THE INFLUENCE OF FIELD TRIP EXPERIENCES ON DEGREE-SEEKING EAST ASIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ ACCULTURATION

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Presented
to the Faculty of
California State University, Chico

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in
Recreation Administration

by

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Spring 2013
THE INFLUENCE OF FIELD TRIP EXPERIENCES ON
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Spring 2013

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ABSTRACT

THE INFLUENCE OF FIELD TRIP EXPERIENCES ON DEGREE-SEEKING EAST ASIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ ACCULTURATION

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The United States is receiving a large number of international students every year. International students’ acculturation is not a new topic, yet limited efforts have been made to incorporate a recreation perspective into research about acculturation. This qualitative study explores the influence of field excursions on degree-seeking East Asian international students’ acculturative processes and problems during their study in the United States. Eight degree-seeking East Asian international students from a public, comprehensive, four-year university in Northern California participated in one of four, similarly structured field trips. Findings are presented in three chronological stages: (1) pre-trip recruitment and interviews, (2) in-field observation, and (3) post-trip interviews. Most of the findings are consistent with previous research in terms of international
students’ language barriers, academic stressors, social difficulties, and other acculturative problems. In addition, these degree-seeking East Asian international students’ leisure patterns were indoor-oriented, and they showed little interest in participating in outdoor activities. These findings were also consistent with previous research. Despite these difficulties, the field trips appeared to provide a good platform for international students to broaden their social networks, enhance their outdoor knowledge and skills, and raise their awareness about the community. Findings also showed that students’ attitudes towards leisure had been positively changed after the field trips. All of these activities and attitudinal outcomes help to mitigate the problems associated with degree-seeking East Asian international students’ acculturation to academic life in the United States.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Since the end of World War II, the United States has been expanding its educational and cultural relations with other parts of the world. Its rich higher education resource attracts thousands of students from all over the world. According to the Institute of International Education’s annual publication, Open Doors 2012, the total number of first time enrolling international students in the United States’ institutes in fall 2011 had increased by 6.5% over the previous academic year (Institute of International Education, 2012). The Open Doors’ Press Release showed that

…the number of international students at colleges and universities in the United States increased by six percent to a record high of 764,495 in the 2011/12 academic year. (November 12, 2012)

Students from East Asia comprised 36.6% of the total number of international students as of December 2011. By far most of the East Asian international students were from China (194,029), followed by South Korea (72,295), Taiwan (23, 250), Japan (19, 966) and Hong Kong (8,032) (Institute of International Education, 2012). The United States has maintained an incomparable position as an education “Mecca” for students from all over the world; while at the same time, the international education industry has created positive economic and social impacts on communities throughout the United States. International students are making a great impact in the United States and their
needs should not be neglected. International students’ acculturative problems have been a concern in the American education industry. Scholars from different disciplines such as communication, sociology, psychology, and ethnology (Alexander, Workneh & Klein, 1976; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1998; Yeh & Inose, 2003) have studied international students’ psychological, social, cultural, and educational experiences. Among the huge group of international students, degree-seeking East Asian international students are chosen to be the subject of this study for two reasons: East Asian students are the largest component of the international students body in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2012), and degree-seeking East Asian students generally experience higher levels of stress, lower levels of satisfaction, and greater cultural disparity as compared to international students from Western cultural background (Hofstede, 2004; Wang, 2011, Wu, 2011).

Most of the existing literature about international students’ acculturation focuses on identifying and analyzing the problem, or suggesting solutions to improve international students’ lives from psychological or educational perspectives (Oberg, 1960; Pedersen, 1991; Sovic, 2007; Young Kim, 1982; Berry, 1994 & 1997; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011). However, research has also shown that recreation plays a positive role in individuals’ physical and mental health (Iwasaki, 2003; Wan-Chi, Ko-Chia, Yao-Shun, Chao-Ping, and Chia-Ming, 2012; Li and Stodolska, 2006; Brunette, Lariviere, Schinke, Xing, and Pickard, 2011). Therefore, this research study proposes to adopt recreation as a new perspective to view the acculturative problems of degree-seeking East Asian international students.
The field excursion was chosen because it is an important aspect in leisure and recreation studies, and it is often considered as an effective strategy for outdoor learning (Falk, 1983). For international students, field trips can be more than just a supplement to the in-class learning. Recreation is an essential element of human biology and psychology (Kamensky, 1997), which are two big concerns of international students’ acculturation. Recreation has been shown to be helpful in students’ social, psychological, or cultural experiences; however, there is little literature about international students’ recreational behaviors and patterns. It is the researcher’s hope that the current study will produce mutual benefits to both recreation studies and international education by bridging the two fields.

Statement of the Problem

Aside from the fact that degree-seeking East Asian international students’ experiences require more attention in the United States, the researcher’s personal experience also supports the need for this study. The researcher is an international student from China who arrived in the United States 16 months prior to the start of this research project. Her cultural experiences, including language barriers, cultural differences, sudden transitions, and socialization problems, made her realize that the process of acculturation was more difficult than expected, even for a prepared and well-educated international graduate student; let alone for students who enter the States without much preparation. In addition, the researcher’s work experience in the international student office in the university brought new insight into the problem. In one field excursion organized by the office, she realized that it was a good way for new international students
to connect with each other and broaden their social networks (see Appendix D for the anecdote of the researcher’s personal experience).

**Purpose of the Study**

In this study, field trips and interviews were conducted in order to find out the influence of field excursions on international students’ acculturation. This study includes four major purposes:

1. To identify adaptation problems that degree-seeking East Asian international students experience, including study, social networking, cultural understanding, and recreational patterns, during their sojourns in a mid-size college town setting in America;

2. To see how field excursions influence degree-seeking East Asian international students’ acculturation in their study, social networking, cultural understanding, and recreational patterns;

3. To find out the difference(s) on degree-seeking East Asian international students’ lives in study, social networking, cultural understanding, and their attitude towards recreation before and after the field trip; and

4. To seek potential developments in international student programming through recreational services.

**Research Questions**

In order to achieve the four purposes, two research questions were framed:

**RQ1**: How do degree-seeking East Asian international students experience cultural differences and manage acculturation in an American public university environment?
RQ2: What role, if any, does recreation play in degree-seeking East Asian international students’ acculturation?

Theoretical Bases and Organization of this Thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter I provides the context of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, the theoretical bases and organization of the study, limitations, and definition of terms.

Chapter II provides a theoretical background through a review of some of the relevant literature. Research articles from the disciplines of cross-cultural psychology, intercultural communication, and related fields that focus on international students’ acculturation are reviewed. Existing studies on leisure and recreation theories and weekend field excursions are also discussed to demonstrate the potential contributions of recreation in students’ mental health.

Chapter III documents the steps used to conduct the study. The research procedures were performed in a chronological order. In Stage I, degree-seeking East Asian international students were recruited to participate in the weekend field school program sponsored by a department of recreation, hospitality and parks management on campus. Due to recruitment difficulties, only eight students participated in the study on a voluntary basis. After recruitment, the researcher conducted in-depth, pre-trip interviews with the eight participants. In Stage II, a participant observation approach was used to note participants’ behaviors during the field trips; and the researcher took field notes. After the field trips, in-depth, post-trip interviews were conducted to identify the changes, if any, in participants’ social network, academic performance, cultural understanding, and
leisure patterns. The post-trip interviews were Stage III of the data collection procedure. The interviews were audio recorded and manually transcribed by the researcher; and later, the transcriptions were open coded and presented in an anonymous and aggregate format.

Chapter IV shares results and discussion from the findings of the study. Findings are presented using the same three chronological stages – pre-trip recruitment and interviews, in-field observation, and post-trip interviews – to collect data. Chapter V presents the summary, conclusions, and recommendations drawn from the study. References follow Chapter V and three appendices complete the study. The appendices include:

A. A Consent Form, which was used to obtain agreement from students to understand and participate in the study;

B. Two Interview Guides, which were used as a form of research assistance during the pre- and post-trip interviews;

C. An anecdote of the researcher’s personal acculturation experiences as a supplementary material to the study.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study is designed to discuss several topics about degree-seeking East Asian international students’ acculturation, the focus area is limited to a single field trip experience that occurred in Northern California. Further, the small sample size is a limitation of the findings.

The sample size is small even for a qualitative study. It was due to mainly due to the recruitment difficulties. Degree-seeking East Asian international students showed
little desire to participate in outdoor activities; and they generally expressed more concerns or difficulties in participation. Some of their reasons are further illustrated in details in Chapters III and IV. There were also external reasons, such as the conflicts between the field trip schedules and students’ class schedules, or students’ overlooking to the email invitations. Thus, the results should not be generalized to represent the whole body of East Asian international students in the United States.

In addition, students were recruited from a public university located in a mid-sized town in California, where 80% of the residents and students are Caucasian Americans. The internationalization level is not as high as large cities, such as San Francisco or Los Angeles, so it is plausible that international students were more dependent on their “comfort zones”, i.e. their own cultural groups, and were less comfortable to participate in activities or communicate with domestic students. Therefore, the results should not be generalized to a statewide or nationwide level.

Third, only one post-trip interview was conducted to inspect changes on degree-seeking East Asian international students’ adjustment processes, so the results should be viewed with caution.

Definition of Terms

Acculturation

Although scholars from different disciplines have developed numerous theories and models through the years, the classic and first widely used definition of acculturation was offered by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936): “Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different
cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (p.149). In this study, acculturation is associated with degree-seeking East Asian international students’ cultural adaptation behaviors, including their academic, social, cultural, and leisure patterns.

**East Asian International Students**

East Asian countries and regions usually include People’s Republic of China (including Hong Kong and Macau), Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, and Mongolia. In this study, East Asian international students refer to foreign students, who are from People’s Republic of China (including Hong Kong and Macau), Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea.

**Degree-seeking International Students**

According to Travel.State.Gov. (n.d.), degree-seeking international students are foreign students who pursue education in the United States on F-1 visas when the primary objective of their education is to obtain a degree by completing an educational program. This group of international students is in contrast with the group of exchange international students or scholars, who are on J-1 visas, and whose sojourns usually last no longer than 12 months in an educational institution.

**Field Trip or Excursion**

Field Trip or field excursion is a visit (away from the normal environment) made (usually by students and teachers) for purposes of firsthand observation. Other purposes of a trip also include to conduct research or to provide students with experiences outside their everyday activities, such as camping (Falk & Balling, 1982). In this study,
field trips include hiking, camping, outdoor learning, wildlife preserving, and park service volunteering.

**Internationalization**

In this study, internationalization refers to any international education related activities on an American higher education campus. These activities include but are not restricted to the academic mobility of international students and scholars; international programs and projects; an international or global dimension in the curriculum and the teaching-learning process; and students, faculty, and campus staff’s awareness of international education (Knight, 2005, p.2).
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The acculturative processes and problems among international students are intensely discussed worldwide (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Most international students come to study in America to pursue their dreams of learning advanced knowledge, fulfilling themselves, or experiencing life. But imagine the costs behind their decisions – not only the time and money they spend but also the courage, initiative, and ambition to leave everything behind and seek adventure in a brand new land thousands of miles from home. Especially for degree-seeking East Asian international students, it does not only mean to be a “foreigner” in a strange land, but also includes the academic, social, and cultural stressors that they experience.

