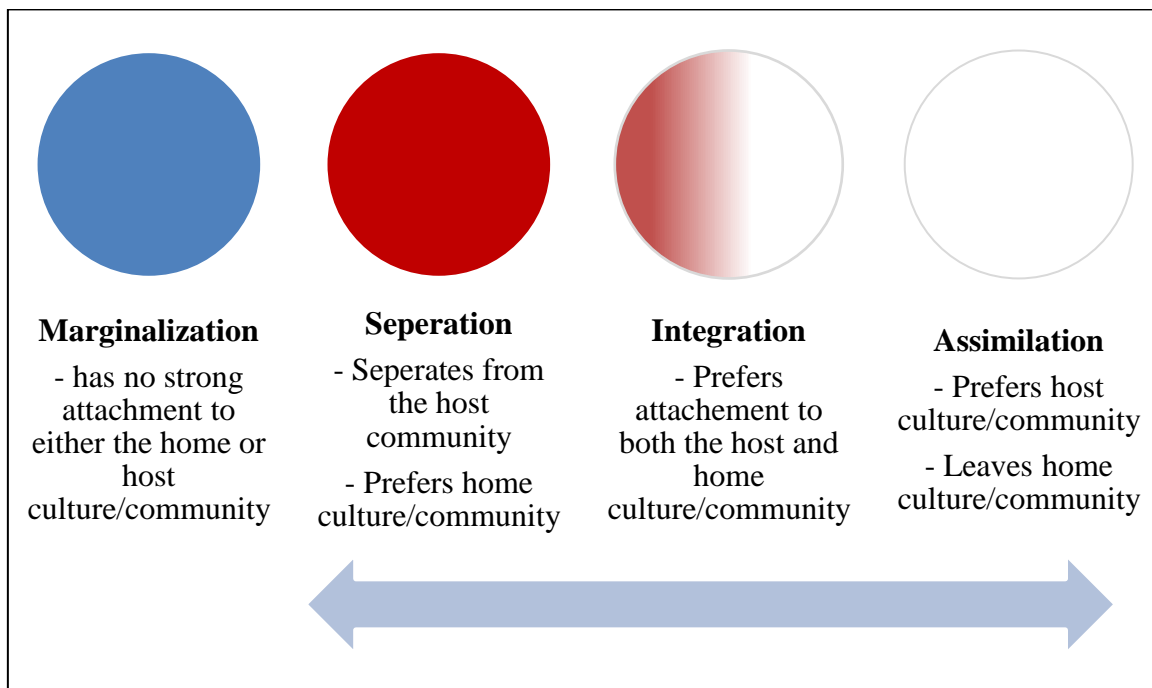


Figure 7. Berry’s Acculturation Theory (adapted from: Schmitz & Schmitz 2012: 18; Berry 2009: 366; Ward et al. 2005: 103)

Berry’s acculturation theory outlines four different acculturation strategies of cultural identity: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization (see Figure 7). Marginalization is a position whereby cultural practices towards any particular society

are of no importance to the individual. When the home culture is seen as very important, and there is no desire to follow any of the host society's cultural practices, then the person falls under the separation category. Assimilation is the opposite to separation as the person chooses to ignore their home culture, and goes through more behavioural changes to follow the cultural practices of the host society. Finally, integration is the most successful acculturation strategy as it involves a psychological and sociocultural balance of both cultures. The person in this position sees equal importance in following both the cultural practices of their home as well as those of the host society on a daily basis (see Figure 8). (Brown 2009; Ward et al. 2005; Berry 2005; Berry 1997, 2005, 2009).

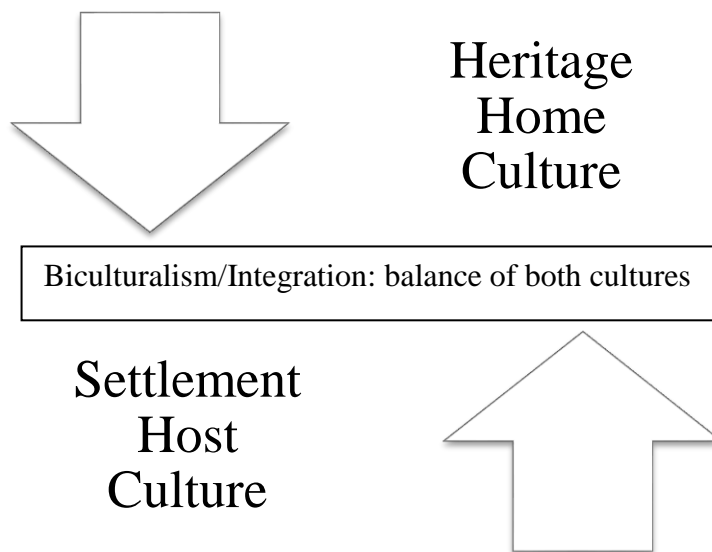


Figure 8. Balancing Home & Host Cultures (adapted from Ward et al. 2005: 102)

Ward et al.'s ABC framework, in particular the social identity approach, is elaborated from Berry's acculturation theory (see Figure 7). The theory explains that when individuals are faced with cultural differences, they experience an internal psychological conflict and will adjust their behaviour accordingly (Schmitz & Schmitz 2012: 18; Berry 2009: 366). Positioning in Berry's acculturation framework is based on

the level of attachment and interest the individual has in maintaining their heritage culture and identity, as well as their level of involvement and interest in being a member of the host cultural society (Berry 2009: 659). The duration of time an individual remains, or plans to remain, in the foreign cultural environment, has an important implication upon their acculturation process (Ward et al. 2001: 123). Berry's acculturation theory focuses on the acculturation strategies of individuals experiencing a long-term cross-cultural transition, like immigrants, migrants, and refugees. Since student sojourners have the intention on returning home to their country of origin after living abroad, their social and cultural identity issues are less problematic and long-term. Although, it is still important that student sojourners follow an integration strategy of balancing both their home culture and the culture of the host society when abroad (Ward et al. 2001).

4 METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the qualitative methodology approach used when conducting and analysing research for this thesis study. Steps involved in the qualitative interview and data collection process for a cross-language research study are described in the first section. Information about interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the qualitative analysis process used for interpreting and describing the research data collected, is provided in the second section of this chapter.

4.1 Qualitative Research

The empirical process of this research study follows a qualitative methodological approach. Qualitative research approaches have been used since the 1960s to understand a more naturalistic, contextual, and holistic view of humans in society (Leech & Onwuegbuzie 2007: 557). The qualitative research process follows pre-existing research questions and a theory, but is mainly based upon a method of induction. Within the induction method hypothesis predictions regarding the research findings are avoided before the actual data is collected and analyzed to allow for analytical theory results to be induced from the data itself (Seale 2004: 131; Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014: 9). Qualitative research methods are more exploratory as they can uncover and address issues not previously envisioned, as opposed to quantitative research methods that have relatively fixed research aims throughout the research (Seale 2004: 313). Hatch (2002) explains that the aim of qualitative research is to understand the experiences and inner perspectives participant subjects have surrounding the reality of the situation in which they are living. Instead of participating in measured experimental tests and survey questionnaires like in quantitative research, the participant subjects in qualitative research are more personally involved and actively engaged in the data collection through an interview process. (Hatch 2002: 7)

Direct observation and face-to-face interviews are the main methods of data collection in qualitative research. John Lofland explains clearly in his book *Analyzing Social*

Settings that the term “interview” is a construction of two words. The word “inter” means between two objects or points, and the word “view” means to look at something (Lofland 1971: 75). Therefore, the action of “interviewing” involves the discussion and observation of subject matter between two objects or people. Qualitative interviews are known as in-depth loosely structured conversations with a purpose (Seale 2004: 181). During the in-depth interview process, a person, known as the interviewer, questions another person to answer pre-set questions about their feelings, and experiences. Interviews are tape-recorded and notes are written of key sentences, words, and names in order for the researcher to accurately record what is perceived and experienced by the participant (Lofland 1971: 89). Instead of following a formal question and answer exchange like in quantitative approaches to research methodology, qualitative interview procedures are a more relaxed and fluid conversation between equals (Seale 2004: 107).

Compared to other research procedures that follow a strict approach, qualitative research is more unstructured, adaptable, and spontaneous as its goal is to uncover a broader and better understanding of the experience and overall situation of the subjects (Berry, Poortinga et al. 2011: 24). A successful interviewer must have interest, respect, understanding, and sympathy for the views of the informants. The interviewer must also have a non-argumentative attitude, willingness to adapt questions, and patience to listen quietly to answers provided. (Seale 2004: 180; Lofland 1971: 89) Questions may be changed, and further questions may be generated during the interview process by the researcher in response to verbal and non-verbal responses given by participants. Non-verbal responses, such as gestures or facial expressions, are important reactive answers to questions as well as cues that the researcher should alter or ask another question (Hatch 2002: 23).

Cross-language qualitative research is method of research commonly found in cross-cultural studies that involves language related challenges. Researchers commonly solve challenges presented in cross-language research by working with a translator or interpreter. Translators and interpreters are beneficial in providing language translation services and bridging the linguistic barrier between the researcher and their participant

informant. However, there is scepticism in the trustworthiness of data results provided by translators (Squires 2009: 278). If the translation process alters the original structure and language choice of the researcher and the informant, then results will not adequately capture the true essence of the phenomenon, and the validity of research findings in the final report will be threatened (Squires 2009: 278 & 280). It is important to understand that translators have their own perspectives and influence as a third person on the social interaction of the interview process (Temple 2002: 853). Therefore, phenomenological studies that focus particularly on the language used by participants to describe their personal experiences and feelings, should try not to involve the use of interpreters or translators during their data collection or analysis process (Squires 2009: 279 – 280).

4.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a recently developed approach to qualitative research analysis that is becoming increasingly popular. The first recorded IPA paper was in 1996 by J.A. Smith in the U.K. who defined the analysis approach for health psychology. Although, in later publications Smith explains that the analysis approach is also useful for researchers in social and health sciences as well as other disciplines. IPA is similar to other qualitative approaches, except for the fact that it deals more with understanding the perspectives of the participants involved. The analysis process is phenomenological in that it is concerned with lived experiences. IPA also has theoretical roots in hermeneutics as it deals with interpretation and idiography, describing the meaning, as well as the personal perspective, individuals have surrounding their experiences. (Smith 2011: 9 – 12; Smith et al. 2009: 1 – 29)

Publications with IPA are commonly conducted with a homogenous small group of one to fifteen participants with interviews that last around an hour (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014: 9–11). This method allows the researcher to devote more attention to understanding clearly the situation of each participant as well as the somewhat

homogeneous group. The primary goal of researchers using IPA is to elicit detailed information about the participants' personal experiences, feelings, and thoughts regarding particular research questions (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014: 10). IPA results are valuable as they present a more detailed and holistic account of the mental and physical situation of the participant subjects. In order to explain the responses given by the informants explicitly and accurately in the final analytical report, the researcher must first understand their point of view very clearly. The IPA process is described by Smith as "double hermeneutic," since the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant who is trying to make sense of what is and has happened to them. (Smith 2011: 10; Smith 2004: 40) This "double hermeneutic" process of analysis can present a challenge to the researcher. However, IPA is flexible in its guidelines, so the researcher can adapt it according to their objectives (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014: 11).

Stages involved during the qualitative IPA process form a pyramid that functions according to an inductive bottom-up research approach (see Figure 9). The bottom first stage involves examining and understanding the data information thoroughly and repetitively to identify relationship connections. During the coding second stage process of the analysis, irrelevant material is discarded, and related material is grouped together. This process involves evaluating, synthesizing, comparing, critiquing, interpreting, hypothesizing, and organizing the research data from the interviews and field observations. From emergent themes discovered in the collected data, important topic categories and labels, as well as subcategory topic labels, are established in step three and four of the IPA. After data is organized under pattern and theme categories, an overall picture, as opposed to a puzzle completed from data previously known, can then be discovered (Hatch 2002: 9). This overall picture aids in understanding clearly the experience participants have in their social setting, and the relationship it has to the associated theory of the research study. Finally, the fifth step involves writing the narrative account of the study results within the final report with original quote excerpts from the participants, and an analysis interpretation by the researcher. (Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014: 12)

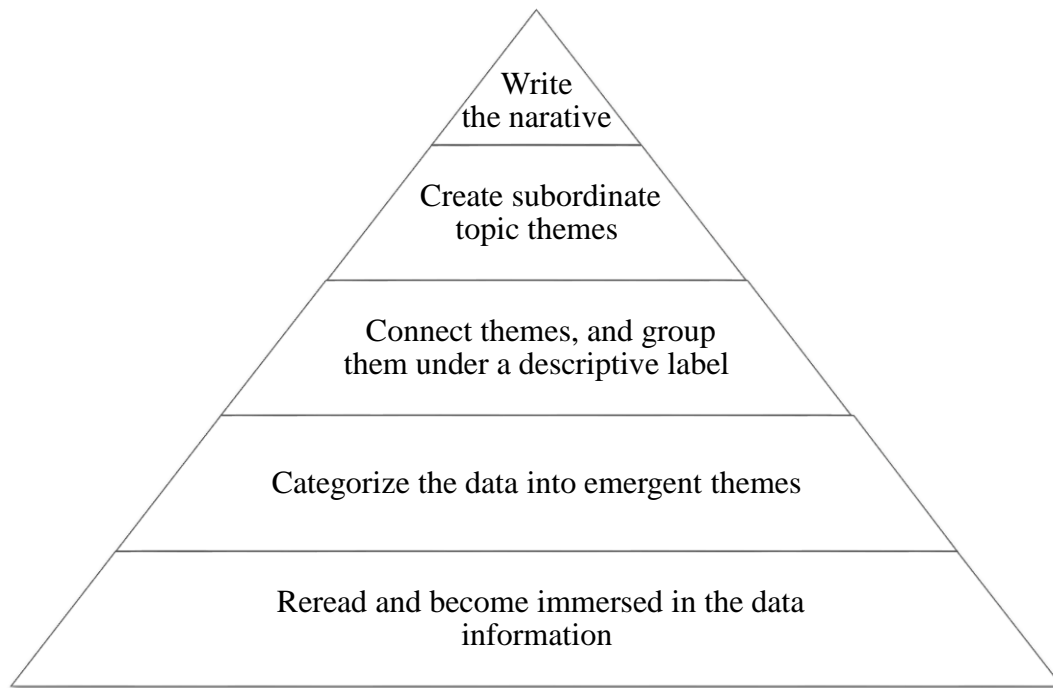


Figure 9. IPA Approach (adapted from Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014: 12)

5 DATA COLLECTION

In social research, it is important to understand the many variables involved in the data collection process that would affect the outcome of analysis results. These determining variables include the location in which the interview takes place, who is being interviewed, who is doing the interviewing, and the format of the questioning process (Seale 2004: 180). Therefore, information about the university and city of Macerata, the participant subjects, the position of the researcher, and the steps involved in the interview process are all explained in sections of this chapter.

