

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: A Comparative Study of Chinese and American Youth Culture

Abstract approved

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Joan E. Gross

The purpose of this study was to explore American and Chinese college student underlying cultural assumptions, which influence their perceptions and behaviors in various domains of life. The objectives of this study were to: (a) To generate timely knowledge of Chinese and American youth's cultural images, meanings, and frame of reference. (b) To evaluate the extent and nature of psycho-cultural difference between American and Chinese population samples. (c) To increase the cross-cultural awareness of both cultural groups and offer deeper insights of perceptions and belief system of their contemporaries. (d) To examine how the economic, social and political changes affect people's images and cultural frame of reference. (e) To provide a better tool to prepare future study abroad students.

The methodology employed in this research includes Associate Group Analysis (AGA), focus groups, and participant observation. The data derived from 73 returned surveys on 25 stimulus words (42 from Chinese respondents and 31 from American respondents). These were analyzed using AGA. Focus groups and participant observation were used as follow-up

research methods to clarify, extend, and qualify findings on the topics explored in the analysis.

The findings revealed that American self-image and their attitudes towards family, education, values, conscience and other domains of life showed strong individualistic traits with an emphasis placed on self-reliance. Compared to American students, Chinese students' cultural assumptions are related to broad cultural factors derived from Chinese traditional beliefs about self-control and group harmony. Under the influence of western culture, Chinese youth have undergone certain changes in their perceptions and practices. They are experimenting with independent thinking and more concerned with developing their interests and potentials. They readily visualize their material goals and struggle for more personal freedom. However, in spite of the strong pull of western culture and materialism, Chinese students still hold the traditional aspirations of "group harmony," "reciprocity," "mutual obligation" and "self-cultivation," reflecting the stability of community norms over time.

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**A Comparative Study of Chinese and American Youth Culture**

by  
**Laiou Luo**

**A THESIS**

submitted to

**Oregon State University**

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirement for the  
degree of  
**Master of Arts**

**Presented February 26, 2003**

**Commencement June 2003**

Master of Arts thesis of Laiou Luo presented on February 26, 2003

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to extend my most sincere thanks and appreciation to my major professor and mentor Dr. Joan E. Gross for her overwhelming support throughout my academic career here. She was always being there for me academically and personally. This thesis would surely not have been possible without her continual interest, concern, encouragement, and guidance.

I'd also like to thank my graduate committee for their patience and efforts in going through my work. A special thank to Dr. John Young for his thought-provoking suggestions and valuable insights on the broader implication of my research.

I wish to express my thanks to all my friends here in Corvallis, with whom I have shared laughs, anxieties and thoughts. My graduate experience was greatly enriched by their friendship.

My heartfelt gratitude is extended to all the participants of this research for their generously sharing their time and information.

My deepest appreciation goes to my parents who continuously offered their exhaustive caring, love, and encouragement; to my husband, my steadfast friend, for his unwavering support, his endless patience, and understanding.

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# **A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHINESE AND AMERICAN YOUTH CULTURE**

## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

The study of Cross-Cultural Communication is multi-disciplinary and involves many fields of research. Among them is the relationship between culture and language in cultural anthropology, communications and context culture in social linguistics, code and decode in semiology. All of these fields of study have great influence on this discipline. Because of the trend toward globalization, studies in this area have been developed at tremendous pace.

Martin and Nakayama (1998) elaborated on the importance of studying intercultural communication: the technological imperative, the economic imperative, the demographic imperative, the peace imperative, the self-awareness imperative, and the ethical imperative.

**The Technological Imperative:** Modern high-tech communication technology brings people of different cultures into closer contact. Understanding other cultures can facilitate communication with people of these cultures, via these advanced technologies.

**The Economic Imperative:** To compete effectively with other nations in the global market, people need to understand how business is conducted in other countries.

**The Demographic Imperative:** Relationships between residents and immigrants have often been filled with tension and conflict. Understanding each other's culture can help ease the tension and resolve these conflicts.

**The Peace Imperative:** Although simply understanding something would not end war, conflicts in the world do underscore the need for individuals to learn more about

groups of which they are not members. Ultimately, people, not countries, negotiate, and sign peace treaties.