In this section, relevant literature is reviewed in two areas – international students’ acculturation and the role of recreation in students’ mental health. First, a brief historical background of acculturation is introduced. Then, recent research on international students’ acculturation and the specific issues of East Asian students are examined to further discuss the topic. And finally, studies on recreation and its influence on individuals’ mental health are reviewed to demonstrate the uses of and need for recreation for international students.
Acculturation

For years, the topic of acculturation has been discussed by scholars from various academic disciplines, including anthropology, psychology, and sociology. Acculturation is a process rather than a static form of the phenomenon. By tracing back the background of acculturation, one would find it closely related to “culture shock”. Oberg (1960) introduced the concept of culture shock as an “occupational disease” as a result of losing all the familiar signs and symbols, such as customs and words, during social intercourse (p. 177).

Feelings of vulnerability and mental distress, especially among foreign students, have been reported in the literature. Psychiatrists Alexander, Workneh and Klein (1976) described foreign students in their clinical findings as a population that “feels vulnerable and at risk during much of their time in the United States” (p.83). Pedersen (1991) stated that a person’s self-esteem and self-image are validated by significant others, who provide emotional and social support in culturally patterned ways. Moving to a foreign culture suddenly deprives a person of these support systems (p.12). This sudden loss of well-established status, accompanied by a series of new social and academic issues, can cause severe shock and feelings of inferiority and vulnerability.

Later, more scholars from the above disciplines took the next step by exploring transition processes and introducing the term “acculturation”. Young Kim (1982) has been the predominant communication researcher in acculturation. She emphasized the interactivity of communication and acculturation as:

Acculturation occurs through the identification and the internalization of the significant symbols of the host society... Communication and acculturation occur in
and through the interlocking interaction process of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ in the relationship between an immigrant and his new socio-cultural surroundings. (pp. 378-437)

Young also established an integrated model of acculturation that features the cyclic tension of constantly moving forward and drawing back in adaptation growth. Subsequent scholars, such as John Berry and Paul Pedersen, developed this model further. Berry (1994, 1997) examined the psychological variables in acculturation and introduced four acculturation strategies to the literature – integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalization. Pedersen (1995), on the other hand, developed a “five stage model” and named the five phases honeymoon, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy, and interdependence. He illustrated that an individual usually goes through these stages when they relocate and adapt to a new cultural pattern. The duration of each period varies, and the most common phenomenon is the culture shock that the person experiences during the process.

The above is a brief history of acculturation. Only the milestones and related theories are covered here since the purpose of this study is not to establish the existence of the problem. These scholars have laid an important theoretical foundation for the study of international students’ acculturation.

**Acculturation of International Students**

Recent studies on international students’ acculturation are more concerned about students’ psychological status, especially their academic and social stress levels. Findings from several seminal or recent studies are discussed in this literature review.

Silvia Sovic (2007) conducted a study at a London art university to explore how international students experienced stress. Her theoretical framework incorporates the
individuality of stress, culture shock theory and its resolution, international students’ identity confusion, and the teaching-learning relationships influenced by ethnic backgrounds. Sovic collected the data from interviews with 141 first-year undergraduate students from six geographical areas. Interviews were translated and conducted in the students’ native languages by postgraduates from their home countries. Interview questions included topics on “reasons for studying abroad, expectations, cultural and educational differences in arts and design, friendship, gender issues, stress, support services etc.” (p. 149).

Findings indicated that the language barrier was the “most widespread cause of stress”; in addition, “academic shock” and “social shock” were two additional types of shock alongside with the well-known “culture shock”. Language was shown to be the biggest obstacle for those whose first language is not English. Students generally found it difficult or they were less confident to speak in class, and they usually felt “left-out” if teachers did not explain concepts or references. The language barrier was also reflected in the university-specific teaching-learning style. For example, students were reluctant to speak in discussion groups, but they were not able to avoid working in a group setting because teamwork performance was considered to be critical in this university. Such linguistic stress brought negative results to their academic performance and interactions with other people.

Although the research was conducted outside of the United States, results are worth mentioning due to the university’s high level of internationalization. Sovic’s work has provided a preliminary framework of the acculturative problems among international
students – language barriers, social network issues, and academic difficulties. These concepts become the foundation of the questionnaire design of the current study.

Social stress was mentioned in Sovic’s work, but only briefly, with little effort to analyze the social integration problem included in her research. Social support plays a significant role in international students’ lives while they study abroad (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Higa, 2012), and it is also an important aspect of the current study. International students’ friendship network or pattern has a great impact on their psychological well-being. Some students choose to pursue their higher education degrees outside their home countries not only to receive better education but also to experience different cultures and establish relationships with the host-culture people. Despite many studies demonstrating the difficulties of making host-national friends and documenting that students tend to stay closer to people from similar cultural backgrounds while abroad (Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Olaniran, 1996; Williams & Johnson, 2011), establishing friendships with host nationals is still considered an important factor contributing to a successful study abroad experience.

Hendrickson, Rosen, and Aune (2011) conducted a study on international students’ friendship networks, social connectedness, homesickness, and satisfaction levels in the University of Hawaii. Based on the friendship formation model of Bochner et al. (1977) – co-national network, network with host nationals, and multinational network – and other prior research, they hypothesized that (1) international students would have more co-national friends than host national or multi-national friends; and (2) international students with more host national friends would be more satisfied and
content while feeling less homesick. A survey was conducted online with 86 international students from the University of Hawaii with questions in five areas: “social connectedness,” “homesick and contentment,” “satisfaction with life,” “a friendship network grid,” and “a demographic section that included several items concerning English language skills” (p. 286).

The first finding was not consistent with the previous research – international students did not report having a lot of friends from their home countries. The authors offered several explanations: (1) a list of the participants’ whole friendship networks was required instead of listing their best friends, so more weak tie host-national friends might have been included; (2) two thirds of the participants were graduate students who had high English abilities, so intercultural friendships were easier to form; and (3) the unique pluralistic sociocultural characteristic in Hawaii diminished any cultural dominance, so international students, especially East Asian students, were more easily to be accepted by the host population (pp. 289-290). Despite these Hawaii specific characteristics, the second hypothesis was supported – the more friends from the host-country that international students have, the higher level of satisfaction and the lower level of homesickness they reported.

These two findings reinforce the importance of having host-national friendships for international students, and also inform the current study’s research design. The friendship pattern between international students and host-national students serves as an important component of international students’ psychological contentment and emotional support during their cultural adjustment processes. Therefore, the current study
underlines the aspect of social network, especially international students’ interactions with domestic students; yet, attention is paid to participants’ close friendship network and their relationships with the host-national students to further explore the role of social networking in the international student’s acculturation.

**Acculturation of East Asian International Students**

Although the above draws a clearer picture of international students’ acculturative problems, an even more unique group among them calls for more attention – students from the East Asian countries. As mentioned at the beginning, East Asian students make up the largest number of international students in the United States and will continue to grow in the coming years (Institute of International Education, 2012).

East Asian international students exhibit greater cultural differences than students from other areas, such as the European countries (Poyrazil, Kavanaugh, Baker & Al-Timimi, 2004; Wei, Liao, Heppner, Chao, & Ku, 2012; Myers-Walls, Frias, Kwon, Ko, & Lu, 2011; Nilsson, Butler, Shouse, & Joshi, 2008). One possible explanation can be found in Geert Hofstede’s (2004) “Cultural Dimensions” model. On each of the six dimensions (Power Distance, Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long-term versus Short-term Orientation, and Indulgence versus Restraint), people from East Asian countries differ from most Americans. For example, in the dimension of Individualism vs. Collectivism, people from China, a highly collectivistic culture, act in the interest of the group; while the United States is a highly individualistic country where individual needs come before the group (The Hofstede Center, n.d.). Such great cultural distance between the two
geographical areas on an important cultural dimension suggests it is simply harder for people from East Asia to adapt to the American culture.

Few recent studies lay specific emphases on East Asian international students’ acculturative issues. Wang (2011) studied East Asian international students’ adjustment from the psychological perspective. Because of the scarcity of literature for this unique group of people, Wang completed archival research on “stressors and their relations to symptoms of psychological disorders among East Asian international students” to create a framework to identify the unique challenges faced by this population, and to understand their needs and mental health status (pp. 6-7).

Wang (2011) reviewed literature on three main perspectives. The first perspective was the “prevalence of mental disorders in East Asia and United States”, in which Wang used available statistics specifically in Taiwan, Japan, China, South Korea, and the United States. Surprisingly, the existing literature presents a higher depression and anxiety rate in the United States than in the East Asian countries. But Wang suggests that these statistics were retrieved among native East Asians rather than among East Asian international students, so the prevalence rates may not necessarily account for the field of study (pp. 7-10).

The second perspective that Wang reviewed was on the “adjustment challenges and models of stress”. He located several adjustment stressors of East Asian international students that are related to their mental health problems, including “dietary acclimatization,” “financial concerns,” “immigration status,” “language barriers,” “loss of social support,” and “perceived discrimination”. Some of the stressors were well studied,
while others were under-researched, such as food acclimatization and financial concerns (pp. 11-29).

And finally, literature in the “help-seeking and coping behaviors” was reviewed in order to provide more information for current counseling professionals and other support service providers to improve their services. Previous research indicated that East Asian students were used to “suppressive coping styles” and their attitudes towards help-seeking were generally “stigmatizing”. Besides, they were found to be very dependent on family and friends’ support, rather than seeking professional help, such as psychological counseling services. Therefore, counseling services for this group of student would be harder, and counselors should be alert to these features when dealing with East Asian international students (pp. 30-33).

Wang’s work has informed the current study with a systematic framework on East Asian international students’ acculturative difficulties. His attention to stressors, his emphases on the impact of social support on mental health, and his suggestions on counseling services inform the current study in the aspects of social network and help seeking behaviors of East Asian international students. However, behavioral or experimental research in degree-seeking East Asian international students’ acculturation is still absent. This study proposes to work in this specific area in association with recreation.
Recreation and Students’ Mental Health

Leisure and recreation study is an academic discipline, which stems from a combined background of psychology and sociology. This field also draws on various disciplines while evolving, so it becomes a growing field that does not only study individual needs and behaviors but also investigates the relationships among individuals and social interactions as a whole. Kleiber, Walker and Mannell (2011) valued this interdisciplinary field of study:

The psychological study of leisure is primarily social psychological and includes post-positivist psychological and constructionist sociological approaches. This pluralism appears to be healthy, and researchers using these perspectives often study similar phenomena, resulting in a profitable cross-fertilization of insights and understanding. (p. 48)

Prior studies have demonstrated the positive role that recreation plays on individual’s psychological status (Ho, Payne, Orsega-Smith & Godbey, 2003; Leitner, M. & Leitner, S., 2005; Schuster, Hammitt & Moore, 2006; Kyriakopoulos, 2011; Walsh, 2011). Iwasaki (2003) used a repeated-assessment field design to examine the role of recreation in coping with stress among 85 undergraduate students in a university in Canada. The study found that recreation coping beliefs significantly predicted lower levels of mental and physical ill-health and greater levels of psychological well-being above and beyond the effects of general coping.