5.1 Macerata, Italy, and UNIMC

Situated within East-Central Italy is the historical city and University of Macerata (UNIMC). Macerata is a small student city with a population of around 45,000 and a student population of around 13,000. The university contains five main faculty departments: economics and law; law; humanities with languages, mediation, history, arts, and philosophy; education, cultural heritage and tourism; and finally the department of political science, communications, and international relations. Classes and information at UNIMC are provided to students in mainly Italian and English. It is essential that all the students have an intermediate level of Italian, as most of the classes are taught in Italian language, and it is necessary for daily life within the country. (UNIMC 2016; UNIMC IRO & European Commission 2014)

The university and city of Macerata is growing as a home for international exchange students. Beginning frequently with letters of intent, bilateral cooperation agreements between universities develop into detailed educational framework agreements. The majority of international students come to UNIMC as Erasmus+ students from within Europe. Since the University has succeeded in creating a number of bilateral agreements with foreign universities, it is also possible to see a number of non-European Bilateral students on campus. Most of these international bilateral agreements are with foreign universities in the Peoples Republic of China. (UNIMC IRO 2016)

Macerata has a historical connection with China, which continues today with UNIMC's bilateral agreements. The historical connection comes from Matteo Ricci who was born in Macerata, moved to China, and became an important mediator between Europe and China during the 16th century (Shih 2014; Istituto Confucio 2013). The first agreement between UNIMC and a university in China was signed in 2011 with the inauguration of the Confucius Institute at UNIMC from the Confucius headquarters in Hanban, Beijing Normal University (Istituto Confucio 2013). Following this inauguration in 2011, bilateral agreements with Chinese universities for the exchange of students for academic and cultural study purposes have continued. Within the 2015–2016 academic year, the international relations office of UNIMC received a high total of seventeen Chinese international exchange students from bilateral agreements. Nine came from Chengdu, three from Guangdong, two from Heibei, and three came from Zhe Jiang University. The number of incoming bilateral exchange students from China is expected to increase in the future. (UNIMC IRO 2016; UNIMC IRO & European Commission 2014)

5.2 Subjects

The participant subjects of this research study are all Chinese students enrolled as Bilateral exchange students to the University of Macerata (UNIMC) for the 2015 to 2016 academic year (ay). All the subject students are female, no male Chinese exchange students came, born from 1993 to 1996 and are between the ages of 20 to 23 years during the course of this study. They all come from the West-Central region of mainland China, and major as Bachelor students in Italian language and culture at Chengdu Institute, Sichuan International Studies University (CISISU). Arriving together in the middle of August, they all indicated that they would live and study in Macerata, Italy for one full academic year. In July and August of 2016, they all left Italy on separate dates to return home to China. (Information is known by the researcher who worked in UNIMC's IRO: 2015 – 2016)

In the spring of 2015, nominations to study abroad at UNIMC were sent and processed in the international relations office (IRO) of the university, and the subject students for this research study were chosen. When working as an intern in the IRO, I noticed from the application forms of the incoming students that the largest group of Bilateral exchange students came from China. Furthermore, from those incoming Chinese Bilateral students, Chengdu Institute, Sichuan International Studies University (CISISU) sent the largest group of exchange students, nine students to be exact. This group of sojourning students from Chengdu formed a fitting group, and upon arrival to the IRO they all personally gave consent to be interviewed throughout the year for this research study. (Information is known by the researcher who worked in UNIMC's IRO: 2015)

To ensure ethical principles of privacy, the specific identity of the subject participants involved in this research is kept confidential. Since the informants did not give full consent to disclose their personal information publicly in this report, their personal information is not disclosed. All the subject students have been assigned a coded individual number, and shall not be referred to by their actual name within the presentation of data results in this research study, and analysis.

5.3 Position of the Researcher

Being both an Erasmus+ intern in the international relations office (IRO) and an international exchange student at the University of Macerata, I am able to collect data easily over the course of the 2015–2016 academic year. Working and talking with staff members in the IRO allows me to understand the university system of international relations with foreign universities, in particular the bilateral agreement with CISISU. My position in assisting exchange students with their application process allows me to easily meet the incoming exchange students from Chengdu, and understand their study abroad situation holistically. Being an international student and remaining within Macerata for the full academic year also allows me, the researcher, to understand the

acculturative experience of the Chinese student sojourners more completely. Despite the fact that I am not Chinese or Italian, my outsider position within the country allows me to be relatable to the Chinese international students, while at the same time neutral to the cultural difference they are experiencing.

5.4 Interview Procedure

Before the start of the fall first semester, the Chinese international students for the research study from Chengdu arrived together, mid-August of 2015, to the University of Macerata for the first time. Upon arrival, exchange students are required to go first to the IRO to register as incoming students. Working as an intern in the IRO at the time, I was the first representative contact person of the University of Macerata whom the newly arrived Chinese exchange students met. After greeting and registering them as new international students, I ethically asked for their consent to be involved in this qualitative research study throughout the year. Once fully aware and happy to be of assistance, all the subject student sojourners provided consent by their own free will, and the interview process of this research study began.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted three times with each Chinese exchange student from CISISU. During the interview sessions, notes and recordings were made of the questions asked, and the data responses received by the subject students. Questions asked during the interviews were e-mailed to each student prior to the interview session (see Appendix 1–3). Appendix 1 presents the first interview questions conducted August 25th and 26th 2015, a few days after their arrival to Europe, Italy and Macerata. Appendix 2 shows the second interview questions conducted December 3rd and 4th of 2015 just before the Christmas holidays, and exam period. Appendix 3 shows questions for the final interview conducted at the end of the students' exchange in July of 2016.

Challenges were faced during the interview sessions due to the participants struggle in fully comprehending the interview questions, and responding quickly with the correct

vocabulary and grammar in English. By visualizing the behavioural actions of the participants and asking further questions in response, the researcher is able to understand more about the situation and the perspective of the participant subjects (Hatch 2002: 23). Therefore, during the interview process I patiently waited for the informants to respond and avoided correcting grammatical mistakes made in English. When I observed from their behavioural responses that they did not comprehend the question fully or know how to respond correctly, I proceeded to repeat the question again slowly, showed them the question in written form, and in some cases simplified the question.

There was no particular need for an interpreter/translator during the interviews. Squires explains that translation disrupts the fluid process of questioning and describing feelings and experiences of a phenomenon, which is the important focus of a phenomenological study (Squires 2009: 279). By observing behavioural responses and listening carefully to their answers, I was able to understand clearly the contextual feelings and experiences of the informants. Also by observing my behavioural responses and notes taken, informants commented during the interview process that they were pleased that I could understand clearly the meaning of what they wanted to say, since they felt that they were limited in explaining themselves fully and accurately in perfect English.

6 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the empirical results and analysis from the data collected during the three-staged interview process according to Ward et al.'s ABC theoretical framework and the three open-ended research questions asked at the establishment of this study (see appendix 1, 2, and 3 to view the interview questions). The analysis of the data results is presented objectively with excerpts of original quote responses collected from the CISISU students during the interview process. As the students were answering the interview questions, I did my best to understand the full reality of their situation. The personal names and information of the students who provided the quotes have been avoided for ethical purposes of privacy.

After determining common patterns during the coding process, category themes related to the students' acculturative experiences and the topic questions of this research were created. The main topic themes are academic life, daily life, and sociocultural identification. Sub-category topics were formed from these main themes after understanding what affective, behavioural, and cognitive (ABC) issues affected the CISISU students the most. University academic life sub-category acculturative issues are a different teaching style and educational system, academic linguistic problems, and academic support from friends and teachers. Daily life acculturative sub-categories deal with language and communication, sociocultural environmental; freedom and social life entertainment; dietary differences and acculturation; and friendships and interactions with locals. After looking into the students' thoughts on sociocultural identification, sub-categories were made on their identity attachment towards their home in China and the host cultural society in Italy.

6.1 Academic Life at UNIMC: Stress, Coping, and Cultural Learning

Cultural difference factors exist between studying at UNIMC in Italy and at CISISU in China. This section addresses the first question of this research study on the adjustment process the Chinese student sojourners have throughout their exchange year to academic

and university life differences. Since the students discussed a different teaching style and educational system, linguistic problems, as well as academic support frequently as factors that affected their psychological and sociocultural stress, coping, and behavioural learning, sub-sections highlighting these topics are provided.

6.1.1 Different Teaching Style and Educational System

The students initially perceive academic cultural differences between the Italian university and their home university in China. However, their specific understanding of the differences in teaching style and the educational system are not clear in the first interview. After studying at UNIMC for four months, the Chinese student sojourners understand more about the academic differences and are able to explain the differences in the second interview. When asked about what they like or do not like about the different system of learning, the students respond neutrally that they did not like or dislike studying at UNIMC, they have just come to realize overtime that it is a “different system” (example 2). The students explain how the environment and system of learning at UNIMC is different from what they are used to in China. Compared to CISISU where around 33–40 students attend class, the class sizes are smaller at UNIMC (example 2). The students explain that the classes are also longer at UNIMC, which presents a problem as it disrupts their normal lunch period and overall diet (example 1).

The student sojourners explain in the second interview how the behaviour of the Italian professor is different from professors in China. Professors in Italy are late or “cancel classes”, and do not use PowerPoint and give notes about their lecture (example 1 & 2). The students described these differences with affective stress as they explain that their learning and success in the class must come from listening and fully comprehending the spoken lectures, which they find challenging. Compared to receiving assistance easily and frequently from their teacher in China, the students explain how difficult it is to meet with their Italian professors face-to-face for help after class, and how they must e-mail prior to meeting (example 2). Frustration is expressed in the irregular and unfamiliar system, and their requirement to independently show their need for support.

- (1) Classes are only 45 minutes in China, while here they are longer, like three hours. There are also classes around the time we normally have lunch, 12 – 1pm. This is challenging. Also teachers here can cancel classes, but in China this doesn't happen as it is fixed. (Student 8: Interview 2)
- (2) I don't like or dislike studying here, I just realize that it is a different system. Study is more regular in China. It is hard to understand the meaning of the lectures so I have to do more translation to understand the courses. I still have troubles because the Professor doesn't use PowerPoint and give notes about the lecture, they just talk. In China the classes are bigger, 33 – 40 students. Here the classes are small, around 20–30 in a class and the classes are longer, 3 – 4 hours. In China, we talk and see the teacher every day. It is easy to talk face to face more with the teacher in China than in Italy when we must e-mail to meet. (Student 9: Interview 2)

Students express feelings of acculturative stress in the second interview as they explain the challenges of studying in a different educational system in a foreign university. Student 7 negatively explains how she predicted she would have troubles with studying in Italy, and was correct (example 4). Student 3 expected life at UNIMC to be “full of happy experiences,” but in the second interview she states how “the lessons are difficult” and the life is “simple” and “boring” (example 3).

Despite negative affective feelings of acculturative stress, the same students also respond, similarly to their fellow sojourning classmates, with positive feelings of stress to cultural difference stressors. Even though the students are frustrated that the time schedule for their Italian classes and the behaviour of their Italian professors is not consistent and regular, positive reactions are also given. Students express feelings of content after realizing that “classes are more free as the time is not strict” and that they are able to “come and go” as they want (example 4). The students also express academic satisfaction with the fact that their Italian Professors are “kind, less strict, and smile,” which helps them cope to the stress of difficulties they are experiencing adjusting to their academic classes and different university life (example 3).

