THE ROLE THIRD PLACES PLAY IN FACILITATING
ACCULTURATION FOR INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS IN THE U.S.

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Chunjie Sun
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Fall 2010

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE THIRD PLACES PLAY IN FACILITATING ACCULTURATION FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE U.S.

by

Chunjie Sun

Master of Arts in Recreation Administration

California State University, Chico

Fall 2010

The purpose of the study is to examine the role “third places” play in facilitating acculturation for international students in the United States. All international students go through the process of acculturation. International students suffer different levels of acculturative stress due to language barriers, difficulties in academic performance, and cultural shock. This study examines one particular venue through which international students can gain social support to help with their acculturation, the third place. Qualitative interviewing is used as the research method to investigate the meanings of the third places to the international students as they relate to their acculturation. Implications for university international students’ offices, local third places owners are included, along with suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the role “third places” play in facilitating acculturation for international students (IS) in the United States. In particular, the study 1) explores the experiences of Asian IS who travel from countries where English is not the native language, 2) identifies what venues serve as third places for IS and the characteristics of third places from IS points of view, and 3) examines the meanings of third places to the IS in terms of the importance to their acculturation.

Need for the Study

The United States hosts more IS than any other country in the world (McMurtrie, 2001). The number of IS enrolled in United States higher education institutions is estimated to be 671,616, according to Open Doors 2009 (Institute of International Education, 2009). Notably, students from Asian countries constitute the highest percentage of the total foreign student enrollments in the United States. India is the leading supplier of IS (103,260), followed by People’s Republic of China (98,235), South Korea (75,065), Japan (29,264), and Taiwan (28,065). According to the international students office at CSU, Chico, the total number of IS is increasing annually (Office of International Education, 2009). Students from People’s Republic of China
enrolled in Fall Semester 2009 (116) is nearly 3 times that enrolled in Fall Semester 2008 (47). The number does not include students who are working on their theses or doing optional practical training. IS contribute more than $15 billion to the U.S. economy (Open Doors 2009, Institute of International Education), they also provide additional financial support for many universities whose traditional student body is changing (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004).

In addition to the normal process of adapting to new educational and social environments that every student may have, IS encounter additional stressors due to the language barriers, demands of academic performance, and cultural adjustments.

Acculturation is defined as an adaptive process of cultural adjustment associated with direct contact and interaction between two distinct cultural groups (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). Asian students, who travel from countries that have distinct cultures, life customs, and education systems, encounter numerous types of cultural shock. Studies have indicated that acculturative stress increases when there is a great gap between IS’s traditional culture and the host culture (Graham, 1983). Experiencing acculturation stressors can cause a variety of physiological and psychological stresses.

In a quantitative study, Rowan (1993) found IS generally felt alienated from American students, faculty, and staff (as cited by Thorstensson, 2001). Social support provided a powerful coping strategy for IS experiencing stressful life change (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Most colleges and universities in the U.S. have international students’ offices, which provide services and counseling programs for students who have difficulties. However, the research literature documented that IS, in general, do not seek assistance, especially mental health counseling (Mori, 2000; Thomas
& Althen, 1989). Most IS usually tend to seek assistance and social support from friends, families, and other co-nationals (Nilsson, Butler, Shouse, & Joshi, 2008) in a less formal setting.

This study examines one particular venue through which IS can gain social support, the “third place.” The term “third place” is being used increasingly to describe an environment distinct from home (first place) and work (the second place). In this study, the second place was the school setting since most of the IS does not work. Oldenburg (1999) concluded that third places exist on neutral ground and provide their guests with a condition for social equality. Everyone shares the same environment, space, and social status. Third places are where people can come and go as they please and they frequently feel welcomed (Lawson, 2004). Within these places, conversation is the primary activity that provides a vehicle for human interaction and individuality. Third places offer an alternative immersion that frequently encourages informal social interactions, thereby, increasing IS social support while being immersed in the local culture. A study showed social support provided a powerful coping resource for students experiencing stressful life changes, including adjust to an unfamiliar culture (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Third places created a sense of community that enrich a person’s perspective on life through conversation with a diverse population (Hummon, 1991).

It proposed in this study that third places might be important for social support networks for IS and thereby help with their acculturation. By exploring the role of third places, this study adds to the body of knowledge concerning third places from the perspectives of IS. Results of this study may have implications for international students.
offices providing better services and programs for IS, and for local business owners who might be interested in hosting IS.

The increasing number of IS has brought cultural diversity to American campuses. Reduce their acculturative stress can help IS perform better in academic and life adjustment in the U.S. Meanwhile, the presence of IS on U.S. campuses helps American students better understand diversity and globalization. IS can provide information related to educational systems in their home countries and different cultural norms. By interacting with IS, American students have opportunities to broaden their cross-cultural perspectives. Overall, educating IS in the United States directly benefits specific higher education institutions, communities, and businesses, while serving the broad national interest of the American economy and culture.

Research Questions

Four research questions framed the research:

RQ1: What places constitute third places for IS?

RQ2: What activities do IS participate in while at third places?

RQ3: Do third places help with acculturation for IS, and if so, how?

RQ4: What are the attributes and characteristic of third places that facilitate acculturation for IS?

Limitation of the Study

There are a number of limitations restricting the generalizability of this study. First, a single methodology (qualitative research method) was used for this study. Further studies should include both qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore the
generalizability of the study’s outcomes. Second, only Chinese and Japanese students from one university in northern California were included in the study sample. Therefore, the study sample was not necessarily representative of the IS population, and findings of the study were not generalizable to overall IS in the United States. Future research also can assess whether similar findings emerge with other cohorts of Chinese and Japanese students at different universities and whether other nationality groups show similar or different patterns.

Definition of Terms

Asian Students
In this particular study, it refers to the students from People’s Republic of China and Japan.

Acculturation
An adaptive process of cultural adjustment from a contact and interaction between two distinct cultural groups (Berry et al., 1987).

Acculturative Stress
Multiple stresses are caused as consequence of the process of acculturation. IS experience acculturative stress because they are not familiar with the new social rules that regulate interaction in the host country (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004), which can cause physical, psychological and social problems (Berry et al., 1987).

Conational
People who travel to the U.S. that they are from the same nation.
Cultural Shock

Anxiety that results from losing all of the familiar signs and symbols of social interaction in a different cultural environment (Oberg, 1954).

International Students

Students who study in foreign educational institutions.

Third Place

A generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home (the first place) and work (the second place) (Oldenburg, 1999).

Western Culture

Cultures of European origin, and that heritage social norms, ethical values, traditional customs, political systems, etc. The term is also applied to countries whose history is strongly marked by European immigration, such as Americans.

Key concepts of the study will be further discussed, and a review of literature will be presented in the Chapter II.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

International Students’ Experiences

All college students go through the process of adjusting to new educational and social environments. Adapting to these environments is even more stressful for IS. Since the population of IS is increasing greatly annually, the literature on IS experience and adjustment has expanded significantly in the past decade. This body of literature has addressed experiences of IS in terms of their language barriers (Morita, 2009; Yang & Clum, 1994), difficulties in academic performance (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Thomas & Althen, 1989), and culture shock that affects their acculturation (Crano & Crano, 1993; Thorstensson, 2001). The majority of these studies focused on the students from Asian and African countries where English is not their native language, nor raised in a westernized culture environment.

Much of the researches showed that language barrier was the most significant, prevalent problem for most IS (Mori, 2000; Morita, 2009; Nilsson et al., 2008; Yang & Clum, 1994). Language barrier presented a major obstacle for IS achieving legitimacy and growing involvement in the community (Morita, 2009). A study indicated that English proficiency was a more important determinant of IS adjustment than age, sex, marital status, or education (Yang & Clum, 1994). Heikinheimo and Shute (1986) pointed out that foreign students must master both informal (daily life) and formal
English (academic work) to successfully adapt American culture. Their study indicated that isolated students reported more problems in academic and social adjustment, caused by their poor English skills.