Another study, conducted by Wan-Chi, Ko-Chia, Yao-Shun, Chao-Ping, and Chia-Ming (2012) in Taiwan, focused on the relationships among leisure involvement, perceived health status, and leisure benefits. The conceptual framework was based on the relationship between leisure activities and individual’s well-being from a positive psychology perspective. Five hypotheses were raised:
(1) Leisure involvement will have a direct positive influence on an individual’s leisure benefits;
(2) Leisure involvement will have a direct positive influence on an individual’s well-being;
(3) Perceived health status will have a direct positive influence on an individual’s leisure benefits;
(4) Perceived health status will have a direct positive influence on an individual’s well-being;
(5) Leisure benefits will have a direct positive influence on an individual’s well-being. (pp. 1248-1249)

The researchers used a convenience sample of 206 undergraduate college students from a pretest, and survey was completed through questionnaires. Results suggested that four of the hypotheses were supported except for Hypothesis 3. Overall, the research revealed that “when students are more involved with leisure activities and perceive an improvement in their health status, they will have a better understanding of leisure benefits and a greater sense of well-being” (p. 1251). Another important implication from the study was that recreation activity participation as well as college students’ “attitude and mentality” should be considered.

This study provides insights for the current study in the influence of leisure involvement on college students’ mental health and well-being. It also supports the value of exploring the influence of field excursions on degree-seeking East Asian international students’ acculturation. Although literature in this specific area is scarce, some effort has indeed been made to explore the role of recreation that is playing in international students’ acculturation.

A study, conducted by Brunette, Lariviere, Schinke, Xing, and Pickard (2011), focuses on the impact that physical activity has on international students’ acculturation. The study took place in a mid-size university in Northeastern Ontario, Canada among 14
Chinese students, who were selected to participate in a variety of physical activities, including basketball, soccer and other outdoor activities. Within Berry’s (2003) bidimensional acculturation framework, four main themes related to Chinese students’ participation in physical activity were investigated:

(1) Communicating was the “primary motivation”, because students could improve their English, learn more about Canadian culture, and make new friends through communication.

(2) The Canadian Environment attracted students to participate.

(3) The lack of feeling of belonging hindered their participation since the Canadian students usually stayed with their native counterparts as a team, leaving the Chinese or other international students alone.

(4) Fitness and fun of the activity are the positive factors that kept them engaged.

They concluded that participation in physical activity often promoted integration in a new community. Although this study focuses on physical activity, its concept and the way it was conducted are similar to the current study, and the insight it provided was very helpful.

Field Trips

Most of the leisure literature included in this review focuses on leisure or recreation in general, but none of the literature reviewed for this study investigated “field trips”, specifically, as a form of recreation or leisure. Field trips, especially school field trips, are often considered to be an effective supplementary approach to classroom learning (Falk, 1983), and they are usually implemented in post-college educational level.
For example, the most common field trips are museum tours or scientific sites for children. When it comes to a college or university level, field trips usually refer to trips for academic research purposes. And school field trips usually consist of four phases: planning of the program, pre-visit preparation, and follow-up activities (Bitgood, 1989).

Because of the lack of precedents in this specific area, the researcher recruited degree-seeking East Asian international students to participate in field trips offered by an academic department of recreation, hospitality and parks management, and participated in the trips as a participant observer. The purpose was to investigate how these field experiences influence international students’ study, social networks, cultural understandings, and leisure patterns.

Summary

The acculturative problems of international students have been a controversial topic. Numerous studies have been conducted to identify acculturation problems and explore solutions from various academic disciplines. In spite of the absence of research on East Asian international students, three major aspects stand out from the reviewed literature: (1) language barriers, (2) academic stress, and (3) social network problems. Although recreation activities have proven to have a positive effect on an individual’s mental health, there is few pieces focus on international students, especially degree seeking East Asian international students. Those studies, with an emphasis on individual’s mental health, only provide a preliminary framework to examine the role of recreation activities on East Asian international students. There is scant research that associates acculturation with field trip experience among international students.
Therefore, this study proposes to deal with international students’ acculturative problems by introducing field excursions. This study intends to obtain a better understanding of degree-seeking East Asian international students’ acculturative problems, and explore effective approaches for international educators or recreation service providers to consider implementing to help degree-seeking East Asian international students experience a smoother transition to their academic lives in the United States.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapters, relevant research was examined to provide a theoretical background for this study. This chapter introduces the methodology used in conducting the study to investigate the research questions proposed in Chapter I. This chapter describes (1) the population of the study, (2) the recruitment procedures, (3) the data collection procedures, and (4) the data analysis procedures.

The entire study consists of three stages: recruitment and pre-trip interviews; in-field observation; and post-trip interviews. Each stage has different foci, and the researcher used different research methods for each stage.

Stage I: Recruitment & Pre-trip Interviews. This stage was designed and conducted in order to answer the first research question, “How do degree-seeking East Asian international students experience and manage cultural differences in an American public university environment?” In this stage, a purposive sampling method was employed to recruit degree-seeking East Asian international students. And later, a qualitative interview approach was used for the pre-trip interview. The pre-trip interview focused on three aspects: (a) students’ academic performance, (b) their social networking strategies, and (c) their recreation activities and leisure patterns.

Stage II: In-field Observation. Participants’ behaviors, especially students’ interactions with their domestic peers and the park staff, were the main foci. Participant
observation was the primary method in this stage. The researcher’s field notes were incorporated into the data analysis.

Stage III: Post-trip Interviews. This stage explored any differences in: (a) students’ academic performance, (b) their social networking strategies, and (c) their recreation activities and leisure patterns after the field trips. Stage II and III were constructed to answer the second research question, “What role, if any, does recreation play in degree-seeking East Asian international students’ acculturation?” In this stage, a qualitative post-trip interview was conducted. A different interview guide was used.

A protocol proposal, an informed consent, and a set of two questionnaires for the current study were submitted to the campus Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to the initiation of the research. After approval, the researcher was authorized to conduct the study. In this study, eight international students representing two Asian countries, People’s Republic of China and Japan, participated in the field trips on a voluntary basis; and each participant was interviewed twice before and after the field trips.

Participant observation was used specifically for the second stage. This approach provides an opportunity for the researcher to gain a close view of the given group of individuals. On the one hand, the researcher can implement the research mechanism in a way that is appreciated by the participants; and on the other hand, participant observation creates “increasingly precise, vivid, detailed, and theoretically relevant accounts” of the experience (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, pp. 136-150). Thus, the researcher participated and observed participants’ behaviors during the four field trips. Field notes were taken as part of the observation data.
Qualitative interviews were employed as the primary data collection method in this study in order to (a) obtain interviewees’ opinions on different aspects of the topic, and (b) better understand interviewees’ responses not only on a “factual” level but also on a “meaning” level. The researcher sought to interpret interviewees’ responses and obtain immediate feedback on whether the interpretation was correct. Qualitative interviews have also been found to be helpful in achieving in-depth or additional information around the topic through the researcher’s probing (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 30).

Population of the Study

Purposive sampling was used to recruit degree-seeking East Asian international students to join the study. As noted in the literature review, East Asian students are from highly collectivistic cultures and experience greater differences between their cultural backgrounds and American culture (Hofstede, 2004; Wang, 2011). Therefore, they were assumed to have more difficulties in adjusting to the host culture.

Another reason of using purposive sampling in this study was derived from the findings of a pilot study conducted by the researcher (Wu, 2012). The pilot study investigated a similar topic but with a broader sample of international students. Participants included both exchange international students (who came to the University on their exchange programs for two semesters or less) and degree-seeking international students (who spent longer time in education at U.S. institutions in order to obtain a degree). Twelve international students from seven different countries and regions joined the study. Participants went on a field trip to Lassen Volcanic National Park in Northern
California that organized by the Office of International Education during the International Student Orientation.

One of the most important findings from the pilot study indicated that most exchange international students did not give priority to study because they valued life experiences much more than study within a short time frame of their stay in the United States. Therefore, they reported a lower stress level and they were more active in recreation activities, such as the special events on campus or traveling throughout the United States. Degree-seeking international students, on the contrary, felt pressure to maintain a certain GPA to finish their degree programs and reported more stressful academic and life experiences as they prioritized their academic studies. Another important finding from the pilot study suggested that international students from East Asian countries experienced more difficulties and greater culture shock in the process of acculturation. Therefore, East Asian students would have a harder time of making friends outside their own ethnic groups because of greater cultural differences between the Asian culture and the American culture.

In light of the findings from the pilot study and the existing literature on East Asian international students, the researcher purposely narrowed down the population for the current study to degree-seeking East Asian international students, because this group needs more attention in terms of acculturation.

Recruitment Procedures

Recruitment followed after the target group was selected. A field school class offered by the recreation, hospitality, and parks management department in the 2012
Spring Semester was used as the primary mechanism to recruit degree-seeking East Asian international students on campus. Although it was a one-unit class, international students were allowed to participate without paying for the academic fee ($372 per unit for non-residents). Therefore, one financial concern was eliminated. With help from the Office of International Education, four weekend field trips were promoted through e-mail invitations and social media. There were 193 degree-seeking students from five East Asian countries and regions on campus in February of 2012 (130 from China, 24 from Japan, 29 from South Korea, seven from Taiwan, and three from Hong Kong). Fifteen students responded with interest in participation; and eight actually participated in one of the four weekend field trips. The sample size was smaller than desired. Possible reasons for the small participation rate may include one or more of the following:

1. Participation is on a voluntary basis since participants would need to invest time, money (although very little, such as transportation fee), and risk, thus, no alternative sampling methods would be appropriate to expand the sample size.

2. Students might have missed the invitation e-mails or social media promotions due to the large volume of emails and updates they received every day.

3. When asked for the reason they declined to participate, some degree-seeking East Asian students expressed very little interest in outdoor activities.

4. Although many students showed interest in joining the trips, the field trip start-day on Fridays conflicted with their class schedules.

It should also be noted that among the three target countries, no Korean students responded or participated in the field trips. The researcher understands that the
final sample size is very small so the results of the study should not be generalized; however, some possible implications can be drawn from the recruitment difficulties and will be discussed in Chapter IV.

Among the eight participants, two were male and six were female. Two students were from Japan, and the other six were from People’s Republic of China. The average age of the participants was 22 years old, and the average length of their stay in the United States was 26.25 months. Six academic disciplines were represented by the eight participants, including: Event Management in Recreation Administration, Nutrition and Food Science, Journalism, Communication Design, Teaching International Language, Business, and Biochemistry. Only one participant was a graduate student, while the other seven were undergraduate students. Participants’ contact information and any identity-related information remained confidential. To maintain confidentiality while aiding data analysis and reporting, the eight participants were renamed as:

Yuka and Kaoru from Japan;

Jerry, Sam, Amy, Susan, Helen, and Winnie from People’s Republic of China.