- (3) Teachers are kind, less strict and smile [...], life is not as I expected because before I thought life at UNIMC is full of happy experiences, but

the lessons are difficult and I don't often take part in some activities.
(Student 3: Interview 2)

- (4) Classes are more free as the time is not strict. We can come and go later as we want. Yes, I thought I would meet some problems and I have.
(Student 7: Interview 2)

Even though the students do not feel as though they have changed their behaviours to fit into Italian university life, their comments during the second interview indicate that they have. "I feel like I have not changed. I just am more late for classes," explains student 1 (example 5). The student sojourners have developed over the past few months a better understanding of the different system, and become more relaxed with their new academic routine. Their acculturative stress of cultural differences while studying at UNIMC is no longer affecting them psychologically as it did at the start of their classes.

- (5) I feel like I have not changed. I just am more late for classes than the first time, because the professor doesn't start till later. (Student 1: Interview 2)

In the final interview, the student sojourners review the different teaching style and educational system at UNIMC by explaining the problems that they continue to have over their academic year. The students describe, similarly to the second interview, how the lectures are hard to attend, as they are "long" and "difficult to understand with "many definitions" which they must learn and memorize (example 6). The fact that lectures interfere with the students' normal lunch period is a continual problematic issue (example 7). Culturally the Chinese students are used to having lunch from 12–1, and a change in this habit causes them stress and affects their dietary health. The limited supervision and availability for assistance from the teacher is another acculturative stress issue and university life cultural difference factor experienced by the CISISU students. The students comment on the tardiness of their professors, and the problems that they have experienced throughout the year in meeting after class (example 6 & 7).

- (6) Studies were at first difficult to understand and stressful. I also had some lifestyle problems, but now I am used to the life here. The problem is that at university the teacher doesn't come to the lesson because he is always sick and we must study alone. This doesn't happen in China because

there the teacher is very diligent. So students here lend notes and help each other. Also the subjects are very difficult because we must memorize very many definitions. So we ask the teacher to explain more to us after class. (Student 2: Interview 3)

- (7) Long lectures were a problem, especially when they occurred during our normal lunch period from 12 – 1. It was a problem because in China we have lunch at 12, so the class will be ended before 12 then we will have a noontime rest especially at summer. Also if we have some question for the class or the content that we learnt that day, we can ask the teacher anytime because they will stay in their office. But in Italy the professor is not available a lot of the time. After a year, I got used to these differences [...]. My habit of study has changed. Now I study more alone while in China the lessons are more under control of the teacher. Also the time, and how I eat is different here [...] I feel very happy. I think this year in Macerata will be the valuable thing for me, from the chance as an exchange student I learnt about the different form of education. (Student 8: Interview 3)

Compared to the second interview, CISISU student sojourners express more feelings of coping and examples of behavioural changes to cultural differences after studying in Italy for a full academic year. Students explain how their learning and study habits have changed as well as their eating times to adjust to the different educational system. They express more feelings of independence as they “study more alone,” which is a change in their behavioural method of studying since coming to Italy (example 6 & 7). They also display more proactive behaviours towards their problems as they independently seek out help of their professor and classmates after class (example 6).

- (8) I feel very happy and I like Italy, I don't want to go back to China because studying and working there is very hard and tiring. (Student 6: Interview 3)

After receiving help from professors and fellow students, the Chinese sojourners express affective feelings of coping and happiness with their academic studies in Macerata. They explain in the final interview how they have become used to the life and differences while living and studying in Macerata. Since studying and working in China is “very hard and tiring”, student 6 explains how she does not look forward to going back to China, and prefer the different educational system in Italy (example 8). Overall,

the students explain that studying abroad in a different education system at UNIMC is a “valuable” experience for their future as it opens their mind to another educational system, and way of living (example 7).

6.1.2 Academic Linguistic Problems

The ability to clearly and fluently communicate and understand the language of professors and the surrounding environment at the university is important for academic success. However, when the language of the professors and the foreign university environment is different from your mother tongue, challenges are met and behavioural changes need to occur to affectively cope. Student sojourners express their feelings of affective stress before their university classes begin in regards to their comprehension level of Italian.

- (9) Now it hasn't started, but I think I will have to spend more time with studies because the teacher doesn't speak Chinese and my Italian is not so good (Student 4: Interview 1).
- (10) Yes, with the language. At first, it must be difficult to understand what the professor will say and I must adapt to the environment of the classes. Normally we only study language, but here we must study many subjects in Italian language. (Student 5: Interview 1)

With Italian being the official language of UNIMC and their academic studies, they all predict that they will have some troubles studying “because the teacher doesn't speak Chinese,” the books and “subjects” are “in Italian language,” and their “Italian is not so good” (example 9 & 10). They also express initial affective concern that they will not be able to understand the lectures, and will have to spend more time studying subjects in a foreign language, which they normally do not learn about back in China (example 9 & 10).

After experiencing acculturative stress from linguistic limitations during classes at UNIMC during the first semester, the student sojourners express their feelings of frustration in the second interview. The students show feelings of academic stress due to

their struggle of understanding the Italian teacher's "different" pronunciation and abundant "professional" vocabulary (example 11 & 12).

- (11) The teacher talks a lot and it's hard to understand everything. I thought translation lessons would be easier, but it's difficult because I don't understand all of the Italian. (Student 3: Interview 2)
- (12) In class the teacher speaks more professionally and different in Italian. With Italian friends, communication is different. (Student 9: Interview 2)

Since the teacher "talks a lot" and "it's hard to understand everything" of the foreign "pronunciation" in classes, student 3, and other CISISU students, thought it would be easier to take Chinese/Italian translation lessons at the Confucius institute (example 11). However, even translation lessons are also difficult because, as the students explain, they "do not understand all of the Italian" (example 11). The translation classes are organized for native Italian speaking students. Even though the classes include both standard Chinese and Italian, the level of Italian in the classes is advanced and a stress factor for many of the Chinese students in the class.

CISISU students describe their continual stress with linguistic issues within their long classes, as well as their methods of positively coping to academic problems in the final interview. The simple tasks of native Italian speakers continue to be a challenge to the Chinese-speaking student sojourners.

- (13) Although I study Italian the talk speed [sic] and dialect is a problem for language and communication. (Student 8: Interview 3)
- (14) Studies were stressful because we must read many books, which is difficult to do in Italian. Also the lessons were very long with difficult vocabulary. In China lessons are only 45mins. It was difficult to understand all the contents of the lesson. The teacher also spoke quickly and it was hard to understand. [...] I also made voice recordings of the lessons to listen and study from later. (Student 3: Interview 3)

Even though they study Italian in China and at UNIMC, the students mention frequently that it is difficult to understand the lectures due to the “dialect” pronunciation as well as the fast “talk speed” of the teachers (example 13). Since the lectures are over 45mins long, it is especially challenging for the students throughout their academic year to understand everything within their university classes. The student sojourners receive coping support from their teacher and classmates to improve their comprehension of the Italian vocabulary, and subject material of the class. To cope with linguistic problems at UNIMC, student 3 makes “voice recordings of the lessons to listen and study from later” (example 14). The students also describe their difficulty in reading the required books in Italian (example 14). Many students mention in the final interview that they searched for information on their Italian subjects from Chinese books similar to required books that they needed to read in Italian.

6.1.3 Academic Support from Friends and Teachers

Dealing with the acculturative stress of studying at a foreign university with a different teaching style, educational system, and language base can be challenging. The students plan to cope with these challenges by learning, understanding and improving their skills necessary to succeed at UNIMC from the social support of teachers, friends, and an Italian “buddy”. The student sojourners express positive feelings towards UNIMC’s “buddy program” in helping them adjust to differences and difficulties faced when transitioning to the new and foreign university in the first interview. UNIMC’s optional “buddy program” from the IRO is designed to assist the adjustment process students studying on exchange at UNIMC by pairing them with a local student who studies their language, or a language similar (known by the researcher who worked in the IRO).

- (15) Yes, I would like to make friends with locals here in Italy. I want to help them with their Chinese language and we can study together. It is also nice to have a buddy to help solve my difficulties here, and with local friends I can know the culture more. Despite our different nationality, we are mostly the same in that we all like to help others and treat each other like family. (Student 3: Interview 1)

In the first interview, the Chinese student sojourners state how having a local Italian buddy will help them both psychologically and socio-culturally adjust to their academic stressors. They “would like to make friends with locals” to “study together,” and explain how nice it is to have a local friend to help “solve” difficulties and “know the culture more” (example 15). Having a local Italian buddy helps during the affective and behavioural acculturative adjustment process the sojourners are experiencing. The students explain how learning and improving their knowledge and skills through the support of an Italian friend can help them adjust to life, studies, and the language of the new and foreign culture (example 16). The students also indicate how the cultural learning exchange is binary as both “study together” to learn more about each other’s language, culture, and different studies (example 15 & 16).

- (16) It’s a good way to know about the culture, two people’s culture. Also they can help with adjusting to life, studies, and the language. There are many benefits, friendship, language improvement, learn more about the cultures and different studies. (Student 5: Interview 1)

After studying at the university for a few months, the students explain in the second interview how they are able to cope with their academic issues and learn more of the cultural ways of Italian behaviour from the social support of friends and teachers. Some explain how they previously worried about their ability to succeed at university in Italy due to their low comprehension level of Italian (example 17). Others say that they “did not worry much before,” but they have become “stressed and confused” after starting classes (example 18).

- (17) Yes, I thought I would meet some problems and I have. Studies and communicating in Italian, but I talked to Chinese friends who were here last year for advice. I ask questions to classmates, Italian and Chinese, for help. (Student 7: Interview 2)
- (18) I did not worry much before, just when I arrived in class I was stressed and confused about the teacher and didn’t know how to change the situation, but it’s better now because I made friends with Italian students. [...] I talk to Italian classmates to get their notes on the lesson. (Student 3: Interview 2)

- (19) I listen to the teacher and write an e-mail with my Chinese friends to ask for help. I signed up to Facebook and meet with Italians here to help with studies. Sometimes when I talk to them, they say ah you can't say like this, Italians say like this. They teach the grammar more to help me. Chinese and Italians help me. (Student 1: Interview 2)

By asking questions and receiving supportive aid from friends, the student sojourners show signs of adjustment. They describe how their situation is improving and how they are positively fitting into their new lifestyle (example 17–19). The student sojourners explain that they are able to better comprehend the lectures after chatting about their problems on Facebook, and after receiving classmates' notes on lessons (example 18). Messaging Chinese and Italian friends helps student 1 to improve Italian language skills and studies as friends correct and “teach the grammar” (example 19). These initiatives made by the student sojourners to improve their acculturative stress problems by asking the social support of friends and the teacher proves to have both psychological, and sociocultural benefits.

In the third and final interview, the student sojourners continue to express positive feelings of gratitude towards their Italian classmates and teachers for their psychological and sociocultural support throughout the year:

- (20) I think my Italian friends helped me a lot. When I have problems they will explain very clearly to me. [...] Before I went to Italy I filled a page at the UNIMC to have a buddy partner for practicing the language. But my buddy was very very [sic] busy during the year. Then I started to use Facebook and WhatsApp, and from there I knew many friends mainly from classes. (Student 8: Interview 3)
- (21) I feel very happy because I met many friends and they can help me, and the teachers are very kind. (Student 2: Interview 3)
- (22) I found a classmate to help and lend notes. She was kind and now is my best friend here. (Student 3: Interview 3)

Although the students registered for a buddy from the IRO, at the end of their exchange many explained, like student 8, that their buddy was very “busy” and they received more help from fellow classmates (example 20). Their new behavioural practice of

using “Facebook” and “WhatsApp”, allows them to make more Italian friends who can support them over chat messenger (example 20). Students explain how their classmates are supportive in helping them cope and improve their knowledge and skills of the subjects in Italian by explaining information more clearly (example 20). Student 2 states how the kindness of friends and teachers helps her cope with challenges (example 21). Other students mention how their classmates’ notes and clarification on lectures continues to help them psychologically cope and practically improve their academic ability at UNIMC. After lending notes and assisting with class work, an Italian classmate actually became student 3’s “best friend” (example 22).

6.2 Daily Life in Macerata, Italy: Stress, Coping, and Cultural Learning

Besides academic stress and coping, student sojourners must deal with daily life acculturative differences during their cross-cultural transition. This section focuses on answering the second question of this research study on the acculturation process the Chinese student sojourners have throughout their exchange year to daily environmental and sociocultural differences in Macerata, Italy. Subsection topics affecting the main daily life acculturation of the students include language barrier problems and communication style differences; a smaller and slower paced sociocultural environment; freedom and social life entertainment; food differences and dietary acculturation; as well as friendships, and interactions with locals. Included in this section and subsections are positive, as well as negative, affective responses to daily life stressors as well as the culturally learnt behavioural changes students make to adjust.