Problems with English proficiency can significantly affect IS ability to succeed in academics. The major purpose of IS coming to the U.S. is to get a higher quality education. Therefore, they are more sensitive to their academic performance and under more academic pressure than the average American students (Thomas & Althen, 1989). One qualitative study reported that IS often felt overwhelmed and frustrated with their studies in general and class participation in particular (Morita, 2009). Asian students reported serious problems related to understanding lectures, taking notes, answering questions and writing essays (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986). Lack of language skill contributed to academic stress, which was caused by difficulties in perceiving extensive knowledge and inadequate time to develop it (Carveth, Geese, & Moss, 1996). According to the previous studies, the language barrier had direct negative correlations with academic performance.

Another possible cause of the IS academic problem was their unfamiliarity with the American education system. Thomas and Althen (1989) concluded that the aspects that traditionally caused problems were

- objective-type (as opposed to essay) examinations; the need to do assignments and take examinations throughout each semester, rather than just at the end of the term, the year, or even a two-to-four-year period of studies; and the need to cover a large amount of material and then analyze and synthesize the information. (p. 214)

IS experienced difficulty in adjusting more independent learning approaches in the American education system. One characteristic of American education is critical
thinking, which is not emphasized to many other countries. For instance, professors expect students to participate in the class discussion in the U.S., while students are required to listen and take notes in China. Some IS found it difficult to participate in class conversation with Americans, who they regarded as overly talkative and aggressive (Thorstensson, 2001). The status between students and professors are relatively equal in the class in the U.S., while in Asian countries, a professor’s authority is hardly even questioned. Thorstensson (2001) reported foreign students were shocked by the relatively casual rapport between students and professors in the U.S.

Language proficiency affects how cultural differences are perceived. It is also a very important aspect of cultural adaptation (Yang & Clum, 1994). One study suggested that students, who have language difficulties, did not actively learn about the new culture, and viewed themselves as targets of discrimination (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986). Foreign students perceived themselves as a minority group in the new cultural environment (Yang & Clum, 1994). Oberg (1954) defined “culture shock” as the “anxiety that results from losing all of our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (p. 1). Cultural shock was normal in a foreign cultural environment, although people who were experiencing it may not recognize and respond to problems effectively (Winkelman, 1994). Asian students, familiar with the norm of “collectivism,” found the U.S. norm of “individualism” awkward (Chapedelaine & Alexitch, 2004). Oberg (1954) who studied responses to the culture shock among international sojourners to the U.S. found they often seek out members of their own nationalities to help alleviate feelings of helplessness. Dependence on these social networks limited future interaction with the host culture.
Communication styles are also different between Asians and Americans. For example, Asians communicate less directly than Americans (Tannen, 1998). When asked about factors that helped to improve their cultural adaptation, Asian students expressed the need for more preparation for social environments before and during their studies (Thorstensson, 2001). Oberg (1954) noted the quickest way to get over culture shock was to get to know the people of the host country. As Oberg (1954) noted, expression of interest in the host culture by international visitors will result in a return interest by the host residents in international visitors. As he said, “once you know this value or interest pattern it will be quite easy to get people to talk and to be interested in you” (Oberg, 1954, p. 8).

Challenges for IS go beyond linguistic-based concerns. For example, difficulties in adjusting to American food, music, holidays, and entertainment can be stressful for IS (Yang & Clum, 1994). Financial difficulties were also an issue for IS since immigration regulations reduce the chance of applying for employment and financial aid programs (Thomas & Althen, 1989). Concerns of whether returning home, the possibility of not being able to find a job in the U.S. were also predicted to be stressful for IS (Yang & Clum, 1994). Lin and Yi (1997) claimed that IS are often “struggling between the balance of acculturation and maintaining their own culture” (p. 474-476).

Acculturation
Acculturation is defined as an adaptive process of cultural adjustment necessitated direct contact and interaction between two distinct cultural groups (Berry et
al., 1987). Berry’s model of acculturation is highly recognized because it identifies many dimensions. Multiple changes occur as a result of acculturation, including physical changes associated with relocation; biological changes, such as exposure to new diseases; cultural changes, such as exposure to new economies and religious; social relationships, including in-group and out-group interactions; and numerous psychological changes (Berry et al., 1987).

Berry (1988) concluded the phases of acculturation for refugees, which are pre-departure, flight, first asylum, claimant period, settlement period, and adaptation. The process of acculturation can apply to IS in terms of before they come to the U.S.; flight; after they arrive; honeymoon phase; crises phase; adjustment; adaptation. Some IS might held unrealistically high expectations about their abilities to adjust and the quality of their lives in the U.S. before they came to the country. After they arrive, they may feel excited and interested by all of the new things encountered. After a while, by facing a different new environment with their poor English communication skills, they may face deep feeling of loss, disappointment, resentment, and sadness. Similar descriptions about the stages were listed by Thomas and Althen (1989), including 1) “Honeymoon” stage; 2) Confusion stage, at which the negative aspects of cultural shock are experienced; 3) Accommodate stage, at which both positive and negative aspects of new culture can be perceived. Oberg (1960) added adjustment as the fourth stage, when individual can start to work and enjoy the new culture, even though they might face occasional moments of frustration. Students from non-Westernized cultures often experience more challenges than IS from Westernized culture like Europeans students (Yeh & Inose, 2003).
Acculturative Stress

During the first-hand contact with host cultures, foreign individuals experience “cultural shock” which may cause them acculturative stress if they cannot change their behaviors to match the norms in the host culture (Berry, 1988). “Acculturative stress is often a consequence of the process of acculturation and is characterized by a qualitative change in the life of the individual or community (Thomas & Althen, 1989, p. 222). A study indicated that acculturative stress increased when there was a great gap between IS traditional culture and the host culture (Graham, 1983). IS experienced acculturative stress because they were not familiar with the new social rules that regulated interaction in the host country (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004), which could cause physical, psychological and social problems (Berry et al., 1987).

Acculturative stress can cause physical dysfunctions in immune systems (Winkelman, 1994). Health issues such as insomnia and sexual dysfunctions were reported as the most common health issues (Ebbin & Blackenship, 1986). Acculturative stress also affected mental health that led to the feelings of confusion, anxiety, and depression, and feelings of marginality and alienation (Berry et al., 1987).

Ward and Kennedy (1994) and Ward and Rana-Deuba (1999) reported that acculturation strategies affected the degree of stress individual experiences in the new environment. Four acculturation strategies were identified as integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalization (Berry, 1988). Empirical study suggested that integration was the most successful way of acculturating with the least stress compared to the other three strategies (Berry, 1997). Integration strategy occurred when the non-
dominant group adapted to the basic values of the larger society while maintained their own cultures. That is, to assimilate into the host culture as a positive participant.

**Social Support**

Why do IS often feel socially alienated in the host country? People typically became socially isolated after they experienced events such as relocation (Rosenbaum, 2006). Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994) identified two reasons why IS became isolated. First, IS tended to seek out support from people from conationalists rather than making efforts to reach out to Americans. Second, Americans did not feel obligated to socialize with the IS. Language problems and different cultures created further social barriers. An individual’s self-esteem was validated by his/her ability to communicate with others (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). The lack of social support itself can cause acculturative stress.