Data Collection Procedures

The eight students chose to participate in one of four different field trips based on their own schedules. All four field trips were similar in terms of duration, location, activities, and mix of international and domestic students. Before the study, students understood and agreed to all the activities to be conducted in this study by signing the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix A).
• Yuka, Kaoru, and Sam went on the “State at the Gate” camping trip in the Presidio area in San Francisco. This trip featured a series of outdoor activities, such as zip line and other rope course trainings, a historical introduction on the Golden Gate Bridge, and voluntary services in the Presidio area. Both Recreation majors and non-major students participated.

• Jerry and Susan went to a camping trip in the Samuel P. Taylor State Park in the Marine County. This trip featured a lot of the camping and hiking skills in the wilderness, and voluntary services for the state park. Except for the two international students, others were all domestic students from the Recreation major.

• Amy and Helen went to a non-camping trip to Angel Island in San Francisco. The trip featured a historical tour to the former Chinese Immigration Center on the island, voluntary services for the dock area, and hiking around the island. Other students were all domestic students from the Recreation major and other non-majors.

• Winnie also went to the Samuel P. Taylor camping trip but on a different weekend. Similar activities happened on this trip. And other students were all domestic students from both the Recreation major and other non-majors.

Pre- and post-trip interview questionnaires were constructed based on previous literature on international students’ acculturation as well as on recreation and students’ mental health. In order to identify acculturative problems with the participants, pre-trip interview questions focus on four major areas, i.e. international students’ language proficiency, academic performance, social network, and recreation styles. In the post-trip interviews, questions were designed to explore any differences that students had
after the field trips in the aspects of study, social network, and leisure patterns; and based on that, to further explore the role of recreation in students’ acculturation.

Interviews were carried out on a face-to-face basis with each of the participants in a closed-door meeting room in the library of the university. All interviews were conducted in English. Interview guides were provided (see Appendix B) to the participants at the beginning of the interviews; but in order to create a more natural and comfortable interview settings, students were encouraged to listen to and communicate with the researcher more often than to look at the questions on the interview guides. Students’ answers were audio recorded with each participant’s permission. The recordings have been remained confidential and stored in the researcher’s personal computer.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data Analysis was guided by Grounded Theory. Developed and promoted by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the Grounded Theory differs from traditional research methods because it allows researchers to develop theories from the data analysis process. Grounded Theory is mainly used in qualitative research studies although it is also applied in quantitative studies, and it especially fits empirical situations (p. 1). In Grounded Theory research the usual generation of a theory goes through data collection, coding of key points, creating concepts for different groups of codes, and forming categories for similar groups of concepts. This is helpful for a qualitative study whose objective is to discover and analyze a phenomenon that has not yet been studied, and from there new theories are generated (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, pp. 250-252). Therefore, Grounded
Theory is a good fit for this study since no theories or hypotheses have been formed in this research area, and the current study is to explore relationships between field excursions and degree-seeking East Asian international students through interviews and observations.

Open coding was the primary data interpretation method in this study. The audio data was first partially transcribed. Due to time constraints and the heavy amount of raw data, the researcher only transcribed the relevant answers and anecdotes on an Excel spreadsheet. The total number of words was 4,211. During transcribing, clusters of meanings emerged. Because of the lack of research funding, the researcher manually translated these clusters into different themes, and grouped the answers under each theme. Field notes were also incorporated in coding. A code sheet serving as an outline of the results was also created on a separate spreadsheet. The researcher was the only coder in this study; however, transcripts and codes were proofread by a university colleague with dual master’s degrees in Psychology and International Education. Necessary corrections to the coding were made after the discussion between the researcher and the proofreader.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Previous sections introduce the theoretical background and the research methodology of this study. In this section, research results are presented in chronological order in three stages. In each stage, different themes emerged from the respondents’ answers. Some of the findings from the researcher’s pilot study (Wu, 2011) are also incorporated into this chapter for comparison purposes. This chapter closes with a discussion based on the findings and the research questions, and functions as an analysis and conclusion to the results.

Stage I: Pre-trip Recruitment and Interviews

Stage I features the pre-trip recruitment and interview. Recruitment was the first important step of the study, without which the entire study would not be able to proceed. Only a small number of degree-seeking East Asian international students from People’s Republic of China and Japan agreed to participate. No Korean students participated. This reveals more cultural differences than the researcher expected. Pre-trip interviews followed recruitment. In the interviews, four main themes and several sub-themes framed the analysis:

(1) Language barriers, including three sub-themes: a) daily communication, b) negative influence on study, and c) less inclined to seek for professional help;
(2) Academic performance, including a single sub-theme: active learning;

(3) Social networking, including two sub-themes: a) co-national friendship inclination, and b) interpersonal relationship confusion;

(4) Leisure style, including a single sub-theme: indoor oriented.

In order to understand their current level of acculturation, students were asked to self-assess their language proficiency, academic performance, and social network status using a 1-3 rating scale, where 1 means “poor” and 3 means “good”. Table 1 shows the average score in each aspect; details are discussed in the respective theme analysis.

Table 1

*Degree-seeking East Asian International Students’ Acculturative Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acculturative Aspect</th>
<th>Average Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Proficiency</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Performance</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networking</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recruitment Difficulties

Degree-seeking East Asian international students were the target group of this study. Although the literature suggests that participant recruitment might be challenging due to cultural factors, the researcher did not fully expect the degree of difficulty in recruitment. Respondents to the invitations are mostly from China and Japan, and no
Korean students responded. When some Korean students were casually asked why they did not participate in the research, they reported that they were busy with study or that they had no other friends to go with. The recruitment process in this study reveals more interesting cultural differences among students from China, Japan, and South Korea.

One possible explanation of the low respondent rate of degree-seeking East Asian international students, and especially of Korean students, can be drawn from the previously mentioned, Hofstede’s 5-Dimension (Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity/Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Long Term Orientation) model on National Culture (The Hofstede Center, n.d.). This model was developed to understand organizational culture on an international level; however, two aspects of the South Korea profile on the Hofstede scales may help explain some of the recruitment difficulties in this study. By way of reminder, the Hofstede Model assigns a numerical rating for each country based on a 100 point scale for each of five dimensions. A comparison among and between the East Asian countries and the United States illuminates the range of the cultural gap as well as the relative rankings on the sub-scales. The following national sub-scale figures are drawn from The Hofstede Centre (n.d.).

First, with a score of 18 on the Individualism sub-scale, South Korea can be assumed as one of the most collectivistic countries in the world. In comparison, scores on this sub-scale for the United States are 91, and for Japan and China the scores are 46 and 20, respectively. Such type of society “fosters strong relationships where everyone takes responsibility for fellow members of their group” (The Hofstede Center, n.d.). This can explain why East Asian, especially Korean, students consider company (e.g., someone to
accompany me on the weekend excursion) to be one of the determinants of their participation. And as a side note, based on other students’ observation, South Korean students almost always stay in a group of no less than two Korean students on campus. China, at 20, has a similar Individualism score but the researcher’s Chinese racial background and familiarity based on a student position in the campus International Student office may have mitigated the Chinese students’ tendencies to avoid unfamiliar situations when their existing friendship networks could not be drawn upon.

Second, in terms of Uncertainty Avoidance, South Korea scores 85, one of the most uncertainty avoiding countries in the world, much higher than that of the United States (46) and China (30). People in this culture “have an inner urge” to be busy and work hard, and they consider “precision and punctuality” to be the norm (The Hofstede Center, n.d.). This possibly explains why degree-seeking East Asian students are more concerned about studying than taking part in an outdoor recreational activity.

Hofstede’s Cultural Dimension model shows that the three East Asian countries have relatively close scores in the five dimensions; while most of them are opposites of the United States’ scores. This provides a reasonable explanation for the low motivation of degree-seeking East Asian students to participate in outdoor recreation activities in the American environment, and may provide a partial explanation for the low respondent rate. On the other hand, considering the low scores on the salient characteristics of Individualism and Uncertainty Avoidance in East Asian countries, the ability to recruit any degree-seeking East Asian international students may be an
important first step in designing strategies to assist degree-seeking East Asia international studies in adjusting to American campuses.

Other possible reasons for the recruitment difficulties could include class schedules conflicts with field trip schedules, overlooked or unread email invitations, and lack of interest. These reasons are common to all such recruiting efforts and not limited to degree-seeking East Asian international students.

Language Barriers

According to Sovic (2007), English proficiency has been found to be the biggest concern for international students. Thus, the first interview question in this study was to get an idea of their language level in general. Based on a 1-3 rating scale, which 1 means “poor” and 3 means “good”, the average rating of the eight participants’ English level was 2. The ratings did not appear to be in either extreme even though two of the participants had been in the United States for less than six months; while most of them had been in the United States for 12 months or more. However, it was soon to note that their answers to the language proficiency were all associated with the later questions regarding their acculturation, e.g. their academic performance, social networking, and American cultural experiences. In other words, all these acculturative problems and processes were interconnected. By analyzing participants’ detailed descriptions and anecdotes on their language problems, three sub-themes were formed.

Daily Communication. The inability to converse in a language sets roadblocks to students’ daily lives. Kaoru described her initial experience as “uncomfortable” because she suddenly became the “listener”, while she used to talk a lot back in Japan.
Yuka also had difficulties in talking to people in English:

*When I was in Japan, I had never experienced such kind of problem. But in English, I feel like I have to understand what they say. And this makes me nervous to talk to people... I cannot understand the slangs, so I often ask my friends what those words mean.*

Winnie mentioned that phone call conversations were the hardest part to handle, especially when talking to people who have accents. In one of her phone call conversations with an Internet company specialist with an East Indian accent, she could hardly understand a word. “I had to ask my friend to speak with him for me,” she recalled, “It was very embarrassing.”

**Negative Influence on Study.** Most of the participants mentioned that they worked very hard on their studies, but their performance was not as good as expected. They ascribed the reason to their oral and written English skills. Jerry was a transferred sophomore from China. He said that he was not comfortable asking questions in class; besides, he mentioned that he was not doing well in his major classes. “It’s not an academic problem, but a language problem,” he concluded.

Yuka was the only one who rated her English as “poor”; and she, too, thought that language proficiency affected her academic performance.

*I cannot understand the lectures. And group discussion is pretty hard for me... It’s very hard to just cut in a discussion and express my opinion, so I always just listen.*

Kaoru also indicated that even though she had been here for more than three years, she still had difficulty functioning in project groups because of English problems. She said that American students in her groups “never stop talking” so she did not know how to start her conversation. Besides, “terms”, “jargons”, and “slangs” were mentioned as the hardest parts in understanding English conversations.
Less Inclined to Seek for Professional Help. A follow-up question was asked about how they tried to, if they did, improve their English. Most of the interviewees mentioned that they had never sought help from any professional institutions, such as the English as a Second Language Resource Center on campus. Students would rather let English proficiency develop in its natural course. Students, who lived with host families, found that it was efficient to improve their oral English by communicating with their American “families”; while others just turned to their American peers, e.g. classmates or “conversation partners”, when they encountered language problems.