- (23) Italy is different, the people, culture, environment, and food. [...] I need to go to bed early and adjust to the time difference. (Student 5: Interview 1)

Living in another city and country can be challenging, especially when the distance is far from your home, and there is high degree of cultural dissimilarity. All the Chinese students describe the two countries, as well as the two cities, of Macerata, Italy and Chengdu, China as being “different” or “very different” in the first interview (example

23, 42 & 93). They gave examples as to why they struggle to settle in, but also why they enjoy elements of the Italian culture. After traveling far away from their home in Chengdu, Chinese student sojourners initially have acculturative stress with the time difference (example 23). Mixed pre-feelings and emotional reactions are given when asked if they thought they would have troubles adjusting to daily life cultural differences throughout the year.

- (24) No because I will try my best to update/adjust to life here but with Italians, we may have different personalities, lifestyles, and encounter a culture difference. (Student 2: Interview 1)
- (25) Maybe a little difficulty, but this is life, change a little and gain more knowledge. With Italians our opinions may be different because of our different culture. (Student 3: Interview 1)

Depending on the student and cultural difference factor involved, acculturative issues are viewed as a major, moderate or a minor challenge to their cross-cultural transition. Students show positive feelings towards making behavioural changes to cope during their acculturation process. Adjusting to Italian culture will be difficult, “but this is life, change a little and gain more knowledge,” explains student 3 (example 25). Understanding the importance of cultural learning, student 2 explains how she will try her best to “update/adjust to life” through the cultural learning of new skills and behaviours during her cross-cultural transition (example 24). Accepting the fact that change is required to overcome difficulties of living in a foreign country, is a positive psychological step forward to having a successful study abroad.

6.2.1 Language Barrier Problems and Communication Style Differences

Communicating in the local language is important when conducting daily life activities. However, when the local language of a foreign environment is different from your mother tongue, challenges are met and behavioural changes need to occur to affectively cope. Language and communication is a major cultural difference stressor amongst the students. The student sojourners express their affective feelings on communicating and

need to learn the Italian language when asked in the first interview if they will have troubles adjusting to life in Italy.

- (26) The biggest trouble is the language, Italian. When I go outside, I am afraid of communicating. (Student 4: Interview 1)
- (27) The language is different and it is hard to explain myself easily. Communication and friendships with Italians could be difficult because of the language barrier. I want to tell something, but I don't know how to explain. (Student 7: Interview 1)

Students describe their Italian language barrier in the first interview with affective feelings of stress and fear. When adjusting to life in Italy, student 4 describes the Italian language as her “biggest trouble” as she is “afraid of communicating” and making mistakes (example 26). Other students similarly explain how due to the “language barrier,” their daily life communication and friendships with Italians can be difficult as they “do not know how to explain” things easily and fully in Italian (example 27). They all worry that their limited skills in Italian will cause problems, and perhaps offense.

After living in Italy for a few months, the students notice how Italians communicate in a different style than what they are familiar with at home in China. The students describe in the second interview how the Italian communication style is more openly expressive and direct (example 28, 29 & 30). Italians are more dynamic when communicating as they use more “body actions”, or gestures, and facial expressions (example 35). Although the students describe the Italian personality as being “lazy”, they admire how outgoing and “friendly” Italians are in greeting and saying “hi to strangers” (example 28). However, student 7 admits that at this point it is still “easier to talk” deeply and be closer friends with “Chinese” citizens, due to cultural difference and language barrier problems with non-Chinese acquaintances (example 31).

- (28) Italians communicate differently than Chinese, but I like it because they are friendly and say hi to strangers. This doesn't happen in China. Also Italians are more lazy [sic] and not on time. (Student 6: Interview 2)

- (29) They have many body actions [sic] and face expressions, but other than that there is no surprise in communication style, they are normal. (Student 1: Interview 2)
- (30) It depends, but they are more direct in communicating. (Student 2: Interview 2)
- (31) Italians are more exciting to be with, but it's easier to talk with Chinese. [Conversations with Italians are] good, but simple. I only ask questions and answer, not chat. (Student 7: Interview 2)

Students continue to express their daily life affective issues with Italian during the second interview, but explain that their situation is improving. Being able to understand some words and communicate fluently is a problem still for many students. Student 1 explains how she, like many new language learners, is having problems understanding jokes and quickly finding the words in a dictionary to understand, and communicate effectively with local Italians (example 32). Communication is less stressful than before, owing to the fact that their Italian language ability is improving, and their Italian friends now “speak slower” in conversation with them (example 33). Even though the students do not say directly that their Italian language and communication abilities have improved, I notice a behavioural change and heard positive feedback of their results in their Italian intermediate language class.

- (32) Sometimes I have some problems, especially with jokes. Some words I don't understand so well and can't find a dictionary. (Student 1: Interview 2)
- (33) At first, it was difficult because they spoke too fast, now its ok. They speak slower, and it's ok. (Student 8: Interview 2)

From the students' comments and behaviours during the second interview, more signs of coping and learning of Italian cultural practices are taking place. The students explain how they use “WhatsApp” messenger to chat to their Italian friends and that their communication in Italian is “good”, but they still have problems (example 34). Students, like student 3 in particular, explain how they now communicate and greet in the Italian cultural way by kissing on the cheek, which is not culturally done in China

(example 34). Culturally in China people do not show public displays of intimate affection for friends, family, and lovers as Italians culturally do. Greetings in Chinese culture are made at a socially acceptable distance, and do not commonly involve kissing on the cheek like in the Italian culture. Besides greeting differently, many of the student sojourners explain how they now “use a little more Italian gestures when talking” (example 35).

(34) [Communication with Italians] is good. I chat on WhatsApp and at university to Italian friends in Italian. Since I came here, I greet people in a different way. Italians kiss on the cheek when they meet, which we don't do in China. (Student 3: Interview 2)

(35) I use a little more Italian gestures when talking (Student 1: Interview 2).

In the third interview, the students continue to describe their challenges with their Italian language and communication skills. They all continue to express their linguistic and communicative struggles in understanding the native Italian, or Macerata, pronunciation and fast talking speed of local Italians on a daily basis. Expressing their needs and problems with important issues, like health and sickness, is also a dilemma the students continue to face (example 36). Therefore, it is still easier and psychologically more comfortable for many of them to speak in their mother tongue of Chinese.

(36) If a foreigner, like myself, gets sick abroad it is difficult because we can't explain clearly about our sickness and problems in the foreign language. (Student 8: Interview 3)

Despite linguistic and communicative struggles, the students exhibit positive improvements in their Italian, and changes in their style of communication in the final interview. Compared to when they first arrived to Macerata in August, the students' communication and behavioural style is less reserved, and more open. After studying formal Italian speech at university in China and in classes in Italy, the students describe how pleased they are in learning the “real Italian” and slang “dirty talk” used daily by

young people in Italy (example 38). The “dirty talk” the students mention refers to rude/impolite informal slang, common speech, and swear words.

- (37) I am more open and less shy than before. I am also more polite [sic] with people (Student 2: Interview 3).
- (38) As we all know, if someone starts to study the language the dirty talk [sic] is the most important part. [Italian friends] also told me ‘real Italian’ (“modo di dire”). For example, when we finished the meal together at the restaurant and we want to pay for it, we shouldn’t say “mi scusi vogliamo pagare.” We just need to say “il conto”. (Student 8: Interview 3)

According to comments in the final interview, the friendlier and more open communication style amongst the local Italians has influenced the communicative behaviour of the Chinese student sojourners. Besides learning the “dirty” slang, the students also describe how they learnt over the year to be “more polite”, open, and less shy towards people as Italians do culturally (example 37). Student 2 mentioned, following the third interview, that she will even write about politeness for her thesis topic, since she and her friends from CISISU see, and experience major cultural differences in politeness between their home culture in China, and their host Italian culture (example 38).

6.2.2 A Smaller and Slower Paced Sociocultural Environment

Students respond with positive, as well as negative, acculturative feelings of stress towards new and different aspects of the sociocultural environment in Macerata and Italy during the first interview. They positively describe the scenery in the Marche countryside as “beautiful” and “clean”, and the weather as “nice” (example 41 & 42). They express enthusiasm in traveling to new places and seeing new sites in the foreign country (example 39). However, at the same time they frequently describe their challenge in transitioning their life to a countryside city with a “smaller population” that functions at a “slower” pace (example 40). Life in China is “busy” and “quick”, but life in Italy it is “slower” (example 40 & 42). Frustration is expressed in the realization that “quick” services that they are familiar with at home are not readily available in the

small and slow-paced city of Macerata (40 & 42). These cultural difference challenges cause acculturative stress amongst the students. Student 5 explains how she realizes that she must “get used to the different environment” in order to affectively cope to the sociocultural and environmental differences (example 41).

- (39) Here there are new places to travel to, and sites to see that are different than in China (Student 8: Interview 1).
- (40) Italy is different. Life in China is quick, but in Italy it is slower. Here there is a smaller population, and the food is different. (Student 3: Interview 1)
- (41) People are more outgoing, there are more dogs everywhere, and the weather is nice with a clean environment. [...] I must get used to the different environment. (Student 5: Interview 1)

Unfamiliarity and the lack of home comforts in the new sociocultural environment of “small” city Macerata causes stress amongst the Chinese student sojourners and requires them to make behavioural changes to adjust. The Chinese students complain and describe their acculturative stress that “the supermarket is far away and transportation and everything [in Macerata and Italy] is not convenient like in China” (example 42). Daily life is also less “convenient” in Macerata and Italy as “shop hours and working hours are less” (example 43). Due to limited efficient transportation and opportunities for social life, the students complain that they spend “more time just at home and have to travel on foot”, walk, more (example 42).

In realizing that their daily life tasks and routines are more difficult in a foreign country, the student sojourners express in the first interview their affective acculturative stress in conducting their daily routines. The student sojourners explain how stressful it is “shopping” and dealing with “medicine, bank and money issues, travel, and other difficulties and problems” (example 42). When handling these important daily tasks in a foreign country, they students reveal their “need” for “help” to adjust (example 42).

- (42) Italy is very different than my country and culture. The environment and scenery is very beautiful and the people are very enthusiastic. But I don't

like the food, especially salad. Also life in China is more busy [sic] with the market and friends and family and my father's factory, but here in Italy I must spend more time just at home and have to travel on foot [sic] more because transportation is difficult. I also have less friends here. [...] The supermarket is far away and transportation and everything here is not convenient like in China. I need help with [sic] shopping for medicine, bank and money issues, travel, and other difficulties and problems. (Student 4: Interview 1)

- (43) Different, China is more convenient because in Italy shop hours and working hours are less (Student 1: Interview 1)

After living in Italy for a few months, the students continue to express feelings of confusion and homesickness on a daily basis with aspects of cultural difference in the small city of Macerata, Italy. "Life here is simple and boring," explains student 3 as well as other Chinese students (example 44). The other students explain how their previous issues, regarding efficient transportation and lack of convenient services when conducting daily life activities, are still problematic acculturative stressors in their lives. They also express their struggle adjusting to the higher cost of living in Macerata and Italy compared to their home city in China (example 45). Besides discovering new architectural styles and tourist sites, the student 1 does not express further enthusiasm in sociocultural environment as she explains that China has "almost everything else" that they need or enjoy (example 46).

- (44) Life here is simple and boring. [...] Life here is more gentle and less stressful. The weather, with the blue sky and comfortable temperature. Also the people are warm and kind. (Student 3: Interview 2)
- (45) The cost of things here are more expensive than in China. (Student 2: Interview 2)
- (46) The building style, China has almost everything else. (Student 1: Interview 2)
- (47) It is quiet because in China it is noisy and busy. I like it and was surprised that cars stop even if there are no lights because in China it is very scary to cross the road. I also see self-service payment machines in supermarkets. (Student 9: Interview 2)

Despite feelings of confusion and frustration with cultural differences in the sociocultural environment, there are aspects of the Marche countryside that the student sojourners enjoy. Even though the lifestyle in the smaller and slower paced environment is more “simple,” the students positively describe their eustress in adjusting to a “more gentle and less stressful” life in the quiet and safety of Macerata (example 44 & 47). Even though they miss their busy lifestyle in China, the students are “surprised” and pleased that “cars stop even if there are no lights” and there are “self-service payment machines in supermarkets” (example 47). Students describe how they like traveling to see different architectural styles, and enjoy the nice “weather” with “blue sky” and a “comfortable temperature” (example 44). They also indicate positive signs of coping to stress as they frequently describe the local people in the smaller city as “warm” and “kind” (example 44).

The Chinese sojourners continue to mention the slower lifestyle pace of the local people and the smaller size of Macerata in the final third interview. Positive feelings towards the “kind” and “enthusiastic” personality of local Italians remain amongst all the students (example 49). They exhibit more of an understanding for the “slower” relaxed pace of life and less working hours in Italy (example 48–50).