Further, social support was not only crucial for positive well-being, but also provided a powerful coping resource for students experiencing significant life changes (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Other findings suggested that social support was directly related to a lower probability of physical and mental illness (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Students with few social connections tended to view university life more negatively (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Therefore, IS with better social support were easier to adjust to the new social environment and experienced less acculturative stress.

Ward and Kennedy (1993) found that a greater amount of interaction with host nationals could help to improve communication skills and facilitate general adaptation. Chapdelaine and Alexitch (2004) also suggested that IS who interacted with
Americans may experience less culture shock because they were coached about cultural rules and social skills acceptable to the host country.

In addition, Bochner, McLeod, and Lin (1977) found that foreign students used social networks in different ways. For example, they prefer local students for help with language and academic difficulties, but co-nationals for emotional support. IS who came to the host country with their family or partners sometimes suffered less stress (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992), yet this prohibited further interactions with members of the host society (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). The majority of IS came to the host country without family members or previous friends. A study by Heikinheimo and Shute (1986) indicated that IS perceived the relationships between them and Americans were superficial, causing them to give up hope of reaching deep cross-cultural relationships. Morita (2009) suggested pairing up one IS with one local student interested in cross-culture interactions or creating a small group involving both parties, this may be helpful for not only IS linguistic and cultural adjustments but also local students’ socialization. When social interaction occurred across cultures or different nationalities, it could provide opportunities to learn about other cultural groups (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006). One such program, involved creating “conversation partners,” by pairing IS with faculty, staff or local students, has been found helpful in improving English language proficiency and assisting with cultural adjustment (Zhai, 2002).

Most colleges and universities in the U.S. have international student offices, which provide services and counseling programs for IS who have adjustment and other difficulties. However, the research literature suggested that IS, in general, did not seek assistance, especially with mental health counseling (Mori, 2000; Thomas & Althen,
Asian students were less open to counseling than others, and they were uncomfortable with and felt shame regarding this type of treatment offered by universities (Yoon & Jepsen, 2008). The reason probably was that in American culture, the psychological self was viewed as central because of individualism (Brinson & Kottler, 1995), while Asian, Hispanic, and Black cultures tended to emphasize group cooperation (Sue & Sue, 1990). Frequently, they did not view counseling as a way to solve their problems (Brinson & Kottler, 1995). Because the majority of counselors were Americans, IS tended to be suspicious of the counselors’ conscious and unconscious motives for helping minority students in cross-cultural contexts. Some may even consider counseling programs to be a kind of mind control (Brinson & Kottler, 1995). Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) reported that IS rarely used the support services at their universities. This was partly because they were unclear about what services were provided (Mori, 2000), and partly because they were in conflict with IS values. It can be assumed that most IS usually tend to seek assistance and support from friends, families, and other co-nationals (Nilsson et al., 2008). The availability of informal social settings that facilitating these interactions may be important to the IS experience.

Third Places

The term “third place” is being used increasingly to describe a setting beyond home (the first place) and work/school (the second place) in which people relax and participate in social interaction on a regular basis. Ray Oldenburg’s (1999) *The Great Good Place* is the most influential work to explain why third places are crucial for civil society. Other writers have commented on the concept of a third place, noting the
importance of Oldenburg’s theory (Jeffres, Bracken, Jian, & Casey, 2009; Lawson, 2004; Mair, 2009). It proposed in this study that third places may be important for social support networks for IS and help with their acculturation.

**Definition and Characteristics**

According to Oldenburg (1999), “the third place is a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work” (p. 16). Third places were usually small-scale, independent businesses, which were owned and operated by local people who seem to know the community (Rosenbaum, 2006). Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, Etc., Fit into the Third Places Category by Providing a Public Place for Social Gatherings and Interaction.

Oldenberg (1999) concluded that third places existed on neutral ground and that they served to create an environment for social equality. Everyone shared the same environment, space, and social status. At third places, people can come and go as they please and they frequently feel welcomed (Lawson, 2004). Within these places, conversation was the primary activity that provided a vehicle for human interaction and individuality. The character of a third place was determined most of all by its regular clientele and was marked by a playful mood. This contrasts with people’s more serious involvement in the second places (work/school). The third place was remarkably similar to a good home providing opportunities for psychological comfort and support. Lawson (2004) claimed that third places must be easy to find, easy to access in the neighborhood, therefore it can easily become a regular part of a social routine.
Third Places and Quality of Life

As Das (2008) notes, both objective and subjective factors were important for people’s quality of life. Third places were part of the “constructed environment” that contributed to both objective and subjective conditions of living. His study, which explored quality of life indicated that availability of public spaces, involvement with society, and interaction with neighbors were important contributors of a overall quality of life. The existence of third places within communities may improve quality of life. Oldenburg and Brissett (1982) note that third places were where people gather primarily to enjoy each other’s company thus provided the elements of quality of life that noted by Das (2008) above.

Third Places and Social Support

Third places functioned as unique public spaces for social interaction (Jeffres et al., 2009). They also served as a means of “keeping in touch with reality” through intimate personal ties outside the home and workplace (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982, p. 280). Hummon (1991) suggested that third places provided the individual with stimulation and the joy of shared fellowship, while enriching a person’s perspective on life through conversation with diverse others. “For an individual, the third places offer stress relief from the everyday demands of both home and work. It provides the feeling of inclusiveness and belonging associated with participating in a group’s social activities” (Jeffres et al., 2009, p. 336). As Oldenburg and Brissett (1982) stated, the major function third places serve is to provide venues for informal public gathering. It provided a venue for someone searching for friendship and social interaction. Haine (1992) indicated that third place like cafés had become one of the most important places where people would
draw social support. In Glover and Parry’s (2008) study, one of the third places, named Glida’s Club, provided a therapeutic refuge for people living with cancer. Because this place functioned as a “home away from home” for the patients, gaining opportunities to socialize on an informal basis thus building emotional attachments within a group. It also has been recognized that relationships were built at third places providing considerable social support besides what people usually think should gain from families or coworkers. Such social support was vital to people’s health and longevity (Rosenbaum, Ward, Walker, & Ostrom, 2007).

**Third Places as Culture**

Borer (2006) stated his understanding of place from a culturalist’s perspective, “a place is only a place if it has culture makers—human beings—to create it, use it, live with it, live through it, and consider it significant” (p. 175). People were attracted to those places because it defined the town’s or city’s or nation’s character and represents a cultural narratives. The most valuable assets of culture were maintained at certain places, so they can be passed from one generation to the next, introduced to newcomers and visitors (Borer, 2006). Certain third places have been identified as “culture-specific,” such as pubs in England, sidewalk cafés in Paris, and beer gardens in Germany since these were uniquely associated with the history and culture of these cities (Carmona & Tiesdell, 2007). Therefore, place was more than just its physical element, it referred to the social and cultural meanings and emotional attachments held by an individual or a group for a spatial setting (Glover & Toronto, 2008).

Third places and the power of informal life have been an important part of American culture for a long time (Lawson, 2004). For IS, third places are essential to get
to know the local culture and therefore to support their acculturation. Coming to the United States caused a feeling of helplessness (Oberg, 1954), which prohibited IS future interaction with the host culture. Third places provide a relatively casual atmosphere that creates an open-private space for IS to be a part of the community.

IS are more prone than local students to experience negative stressful events that result in their experiencing acculturative stress (e.g., language barriers, emotional loneliness, cultural shock). To better adapt to the new environment, people may obtain social support. However, IS who travel from other countries by themselves, often lack sufficient social networks. Thus, IS are more likely to seek out third places where they can form casual social relationships to obtain social support, or just relax as they are exposed to the new environment and culture.