Academic Performance

Apart from being affected by the English proficiency level, the participants also found the different teaching-learning style to be an obstacle for their study. The average score of the participants’ academic performance was 2.15. Most of the participants said that they worked very hard on their studies, so they thought that they “deserved” a good grade; however, the results did not turn out as desired. As the interviews proceeded, the researcher found that the participants commented frequently on the differences between class settings in America and their home countries.

Active Learning. Almost all interviewees reported a hard adjustment to the typical interactive teaching-learning style in an American classroom. This style, actively promoted on the host campus (Chickering & Gamson, 1987), is very different from the learning styles from home, where teachers lecture and students listen usually. In their cultures, students rarely ask questions or challenge the teacher during the lecture.
Adjusting to the more interactive style proved difficult for most degree-seeking East Asian students and students were often quiet and shy in class.

Helen, a first year graduate student from China, said “every student discusses in class. It’s very hard for me to do so. In China, students just sit there, listen, and take notes.” It took her a long time to get used to the American teaching-learning style. However, she emphasized that she liked the American’s educational style much better because she learned more in this way.

Kaoru had a similar problem:

_In Japan, we don’t even talk to classmates in class, but here we have to talk. If we don’t talk, it means we have no idea what’s going on in class._

The traditional East Asian teaching and learning style is teacher-centered, and patterns a one-way knowledge transmitting-and-receiving model (Liu & Littlewood, 1997). Such type of teaching-learning style is quite the opposite to the American way of teaching and learning. In a typical American classroom, the teacher is not the only lecturer and students are not only listeners, but both parties interact with each other by sharing opinions in class. In order to be able to air out their opinions in class, students must read, write, discuss/present, or engage in problem solving. This mode of teaching and learning is known as “active learning” (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). This style of learning has been popularized since Bonwell and Eison’s report to the Associate for the Study of Higher Education in 1990s.

Other than the language barrier, such a different learning mode seemed to be the second biggest challenge that this group of students was facing.
Social Networking

The next part of the interview focused on degree-seeking East Asian international students’ social network patterns. A similar rating scale was used to understand their social and emotional status. The average rating was 2.5, which indicated that students were fairly satisfied with their socialization situation. However, it was found that students tended to make friends within the East Asian cultural groups, i.e. they were co-national friendship inclined. Although they did not report any emotional trauma or serious homesickness, some of them mentioned the confusion they had experienced in interpersonal relationships or the uncomfortable feelings created when they were trying to build up relationships with host-national people. Under this category, co-national Friendship Inclination and Interpersonal Relationship Confusion are the two sub-themes.

Co-national Friendship Inclination. As previous research has indicated, international students show a stronger preference of making friends with students from the same country or other international students than with students from the host country (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985). For the eight interviewees in this study, friendships were mostly developed with international peers who are from a similar cultural background. They met each other at international student events. Some of them mentioned that they built up friendships with the domestic students, but these friendships remained on a surface level – they usually only talked in class or study groups, but rarely met outside of class; even when they did, East Asian students did not feel that they related to their domestic counterparts deeply, on an emotional level, as they did with their co-national peers.
Sam, who had been studying in the university for two years, said,

*I love outings so I met a lot of American friends when I go on trips. We have been getting on very well in the trips, but we seldom hang out with each other afterwards. It doesn’t mean that we’re not “friends”, but I just feel like we have huge differences in our cultural backgrounds and so we probably don’t have much in common in life. Maybe they’re interested in your culture when they first meet you, but you can’t keep talking about the same thing every time you see them. It’s awkward to hang out with them if we don’t have much to talk about.*

Such forms of co-national friendships may be a unique pattern for degree-seeking East Asian international students, when the current findings are compared to a finding from the pilot study (Wu, 2011). In the pilot study European students mentioned in the interviews that they did not remain close to the people they met at the International Student Orientation, and they did not want to “stick” with their European peers on campus. One of their “main goals” was to establish friendships with Americans (pp. 18-19).

**Interpersonal Relationship Confusions.** When asked about their impressions on American people or American culture in general, students gave popular answers, such as Americans being “nice”, or “passionate”; however, a few answers stood out because they suggested the negative impressions that degree-seeking East Asian students had towards interpersonal relationships in America. Some students reported confusing and disturbing interpersonal relationships with others. For example, Winnie was very confused about “dating” in the United States,

*It’s totally different than Chinese tradition. It seems like a “pre-relationship” to me – just going out, having sex… But what’s the difference between “dating” and being boyfriend-and-girlfriend?*

Susan reported the same confusion. She described Americans as “very open”, and she had seen things that are not acceptable in her culture, such as “drugs,” “drinking,”
or “casual sexual relationships”. These confusions made them hesitant to take their relationships with their domestic peers to the next level.

Some relationship sub-themes emerged from the pilot study as well (Wu, 2011), including Skinships and the Surface Level of Friendship. Skinship is a pseudo-English Japanese word, originally used by Japanese people to describe intimacy between a mother and a child in a bath. Nowadays, Japanese or Korean people use the word to indicate physical intimacy. In the pilot study Korean students used the term “skinship” to describe their uncomfortable feelings when people got too close to each other in bars. The usual reactions of the Korean students were to hold back or reject such close physical proximity. Also, some Americans were perceived to perform a “surface level of friendship”. Four of the 11 interviewees thought that they were being “overly nice,” such as their very passionate greetings even meeting for the first time. A European student pointed out that such form of friendship was “superficial” and it confused him whether he could take it seriously.

**Indoor Oriented Leisure Style**

In regard of degree-seeking East Asian international students’ leisure style, most students preferred to engage in indoor recreation activities. Internet surfing, watching TV shows or movies, cooking/ eating with friends, shopping, and partying are the top five most-mentioned leisure activities for the interviewees (see Table 2) based on their pre-trip interview responses. A few of them also traveled within the United States once or twice a year on long breaks from school.
Table 2

Leisure Activities of Degree-seeking East Asian International Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leisure Activities</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet Surfing</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching TV Shows or Movies</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooking/ Eating with Friends</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
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<td>Partying</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chatting with Family and Friends back Home</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Playing Video Games</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading/ Writing</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doing Sports, e.g. basketballs, tennis, etc.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing Outdoor Activities, e.g. hiking, paintball, camping, etc.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Apart from the mentioned explanation of cultural distance, degree-seeking East Asian students’ low motivation in outdoor activities participation might also be explained by their national culture. Extroversion and introversion are usually used to describe human personality; however studies indicated that these traits are also associated with national cultures. A study shows that Chinese males appeared more “socially introverted” than Caucasian males; while Chinese females were more “defensive”, “depressed”, “unaware of somatic and psychological problems”, and “gender astereotypic in interests” in comparison to their Caucasian peers (Stevens, Kwan and Graybill, 1993, pp. 25-27). Regardless of the demographic difference between Stevens et. al’s study and the current study, the national culture difference could possibly explain why East Asian international students reacted more reservedly in participating in outdoor activities.

To conclude the findings in Stage I, three findings stand out: (a) language barriers posed negative impacts on the participants’ study and social lives; (b) students experienced acculturative problems in academic, interpersonal relationships, and other cultural aspects; and (c) degree-seeking East Asian international students had very low motivation for outdoor activities, possibly due to a relatively more introverted cultural background. Although these features could be labeled under the larger “culture shock” banner, each was distinguished in identifying acculturative problems among degree-seeking East Asian international students. In addition, results indicated that students were disinclined to seek help from professionals and largely stayed within their comfort zones. These findings have answered the first research question about how degree-seeking East Asian international students experience and manage cultural differences in this university.
Stage II: Field Trip Observation

The second stage is the researcher’s field trip observation. As an observer, the researcher paid attention to the students’ interactions with domestic students, their emotional status, and other occurrences during the trips that might have bearing on the research questions. The researcher was a participant observer on the trips in an effort to reduce the uncomfortable feelings experienced by the international students. Conversations unfolded between the researcher and the students in a casual format in order to better understand their experiences; field notes were taken during conversations.

Almost all of the participated students were camping for the first time or otherwise spending many hours outside in a natural environment. They seemed to be very excited about learning outdoor techniques, such as setting up tents, cooking outdoors, building campfires, hiking skills, and identifying plants to avoid while outside. As for the voluntary park services, international students often took initiatives to help and work on projects, such as rebuilding trails, removing invasive plants, rebuilding fences, and repainting them. Most of the time, domestic students played a tutorial part to teach international students about the outdoor knowledge; and from there, interactions between international students and domestic students started (some of them carried on into friendship later on). Some slightly uncomfortable moments were noticed, such as working in bad weather, and lacking the culture backgrounds in conversations.

Themes in this stage include: (1) outdoor learning, (2) interactions with domestic students, and (3) negative emotions created by extrinsic factors.
Outdoor Learning

Except for Sam, none of the other seven degree-seeking East Asian students had ever camped or stayed outdoors, so they knew nothing about outdoor techniques. The first thing they learned was to set up a tent at the campground. They seemed to be confused at the beginning, but soon the domestic students taught them how to assemble the tent. Kaoru said that she had never built a tent before, “but my tent mates were all so nice that they taught and helped me build it up.” Similar situations happened in cooking and building a campfire. “I learned something new,” said Amy, “Something I’ve never done before. Doing all these [this] outdoor stuff seemed to be very difficult to me because I never considered myself an outdoorsy person. But now I know it’s not too hard.” When students went on hikes in groups, they learned which plants, such as poison oak, to avoid touching. Few were frequent hikers so they had difficulties in some rough areas, such as creeks, bushes, or rocky trails. The domestic students offered to help and friendships started to form. Susan shared her hiking experience when she came back to the campground:

_The American kids were so nimble and strong. They usually picked the unusual paths to hike – we were just hiking through the bushes down to the creek because they wanted to find a strange water bug in the creek. And after that, we had such a hard time to go back to the normal trail by climbing on the rocks and through the bushes. I was literally stuck in the middle of the creek because I am short and not as strong as they are. But Tony and Cory [two of the American students in the group, renamed for confidentiality] were so nice that they pulled me out of the water and even lifted me back up to the trail. Haha! I was exhausted but it was so much fun! I felt like we were all in this together!_

Interactions with Domestic Students

Such interactions became a very important part of their field trip experiences. In the Golden Gate trip, there was ropes course experience for students from both state
universities. Ropes courses require strength, balancing skills, and an adventurous spirit, brand new experiences to most of the international students. However, according to them, the most valuable part was learning to cooperate with each other as a team. “I was so scared swinging on the rope which was very high above the ground!” Kaoru recalled when she came down from a rope walking, “But all the students on the ground were cheering for me… I felt so supported because of them, and so I made it!” This is also the case when students were doing voluntary services. In the trip to Samuel P. Taylor State Park, Winnie was on the team of rebuilding a fence. It was her first time using the post hole digger, “It was huge and so heavy! I could barely lift it up,” she said, “But my teammates took turns for me, so I didn’t have to dig the whole time.” The domestic students took initiatives to instruct the international students on projects, such as painting, measuring, rolling a wheelbarrow, and so on. The international students all agreed that this was “a very good opportunity” to enhance their outdoor knowledge; and at the same time, they enjoyed working and communicating with the American students.