- (48) China is very different. The shops in Italy will close at 1pm and open again at 4pm, but in China the shops will be open till 10 in the evening. (Student 8: Interview 3)
- (49) I can feel the different culture at first when traveling to Italy. Now after traveling and traveling Italy I feel they are very enthusiastic and kind. The lifestyle and pace is different in China. Young people in China are under a lot of stress and they work all day in their life. Italians are slower. They don't think and worry about many things and life as much. Also the transportation system is of higher quality and faster than here. In China we buy things online and they send it to our home, which is easier to satisfy our needs, but in Italy it is difficult to buy things online. (Student 3: Interview 3)
- (50) It is not very convenient place to live because if I want to go shopping, usually I will go to Civitanova, which is far by train. (Student 8: Interview 3)

Despite positive feelings and experiences living in Macerata, the student sojourners, from a big and busy city in China, continue to report in the third interview their daily frustration in the lack of fast, frequent, and convenient services. Acculturative stress is still expressed with the short working hours, and lack of necessary items in the small shops (example 48). Students explain that they must travel to Civitanova, a nearby town around thirty minutes away by train from Macerata, to find inexpensive shops and a Chinese supermarket that has the products that they need and want (example 50). However, traveling to Civitanova is dissatisfying for the Chinese students as they compare the transportation system in China to be “faster” and of “higher quality” (example 49). They tried to “buy things online” from home, but experienced problems, because online shopping is not as popular and simple as it is in China (example 49).

6.2.3 Freedom and Social Life Entertainment

Freedom, adventure and a fun social life are common non-academic reasons why students desire to travel and studying abroad. Being young university students in their early twenties, the Chinese students explain in their first interview how they look forward to being “involved in the local social life” (example 52 & 53). However, since their arrival to Macerata, the students quickly realize that the social life and entertainment options are limited in the small city. The students express their initial acculturative stress and disappointment in the first interview that the social life atmosphere is not as active as they are familiar with back at home in China. Feelings of frustration are expressed as the students explain how in Macerata it is “quiet at night”, but “in China there are a lot of people out at night and more things open, and more places to have fun” (example 51). After realizing that the social life of students in Macerata is different, the Chinese sojourners express their interest in having local Italian friends to discover the social life that they enjoy.

- (51) Here it is quiet at night and in China there are a lot of people out at night and more things open, and more places to have fun, but here no (Student 5: Interview 1).

Even though the Chinese students have interest and inner enthusiasm, they also have acculturative stress, worry, and fear in being involved in the social life of locals in Italy. The students do not display independent confidence in the first interview in attending social events in a foreign country where they do not know anyone, and are the only Chinese person. They explain that they are “shy” and “scared” because they “don’t understand the rules” of social behaviour when interacting and partying in Italian cultural society, and are not fluent enough in the language (example 52 & 53). The Chinese students show elements of collective behaviour as they state that their involvement in the “social life” depends upon “who is going” (example 53). If their “friends will go”, particularly their Chinese friends, then they would feel more confident and comfortable in being involved. However, “if there are too many strangers I don’t want to” join the social activity or event, states student 4 as well as her fellow Chinese classmates (example 53).

- (52) I am shy at first, but I really want to speak and say hello. I want to be involved in the local social life but am a bit scared because I don’t understand the rules (Student 1: Interview 1).
- (53) I want to know them more and be kind with them, but I feel a little shy. I would like to be involved in the social life, but it depends on who is going. If my friends will go, I want to join, but if there are too many strangers, I don’t want to. (Student 4: Interview 1)

The students describe their delight in the eustress of independence and freedom from their life in China in the second interview. Like many young people in their early twenties who have adventurous dreams about traveling and living abroad to free themselves from their home cultural responsibilities, the students describe how they are excited about “being independent finally” (example 55 & 109). After staying in Italy for a few months, students describe their admiration in how people are “free” to “follow any lifestyle” (example 54, 55 & 109). In China, it is not socially and culturally acceptable to follow any independent lifestyle. For entertainment, the students positively describe their “freedom” to live, and travel around Italy, and Europe, as they want (example 54). Student 9 feels disappointed that Italy, and her life in Macerata, is not as “romantic” and entertaining as she thought previously. Although, she does

describe her “surprise” in discovering “how full of history it is” in Italy and the local Marche region (example 54).

- (54) Different, I thought before that it was a romantic country, but I have not been to other cities, only Macerata and Firenze. Italians are very gentle; I didn't think that before. Also, it is a surprise how full of history it is here. [...], they love to party and relax. There is more freedom for studies and life (Student 9: Interview 2).
- (55) [I remember being excited before coming to Italy about] being independent finally. It's the same. Feels like free time. They just follow any lifestyle here. (Student 1: Interview 2)

Compared to China, the Chinese students explain in the second interview how entertainment and social life behaviours are culturally different in Italy. They view the Italian culture as “lazy” in many ways as they notice how people in Italy prefer to relax and enjoy more comforts in their life (example 54, 55, & 57). The students frequently mention that there is “more freedom for studies and life” in Italy to “follow any lifestyle” than back home in China (example 54 & 55). Academic studies and work in China is hard as the population in China is high, and many people are competing for a good job. The students explain that they must study and work hard at university to get a good job in the future, and not disappoint their family. Therefore, they are not used to having “free time” to “party and relax”, and independently to do what they want stress free of social and family cultural acceptance.

Since the semester has started, the Chinese students reveal their surprise in the party lifestyle of local students in the second interview. They notice how students in Macerata love to party frequently, and “late”, “even on weekdays” (example 57). Student 8 describes how surprised and “curious” she is in understanding why Italians and other local students, especially girls, drink and smoke a lot at a “young age” (example 56). It is not culturally appropriate and common to see girls and young students smoking freely in public where they are from in China. Even though the CISISU students indicate their interest in the social life events and activities, many also show their disinterest as they

describe their separation, and preference in not being fully involved in the party lifestyle of other exchange, and UNIMC, students.

- (56) Their attitude, they go crazy in parties. I am curious why they smoke so much because it's a young age, even the girls smoke a lot. They also drink a lot. (Student 8: Interview 2)
- (57) Adults push children in prams even if they are big. People here love animals and dogs. Italians drink a lot of coffee and people party late, even on weekdays. (Student 1: Interview 2)

In the final interview, the Chinese student sojourners reflect upon their social and daily life experiences living in Macerata for a year:

- (58) Actually I like the life in Macerata, for me Macerata is very suitable for studying because it is quiet, but not for entertainment (Student 8: Interview 3).
- (59) For social life, I met many Italians and they take us to other cities and we eat together, and play games. They invited us to a birthday party and we invited them to our home and ate Chinese food together (Student 2: Interview 3).

Students explain how the small and “quiet” sociocultural environment in Macerata is “very suitable for studying...but not for entertainment” and having fun (example 58). Since there are not as many “entertainment” options available for social life, the introverted students explain how they enjoy making their own social events inviting Chinese and foreign friends over to their home to eat “Chinese food together” (example 59). Also, their Chinese and foreign friends invite them over for parties and activities, which they enjoy and appreciate (example 59). Student 2 mentions how kind her Italian friends are in inviting her and her Chinese friends from CISISU to their homes to show them “other cities”, and teach them “games” (example 59). Positive social experiences like these with Chinese, foreign, and Italian friends are what makes the exchange students’ stay more memorable, and entertaining.

6.2.4 Food Differences and Dietary Acculturation

The topic of “food” comes up frequently as the student sojourners discuss the cultural differences between China and Italy upon arrival to Macerata (example 40, 60, 61, & 62). They state how they want to learn to cook some dishes, try Italian food, and how they already like “gelato” (example 60, 62, 105 & 106). Despite liking some Italian food at the start, they all clarify in the first interview how the Italian food is very different from Chinese food, and how they prefer their Chinese diet (example 60 – 62). In order to maintain their preferred Chinese diet, the students encounter acculturative stress trying to cook their cultural food in a foreign country (example 62). Cooking is particularly challenging for the young sojourners since they all explained that they “did not cook at home in China”, and must learn how to cook their Chinese cuisine in a foreign country (example 62).

- (60) I like gelato but the other food is so-so [sic]. (Student 3: Interview 1)
- (61) The food is very different. I don't like Italian food. (Student 6: Interview 1)
- (62) I like Chinese food more. In Italy I like some food, like gelato. [...] I don't cook at home in China, but if I want Chinese food I will have to. (Student 5: Interview 1)

After living in Italy for a few months, the Chinese students have a better understanding of the Italian food culture, and its difference to their home food in China. They all find the Italian diet to be “very different” from their Chinese diet and hard to adjust to as they mention “food” as a top cultural difference stressor during their acculturative adjustment to Italy (example 63, 64, 65, & 95). The Chinese students clarify that the main difference between the Western Italian diet, and their home diet in China, is that “Italian food is more original”, while “Chinese food has more ingredients” (example 63). They all explain that they find it difficult to adjust to the “plain” Italian food as they prefer, and are used to, eating “spicy food” at home in China (example 64 & 73). The Italian diet contains more “bread and flour, which is different from Chinese food” (example 63). This is a problem for all the Chinese students as they explain that the

Italian food is “more fatty”, and that the different diet is not good for their body (example 65). In China, “rice” is the main food and Chinese people culturally eat “rice every day,” which is “very different” from the Italian food culture that enjoys bread and pasta (example 63 & 64). Also, compared to the Chinese culture where they drink a lot of tea, Italians drink a lot of coffee (example 63). Moreover, the students describe their feelings of frustration and acculturative stress with the fact that there are not many options on the street for cheap and quick food as there are in China (example 64).

- (63) Italians drink a lot of coffee [...]. Italian food is more original. Chinese food has more ingredients. Some is delicious. I like pizza margarita, spaghetti and tomato, hot chocolate, and tiramisu, which I can now make myself. Italian food can be strange, or maybe our Chinese food is strange. They don't eat all parts of the pig. Italians like bread and flour, which is different from Chinese food. Rice is our main food. (Student 1: Interview 2)
- (64) Very different, Italian food is ok but plain as there are not many options on the street (Student 7: Interview 2).
- (65) Very different, it is more fatty [sic] for my body (Student 6: Interview 2).

The students describe in the second interview how they like some Italian food, and show signs of behavioural changes and adaptive cultural learning. Students state positively how they find some Italian cuisine, like “pizza margarita, spaghetti and tomato, hot chocolate, and tiramisu,” to be “delicious” (example 63). They also mention how they have already learnt to make some Italian food, like the “tiramisu” (example 63). Although most of their Chinese eating habits remain, the students explain that their behaviour and time of eating has changed. They have lunch and dinner later, at around 8pm because of their busy class schedule, and the culture of local Italians (example 66).

The Chinese students continue to express acculturative confusion and stress, as they try to make sense of the different Italian food they encounter while living in Italy for a few months. Student 1 describes the food as “strange” and is confused why Italians don't eat all parts of the pig as they enjoy in China (example 63). In thinking more deeply on the matter, she then realizes that perhaps “Chinese food is “strange” to foreigners, and

because the Italian food is not of her culture, that is why it seems “strange” (example 63).

When grocery shopping, the students notice many new “strange” kinds of food. The new foods in Italy, in the perspective of the Chinese sojourners, consist of “prosciutto”, “gelato, pizza”, “more kinds of chocolate,” “salmon, lots of cheese, and marzipan” (example 67 – 69). Cheese is a food product that the students are not fond of, and acculturative feelings of surprise are shown in the interview as they describe the many varieties that they find abundantly in the shops (example 67 & 69).

- (66) Chinese food, we can find only around half the ingredients we want in the Chinese supermarket here. I feel that I haven’t changed much. My eating times have changed because of my class schedule. Now sometimes we eat dinner later, at around 8pm. (Student 8: Interview 2)
- (67) Prosciutto and lots of cheese (Student 7: Interview 2).
- (68) Gelato, pizza, and more kinds of chocolate (Student 5: Interview 2).
- (69) There is strange salmon, lots of cheese, and marzipan (Student 6: Interview 2).

Cooking Chinese food in Italy is a challenge and acculturative stressor because the ingredients necessary for their cooking are not all easily available at the cheap prices they are used to when shopping in China. Despite finding a Chinese supermarket, the Chinese student sojourners show, in the second interview, feelings of stress in the fact that they can only find around half of the ingredients that they want and miss from their region in China (example 66). Students described missing “Chinese rice”, “hot pot ingredients”, “Chinese herbs”, “lychee fruit”, “tofu, certain meat”, food from their region, and Chinese spices (example 70–73). Although there are many options available for buying rice in the Italian supermarkets, Student 2 clarifies that “Chinese rice”, particularly the rice that she is familiar with in her home region, is distinctly different (example 70). Not being able to have familiar cultural foods for their daily diet causes the student sojourners to feel affective stress, and homesickness when living in Macerata.

- (70) Chinese rice and lychee fruit especially (Student 2: Interview 2).
- (71) Chinese herbs and caraway (green vegetable) especially. Hot pot ingredients, and certain Chinese vegetables; however, about once a month I go together with my Chinese friends to Civitanova to the Chinese supermarket to buy Chinese food ingredients. (Student 1: Interview 2)
- (72) Tofu, certain meat, and food I miss from my region in China (Student 5: Interview 2).
- (73) Here the bread and food is more sweet and salty, in China we eat more rice than here. [...] Chinese food is spicy, and I miss spicy food. (Student 3: Interview 2)

The students describe in the final interview how they are discovering new appetizing Italian dishes, but are still missing Chinese food and having acculturative issues adjusting to the Italian diet. Student 2 explains how she enjoys “spaghetti di seppia” in Venice and pizza in Napoli (example 74). Student 3 likes tiramisu, beefsteak and spaghetti, but does not like pizza because it has cheese on it, and she does not like cheese (example 75). Dairy products, especially cheese, are not consumed as much in China as they are in Italy. Students frequently comment on how, even after living in Italy for almost a year, they do not delight in cheese or other milk products as they believe that it is bad for their body. The students all explain how they are looking forward to having the spicy food of their region when they return to China, as they are still not used to all the “different” food in Italy (example 74 & 75).