Chapter III outlines the research methods, including data collection and analysis.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

The literature discussed in Chapter II has suggested that “third places” may be important social support networks for IS and help with their acculturation. This chapter describes the research methods used to investigate the research questions proposed in the previous chapter. The chapter is organized into four sections: 1) organization of the interview questions, 2) sampling procedure, 3) data collection, and 4) data analysis.

According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), “qualitative interviewing is a way of finding out what others feel and think about their worlds” (p. 1). Based on the particular sampling, IS, the use of face-to-face, one on one, in-person interviews were better than other methods, because qualitative interviewing allowed the researcher to explain the terminology and answer interviewees’ questions through the interviews. During the conversation, the researcher was able to probe deep, follow up with appropriate questions, and fully explore the topic. In addition, the flexibility of qualitative interviewing allowed the researcher to elaborate on certain questions depending on how the interviewee felt and the direction of the conversation. Moreover, because of IS’s language barriers, the researcher was able to listen to the words actually said, ask for clarification, and pay attention to the nonverbal cues that indicated emphasis and emotional tone.
Prior to the beginning of the study, the researcher submitted a protocol proposal for the study and an inform consent form to the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). After approval of the project from the IRB, the researcher received permission to conduct the study at the university.

**Interview Questions**

The interview questions used in this study were organized into four sections. A copy of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A. All the questions were open-ended. The first section aimed to collect general background information about the participants, such as age, gender, major, marital status, and length of stay in the U.S. The second section consisted of questions to identify the IS life experiences while they studied in the U.S. For instance, the interviewees were asked to describe their feelings when first arrived the U.S. This helped the researcher to analyze and understand subsequent responses and to help the interviewees become comfortable with the interview process. The third section consisted of questions to identify the interviewee’s third places and the activities they engaged in while at these third places. The fourth section consisted of questions to identify the characteristics and features of third places that IS felt were important to their acculturation.

The researcher used two languages in the interviews. She used Chinese as the speaking language while interviewing with IS from People’s Republic of China, and used English while interviewing with Japanese IS. In order to assure the consistency of the research questions in both versions, several steps of translating occurred. First, the interview questions were written in English by the primary researcher. Then, the primary
researcher translated the questions into Chinese. Later, another graduate student from People’s Republic of China translated the Chinese version of the interview questions back into English. At last, the primary researcher compared the two English versions of the questions to test the consistency.

**Sampling Procedure**

This research involves face to face, one on one, in-person interviews with thirty-four (34) IS who attended a large university located in northern California, eighteen (18) were from People’s Republic of China and sixteen (16) were from Japan. The average time of stay in the U.S. was almost 3 years ($M = 2.8$). Eleven (11) were male, and twenty-three (23) were female. Six (6) students are married. The average age was 24 ($M = 23.5$).

Purposive sampling was used to recruit interviewees based on “their relevance to the research question, analytical framework, and explanation or account being developed in the research” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 232). IS were identified and recruited for the study through acquaintances of the researcher (as IS herself) and snowball sampling. Snowball sampling occurred at the end of each interview, where each interviewee was asked to suggest another IS who might be willing to participate in this study.

Interviewees in the research represented in diverse academic interests, with majors including business, education, communication studies, recreation administration, nutrition, environmental science, international relations, graphic design, and interior design. Both undergraduate (23) and graduate (11) students were included in the study.
All interviewees in the research were over 18 years old, and had been in the U.S. for at least one semester period time.

Data Collection

Interviewees were informed in advance about the purpose of the study and were invited to participate. After they agreed to the interview, the researcher sent them a letter of intent via e-mail and made an appointment to meet with them at a location of their choosing location, such as coffee shops. The interviews lasted approximately 15 to 40 minutes.

All of the interviews were audio recorded, with the participants’ permission. Key parts of each interview were transcribed. The interviewees were informed that their names would not appear in the transcripts and final report, in order to keep the findings confidential. The transcript was made directly from the tape, with pauses and nonverbal behaviors included. The researcher did not take notes during the interviews. The transcript was kept and made available to interviewees on request.

Data Analysis

The approach to data analysis in this study paralleled Rubin and Rubin’s (1995) approach that demonstrated in their book. The researcher read and reread the interview transcript to note core ideas and concepts and found themes. The researcher coded the material to group similar ideas together and identified how the themes related to each other.

Coding proceeded in several stages. First, the researcher set up a few main coding categories, suggested by the original reading of the interviews transcript and the
intended purposes of the study. Then the researcher came up with a coding sheet according to the categories. As the researcher reread the transcript, she marked off each word, phrase, sentence, example, and story as a single coding unit that fits the categories listed on the coding sheet. When new categories emerged as the researcher analyzed the data, she went back and recoded the material, and then she changed or added the new coding categories. After the researcher marked up the interviews transcript with coding categories, she put all the material with the same codes together by using computer. After all the material was arranged with categories, the researcher analyzed them within and across categories. “Comparing material across categories allows the researchers to figure out which themes seem to go together or contradict each other” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 226). A coding sheet constructed by the researcher is in Appendix B.

While there were some disadvantages to having single researcher as the only coder, two approaches were used to strengthen the method. One was that a graduate student from People’s Republic of China listened to some of the taped interviews and read part of the transcript to double check that the primary researcher was coding them properly. The primary researcher also periodically checked the transcript to make sure that the coding was correct. Another approach was used during the interviews with Japanese IS. One undergraduate Japanese IS served as a translator for the primary researcher to ensure the Japanese interviewees understood the interview questions correctly.

By applying the approach that discussed above, the importance of third places as social support networks for IS acculturation was discovered. These findings will be explained in the Chapter IV.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This discussion of the study findings and results is divided into four main sections: The first section focuses on exploring the IS experiences of study aboard. Emotional feelings, language barriers, academic stresses, perceptions of education systems, cultural shock, and living situations will be discussed.

The second section focuses on answering the first and second research questions, which identified what places constitute “third places” for IS, and the activities they participated in while at third places.

The third section describes the meaning of third places for IS. Specifically, meanings that were relevant to their acculturation are discussed.

The fourth section identifies the attributes and characteristics of third places that were appealing from IS point of view.

IS Experiences

At the beginning of the interview, the researcher explored the study abroad experiences of IS. Each interview began with the question “Tell me about the first time you came to the U.S. for study?” Most of the interviewees reported that they perceived major differences between the host country and their own countries. The magnitude of
these differences was evident in the following exemplary quotes: “Everything is totally different.” “It is so different.”

**Emotional Feelings.** Interviewees reported three major emotional reactions to the perceived differences. First, interviewees felt excited and curious. As one Japanese student said, “I was so excited when I first came here because that was my whole dream of study abroad since I was a kid. I was going to start a new life.” Another Chinese student reported, “When I first got here, I was excited. It’s very pretty here, so many trees.” Some negative feelings were however reported. Some interviewees reported feeling nervous and scared. For example, many interviewees shared a sentiment like the following: “I was so nervous because it was the first time I study abroad.” One Japanese student said, “I was really scared that people couldn’t understand what I was talking because of my poor English, and I’m also worried about the relationships with Americans.” Many interviewees reported feeling that American people were nice and friendly. As one interviewee noted, “People are more friendly than Japanese. You know, Japanese don’t say hi and hello to strangers. Here, we can open up to other people. So I think that’s very nice.” A Chinese student also shared a similar feeling, “Here, when you walk on the street, people will say hi to you, no one would do that in Beijing.”