**Negative Emotions Created by Extrinsic Factors**

Some “low times” were noticed during the trips, mostly because students were emotionally affected by some extrinsic factors, such as bad weather and the lack of cultural background in conversations. During the Golden Gate trip, students were working in the woods to clean up the trails and remove invasive plants under heavy downpours. They came back with wet clothes and muddy shoes, looking upset. Kaoru and Yuka said that their moods were “ruined” by the bad weather. Apart from the weather, students reported some uncomfortable feelings when they were engaging in
activities with the American students. For example, on the Angel Island trip, when they were playing a board game with other American students after dinner, they became very quiet because the game required lots of background knowledge on American culture. The American students were chatting fervently with each other about the game, while the international students stayed quiet and did not fully understand it.

In summary, outdoor learning, interactions with domestic students, and the negative emotions created by extrinsic factors were the three themes that stood out to the researcher during the trips. Although a lot more had happened during the trips, findings from the post-trip interviews will be presented, thereby countering possible bias from the participant observer and enabling the participants to speak for themselves.

Stage III: Post-trip Interviews

All of the students who participated in these field trips provided positive feedback for the field school program. They found the trips to be “interesting” and educationally informative. Students enjoyed the field trips because they provided an introduction to the beautiful scenery in Northern California and the interesting experience for the international students during the trip. However, some of them had a few slightly negative comments, such as on weather, food, and schedules, which can be improved on in future planning. In this stage, three main themes and several sub-themes are presented:

(1) Social networking, including two sub-themes: a) comfortable communication but with minor issues, and b) host-national friendship achievement;

(2) Academic performance benefited from a broadened social network, and
(3) Field school experience, including three sub-themes: a) improvement on community awareness through volunteer experience, b) improvement on outdoor knowledge and skills, and c) change of understanding and attitudes towards leisure.

Social Networking

Most of the students agreed that the field trip helped broaden their social networks. They made friends during the trip, although friendships were not necessarily carried on to the next level.

Comfortable Communication but with Minor Issues. In the pilot study (Wu, 2011), there were differences between the Asian students’ and the European students’ friendship patterns – the Asian students tended to make friends within their similar cultural groups, i.e. co-national friendships; while the European students made more friends outside of their own group, especially with other international students and domestic students. However, in the current study, the exchange students and other groups of non-East Asian students were removed, leaving only the degree-seeking East Asian students as participants. These degree-seeking East Asian students were put in a group with a majority of domestic students, so the participants had more opportunities to communicate with domestic students directly. Most participants in this study indicated that they felt “comfortable most of the time” in communicating with other domestic students or the park staff during the trips; and they described American students and the park staff as “friendly”.

However, some students mentioned that it was easy for them to talk to the park staff, but the situation was slightly different when they were with the American
students. Jerry said that sometimes he could not understand when the American students spoke too fast; Amy pointed out that she “had fun” interacting with them but she could not understand when they were playing games; Helen found that it was not easy for her to talk to them because she did not think they had much in common, Kaoru reported similarly; while Winnie mentioned that some of the students were interested in talking about Chinese culture with her but some were not, and she did not know how to communicate with those who were not interested. These descriptions are in line with the researcher’s observation of their “uncomfortable moments” in the trips.

**Host-national Friendship Achievement.** During the trips, most of the participants established at least casual on-site friendships with the domestic students. They “enjoyed” the activities that they had with the American students, such as the rope course, hiking, and the games. Yuka seemed to benefit from the new friendships. She made some friends whom she could “talk to” in class now, “Even though I’m still the only Asian in class, I feel so much more comfortable now because I know some people.” She mentioned that the friends she made during the trips were mostly American students and they were from the same major with her. Jerry maintained his friendships with the domestic students he met from the trip by “adding them on Facebook” and “had their phone numbers”. He mentioned that he “hung out” with them after the trip, and sometimes they walked home together after school.

Nevertheless, not every participant carried their friendships forward after the field trips as did Yuka and Jerry. Kaoru made friends with some American students during the rope course, but she did not become very close friends with them. She said that
she would say “hi” to the American students she met from the trip when she saw them on campus, but she did not think she would get any closer with them. Amy reported similarly. Some of the students seemed to be even more reserved about making friends with American students. Winnie said that she did not make any friends from the trip because her close friend kept her accompanied during the trip. “If I have friends around me, I don’t usually go make new friends but just stay with the people that I’m familiar with.” she said, “Sometimes I don’t know how to talk to Americans.” For her, the cultural barriers seemed to be insurmountable.

In conclusion, the field trip experience helped the participants to broaden their social network to some extent – they had more opportunities to communicate with domestic students directly and therefore, some of them established and maintained friendships which were beneficial in other aspects afterwards. However, some of the students had difficulties in establishing closer or long-term friendship with domestic students because of cultural barriers.

**Academic Performance Benefited from a Broadened Social Network**

An immediate improvement in degree-seeking East Asian international students was not expected to grow from this short-term study; however, some participants did report that the formation of their new social network was producing benefits on their study. And the form of benefits is reflected in help seeking. Half of the participants mentioned that they established certain levels of friendships with the American students they met during the field trips, and after that they still saw each other in class or on campus. They, therefore, turned to these “new friends” for help with their study, or
communicated with them to improve their language skills. Although no immediate improvement had been made on their academic performance during the short period between the conclusion of the field trip and post-trip interviews, it is not hard to visualize a promising academic performance prospect in the long term based on the formation and development of their help seeking network. Besides, most of the students emphasized in the pre-trip interviews that language is the biggest obstacle to their academic success, increasing opportunities for degree-seeking East Asian students to communicate with the domestic students can be an effective way to help them improve their English proficiency.

Field School Experience

Students rated their field trip experience in general as 2.7 on average based on a 1-3 rating scale, which 1 means “bad” and 3 means “good”. They described their first field school experience mostly as “fun” and “very interesting”. Some of their best memories were hiking, the rope course training, and “just being outdoors”. Helen said that she liked outdoor activities now. However, almost every one of the participants mentioned a negative or to-be-improved aspect of their trips. Their answers were very much in line with the researcher’s observation during the trips.

Uncomfortable feelings were created by extrinsic factors, including bad weather, food, and no shower/electricity on the campsite. Kaoru recalled her “awful” camping experience:

*It was raining heavily, so it was very hard to do activities outside. And I couldn’t even take a shower when I got wet. I felt very dirty and unhealthy. It was kinda awful.*

This affected her mood in communicating with other people as well as engaging in the activities. Yuka complained about the shower part too; while Amy was
slightly dissatisfied with the campsite having no electricity since it was inconvenient for her to walk in the dark to just go to the bathroom; and Jerry thought that the food could be improved, but he also understood that it was acceptable under an outdoor circumstance.

When coming down to the details of the trips, students talked about their volunteer experiences, the knowledge and skills they learned, and their attitudes and understanding of the field school and outdoor oriented leisure.

**Improvement on the Awareness of Community through Volunteer Experience.**

One of the highlights in these field trips was voluntary service, and it was these voluntary activities that made field school different than just a normal school field trip. Students also rated their volunteer experience in general as 2.7 based on a similar 1-3 rating scale. They all expressed that they were happy of being able to help the park staff and the community; and at the same time, they realized the importance of maintaining these recreational resources. Yuka said “I didn't realize how important for the parkies to keep the park clean until I did it myself.” Amy also agreed that it was good to help whatever the park staff did not have time to do. Kaoru said that she had “never thought about such kind of activity before”. She did volunteer work, such as helping old people, but nothing like this kind. She was so happy when she saw how clean the place had become after she finished the work. Although this was not related to her field of study (she was a business major), she thought that she might find new opportunities to work in the nature other than office jobs in the future. Students realized that they did not pay attention to the maintenance part at all when they visited a national park, but now they knew how hard but important to do so. Sam added that this was something new to him:
I did not associate outing with voluntary services before. And I have to say that this idea is really awesome! It doesn’t only help students learn about outdoor skills but also enhance their awareness of protecting our natural resources.

**Improvement on Outdoor Knowledge and Skills.** Students all mentioned that they learned some skills through volunteering in park services. For example, Sam had his first night-hike experience although he had hiked a lot, and during the hike he learned now to engage his other senses than vision which reduced at night; Jerry got to learn about tree-cutting tools, and it was his first time driving in the woods; Amy had her first sleeping bag experience and learned how to cooperate with others; Helen also mentioned how she learned about teamwork as well as some painting skills from the trip, and she also learned more about Chinese immigration history by visiting the former immigration site; Susan learned how to cook outdoors by using the camping appliance, and it was her first time learning how to build a campfire too; while Winnie learned how to build a fence which she had never thought she would do before, and she also learned about nature, such as identifying poisonous plants.

All these outdoor skills seemed to be new and interesting to the students who did not get to experience these when they were back in their home countries. Students agreed that this helped them better adjust to the outdoor activities, which is a large component of American culture in the western states.

**Change of Attitudes and Understanding towards Leisure.** For most of the students, it was their first real outdoor experience. Except for the new things they saw and learned, the most important change was their attitudes towards leisure. In the pre-trip interviews, most preferred indoor recreation activities; however, in the post-trip
interviews, many of them mentioned that they would now consider outdoor activities as an alternative.

All participants were asked to describe their opinions of field schools and the international students mentioned how differently they perceived field schools after the trips. Helen thought it would just be a tour before she went, but now she found it to be much more. “It was a trip of service projects to help people, a trip to make friends and learn about different cultures, and a trip to know more about California” said Helen. Yuka also mentioned that it was not just about “having fun” but a very good opportunity to improve her English and to change her impression on American people. Kaoru emphasized that she had learned so much although it was only a brief three-day trip, and she described her perception of field school now as “one community” in which all people were knowledgeable and experienced.

Almost all of the participants said that they would participate again in field school in the future, and they would recommend it to their friends. Helen said that she had already recommended it to her friends by telling them all the benefits she gained from the trip, such as making new friends and seeing more places in California; Amy thought she would encourage her friends to join “to get fresh air” and “get away from computers”; while Kaoru would do more volunteer work on weekends since she found it was “fun”. Besides, Kaoru also realized her attitudes towards leisure had changed through making new friends. “It was nice to get to know more people,” she said,

*I have never hung out with people outside my major. Students in my major are all very focus on logic and future career. Even if they talk in class, they usually only focus on schedules, punctuality, results, etc. But Recreation majors are more about helping, sharing, and being happy.*
She concluded “sometimes trying to enjoy the process is very important too.” These changes were not perceived as fundamental or permanent, but they were very well noticed by the students’ themselves.