- (74) The food is not a problem so much. I like spaghetti di seppia from Venezia, which is very delicious, and the pizza from Napoli. But Italian food is not very spicy, and Chinese people like spicy food. I get Chinese food, like dumplings from the Chinese supermarket, to cook at home here. I am learning some recipes from books and YouTube to cook Italian food, like pasta carbonara, here. (Student 2: Interview 3)
- (75) The food is different. I don't like cheese, and pizza because it has cheese. I miss the spicy food and home cooked food in China often. I like tiramisu, beefsteak and spaghetti here. (Student 3: Interview 3)

As well as learning to cook their traditional food in Italy, the Chinese student sojourners show signs in the final interview of behavioural changes in culturally learning the Italian dietary habits and cuisine. Many students describe how they “feel more Italian” as their “habits have changed living” in Italy (example 76 & 77). They are learning some recipes from books and YouTube to cook Italian food, like pasta carbonara (example 74). They are also adopting the Italian cultural love of coffee. Student 8 explains that she now drinks more coffee than before, and enjoys socially having a “café in the piazza” after studying with her Italian friends (example 76). Student 6 similarly explains how she now drinks “coffee in the morning,” which she was not accustomed to do so before as in China they drink more tea (example 77). The students all also explain how their behaviour of eating has changed, and they are now used to eating with “a fork and knife” and having their meal “later” (example 78).

- (76) My eating habits changed as I started to drink more coffee. [...] Socially I usually go to the library with my friends to study, and then we have a café in the piazza. (Student 8: Interview 3)
- (77) I feel more Italian. My habits have changed living here. Now after dinner I will eat fruits and when I arrived in Italy I started to drink coffee in the morning. (Student 6: Interview 3)
- (78) Also the time, and how I eat is different here. China uses chopsticks and here they use a fork and knife and eat later. (Student 3: Interview 3)

When discussing dietary acculturation during the final interview, the Chinese students reveal that the different medical treatment system in Italy and Western countries is a problematic acculturative issue for their health and diet:

- (79) Also medical treatment is different [...] Western medicine has hormones and is not good for our body. It can make us fat. Chinese people are nervous about Western medicine. (Student 8: Interview 3)

Student 8 explains clearly that Chinese people are nervous about taking Western medicine, as they believe that the “hormones” in it are “not good” for their body, and will make them “fat” (example 76). Other Chinese students support and share this same opinion about Western medicine. They explain how they prefer Chinese medical

treatment methods, as it is better for their diet and overall health. It is difficult for student 8 to clarify the exact differences between the Chinese and Italian medical system and dietary treatments. In hearing student 8 and other Chinese students talk about the different medical treatments, it sounds as though they are educated in China to avoid Western medicine, but are curious and unsure if the Western medical treatments are actually different, and bad for their body.

6.2.5 Friendships and Interactions with Locals

The Chinese students feel welcome upon arrival to Italy as they describe in the first interview how the local people are “enthusiastic” and “kind” (example 41, 42 & 80). The students explain that they felt nervous before coming, as this is their first time to come to Italy, and Europe. Since everyone has been kind and enthusiastic so far in helping them when traveling to Macerata, the Chinese students all express acculturative feelings of joy in the first interview in living in Italy for a year (example 80). Social support from host and home national friends is important during the acculturative adjustment process to cope with differences and learn the cultural behavioural practices common in the new sociocultural environment. The students all mention in the first interview how they would like to make friends with locals. They state how they would like to “share opinions and ideas” with new Italian friends (example 81). Being foreigners/strangers in Italy, the students describe how they value the assistance of locals especially with their sociocultural adaptation process of learning the language and living comfortably in the foreign country (example 81, 82, & 83).

(80) I like the people here because they are very kind, and have helped me when traveling (Student 8: Interview 1).

Despite the student sojourner’s interest in having foreign and Italian friends, they all explain that it is not easy to make new friends in a foreign country. “Chinese people are often more shy” when it comes to meeting new people, which is a problem and a stressful barrier to making new friends (example 81). Even though it is not easy to make new friends in a foreign country, the students explain that they will try their best to be

“more outgoing” because they know that they can learn more about the foreign Italian culture from local friends (example 81 – 83).

- (81) Chinese people are often more shy, but should be more outgoing so to learn the language and share opinions and ideas (Student 5: Interview 1).

The “shy” student sojourners are fortunately able to have assistance in making friends and acquaintances in Macerata, Italy. The CISISU students are grateful that their senior schoolmates, who came to study at UNIMC the year before, have introduced them to locals in Macerata (example 82). They are also grateful for the “buddy program” as it introduces them to local Italian students who are studying Chinese language and culture at UNIMC. Students explain that having local friends and an Italian “buddy” has both psychological and sociocultural benefits for their daily life acculturation to Italy. Since the students explain that it is not easy to make new friends and they feel shy when it comes to meeting new people, the “buddy program” helps them psychologically cope with these problems by assisting in the friendship making process (example 82 & 83). Upon arrival, they know nothing about Macerata, feel somewhat helpless, and appreciate the support from locals (example 83).

- (82) Our friends that were exchange students from last year introduced us to some local people here, who we met yesterday for the first time. It is not easy to make new friends, but I will try my best. With local friends, I can know more about the culture and things here. (Student 7: Interview 1)
- (83) It’s the first time that we are here and we don’t have foreign friends and through the buddy program we can make new friends here which is great especially for shy person. It is good to help learn and practice Italian language. With foreign friends, we can learn from each other’s cultures and part of the world. (Student 9: Interview 1)

In the second interview, the CISISU students describe how they are able to cope, adjust, and change their behaviours. They explain how Chinese, Italian, and foreign friends are helpful in making them feel comfortable, and adjusted these past few months to their new sociocultural environment and daily lifestyle (example 84). “People here treat you nicer than back at home,” many students state as they explain how the friendliness of the locals has positively affected their acculturation (example 85). Even though they

miss people and their daily lifestyle in China, now everything is ok as they are used to their life in Macerata thanks to the open support, and kindness of their friends and locals in the community.

(84) Chatting to friends from home and Italian, Polish and Chinese friends here (Student 2: Interview 2).

(85) People here treat you nicer than back at home (Student 8: Interview 2).

Before returning to China, the Chinese students express their gratitude towards friends and locals in Macerata for their social support in helping them cope with daily life acculturative issues during the third interview:

(86) The local people are very kind. One time I went to the post office with a big box and the work staff went out to help me carry the box. [...] Socially, I am happy because I have made a lot of friends at University here. I cook Chinese food, and they cooked Italian dishes and introduced me to their family. I do not feel lonely here or bored because I chat on WhatsApp with friends here and WeChat with Chinese friends. (Student 3: Interview 3)

(87) [Italian friends] are very nice, and gave us presents because we are leaving. I feel very happy to meet them and do not feel lonely in Macerata. [...] One night I was lost coming home from Rome to Macerata and missed the station. A person drove me from Ancona to Macerata in their car to help. Another time I arrived at the station after midnight and there were no taxis and I live far from the station and had lots of bags from shopping. I talked to the boss of the kebab shop and he took me to my home in Macerata. So kind [sic]. (Student 2: Interview 3)

They have enjoyed many fun social experiences over the year with their Chinese and foreign Italian friends. Student 3 explains how the local people in the post office have helped her, and how she is grateful for having a lot of kind friends who have introduced her to their family, chatted to her on WhatsApp, and taught her how to cook Italian dishes (example 86). Student 2 tells wonderful stories about how locals drove her home one night when she “was lost”, and another time when she “arrived at the station after midnight and there were no taxis” (example 87). The students also mention how kind

their Italian friends are in giving them presents because they are leaving (example 87). When socializing and chatting with Italian friends, the CISISU sojourners explain that they did “not feel lonely” or bored in Macerata (example 86). Socialization with locals helps them adjust, and cope with their psychological distress of living away from family, friends, and familiarities at home in China. Although the students look forward to returning to China, they all explain in the final interview that they will miss all their friends and the kind people that they have met while living in Italy (example 86 & 87).

6.3 Social and Cultural Identification

This section, on the final third question of this research study, aims to understand the thoughts and experiences of cultural and social identification and attachment Chinese CISISU students have over their year abroad to their home society in China, and their host society in Macerata, Italy. All nine CISISU female students explain in the first interview that they had never been to Europe before, let alone to the city of Macerata and Italy. Also, except for student 8 who spent two weeks in South Korea, this is the first time for them to travel and live on their own for an extended period of time in a foreign country outside of China. An analysis of the students’ responses, with quote examples, is provided in the two subsections below on home culture identification and importance, and host culture interest and bicultural identification.

6.3.1 Home Culture Identification and Importance

All the students declare in the first interview that Chinese culture is different from Western Italian culture, and is “very important” to their personal identity (example 88 – 90). They show their nationalism and strong Chinese identification by explaining how China has a long history, and Chinese culture is the heritage culture of their mother, family and home country (example 88, 89 & 90). Chinese culture is “very important” in influencing the life of student 9, as well as the life of “every Chinese person” (example 89). The students express pride in their Chinese culture, and interest in promoting and educating foreigners about their country when they “go abroad” (example 90). This

pride and desire to promote “how good” their country is further shows their nationalism, and strong identification with their home culture in China (example 90).

- (88) Chinese culture is very important to me. It is the culture of my mother and family. (Student 7: Interview 1)
- (89) Chinese culture is very important to me. It influences my life a lot, just as it is important to every Chinese person (Student 9: Interview 1).
- (90) Chinese culture is very important because I am Chinese and when I go abroad, I want to show foreigners how good my country is. (Student 1: Interview 1)

In stating how important their culture is upon their life, the Chinese exchange students all explain in the first interview how they will continue to maintain their Chinese culture when living abroad. Similar to responses given by other Chinese students, student 6 plans to continue watching Chinese TV/movies, reading books, keeping friendships with Chinese friends, in Italy and in China, and eating Chinese food (example 91). Following their Chinese lifestyle in Italy is not simple, but their motivation to practice their Chinese culture in their daily life abroad shows their strong sociocultural identification with their home culture.

- (91) [I will continue to practice my Chinese cultural lifestyle in Italy by] watching Chinese TV/movies, reading books, keeping friendships with Chinese friends here and in China, and eating Chinese food. (Student 6: Interview 1)

Some of the students see cultural differences as a major barrier in having a close and “deep” relationship with anyone not Chinese (example 92). Some students, like student 5 for example, believe that friends from China can easily be considered as “family” because they come from the “same environment”, but friendships with Italians is “not impossible, just very difficult” (example 92). The Chinese students express their worry in having a “disagreement with foreigners” in Italy, since they “think different” and have “different cultural backgrounds” (example 93). The perspectives from some

students present a rather nationalistic and closed-minded initial view on creating and maintaining new friendships with non-Chinese nationals (example 92 & 93).

- (92) Having friendships with Italians may be more difficult than with Chinese friends because of the culture difference. We come from the same environment, so we can understand each other better like family, but I think we can't have a very deep relationship with foreigners because of the culture difference. It is not impossible, just very difficult. (Student 5: Interview 1)
- (93) This is my first time to Italy and I think it is very different to adapt to because the language communication is different and also the culture is different. [...] I am afraid of making mistakes because it is a different culture. Also the language, I am afraid that I will have a disagreement with foreigners here about things because we think different and come from different cultural backgrounds. (Student 8: Interview 1)

It is interesting to note that all the students present feelings of a stronger Chinese sociocultural identity after living in Italy for around four months. The students explain that they identify stronger towards their home Chinese culture after understanding more about the cultural differences that they have with foreigners in Italy (example 94 – 97). The student sojourns mention communication, environment, lifestyle, and eating habits frequently as the main cultural difference factors that make them feel, and identify, more as Chinese (example 94 – 97). They all express their homesickness particularly for their parents, friends, food, and books in Chinese (example 95). Once understanding more about the different lifestyle and eating habits in Italy, all the students explain that even after four months they cannot “adapt to it,” and identify as “more Chinese” because they want to eat “Chinese food” (example 95 – 97). Food is an important aspect of their cultural identity, just as it is for native Italians. All the students respond that their sociocultural identity has changed, and that they “feel more Chinese” after realizing how much they prefer their “Chinese lifestyle” and love “eating Chinese food and rice every day” (example 94, 95 & 96). They express feelings of maturity in revealing how they have “gained more wisdom about the way of life” after discovering more about their identity, and what makes them feel culturally “Chinese” (example 94).

- (94) I feel more Chinese coming here. I realize that I prefer the Chinese lifestyle. I also feel that I have gained more wisdom about the way of life. (Student 2: Interview 2)
- (95) [I miss] my parents, friends, food, and books in Chinese (Student 9: Interview 2).