**Language Barriers and Academic Stress.** The interview data suggested that language posed a significant obstacle to both IS daily and academic life. Many interviewees reported, “I found it’s hard to make friends with Americans because my English is not so good, even though we communicated in the class, after class we rarely hang out.” One Chinese student said, “When I first got here, I don’t even go out by myself, because I’m afraid that I don’t know how to talk to people. And I don’t know
how to order. There are so many names just for cheese.” Another Japanese student said, “I didn’t understand what were people talking. American people speak so fast.” Interviewees reported that they felt more confident if they were more fluent in English. “Sometimes I can’t get the point. I like to talk to people. I think if my English is better, I will feel more comfortable talking to the native speakers.”

Interviewees felt that their difficulties in language proficiency caused academic stresses in different ways. First, some found that their comprehension of course materials was limited. As one Chinese student said, “I missed the submission of my first homework, because I don’t understand the syllabus.” Another Chinese student reported, “I think GE class is so difficult, such as biology class. There are so many difficult words.” Interviewees also felt that language presented difficulties in participating in the class discussions and performance. One Japanese student said, “the discussion is so hard for me, as well as the presentation.” Another Japanese student explained this sentiment in details:

I went to an English institution in Tokyo before I came here. They taught me pretty much everything, like how to write a paper. But here, most of my classes have group discussion, especially business major. So I am scared of talking in front of people, especially native speakers. I don’t want to be judged by people. I’m afraid they might think I have a weird accent.

One Chinese student shared similar feelings:

I think American students are so enthusiastic in discussing in the class and asking questions. They are so confident about themselves. If they have any question or opinion, they just speak out. I don’t think I can do that. I still cannot ask questions during the class. But now I try to ask questions to the professor after the class.

Education System. All the interviewees reported that they found the education system to be different between the U.S. and their own countries. Comments were made
about the following: (1) different educational goals (2) class environment (3) academic requirement (4) relationships with professors. A comment that reflected perceived difference in educational goals is: “I think it’s better than Japan. Japanese study really hard before they get in the university. After that, they don’t really study hard. The education goals are different.” A comment that was typical of perceived differences in class environment is:

The school system is totally different. In Asia, we don’t talk a lot in class. We listen to the teacher, but we don’t say a lot. It’s different here. We have to talk in class. Well, I like discussion. It’s fun. I can learn a lot, learn what other students think and feel.

A comment that reflected perceived differences in academic requirements is as follow: “For my major, I can’t miss one class. If I miss one, I could not catch up later. That’s different back home. People are missing class all the time. But they still can pass the course.” Interviewees noted that they faced more difficulties while studying in the U.S., “The education system is different. It’s harder here. You need to work hard not only for the finals, but also quizzes throughout the whole semester.” Even though interviewees reported difficulties, they noticed that they preferred the U.S. educational system, “I think it makes more sense here. You get to pick the classes, and you get to decide when do you want to graduate.” Relationships with professors were an area of perceived differences. As one student noted, “It’s weird that you can call the professors by their names. I like it here. It’s easy to communicate with them.” Another interviewee noted, “The professors are nice here. You can always find them during the office hour. They will ask things about your life, not just about the class.”
Cultural Shock. Most of the interviewees reported they experienced certain levels of cultural shock. A few of them reported were still feeling it. Different life styles and values were reported as the most frequent causes for cultural shock. One area of cultural shock was the perceived freedom of American students. As one Chinese student reported, “The lifestyle is free. You can see people walking without shoes. Or they play under the rain, they don’t even run.” Interviewee also noticed that the perceived differences are not only due to the language, but also the culture, “Sometimes I just can’t understand what are they talking about. It’s not just about the language, it’s the culture.” As one Chinese student explained:

I found big culture differences. For example, the way of thinking. To sum up, something they think is funny, I don’t think that is funny. Sometimes, they like to make things complicate. Later, I became more understanding. However, I just understand, but I don’t agree.

Cultural differences could create a barrier for IS seeking deep friendships with Americans. As one Japanese student said, “Cultural differences make me feel difficult to make American friends, also the language differences.” Another Chinese student said, “You can know lots of American, but you cannot really make yourself fit in their circle. The life style is so much different after all.”

One noticing finding was interviewees who had previous study abroad experiences reported less or no cultural shock with current study abroad experience.

Living Situation. All interviewees reported were living in rented apartments and houses. Most interviewees liked the American living style. For example, they felt they had more space in the U.S. than their home countries. They are also very satisfied with public service. For example, they noticed that people with disabilities were
accommodated more frequently in the U.S. than their own countries. About the consumption level, most Chinese students felt that living expenses were high, but Japanese students did not. One Chinese student noted that, “When I first were grocery shopping, I realized that I have to times everything by seven, that’s a really high price.” However, a Japanese student indicated, “Things are much cheaper than in Japan, I like it very much.”

Most interviewees disliked the American food. Typical comments included: “The food here is so much different than Asian food. I couldn’t adjust to the food. I cook a lot,” “I couldn’t eat anything besides salad. They are just too greasy to me,” or “I choose to cook at home.”

To summarize, in IS’s early stage of study abroad, they had both positive and negative feelings about the new environment, including excitement, curiosity, fear, and anxiety. Language barrier had a significant impact on IS’s daily lives and academic performance. Different value systems and life styles caused cultural shock. At the time of the interviews, most interviewees had become used to everything and had gradually adapted to the new culture.

Findings for Research Question 1 and 2

RQ1 and RQ2 were designed to identify which places constitute “third places” for IS, and the activities they participated in while at third places. Interviewees were asked to identify what constituted third places for them. The most frequently cited third places were cafés/ coffee shops, followed by shopping centers, grocery stores, malls, and
markets; friends’ houses; bars; gym; movie theaters; parks and outdoor areas; and restaurants (Table 1). When the researcher asked the interviewees “what is your favorite

Table 1

*Third Places Cited by Interviewees*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Third Places</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cafés/ coffee shops</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping centers, grocery stores, malls, and markets</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends’ houses</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bars</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gym</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie theaters</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks and outdoor areas</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. More than one answer was possible, n = 34*

third places,” the most frequent cited favorite third place was cafés/ coffee shops (Table 2). The frequency of visiting their favorite third places is listed in Table 3. The major functions served by their third places included hanging out with friends; studying/doing homework; shopping; exercise; seeing movies; eating/ drinking; and watching people (Table 4).

Based on these findings, it appeared that third places, such as coffee shops, serve major functions for IS to study and build social support networks.
Table 2

**Favorite Third Place Cited by Interviewees**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Favorite Third Place</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cafés/ coffee shops</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gym</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping centers, grocery stores, malls, and markets</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks and outdoor areas</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends’ houses</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bars</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No preference</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Note. N = 34_

Findings for Research Question 3

RQ3 explored whether interviewees believed that third places helped with their acculturation, and if so, how. Most of the interviewees reported that third places helped with their acculturation. Only three interviewees reported that they had not considered the role of third places. Analyses of interviewees’ comments about their experiences of third places suggested three categories of meanings: (1) home away from home (2) place for social life (3) place to experience culture.

**Home Away From Home**

Most of the interviewees reported that they felt scared, confused, stressful, and marginalized when they started new lives in the U.S. As one Japanese student explained:
Table 3

*Frequency of Visiting Favorite Third Place*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 times a week</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once a week</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times a month</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 34*

It was kind of weird at first because I realized that I was the minority. Back in Japan, I was the majority. While I am here, people don’t see me as Japanese, they see me as Asian. I was so stressed out. I wanted to go home. I just wanted to go back home. I felt there was no life here. Basically what I do here is going back and forth for school. I have no life here. I can’t do anything.

Because of the unfamiliarity of the environment, the home and school were the only two places that IS could go. Many IS reported were looking for a place where they can go and feel comfortable while they stay there. One Japanese student said, “sometimes, I just want to go somewhere, anywhere but my small bedroom in my apartment.”