Conclusions can be drawn for Stage III in two important aspects, i.e. social networking and field trip experience. First of all, the degree-seeking East Asian international students’ social networks broadened during and after the field trips. Their interactions with American student helped them establish new friendship networks outside of their co-national group, and this could benefit them in other ways, such as study (although not an immediate benefit) and cultural understanding. Secondly, their field trip experiences brought positive changes to their acculturation. Students favored achieving outdoor knowledge and skills, their awareness of community was changed through volunteer activities, and their attitudes towards leisure were expanded, to some extent, about active outdoor recreation. Therefore, the second research question on the role of recreation in degree-seeking East Asian international students’ acculturation is answered.

Discussion

This study was designed to explore the role field excursion play in degree-seeking East Asian international students’ acculturation. Findings from this study make several important contributions to the literature on both international students and on recreation studies; and findings from this study further inform the understanding and influence of recreation activities on international students. In this section, the above findings are discussed within the context of the research questions and literature review.
Summary of the Findings

In the first stage, several acculturative problems were identified: (1) language barriers, which caused academic and social problems; (2) the differences in teaching-learning styles that affected international students’ academic performance; and (3) their friendship patterns as well as their confusion about interpersonal relationships, which posed negative impact on their social networking. These students’ preferred leisure setting was mostly indoor-oriented, which may also help explain the students’ low motivation for participating in outdoor activities. In addition, the difficulties in recruiting degree-seeking East Asian students confirmed and revealed broad cultural differences between East Asian and American culture.

In the second and third stage, students’ field trip experiences caused certain levels of changes in their lives, study, social networking, and attitudes towards leisure. They all favored the opportunities of learning outdoor skills and of volunteering. Through these experiences, they changed some of their perceptions about Americans and American culture; and they broadened their social network, which may benefit their lives and academic performance later on. Most of the participants agreed that they would now consider outdoor activities among their alternative leisure options. Although these changes might be short-term rather enduring, they suggested that recreation had played a positive role on the participants’ acculturation.

Overall, several acculturative problems were identified by the eight degree-seeking East Asian international students in terms of their language, study, and friendship
patterns. Their leisure patterns were also found to be indoor-oriented before the field trips happened. However, after the trips, students showed different levels of changes in terms of their social network and leisure pattern. Therefore, one may conclude that the field trips have produced positive results for these degree-seeking East Asian international students in their acculturation.

How Students Manage Their Acculturative problems

This study has identified several acculturative problems among the eight degree-seeking East Asian international students, including their language barriers, academic stress, and social network issues. Language barrier is the greatest concern for East Asian international students. It did not only cause difficulties in students’ daily communication, but also posed negative impacts on their study and social networking. Students in this study emphasized the difficulties for them to adjust to an active learning style in an American classroom; however, such difficulties are deeply rooted in their linguistic and cultural differences (Sovic, 2007; Kuo, 2011). For example, most students reported the major difficulty they had in class was about group discussions or presentations which required fair language skills and cultural backgrounds; also, students considered the language problem to be the reason of having lower grades than they expected. Besides, the confusions they had towards interpersonal relationships were created not only by the different cultural backgrounds but also the lack of communication and mutual understanding.

As Sovic (2007) summed up, international students were not facing that much of a different set of problems from their domestic counterparts; yet, they were “more
likely to be confronted by an accumulation of these problems” precisely because of their lack of “integration” – difficulties in social network development, in communication with tutors and peers, and in opinion articulation (p. 156).

Although students realized their language problems, they were less inclined to seek help from professional counseling services on campus; instead, they tended to attain support from their peers. This, again, reinforces the importance of social support for international students. As Hendrickson, Rosen, and Anue (2011) indicated in their findings, social connectedness was positively related to satisfaction and contentment; they also emphasized that these psychological satisfaction and contentment were mostly contributed by host-national friendships (pp. 289-290).

Results about social network patterns in this study replicate key findings from previous research, in which co-national friendship was the foundation of international students’ friendship networks. However, Hendrickson et al.’s finding on the importance of host-national friendships to international students’ psychological well-being still applies to the current study. In the post-trip interviews, students pointed out that meeting new friends was an important aspect of the field trips. The field trips provided a better and easier opportunity for them to develop host-national friendships; and these friendships later benefited their life and study in various aspects.

How Field Excursions Mitigate the Problems

Previous literature has provided an insight in solving acculturative problems by casting light on the positive role of recreation on individual’s mental health (Iwasaki, 2003; Wan-Chi et al., 2012; Brunette et al., 2011). However, this study showed that
degree-seeking East Asian international students’ recreational pattern was more indoor-oriented. Trying something outdoors was a challenge for them. Students in this study showed concern and misgivings in participating in outdoor activities. Although this may be explained by the greater cultural distance they bear from the American culture, the relationship between their recreational styles and their acculturative problems has not yet been touched upon in previous studies.

In this study, field excursions were used as the research mechanism in recreation to mediate the relationship. In result, field trips were found to mitigate degree-seeking East Asian international students’ acculturative problems in three ways:

First, field trips can provide a good platform for degree-seeking East Asian international students to develop host-national friendships. This study showed that field excursions provided a good platform for international students to communicate and interact with domestic students as well as other international students in a relatively more relaxing environment. Students cared less about their language disadvantages, but enjoyed more of the nature environment and the interactions with other people. Furthermore, these interactions develop into different levels of host-national friendships, which were beneficial to students’ psychological well-being (Hendrickson et al., 2011). Students did not only report satisfaction and contentment, but also indicated changes that were brought by these host-national friendships, e.g. support in class and study. As emphasized, degree-seeking East Asian international students consider social support to be a very important form of help; and field trips could create more of these opportunities.
Second, field trips can broaden degree-seeking East Asian international students’ horizon on outdoor skills and community awareness so that they find it more easily to adjust to their new environments. As an educationally effective form of outdoor learning (Falk, 1983; Bitgood 1989), field trips may arouse the interests of non-English speaking students, many from urban areas, in an outdoor environment. In addition, familiarizing the students with outdoor knowledge and skills may help them embrace the American recreation style more easily as outdoor or adventurous activities play a large part in the American recreation experience, at least in the western states. Volunteer activities, although not a common form of activities in the field trips, can also help international students learn more about the community they are living in. Most of the participants in this study provided positive feedback on their volunteer experiences and their awareness towards community have been improved.

Third, field trips can open up degree-seeking East Asian international students’ attitudes towards outdoor activities so that they would be more actively engage in more events and activities on- and off-campus. One of the most important findings in this study is that the degree-seeking East Asian international students’ attitude towards outdoor activities and voluntary park services has been positively changed after the field trips. As a finding established in the pre-trip interviews, degree-seeking East Asian international students’ leisure patterns were mostly indoor-oriented. That was also one of the reasons why they were not active in joining events and activities on campus. However, after the field trips, most students reported that they would now consider outdoor activities as a leisure activity option. This is a good sign of their campus involvement; and it gives a
hint: after all, degree-seeking East Asian international students were not too passive nor too shy to get involved, what they need is an appropriate opportunity – a costless, care-free, friendly environment – to learn and to adjust.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter functions as a conclusion to the previous chapters, which include the reviewed literature, methods, and the findings. This chapter consists of three sections: (1) summary of the study, in which key aspects in the previous chapters are reviewed; (2) implications, which provides insights into relevant fields of study based on the current findings; (3) limitations on the ability to generalize from these results; and (4) suggestions for future research.

Summary of the Study

Of the large body of international students studying in the United States, East Asian students are the largest numerically and they also experience greater cultural differences than students from many other cultures. Their acculturative processes and problems have been studied from various aspects, but the role and potential value of outdoor recreation is under-investigated and could add to the knowledge about the international educational experience for degree-seeking East Asian students. Therefore, this qualitative research study was designed to explore the influence that field trips have on degree-seeking East Asian international students’ acculturation.

Literature on international students’ acculturation was first reviewed in order to provide a theoretical framework for the problems international students might face.
Most of the literature discussed problems that international students experienced in their acculturation, e.g., language barriers, academic stress, social problems, financial burdens, etc. Next, existing studies on recreation that are related to students’ mental health were also examined. This body of literature had demonstrated the positive role that recreation had been playing on students’ psychological wellness; but it was still silent in the field of international students in particular. Therefore, it seemed important to investigate recreation as a factor in international students’ acculturation.

Eight international students from People’s Republic of China and Japan were recruited on a voluntary basis to participate in one of four outdoor-oriented field trips that organized by a department of recreation, hospitality and parks management located at a comprehensive, four-year university in Northern California. In-depth interviews, along with the researcher’s field notes based on observation made during the field trips, explored the field trips’ influences on students’ study, social lives, cultural understanding, and leisure patterns. Data was collected and examined under the guidance of the Grounded Theory. Thus, different categories emerged during open coding; themes and sub-themes were created in the presentation of findings.

Results and findings are presented in three chronological stages. In the first stage, recruitment difficulties were first discussed to understand degree-seeking East Asian international students’ cultural behaviors and the small sample size of the study. In the pre-trip interviews, most acculturative problems that the students mentioned were consistent with the previous literature. Language proficiency was the biggest concern for degree-seeking East Asian students greatly impacting their academic and social lives. In
addition, students reported that the “active learning” style created a difficult adjustment. As for their social networks, degree-seeking East Asian students preferred to make friends from similar cultural backgrounds.

In the second and third stages, students’ field trip experiences featured (1) learning outdoor knowledge and skills; (2) establishing host-national friendship networks, (3) improving their awareness of community by volunteering in park projects; and (4) changing their attitudes towards leisure, such as agreeing on participating more in outdoor activities.

In conclusion, field trips have played a positive role in degree-seeking East Asian international students’ acculturation. However, due to the small sample size and other limitations, results should not be broadly generalized.

Implications

Based on the findings and discussion, several implications can be derived from the study.

First, efforts should be made to motivate degree-seeking East Asian international students to participate in more outdoor activities. According to our findings, students who went on the trips all provided positive feedbacks for their initial outdoor experiences; and those experiences had a positive influence on their acculturation. Some of the participants even requested to participate in the trips in later semesters. Based on the promising results from the study it is important to introduce more degree-seeking East Asian international students to outdoor activities. Therefore, international educators or service providers should work on motivating degree-seeking East Asian students to
participate in more outdoor activities. One of the effective approaches might be to ask participants from past field trips to help motivate and recruit other students to participate in future events and activities, because they know every detail about the trips and they would be the best presenters to share their experiences.

Second, more opportunities should be created for international students and domestic students to interact with each other. It is an effective way to improve international students’ language skills. This study suggests that peer communication is an important way for international students to practice spoken English. As reported, students mostly turned to their friends and classmates for help with language problems; and some of them have English conversation partners who are American students. Besides, international students generally had positive experiences interacting with domestic students in outdoor learning. This implies that international students feel comfortable in communicating with domestic students under a friendly and active outdoor recreation environment. Therefore, partnering international and domestic students could be an important way of helping international students overcome language barriers.