Although the students describe feelings of inclusion and a sense of belonging in Macerata, they also feel “different” and describe how they identify as a “stranger” on a daily basis (example 96). Feelings of being a “stranger” come from the fact that they are still “not familiar with the environment”, and have difficulties adapting to the Italian culture (example 95 & 96). Their thoughts and feelings of difference come from their physical appearance, as well as their inability to fluently comprehend and speak the local language (example 96). Some students, like student 7, describe how uncomfortable they feel when they enter class or walk on the street as it feels as though they are a “stranger” and people are staring at them (example 96). However, not all the Chinese students expressed the same thoughts and feelings.

- (96) I feel more Chinese coming here because I am not familiar with the environment and realize more of the culture difference. The lifestyle and eating habits are different. (Student 3: Interview 2)
- (97) I feel more Chinese because I meet many different people and am in another culture and still I don't adapt to it. I like eating Chinese food and rice every day. I feel a little like a stranger here because on the street many people look at me like I am different. Also I find it hard to communicate deeply. (Student 7: Interview 2)

Thoughts and feelings of identifying as Chinese remain strong at the end of the Chinese students' study abroad in Italy. Although they have positive experiences in Italy, know more of the Italian cultural behaviours, can communicate better, and feel less of a stranger in Macerata, all the students express their “need and want to go back to China” (example 98 & 99).

- (98) [...] I need and want to go back to China (Student 2: Interview 3).

- (99) It is hard to part and leave, but no I couldn't stay longer. I have not come home for one year and I miss my friends, and family in China. One year is ok, but more no. (Student 9: Interview 3)

Responsibilities as well as their homesickness for family, friends, and food are motivating factors for the students to return to China (example 99). With these important factors in mind and a strong Chinese sociocultural identification, most of the sojourners explain how they could not live longer than a year abroad (example 98 & 99).

6.3.2 Host Culture Interest and Bicultural Identification

There are individual differences in the first interview regarding the CISISU students' initial interest in Italian culture, and thoughts on choosing to study Italian. Some have very positive and enthusiastic thoughts on majoring in Italian at university in China. Student 9 tells a beautiful story about how she had heard of Firenze and an Italian poet in a Chinese story when she was younger, and wants to learn more about Italian culture, the story in Italian, and visit Florence (example 100). Student 5 explains how she likes Italian art and the language, and is happy majoring in Italian (example 101).

- (100) I heard of Firenze and an Italian poet in a Chinese story when I was younger, and want to learn more of Italian culture and the story in Italian. I study Italian language and think that this University of Macerata is very good and the city is attractive. (Student 9: Interview 1)

- (101) To study Italian, I like it and Italian art (Student 5: Interview 1).

Not all the CISISU students have initial enthusiastic thoughts on learning and majoring in Italian at university. Many students admit in the first interview that they would rather study other languages or subjects. Student 4 explains that she would rather study science; student 6 says that she would rather study Spanish; and student 8 would rather study Korean (example 102 – 104). However due to their pre-university test results and university options in China, these students explain that studying Italian is their “only choice for studies at university” (example 102 & 103). Even though studying Italian at university is their only option, these students also mention their growing interest and

motivation to come to Italy to improve their Italian and enjoy life in Europe (example 102–104).

(102) I came to Italy to improve Italian. It was not my first choice but my only choice for studies at university. I prefer science. (Student 4: Interview 1)

(103) I study Italian in China. I would rather study Spanish, but my test results were not good so I am studying Italian. (Student 6: Interview 1)

(104) I study Italian and want to enjoy life in Europe, but really I would like to learn more Korean. (Student 8: Interview 1)

All the students express their thoughts and interest in the first interview in integrating into the Italian culture by learning the language, meeting new people, and taking part in the social life with locals within the community. In China, they all study Italian, but “learning the language is not enough” (example 105). Therefore, they are in Italy to experience and “learn” the real Italian cultural way of life (example 105 & 106). The student sojourners all state that they would like to travel around Italy, and learn about the culture, history, food, fashion, art, cooking, and music (example 101, 105 & 106). They mention how they would like to understand more about the “views” of the locals and the cultural differences Italy, and Italian culture, has to their home culture in China (example 106).

(105) Learning Italian language is not enough, I should also learn the culture, history of Italy, food, and fashion (Student 1: Interview 1).

(106) Yes, cooking, views, clothes and fashion, the language and the culture (Student 7: Interview 1).

The CISISU student sojourners exhibit changes in their cognitive social identification in the second interview. A closer attachment towards their host Italian culture is exhibited in the fact that they are now identifying themselves by a new Italian nickname and using social media common amongst young people in Italy. Except for Lu, the rest of the CISISU students have changed their name to Veronica, Luna, Luana, Ambra, Emma, Selene, Gaia, and Sofi. Facebook is not used in China, but all the Chinese students have now created a Facebook account in Italy, and are using their Italian nickname as their

profile identification. They also all now have an Italian phone number and are using WhatsApp, along with Facebook, to connect with new Italian friends. When introducing themselves to new people in Italy, often they will provide their Italian nickname. These changes show signs of psychological and sociocultural adaptation and adjustment towards the Italian cultural society.

All the CISISU sojourners state in the first interview that they are interested in making friends with local Italians. The students display bicultural in-group friendship interests in not only having Chinese friends, but also having foreign Italian friends (example 107). They explain how Italian friends can assist them, through a cultural learning process, in living more comfortably within Italy as they “know more about Italian and Italy” (example 107). Furthermore, the student sojourners describe psychological feelings of coping with daily life stressors and belonging in the new community. By having foreign friends, they are able to have a “new family” to help them learn how to adapt better to the life in Italy and not feel lost or lonely (example 108).

Some students, like student 3, project an initial open-mind as they think “nationality” should not make any difference in the friendship making process because everyone is mostly the same in their desire to help others and treat each other like family (example 15). The students explain how it is interesting and rewarding, on both sides, to have foreign friends as you are able to know and learn more about two people’s culture and another “part of the world” (example 108). Students describe their interest in understanding the different way of life in Italy. Student 8 says in the first interview that she is actually “happy to make new foreign friends” because “foreign friends are more open and exciting to talk to freely about new things,” but “Chinese friends are backward looking as they just talk about basic life, but not all things” (example 108). Since European culture is more open to expressing ideas and opinions, student 8 positively explains that she feels free to talk with foreigners in Italy about new topics on a deep level, rather than “basic”, level.

(107) It is important to make friends with locals because they know more about Italian and Italy, and I want to learn Italian habits and how they handle

problems, more of their history and their lifestyle. Also by making friends with them, you know more and can live more comfortable. Just being with Chinese I think is no good. Chinese and foreign friends are all good and the same, I think only the language is the only difference. (Student 1: Interview 1)

- (108) To help with the language and adapt to life in Italy so that I don't feel like I am lost in a foreign country and that I have a new family. It also works both ways as we help each other with languages and make friendships. Not only two people, but two cultures [...] the local people can teach me the local things of the country and Italian. I am happy to make new foreign friends because I think Chinese friends are backward looking as they just talk about basic life, but not all things. Foreign friends are more open and exciting to talk to freely about new things. (Student 8: Interview 1)

Despite challenges adjusting to cultural differences living in Italy, the Chinese students feel welcome and express content with their exchange in the second interview. The students describe how daily life experiences are “better” than most of them expected (example 109). They continue to be “surprised” at how “friendly” the locals are, which makes them feel welcome and at home in the new environment (example 109). Student 6 particularly expresses her interest towards the friendly and open Italian society that allows students more independence and freedom during their studies and daily life (example 109). Other students remark on their discoveries of new beautiful places and “delicious” food. They also explain how they are developing closer friendships with foreigners in Italy, and admire how locals treat them nicer than in China (example 84, 85 & 109).

- (109) I am surprised because it is better than I expected. The local people are friendly and the food is delicious. I don't want to go back to China. In Italy I am more free. If I don't attend a lesson it is ok, and I am free to travel and do what I want. (Student 6: Interview 2)

Although the students still identify strongly with their Chinese heritage culture at the end of their year abroad, their feelings of belonging and being a stranger in Macerata are changed. Positive thoughts are expressed in the final interview as the students review their overall experience, and sociocultural thoughts of identification towards their life in Macerata and Italy. At the end of their academic year, most of the student

sojourners identify with feelings of belonging towards Macerata, and display struggles in having to leave. Students explain that they are now “used to the lifestyle” in Macerata, “like the food and have met many people here”, which they feel sad to leave (example 110). Many students describe Macerata in the final interview as their “second home” (example 110). Some also explain how they have become so close with their Italian friends, locals, and apartment owners that they consider them their Italian family or “*familia Italiana*” as they say in Italian (example 111). With Italian life being better than expected, student 4, 6 and 8 express interest in living and studying longer in Italy (example 109 & 111).

(110) I feel very happy and the University and city of Macerata feels like my second home. I didn't feel lonely here. The people were very kind and enthusiastic to me. I feel like a local because I am used to the lifestyle here, I like the food, and have met many people here. I want to study and live here longer because I like the studies and life here and I enjoy being with Italian students as we help each other to improve our language skills. [...] I would like to travel and show my family and boyfriend in China life here. It has made me feel half Chinese and Italian. I would like to be an Italian teacher in China in the future and teach Italian language and culture to Chinese students. This experience has helped me. (Student 2: Interview 3)

(111) When I arrived at Macerata I'm just an exchange student, but one year passed and I knew many friends there and I called them *la mia familia Italiana*. Before I left Macerata, my Italian friends organized a party for me. It was amazing. At that time, I don't want to leave, I really like them because they are so kind. Maybe if I go on studying I will do a postgraduate study in Italy. (Student 8: Interview 3)

(112) I feel half Chinese and half Italian now. I would like to keep connected to Italian culture when back in China. I would like to work in either the Italian embassy in China or as a translator. I feel lucky to have come here to study and travel a lot. It helps me to reach my experience. I made many friends and had a good experience for my life. (Student 3: Interview 3)

The Chinese students present a bicultural identity in the final interview as they express their attachment towards both their home culture in China, and their host Italian culture. “I feel half Chinese and half Italian now,” state many of the students (example 110 & 112). Many explain that they feel more Italian since their daily life habits have changed

while living in Italy for a year, but are still strongly Chinese. Although student 2 and 3 did not express enthusiastic thoughts on choosing to study Italian and live in Italy at the start and felt that their life was simple and boring, they were more motivated than the other students to “update” and “change” their life temporarily to fit into the local society (example 24 & 25). All the students describe how their attachment towards Italy has grown while living in Macerata, and how they will continue to identify with Italy and the Italian culture throughout their life and future career (example 110 – 112).

Overall, studying abroad at UNIMC in Macerata Italy has been a valuable and “good experience” for the student sojourners as it has “helped” them gain more of a deeper understanding about the cultural way of life in a foreign country, as well as their own (example 7, 110 & 112). With a degree in Italian studies and a positive study abroad experience in Italy, many of the students indicate that they hope to find a job in an “Italian embassy,” or work as an “Italian teacher” or “a translator” back in China (example 110 & 112). Although student 8 stated initially that she would rather study Korea, in the final interview she explains that she has been happy living and studying in Italy and is considering doing a “postgraduate study in Italy” in the future (example 111). Many also mention how they would like to return to Italy sometime in the future to show their family and friends in China the Italian life they have positively experienced over the past year (example 110).

6.4 Discussion

The objective of this study was to understand the acculturative experience CISISU student sojourners currently have studying and living abroad in Macerata, Italy for an academic year using a qualitative “liquid” approach to research. Informative answers to the research questions, on the student sojourner’s psychological and sociocultural experiences of acculturation, came directly from their responses in the three semi-structured interview sessions. The student sojourners described and explained their experiences and feelings of affective stress, coping, behavioural learning, and

sociocultural identification while living and studying as exchange students in Macerata within the interviews.

The research questions and analysis process of this thesis study followed Ward et al.'s (2001) ABC theoretical framework of acculturation. The ABC framework looks at the affective, behavioural, and cognitive adjustment process of change that occurs when a person transitions from living in one cultural environment to another that is culturally different. Ward et al. use previous social psychological theories to support the stress and coping, cultural learning, and social identification sections of their acculturation framework. Overall, the ABC framework was beneficial during the analysis process in categorizing the thoughts, feelings, and experiences the Chinese student sojourners had acculturating to their new life in Macerata. Through the ABC framework categorizations, it was relatively simple to critically examine and interpret the empirical research data of this study.

The first research question aimed at uncovering the affective stress issues, coping strategies, and behavioural changes experienced by the Chinese student sojourners during their yearlong academic transition to the University of Macerata in Italy. In accordance with previous research studies, the student sojourners were found to be not prepared enough linguistically before leaving China. Language was overall the main acculturative stress issue encountered by all the student sojourners. Before commencing their studies at UNIMC, the CISISU Chinese student sojourners admitted their pre-stress worries of studying new subjects in Italian from an Italian professor. Although the students study Italian at university in China, they are not fluent in the foreign language. They experienced linguistic difficulties comprehending the pronunciation, fast speaking pace, and complex vocabulary of their UNIMC teachers in their classes throughout the academic year. Besides language problems, they also described their acculturative issues dealing with longer classes, an irregular and different educational system, tardiness of their teacher, and requirements for more independent study. To positively adjust and fit into the new educational system, the Chinese students began to improve their Italian, study more alone, record lessons, be more relaxed in attending classes, and

use Facebook and WhatsApp messenger to chat to new Italian friends. Their independent initiatives to seek support from classmates and the teacher, and adjust their behaviours accordingly, improved their situation, and allowed them to cope with cultural differences at the foreign university.