Cafés/coffee shops were most frequent reported as the IS’s favorite third place to hang out. One Japanese student indicated Starbucks was her second home:

I need somewhere besides my room and my house to stay. When I come here, I don’t feel like I’m in somebody’s place. But I did feel like a foreigner at the beginning. Then I got used to it. I started to know them (the staff), I feel like I am one part of this place. It really makes me comfortable. It’s like having my own
Table 4

Major Activities of Third Places Cited by Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hang out with friends</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study/do homework</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See movie</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat/ drink</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch people</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. More than one answer was possible, n = 34.

place. If I don’t come here, I don’t think I can finish my homework, you know what I mean, right?

Another Japanese student also conveyed this sentiment:

I come here (Starbucks) almost every day. I don’t think I can live in Chico without Starbucks. If there is no Starbucks or other coffee shop, I’m going to be so bored, plus, I can stay here. I’m really comfortable to stay here for a long time.

Sometimes, IS need third places to change their environment. “I live with my boy friend, and he is always there. When I need time to be alone, I need to go to another place, for escape.” One Chinese student said, “Usually I stay at home all by myself, if I go to coffee shop, it change the environment, help me to relax.” As one Japanese student explained: “Sometimes I just want to leave my home. I do want to be alone, but I don’t
want to be “alone.” You know what I mean right? I need noise, and I need people around me, but I don’t need to know those people.”

Another Japanese student used third places to help eliminate feelings of stress:

Cafés are like home, help me to stay away from stress. Sometimes, when I was at home, I still feel stressful, because I have roommates. I would get bored at the same place all the time. At café, I am surrounding by my favorite things, such as coffee, little antique, some painting on the wall. That’s cool.

Overall, the interviewees recognized the importance of third places in their lives. One Chinese student explained, “As an international student, I always feel bored and lonely. If we have nowhere to release the stress and tension, then it would create huge psychological stress.” One Japanese student shared similar feeling, “If there is no coffee shop, and if there is no place for me to go. I think I would go crazy. I have already felt no life here. So I need those places.”

In sum, since the main purpose for IS to study abroad is getting further education, school and home were both the most familiar environment for them. Third places provided venues for IS to escape from the same environment, helped IS to relieve life stresses.

Place for Social Life

Social contact and social support are important to IS, especially while experiencing social isolation and marginalization in the new cultural environment. For the interviewees, the major function that third places serve is as a venue for meeting friends. This confirmed many of the characteristics of third places that were identified by Oldenburg (1999). A third place was neutral ground, open to all groups, and conversation was the primary activity.
For some of the interviewees, third places were venues where they socialize with conational. According to one Chinese student: “I feel awkward when I’m sitting there alone. Usually I go there with my friends. I feel lonely and uncomfortable sitting there all by myself.” Another Chinese student reported a similar feeling:

I think that is a place for me to meet friends and talk with them. To me, that’s what coffee shop for. It’s a place for conversation. I go there to relax, to relieve my stress, not to do homework. Do you really think people would be able to read at that place? (laugh) I don’t think so.

Going to third places created opportunities for IS to promote deep friendships. As one Chinese student explained, “It helps me to relax, also helps me to know my friends better. If we don’t hang out a lot, we don’t really get chance to know each other better, then the relationship between us would not be so nice.”

Some interviewees indicated that third places provide opportunities for them to socialize with native speakers. One Chinese student said:

Sometimes, when we finish our group meeting, we will go to some place to get something to eat or drink. It helps my English, I mean, not for class, just for daily life, such as slang. And, it brings us closer. The conversation is easier. I feel like we were just talking, not doing group project. It’s different.

One student from Japan shared a story with the researcher. It’s about how he made an American friend at a coffee shop.

I was sitting at Starbucks and reading my book. An American girl came to talk to me. She asked me if I am Japanese. She told me she wanted to go study abroad in Japan. She was wondering if she could practice her Japanese with me. I said okay. Then we set to meet each other every weekend. Now she is in Japan.

Interviewees reported socializing with both old and new friends at third places. Some interviewees reported that they used third places to meet familiar strangers,
those people who they see regularly but only know by face. Those people were also the regulars of certain third places. One Japanese student said:

“It’s always nice to run into people in the coffee house. What I like the most is different people have different experiences, I usually like to talk with old American people, because they have so many interesting life experiences, and they like to make small talks. Plus, people are always nice, an old lady told me: “you should go to this restaurant and try their crab cake.”

In sum, third places provided IS with an open venue in which they could develop friendships with conationals, other international students, and local people.

Place to Experience Culture

In the new environment and new cultural setting, individual might experience certain level of cultural shock. Berry (1997) suggested the most successful way of acculturating with the least stress was integration. This meant non-dominant group understood and accepted the basic values of the larger society while its members maintained their own cultures. The purpose of study abroad was not only to gain knowledge but also to understand different cultures. Borer (2006) indicated places were where cultures maintain their most valued assets so they can be introduced to newcomers and visitors. Third places and the power of informal life had long been an important part of the culture of the United States (Lawson, 2004). One of the interview questions was “do you feel comfortable when the person sits next to you try to talk to you.” The findings indicated that the interviewees shared same cultural experiences at third places. One Japanese student’s experiences serve as an example of the way third places help with integration:

First it was weird, because this kind of thing would never happen in Japan. I was like “why are you talking to me,” then I realized people do this all the time here. They just like to make small talks. Last summer, it happened a lot. I had summer
school here, so I didn’t go back home (Japan). Chico was dead because all the students were gone. I went to Starbucks everyday. There are several old people who were there all the time. I talked to them almost every time I was there. It was good, and they are so nice.

One Chinese student shared a similar thought:

When the strangers come to talk to me, I feel a little bit weird at first. But I understand it. It’s just one part of American culture. They like to talk to people, and they are very nice. I think most of Americans are direct. They say what they want to say. I like that.

One Japanese student considered the communication style that people used in the coffee shops as representative of western culture:

Like how the staffs talk to you, they ask “how are you doing today?” That’s something different than Japanese culture or Asian culture. The staff in Japan, they usually say: “hello, can I take your order?” They don’t socialize with you. They don’t make small talk. The styles are different. I prefer the style here. I think it makes more sense. I don’t understand why people are so shy in Japan. I mean I am shy, but I want to change my attitude.

Another Japanese student made a similar point:

I think it will be awkward if we do this in Japan, such as asking how was your day. It’s different. Because in Japan, it is considered rude, but here, it is rude not to have conversation with them, you know, like you ignore them. In Japan, ignoring is not rude when it comes to the strangers. Sometimes, it’s even polite to ignore other people. You keep distance with each other.

These experiences were cultural and unique to IS since they wouldn’t get the same experience in their own countries. According to their stories, most of them got used to the new environment and culture. For example, one Chinese female student said: “if I feel comfortable, or my English is good enough, I would start to talk to the person who sits next to me.”

Some interviewees considered the third places as cultural settings. One Chinese student told the researcher that the reason why she goes to third place was to gain cultural experience:
I used to watch American TV shows before I came here. In the shows, the coffee houses look a certain way, people were doing certain things at those places. When I got here, I wanted to go to check out those places. I want to see if they really look like that way. I don’t really like drinking coffee, it makes me dizzy. I just think coffee house is another thing about western culture.

Another Chinese student considered that going to coffee shops was a “certain thing to do at certain places”:

If I go back to China, I don’t think I would go to coffee shop that often as while here. I think it’s just some custom I adopt when I am here. All my classmates in my group they’d like to go there after work. I don’t want to feel like left out. I think it’s better for international students to do something that American students like to do. Then we won’t feel marginalized. Plus, if we go back to China, the people we socialized with are different people. I think it’s still about the environment. People here, are more relaxed.