Fourth, recreational programming can provide a very good platform for international students to expand their knowledge beyond the classroom as well as to broaden their social networks. Programming is a very important part for international student services, and it has been successfully practicing by institutes with their international students and family members. And recreation studies can provide a more in-depth and comprehensive knowledge and hands-on experiences for international student
programming. Therefore, having the two fields work closely together can be one of the
directions for international student services to pursue in the future.

Fifth, professional counseling should be encouraged. In this research, students
stated that they did not seek any help from the professional counseling resources on
campus. Although peer support is an easy and shame-free way for international students
to seek help with their language problems, professional counseling systems can provide
more comprehensive and professional assistance to the students. One potential
development for the counseling system on campus might be considered to cooperate with
the Recreation Department, which offers educations in leisure counseling and therapy.

And finally, friendship is an important form of emotional support for
international students, but the co-national friendship patterns and the interpersonal
relationship patterns may presents barriers for increased socialization. On the one hand,
helping students to come out of their comfort zones to broaden their social networks is an
important strategic step for international educators to consider; however, they should also
be cognizant of some culturally sensitive relationship issues, e.g. the American ways of
greetings, and certain relationship patterns. Educators should prepare international
students for such cultural differences as early as possible and at the same time, educate
domestic students to understand this cultural difference, so that both sides can gain
mutual respect and appreciation. This should become an important aspect of campus
internationalization, especially for schools located in less-culturally-diverse areas.
Limitations

First of all, the sample size was small even for a qualitative study. It was mainly because of the difficulties of recruiting degree-seeking East Asian students to the field trips. As discussed before, degree-seeking East Asian international students generally have more concerns or difficulties in participation. There are also external reasons, such as the conflicts between the field trip schedules and students’ class schedules, or students’ overlook of the email invitations and promotions. In light of these issues, recruiting eight degree-seeking East Asian international students to participate in weekend field excursions is, perhaps, an accomplishment in and of itself.

In addition, students were recruited from a four-year public university is in a small town in California, where 80% of the residents or students are Caucasian Americans. The level of internationalization is thus, not as high as that in some big cities in California, such as San Francisco or Los Angeles. The university is relatively less culturally diverse, so it is perhaps understandable that international students are more dependent on co-national friendships and less comfortable with domestic students. But the benefits of such interactions have clearly emerged from this research and bear further consideration.

Finally, only one post-trip interview was conducted shortly after the field trip to identify the changes, thus results should be considered preliminary and subject to further investigations. More research on the relationship between recreation and international students’ acculturation is called for in the future.
Future Research and Recommendations

Based on the limitations, a few suggestions can be addressed for future studies. 

Incentives and Funding

As mentioned, the small sample size of this study was mainly due to recruitment difficulties. Coming from a more introverted and less individualistic cultural background, degree-seeking East Asian students showed low interest in taking part in outdoor activities in the first place; without any incentives, it was even harder to motivate them. The current study was conducted without any funding support. For future studies, research funding should be taken into account for creating incentives, promoting the program, and improving the routine practices. Incentives, such as extra credit for one or more classes, letters of recommendation for volunteering, and prizes might enhance international students’ motivation to participate in future studies.

Longitudinal Studies

Due to time and funding constraints, only one post-trip interview was conducted to inspect the changes in students’ study, social networks, and leisure attitudes. Those changes collected in this interview might be short-term or of longer duration. In order to obtain more accurate and fundamental results, longitudinal studies are highly recommended.

Quantitative Studies

The qualitative approach was adopted as the appropriate approach for the current study because there was a lack of precedents related to the topic. Based on this qualitative study, more studies, especially quantitative studies with a larger sample sizes
or mixed methods studies are recommended for future research for more scientific and systematic purposes. Research purposes could also be narrowed down to more specific focus, such as on the influence of a certain recreational activity on a certain acculturative aspect of degree-seeking East Asian international students.
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


INFORMED CONSENT

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. It takes place from March 1 to May 18, 2012. This form details the purpose of this study, a description of the involvement required and your rights as a participant.

The purpose of this study is:
- To gain insight into the influence of leisure on international students’ acculturation through field trip experience.

The benefits of the research will be:
- To better understand the issues that international students have in the process of acculturation.
- To provide better field trip experience that could help improve international students’ lives in the United States.

The methods that will be used to meet this purpose are:
- Face-to-face interviews
- Follow-up interviews via phone calls, online questionnaires, emails, or other online formats

You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study or the methods I am using. Please contact me at anytime at the e-mail address or telephone number listed above.

Our discussion will be electronically recorded to help me accurately capture your insights in your own words. The recorded audio files will only be stored in my personal computer, and will only be heard by me for the purpose of this study. If you feel uncomfortable with the recorder, you may ask that it be turned off at any time.

You also have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime. In the event you choose to withdraw from the study all information you provide (including the audio files) will be destroyed and omitted from the final paper.

Insights gathered by you and other participants will be used in writing a qualitative research report, which will be read by my graduate thesis committee members. Though direct quotes from you may be used in the paper, your name and other identifying information will remain anonymous.
By signing this consent form I certify that I ____________________________ agree to the terms of this agreement. (Print full name here)

____________________________                         ______________
(Signature)                                      (Date)
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW GUIDES

The pre-trip Interview Guide

Personal Background
1. Are you female or male?
2. How old are you?
3. Which country are you from?
4. Are you an undergraduate student or a graduate student?
5. What’s your major?
6. How long have you been in the United States?
7. Have you had any field trip experience before?

Acculturation Experiences

Language
8. Based on a 1-3 rating scale, where 1 means “poor” and 3 means “good”, how are you going to rate your English proficiency in general?
9. Did you experience any language problems when you first arrived? If yes, please specify.
10. Did you seek help from any individuals, professionals or institutions? If yes, how did they help you?
11. Please describe any other kinds of culture shock experience regarding language.

Academic Performance
12. Based on a 1-3 rating scale, where 1 means “poor” and 3 means “good”, how are you going to rate your academic performance here in Chico State in general?
13. When you first started your study here, did you find any differences, problems, or difficulties (e.g. the teaching-learning style, classroom environments, workload, class activities, etc.)? If yes, please specify.
14. Did you seek help from any individuals, professionals or institutions? If yes, how did they help you with your problems?
15. Please add in any other kinds of cultural shock experience regarding your academic performance or academic experience in America.

Social Networking
16. Based on a 1-3 rating scale, where 1 means “feeling lonely” and 3 means “feeling happy”, how would you rate your emotional status in general in terms of socialization in the United States?
17. Through which ways did you make friends? For example, from the student orientation, your classes, any on- or off-campus events, or any student organizations.
18. Where are your friends mostly from?
19. What do you usually do when you spend time with them?
20. Do you turn to them for help often? If you do, what kind of help do you usually need from them?
21. Please add in any other comments about how your social network influenced your initial experience of American culture.

General Cultural Understanding
22. Please briefly describe American culture based on your understanding and experience.

Leisure and Field Trips
23. Choose the activity(ies) that you usually participate during your leisure time.
   A. Hiking
   B. Party
   C. Watching TV shows/ movies
   D. Internet surfing
   E. Others, please specify_______
24. How often do you travel? If you do travel, please continue to 3c; otherwise, please specify the reason.
25. Which places have you traveled to since you came to the United States?
26. How much do you know about field schools/ field trips sponsored by the university?
27. What is your expectation for a field trip experience?
The Post-trip Interview Guide

Acculturation

Communication
1. Did you feel comfortable when you communicated with the American students or the park staff during the field trip? If no, continue to 1.a.ii.; otherwise, skip to 1.b.
2. What kind of problem did you have? How did you deal with it?

Social Networking
3. Did you make any friends during the field trip? If yes, please specify where they are from, and then continue to 1.b.ii.; otherwise, skip to 1.c.
4. Please describe your interactions with them in the trip.
5. Do you think you will still see each other or spend time together after the trip?

Culture Understanding
6. Did you experience any culture shock during the trip? If yes, please specify.
7. Do you think you have a different impression on American culture after the field trip? If yes, please specify it.
8. Would you say it is a better change or a worse one? In other words, do you like the American culture more or less now?

Field Trip Experiences

General Impression on Field Trips
9. Based on a 1-3 rating scale, which 1 means “bad” and 3 means “good”, how would you describe your field trip experience in general?
10. Was it different than what you expected before? If yes, please specify.

Volunteer Experience
11. Based on a 1-3 rating scale, which 1 means “I don’t like it” and 3 means “I like it very much”, how would you describe your feeling toward the volunteer experience in the trip?
12. Please describe what you have learned from volunteering.
13. Do you find the volunteer experience helpful to your study or future career? Please specify.

Knowledge and Skills
14. Did you gain any knowledge or skills during the field trip? If yes, please specify it.
15. Do you think the field trip has increased your awareness of community? If yes, please specify it.

Understanding of Field School and Leisure
16. What is your understanding about field school after the field trip? Please specify.
17. Would you participate again or recommend to your friends if there are more field schools in the future?
18. Do you think you have a different attitude toward leisure after the field trip? If yes, please specify.
19. Do you think you would make any changes to your leisure activities in the future? If yes, please specify.
APPENDIX C
NARRATIVE OF THE RESEARCHER’S PERSONAL ACCULTURATION EXPERIENCES

I am an international student from the Peoples’ Republic of China and arrived in the United States in August, 2010 to pursue my post-bachelor study. In the past three years, I have been through so much that I could hardly write them all down here; but my culture shock experiences are still vivid in my memory.

I arrived two weeks before school started, so I had to stay in one of the dorms on campus before I could find a house. I was the only one living in the entire dorm building for five days. I did not have a cell phone or a computer to contact my parents back home who they were anxiously trying to get a hold of me; neither did I know anybody here that could give me a hand. International Student Orientation started a week before school, I thought I could finally meet some people and make connections, but then I was occupied by my new Teaching Associate position. I had to skip most parts of the Orientation to prepare for teaching, which turned out to be very overwhelming for me too. I had never pictured myself teaching public speaking in an American university. I was lost and had never been so stressed out. Classes got incredibly hard for me because of the sudden transition from China to America as well as the transition from work to study again. But that was just the beginning of my stressful first year of graduate school.

My life did not get any better until I start a new job in the Office of International Education as a student assistant. Working with the international student
advisors, who understood my difficulties and encouraged me, made me feel, for the first
time, that I was capable of living here and people actually liked me! At the job, I got to
communicate with more international students.

As time went by, I had grown stronger and got better in adapting to life and
study here; but at the same time, I had noticed more international students’ problems at
work. Out of empathy, I started to have the thoughts of helping international students
with their problems. When I was helping with a field trip to a national park during the
Orientation one semester, I saw how international students interacted with each other, and
how easily friendships were established from the chats and laughs. I made many friends
from the trip too, and some of them have become my lifelong friends. Throughout that
semester, I had been personally connected to those new international students and I
participated in several events with them. I saw the difference between students who
participated a lot in the events and who did not. That could be considered one of my life-
changing experiences; and therefore, I came up with the idea of conducting a study to
explore the influence of leisure on international students’ acculturation.

Thanks to the help of the Recreation Department and the Office of
International Education, this study has finally come true.