The second research question aimed to discover what affective stress issues, coping strategies, and behavioural changes CISISU student sojourners experience to daily environmental and sociocultural differences living in Macerata for a year. Upon arrival, the student sojourners remarked that the sociocultural environment in Macerata is very different from their home environment in China. Similar to previous research studies, language, food, pace of life, social life, and the local people were all highlighted as the major cultural difference factors of the Chinese students' acculturation, and causes of positive/negative stress. They described their stressful challenge of transitioning their life to a small slower paced city that offers less convenient opportunities for their social and daily life activities and errands. Food was a big acculturative stress issue as they frequently mentioned their preference for maintaining their Chinese diet, and their challenges of learning to cook Chinese food in a foreign country with limited ingredients. Furthermore, they explained how their shy personality and limited Italian language skills were barriers in communicating and making strong friendships with locals. Fortunately, the student sojourners were able to cope and improve their situation over the year due to their independent willingness to integrate into the society. Through the social support of friends and locals, the students were able to learn, and improve on, their Italian behavioural culture skills like the language, communication style, and dietary practices. The students were pleased with the free independent lifestyle and, most importantly, the openly friendly nature of the locals who created a welcome environment for them in Italy.

The objective of the final third research question was to understand and reveal how the CISISU student sojourners' themselves socially and culturally towards their home and the host society in Macerata, Italy over their yearlong cross-cultural transition. Since the students have a strong Chinese cultural identity and this was their first time to visit and

live in Italy, the students did not express strong feelings of attachment or sociocultural identification thoughts towards Italian culture at the start. In fact, the students actually stated in the second interview that they identified stronger as being Chinese after realizing more about the cultural differences they had within Italy and Europe, and how they preferred their home Chinese cultural lifestyle. The students were able to cope with their cultural differences in Italy by maintaining close relations with Chinese friends, practicing their Chinese cultural habits, and accepting the fact that their time abroad was temporary. Since they study Italian language and culture as their major at university in China, they were motivated to be involved in the local daily and academic life, learn Italian cultural skills, and live a bicultural life while abroad. The student sojourners expressed their identification thoughts and feelings of belonging in Macerata and sharing in the Italian culture in the final interview. They were able to make close friends and have positive relations with local Italians who they viewed as their Italian family. Even though Chinese culture is a very important in their life, their experience of living and studying in Italy has made them identify at the end of their exchange as “half Italian”. Many referred to Macerata as their “second home” in the last interview, and explained how they will feel connected to Italian culture throughout their life and future career.

Studying abroad is not only associated with academics, it is also associated with the enjoyable, yet challenging, psychological and sociocultural experience of living in a foreign cultural environment. This research study proved how interrelated psychological and sociocultural experiences are, and how affective feelings of stress and coping, behaviours of cultural learning, and cognitive thoughts of social identification are all involved in the sojourner’s acculturation process. It also proved how cultural differences affect the adjustment process, especially for students transitioning to an environment culturally different from their own. The important understanding from this study is that student sojourners experience affective acculturative stress to cultural difference factors positively as eustress, negatively as distress, and neutrally as confusion. Responses varied slightly in the study as the sojourners acculturated differently, both psychologically and socio-culturally, to university and everyday life in

Macerata. However, despite individual differences, the Chinese student sojourners were all affected by the same main topic areas of cultural and environmental difference. They also all remarked on how important social support was in helping them cope psychologically, and socio-culturally improve their situation in the new and foreign cultural environment. As mentioned in previous studies, students that have a more open mind to adjust and change their behaviours temporarily to fit into the local society, are able to have a more positive and successful psychological and sociocultural experience abroad.

7 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study achieved its aim in understanding holistically the acculturation experience CISISU student sojourners have while living in Macerata, Italy and studying at UNIMC for an academic year. The CISISU students' informative responses have been valuable in successfully answering the three research questions of this thesis study. A detailed summary of the findings to the research questions is presented, in connection with Ward et al.'s (2001) ABC theoretical framework, in the discussion section of empirical findings and analysis. Support for previous research is given alongside of new findings from results on the important acculturative issues, coping strategies, experiences of cultural learning, and thoughts of sociocultural identification. The analytical information from this study would be useful for future Chinese students to know before embarking on their acculturative sojourn and university counselors, IRO staff members, and teachers who must assist international, particularly Chinese, student sojourners during their study abroad. Limitations and advice for future related research are provided in this concluding chapter.

After realizing their linguistic limitations upon arrival in Italy and experiencing acculturative stress, the CISISU sojourners expressed their affective need for local support. Students were happy with the UNIMC "buddy program" as it introduced them to an Italian student studying Chinese. The students saw mutual benefits in the program as their Italian "buddy" could support them with linguistic and cultural problems with their studies and life in Italy, and they could assist their new Italian friend in learning Chinese and Chinese culture. Peer mentoring was discussed in the theoretical section of this research paper as an effective means to assist international students as they transition to a new and foreign university and sociocultural environment. However, many of the shy student sojourners explained how they would have liked to have contact with their "buddy" months before their arrival, and were disappointed that their "buddy" was too busy to maintain relations with them over the year. Many were also disappointed that they did not even receive a local Italian "buddy", as the IRO staff explained that few signed up for the program. Since the "buddy program" has valuable

mutual benefits for both international and local university students, it is important that the mentor system be improved at UNIMC. The program should be promoted more to involve local Italian students to be mentors to new students, pairing should be made based on mutual interests and language abilities, and beneficial encouragement, like extra credits for example, should be given to local students that maintain beneficial contact relations with their foreign “buddy”.

There were benefits, but also limitations and difficulties using Ward et al.’s (2001) ABC model of acculturation for the theoretical framework and analysis process of this research study. The critical issue encountered with the framework was with the affective stress and coping section. Students often provided neutral reactions of confusion, rather than positive or negative stress, to cultural difference factors in the interview process. However, neutral feelings are not explained upon in the affective approach, and should be included. In addition, the major problem with the affective approach was that it incorporated acculturative stress and coping together. Having stress and coping together in the same approach not only limited the theoretical focus on both aspects of acculturation, but it also made it difficult to analyze the research data as the two aspects are conceptually very different. The theoretical framework would be more coherent, and it would be easier to analyze experiences of acculturation if affective acculturative stress and coping were separated in the framework. Affective positive, negative, and neutral stress reactions to factors of cultural and environmental difference should stand alone as an acculturative category. Since cultural learning of behavioural skills aids in the positive sociocultural adjustment process, affective coping should be included instead under the cultural learning approach.

The empirical research of this study is limited in the fact that it is a cross-language study with a language barrier. A critical decision was made to not involve a translator during the interview process as it was possible to converse in basic English, English as a Lingua Franca. The only problem during the interview process, due to the linguistic barrier and perhaps the personality of the Chinese informants, was that responses to interview questions were simple and short. Informants rarely expanded on their answers, and further questions had to be asked to understand their situation more fully. I

was able to delve deeper into understanding both their positive and negative experiences and situations. However, limitations existed, as it seemed as though the informants wanted to “save face”, and present more of the positive aspects of their situation. For future research, it would be advantageous if the researcher has a fluent language ability to converse in both the first language of the informants as well as English and the language of the host community.

This research study is limited as a longitudinal study, and I recommend that future studies go more in depth by conducting more interviews with the student sojourners throughout their study abroad. The first interviews were made with the student sojourners a few days after their arrival in Macerata. However, to understand more holistically about their feelings and experiences of cultural transition, it would also be worthwhile to e-mail and question the students before their arrival. I also recommend that chat messages and Facebook entries are included in future longitudinal studies as they provide a lot of information about the sojourner’s psychological and sociocultural transitional experiences. Moreover, follow-up questions could be asked about their experience leaving the host culture, and acculturating back to their home culture.

For future directions of related research, I recommend simplifying the research questions. This study looked into the acculturative experiences of the Chinese student sojourners, and discovered a number of particular acculturative stressors that affected the students strongly throughout the year. This study was limited in discussing the issues in depth; therefore, I recommend that future studies simplify the research questions to one main factor involved in the acculturation process. From previous research and results from this study, I would recommend focusing on either: language and communication; dietary acculturation; or social support and feelings of belonging. Dietary acculturation is a relatively new, but growing field of research. Since the Chinese student sojourners mentioned food and dietary change excessively throughout the three staged interviews as a major issue in their acculturative adjustment process to Italy, further detailed research specifically on this subject would be worthwhile.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Intercultural Experiences Interview 1, August 2015.

1. Have you been to Italy before? (Y/N). If yes, when, where and for how long did you spend in Italy?
2. Is this your first time living alone in a foreign country? (Y/N) If not, where did you live and for how long did you stay?
3. Why did you choose to come to Macerata and Italy for your studies?
4. What do you know and like about Italy and Italian culture?
5. Are you interested in learning more about Italian culture? If so, what would you like to learn more about?
6. How is Italy similar, or different from your own country and culture?
7. Do you think you will have troubles with your studies here at the University of Macerata? If so, why and how?
8. Do you think you will have troubles adjusting to life in Italy? If so, why and how?
9. Would you like to: assimilate (forget your culture); integrate (keep their culture and learn some Italian culture); separate yourself from local Italian culture; or is culture not important to you and you feel like a global citizen of the world? (Choose one of the 4 options)
10. How strongly attached do you feel towards your country and culture?
11. Will you continue to practice your cultural lifestyle while living in Italy? If so how?
12. Do you feel comfortable and welcome here in Macerata, Italy?
13. Will you try to live like a local Italian here by practicing their cultural lifestyle? If so how and why? If not, why?
14. How would you describe your personality when it comes to meeting new people (strangers) from foreign countries and cultures?
15. Will you try to make friends with locals here? Why, and is there any difference between foreign and Chinese friends?
16. How do you think the university could best help support you during your adjustment to life Macerata, Italy?
17. How do you think the university could better help support you before arriving here?

Appendix 2. Intercultural Experiences Interview 2, December 2015.

1. Is life in Italy like you expected? Why or Why not?
2. How is communication going with people here?
3. Do Italians behave and communicate differently than Chinese people? If so how?
4. Are your studies at the University like you expected? Why or Why not?
5. What do you like about University and studies here?
6. What do you not like, and find troubles with, when studying here?
7. How do you adjust to these differences and better understand the system?
8. What do you remember worrying about before you came to Italy?
9. What do you remember being excited about before you came to Italy?
10. What was challenging (neg) for you these past few months as you settled into Macerata?
11. What helped you settle in (feel comfortable and adjusted) these past few months to changes?
12. What do you miss from China? What do you wish you had here?
13. What do you wish you had brought with you from China?
14. What do you like here in Macerata and Italy that is not in China?
15. What do you think about Italian culture (lifestyle)?
16. What do you find confusing and do not like about Italian culture?
17. In what ways do you feel that you belong/don't belong in Italy, and Macerata?
18. Since coming here, do you feel your identity is less or more Chinese?
19. Who do you spend more free time with? What percent is Chinese, Italian or other foreigners?
20. How do you feel you have changed to fit into life here? How might you feel more Italian?
21. How do you feel about Italian food?
22. How is food in China compared to food in Italy?
23. When shopping, what food can you find here that you like and don't have back home?
24. When shopping, what food can you not find here that you miss?
25. Would you like to assimilate (forget your culture), integrate (keep their culture and learn some Italian culture), separate from local Italian culture or are not worried about either culture at all? (Choose one of the 4 options)

Appendix 3. Intercultural Experiences Interview 3, July 2016.

Affective

1. How do you feel your overall academic exchange went to the University of Macerata?
2. How do you feel over the year your lifestyle exchange to Europe and the city of Macerata?
3. How would you say life in China is different/similar than Italy?
4. What was challenging (+stress -stress) for you as you settled into Macerata and Italy?
5. Describe situations during your exchange whereby you realized your culture was different and felt confused or stressed. How did you feel, and deal with the problem? 1. language/communication 2. Academics 3. Food 4. Social interaction 5. Lifestyle & Pace of Life in the City

Behaviour & Cultural Learning

6. What skills and knowledge of Italian culture have you learnt while living here?
7. How do you feel that your behaviours have changed? What and why?
8. What helped you settle in (feel comfortable and adjusted) and integrated into Italian culture and society?
9. Describe your interaction with locals (foreign and Italian). Have they helped you learn the local way of life (culture)? If so how?

Cognitive

10. Do you see yourself as a local or stranger in Macerata? Explain how you feel you belong or do not belong here?
11. How would you say that this exchange has changed you as a person (identity and personality)?
12. How do you feel about leaving? Do you feel that you could live and study longer here in Macerata, Italy? Why yes or no?
13. How do you feel this exchange to Italy will help for your future?