To sum up, third places were where IS experienced American culture, whether they intentionally go there or not. Third places provided the space for IS to be exposed to different cultural environment.

Findings for Research Question 4

RQ4 intended to identify the attributes and characteristics of third places from IS’s points of view. When interviewees were asked, “What specifically makes you want to return,” these characteristics were frequently mentioned: quality, atmosphere, layout, staff, scent, acoustics, art, location, and Wi-Fi (wireless Internet access).

Quality

For coffee shops, restaurants, or bars, interviewees valued good food and drinks. For gym or parks, interviewees reported the quality of facilities was important. This is captured in the following statement, “They (Starbucks) make good coffee. That’s the quality. They are professionals.” Another interviewee noted, “I don’t usually go to
coffee house, but I like that one in downtown, they have good cakes.” Still another interviewee, commenting about gyms, noted, “The gym is really good, I mean all the equipment. You can’t find this kind of gym in Beijing, even though you pay really high membership fee.”

Atmosphere

When the researcher asked, “what makes you want to go there,” over half of the interviewees mentioned atmosphere. A number of students referred to the library as a contrasting environment, noting that third places provided a relatively casual, warm, peaceful atmosphere. One student noted, “I don’t like the atmosphere in the library, too quiet, too depressing. I don’t even like the air in the library.” Another said, “I hate study in the library, because it is too quiet, and everybody is studying. That makes me so stressful.” One Japanese student shared an interesting point:

Going to coffee shop pushes me to read, it certainly does. The differences between reading here in BMU and in the coffee shop, it’s different atmosphere, it’s like changing the mood. When I go to coffee shop, I buy a cup of coffee to read. So that amount of time, it’s like, I buy the time. I think I have to study because I buy that time to study. I think it’s more efficient when I have a cup of coffee with me.

Layout

Interviewees enjoyed being able to select seats that allowed them to have an open-private space. The space allowed customers to create a private spot, yet to see and to be seen. As one interviewee noted, “The seating is private. I won’t be easy to be bothered.” Another comment on the layout, “I like big windows. I can sit and look outside. There is no time limit here.” Some interviewees came to coffee shops alone, and preferred to sit alone, while others came in groups and looked for seating that would accommodate their groups. Interviewees chose to sit in large comfortable couches when
they read or chatted with friends, while other chose to sit at tables to use laptops or spread out their books.

**Staff**

Interviewees reported that services were important, and they felt more comfortable if they know the people who work at those third places. As one interviewee noted the importance of service quality, “If the service is bad, I will not go.” Good services attracted customers, “The staffs are very nice. They offer good service. It makes me feel like they are very happy to serve me.” Familiarity with the staff who works at the third places was also an important element that appealed to IS. As one interviewee mentioned, “Familiar with the staff makes me want to return. Because I feel comfortable to go somewhere that there are some people I know are there.” One interviewee felt valued when the staff memorized her name: “I feel really comfortable when I come here, and people who work here say “hi” to me. Since I come here a lot, most of the staffs know my name. It makes me feel like knowing someone, but they are different as friends, just people that you know.”

**Scent**

This study found some interviewees reacted positively to the smell of coffee and baked goods. “I love coffee. The smell makes me comfortable.” “I like coffee shops, always smell good.”

**Acoustics**

Background music, as well as conversation, provided noise that created a certain level of privacy for people. If the noise was not too loud, it helped the interviewees to calm down and to concentrate on themselves. “I don’t like quiet place,
like library. It’s too quiet. I can’t study. But at Starbucks, people talking and music, I can study.” The quality and the volume of music were also important to cafes, “Coffee shops usually have good music, I like it.” “Music in the café is more like a background sound. It doesn’t affect my study. Library is just too quiet.”

Art

Some interviewees mentioned the artwork in their third places as an important element. “The paintings on the wall, I like them, I think that’s cool.” “Sometimes I just sit and look at them (artworks).” “They have nice painting and cute antiques.” Coffee shops or restaurants provided places for local artists to display their work and connected with the community.

Location

The distance between home, third places and school was also one reason that interviewees chose their third places. “I usually go to the Starbucks near Best Buy, because it’s close to where I live.” “I used to live in UV, there is a Starbucks nearby. I often go there and study.” “I go to coffee shops between classes, they are close to school.”

Wi-Fi

Access to the Internet was an important element to the interviewees while they choosing cafés or coffee shops to study or surf online. “I’m very happy that Starbucks have free Wi-Fi now.” “I usually like surfing on the Internet, and I love coffee, so that’s nice.”
In sum, although available space and configurations in third places may vary, the findings provided guidelines for both the evaluation of existing third places and design for new third places.

In the following chapter, the discussion of findings, implications of the study, and recommendations for future study will be discussed.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The previous chapter provided descriptive analyses of each research question in the study. This chapter discusses the study findings and draws conclusions for the study. The chapter is organized into three sections. The first section discusses the findings. In the second section, theoretical and marketing implications are discussed. The last section suggests future research.

Discussion of the Findings

In general, this study’s findings of IS experiences of study abroad are consistent with those of previous research (Crano & Crano, 1993; Morita, 2009; Thomas & Althen, 1989). The majority of the interviewees found their first few months living in the U.S. to be very challenging since they experienced different academic, cultural, and social environments. At the early stages of study abroad, both positive and negative emotional feelings appeared to be normal for most IS. The results indicated that most of the interviewees got used to the new environment and suffered less stress after several months of staying in the U.S.

Findings of this study supported those of others (Carveth et al., 1996; Morita, 2009; Thomas & Althen, 1989) who found that IS felt particularly stressed by the need to perform academically, given that the primary reason for living in the U.S. was to future
their education. Interviewees also reported their poor English skill caused difficulties not only in academic performance but also in pursuing deep friendships with Americans. Thus, it seems that if IS English proficiency improved, academic challenges would be less of a problem and social adjustment would be easier. Some IS reported that friendships with Americans were superficial. Apparently, language proficiency presented a major obstacle for both parties. Further, due to the cultural differences, IS found it difficult to fully understand different values and norms, and hindering the formation of deep friendships. The living situations also created lacking opportunities for both parties to know each other. From the interviews, it was determined that all interviewees live off-campus, and most of them live with conationals. As one interviewee stated:

> Usually Chinese live with Chinese, American live with American. There is no such chance to meet American outside of the classroom. As we know, American students don’t really make American friends from the class. They made friends with the people they live with. I think the school should provide dorms for IS to live with American students. Maybe that would help with IS, at least for the language part.

The natural response of IS during acculturation was to seek out primary support from conationals, and made efforts to reach out to Americans to improve language and to understand different culture. Feelings of isolation were created primarily by their identities of being foreign students with limited language abilities and different cultural background knowledge. The researcher believed that IS were likely to anticipate the challenges of language barriers, and cultural differences, but were less prepared for social isolation. It seems there is no easy and quick solution for alleviating acculturation stress. However, the study pointed to the value of third places as venues for exposure to the English language and social interaction.
A key objective of this study was to illustrate how and why third places play meaningful role for IS acculturation. Third places were venues in which IS can satisfy not only their consumption needs but also improve their English language skills and social support. As such, IS considered third places to be meaningful. They perceived these establishments as home away from home, place to socialize, and place to experience culture.

The findings indicated that time spent in third places helped to alleviate stress. The social support fostered in third places had a positive impact in facilitating acculturation for IS. The interpretation of the findings suggested that the third places chosen by IS met some of the characteristics of third places as defined by Oldenburg (1999). Such as, third places were remarked as a good home providing opportunities for psychological comfort and social support. However, some attributes emerged in this study that have not been directly addressed in the previous studies, especially from IS points of view. For instance, third places served as venues for IS to experience the different culture. The conversations happened at third places helped to improve IS English language skills. The function of the third places while facilitating acculturation for IS might not be obviously, since all the activities were based on informal settings, and were hard to be quantified. However, according to the findings, students spend a relatively big amount of time at third places (over half of the interviewees visited their third places more than once a week), and recognized that third places were an important component of IS lives. Figure 1 illustrates how third places help with IS acculturation:
Figure 1. How do third places help with International Students’ acculturation.

Because of the different language, interviewees reported that they had hard
time to understand the course materials and felt difficulties in participate in the class
discussion and performance. Language barriers also posed a major obstacle for IS to
pursue deep friendship with Americans. All the interviewees reported that they found the
education system to be different between the U.S. and their own countries. Educational
goals, class environment, academic requirement, and relationships with professors are
perceived to be different. Cultural differences also affect how IS make friends with
Americans. Different life styles and values were reported as the most frequent causes for
cultural shock. Most of the interviewees reported that major functions of third places
served helped with their acculturation.

Implications of the Research Findings

Various implications can be drawn from this study. IS have more
acculturation problems but less social support than American students while studying in
the U.S. With the increasing number of IS, universities, academic programs, instructors,
faculty, and domestic students can play a role in helping IS to better adjust to the new
environment.
In planning orientations for IS, universities should recognize that the priority for most IS is academic performance, and these students usually experience strong academic stress. The priority of academic achievement lead to increased hours devoted to homework versus leisure and the unfamiliarity of living and social environments created further isolation for IS. According to previous research (Thomas & Althen, 1989), IS commonly do not seek assistance from counseling programs. It is likely for newly arrived IS to ask advice from members of their own national groups or conationals through informal channels. Thus, it is important to inform IS those social activities they participate at third places have positive influences for their acculturation. The meaning of third places should be introduced and emphasized to not only IS but also university offices and faculty members. Acculturation is a process that includes language-related, academic, social, cultural, environmental, financial elements, and is common to every individual who traveled from another country. IS should be encouraged to participate in the host community activities and have open views of overall adjustment.

This study calls for better services and programs to support the linguistic needs and social support needs of IS. Perhaps, introducing third places options during the orientation may be helpful for not only IS familiarity of the new communities but also provide better understanding of third places’ meanings. As some interviewees’ experiences illustrated, they found it difficult to make further contact with their classmates outside of the classroom. IS should be encouraged to participate in such peer meetings in informal social gatherings in order to develop and benefit from social support networks. Perhaps, universities could bring third places into campus, for example, build coffee shop on campus.
The research also suggested advanced IS who have stayed in the U.S. help with newly arrived IS. For example, advanced IS could take newcomers to third places and share their experiences of acculturation. It would be helpful to find more ways of promoting contact between IS and the local community. IS could be informed about opportunities for voluntary work at third places in the community. For example, IS could be encouraged to take part in local music festival. It not only provide chance for IS to get to know the local music, but also to communicate with the local people.

From a marketing standpoint, the findings of this study provide several implications for local community third place owners. The desirable characteristics that IS frequently mentioned about third places were quality, atmosphere, layout, staff, scent, acoustics, art, location, and Wi-Fi (wireless Internet access).

Because social relationships are essential for IS to perceive a place as gathering place or as “home away from home,” the findings had special relevance for places where customers can easily interact with other patrons or staff. By creating comfortable seating arrangements, and encouraging interaction between employees and customers, customers can linger, and interacted more easily. Employees might be encouraged to learn customers’ names and engaged in conversations with them. Special cultural events could also be hosted in certain third place that cater to a large number of IS.

Moreover, in order to better host IS and help to improve their English language skills, university offices could arrange newly arrived IS stay in the dorms with newly arrived American students. It is also important to raise the awareness of domestic
students about the difficulties that IS might experience in different types of academic and social activities.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is apparent from this study that both theoretical and empirical studies are need to further comprehend the role third places play in facilitating acculturation for IS. The findings of this study suggest several areas of inquiry of future study. Since this study used a single methodology (qualitative research method), future studies should include both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Future research also can assess whether similar findings emerge with other cohorts of Chinese and Japanese students at different universities and whether other nationality groups show similar or different patterns. One might explore the meaning of third places for American students, in order to compare them with those of IS. In addition, it would be helpful to explore not only the voice of IS but also other stakeholders, such as local students, instructors, who all take part in the process of IS acculturation.
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INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

General Background Information

- Age; Gender; Major; Marital status
- How long have you been in the U.S.?

International Students Life

- Tell me about the first time you come to the U.S. for study. How do you feel about the environment and your new life? How did you adjust to your new life?
- How do you make new friends here? Is there any difference from your country?
- What about the school system or education system?
- How do you feel about living with roommates or alone V.S. living with family back home?

Third Places

- Now you know about the third place notion, tell me what are the places you feel like fit this notion?
- What are the places you like to go to alone or with friends besides school and home? Why?
- What do you do in these places?
- What is it about these places that make you feel comfortable?
- How do you feel when people sit next to you and try to make a conversation with you?
Aesthetics

- What is your favorite hang out place or third place that is not associated with school or home?
- Do you go to this type of place when you are home?
- What makes you want to go there? Describe the space to me (what does it look like; how do you feel when you are there; what sounds to hear; what things do you see; what are people doing around you).
- What specifically makes you want to return?

Conclusion questions

- How does this place make you feel about the new culture?
- How does this place make you feel about your own culture?
- How does this place help you to adjust your new life?
- How does this place benefit you?
1. Tell me about the first time you came to the U.S. for study. How do you feel about the environment?
   A. It’s different
   B. Excited
   C. Curious
   D. Nervous
   E. Scared
   F. Weird
   G. Surprised
   H. Freedom
   I. People are nice
   J. Lonely
   K. Discrimination
   L. Stressful

2. How does language barriers affect your daily life?
   A. Have difficulties in talking to people
   B. Have difficulties in understanding people
   C. Have difficulties in making new friends

3. How does Language barriers affect your academic life?
   A. Comprehension of course materials was limited
   B. Have difficulties in participating in class discussion and performance

4. What is difference of the education system between the U.S. and your own countries?
   A. Educational goals
   B. Class environment
   C. Academic requirement
   D. Relationship with professors
5. What is the reason of causing cultural shock?
   A. Different life styles  
   B. Different values  

6. How do you feel about the living situation?
   A. More space  
   B. Public service is good  
   C. Expense is high/ low  
   D. Food  

7. What are your third places?
   A. Cafés/ coffee shops  
   B. Shopping centers, grocery stores, malls, and markets  
   C. Friend’s house  
   D. Bars  
   E. Gym  
   F. Movie theaters  
   G. Parks and outdoor  
   H. Restaurants  

8. How often do you go to your third places?
   A. Every day  
   B. 3-4 times a week  
   C. More than once a week  
   D. Once a week  
   E. Several times a month  

9. What do you do in these places?
   A. Hang out with friends  
   B. Study/ do homework  
   C. Shopping  
   D. Exercise  
   E. See movie  
   F. Eat/ drink  
   G. Watch people
10. How do you feel about the role third places play?

A. Home
   a. Have an own place
   b. Change environment
B. Social life
   a. Socialized with conationals
   b. Socialized with American friends
   c. Socialized with familiar strangers
C. Culture
   a. Strangers talk to each other
   b. Communication style
   c. Cultural setting
   d. Experience culture

11. What specifically makes you want to return?

A. Quality
B. Atmosphere
C. Layout
D. Staff
E. Scent
F. Acoustics
G. Art
H. Location
I. Wi-Fi (wireless internet access)