The Self-Awareness Imperative: heightens awareness of our own cultural identity and background.

The Ethical Imperative: the study of intercultural communication not only provides insights about understanding cultural patterns, but also helps us address ethical issues involved in intercultural interactions, such as international diplomacy. It enables us to judge what is ethical and unethical behavior given variations in cultural priorities and helps us identify guidelines for ethical behavior in intercultural contexts where ethics clash.

In general, the study of this field can help to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings between different cultural groups, to help them communicate more efficiently and build stronger relationships between one another. It helps negotiators predict possible behavior patterns during the cross-culture communication. Increasing exposure to foreign values would also strengthen the rationality of one's own cultural system, since people usually cannot identify their own cultural backgrounds and assumptions until they encounter assumptions that are different from their own.

Although the study of intercultural communication is a worthwhile pursuit, however, people venturing into this exciting area will find themselves facing a wide variety of situations. The study of culture is as elusive as the study of human communication. Most of the obstacles of studying intercultural communication fall into two categories: (1) failure

to recognize the uniqueness of the individual; failure to explore the unannounced cultural assumptions of each individual; (2) the inability to be objective when dealing with people from other cultures (Samovar 1998).

In recent decades, China has experienced the most radical social experiments ever imposed on a large population. Government imposed ideology, the competing influence of foreign ideas, and a rapid rise in wealth are creating divergent values and outlooks in what was a fairly homogeneous culture only decades ago. However, due to a lack of up-to-date information, the notion that many Americans have of China is that it is an “inscrutable land”, which is steeped in Confucianism and filled with Buddhists and Taoists who work in rice paddies, drink nothing but tea, eat “chow mein” and “chop suey”, have fortune cookies for dessert, and go to bed in silk pajamas. Leisure time is devoted to playing maj-jong and ping pong or practicing tai chi or Kung fu. Most Americans associations with Chinese are nothing but outlandish words such as dim sum, ginseng, gingko, oolong cha, taiji, qi, yin and yang and Fengshui (Hess 1997). Similarly, a lot of Chinese youth are learning English and think they know quite a bit about American culture. In fact, they may have seen many western films, may eat at Macdonald and KFC regularly, may know more about the National Basketball Association or about current popular music than many Americans, may speak quite fluent English, but that does not mean they know American culture the way an American knows it.

Therefore, without up-to-date cultural information, we cannot gain any insight into

how a culture feels towards a member of that culture; how traditional values have been reinterpreted by a cultural group to meet new needs and solve new problems; and how people combine and give different importance to various values in their social practices.

As a student of language and cross-cultural communication, I have a long-standing interest in what non-native speakers experience in using a second language to interact with members of a host culture. Also of interest is how their perceptions and worldviews contrast with native speakers. This understanding depends largely on a comparative method, that is, by systematically comparing the native culture with a foreign culture, which will in turn result in better understanding of the two cultures. However, I found there is relatively little in the way of published materials on this issue. Most of the published materials either take the form of relatively quantitative studies or of practical manuals and “how to” books. This is why I consider a comparative approach important in this research. This study of American and Chinese students perceptions and belief systems intends to pursue five major objectives:

- 1) To evaluate the extent and nature of psycho-cultural difference between American and Chinese population samples.
- 2) To examine how the economic, social and political changes affect young people’s images and cultural frame of reference.
- 3) To increase the cross-cultural awareness of both cultural groups and offer deeper insights of perceptions and belief system of their contemporaries.

4) To better prepare future study abroad students for the hardships of the cultural shock and enable them to adapt their modes of operation to a form appropriate to the local situation.

In the chapters that follow, I shall examine in depth the views and perceptions of both my Chinese and American informants in the domains of family, national image, religion and belief systems, education and health and medicine.

I incorporate the Associative Group Analysis Lorand Szalay and others had used in their comparative study of Chinese and American cultures in 1980s, into my research with focus group interviews. I also rely for insight on my familiarity with both Chinese and American cultures, coupled with my experiences interacting with American study abroad students, and informally observing them in interactions with Chinese people in China. Finally I'd like to point out during my interviews with informants, the discussion is always oriented toward the cultural ends of interaction rather than toward questions of individual disposition, prejudice, or attitude which members of different cultures may bring to a conversation. I believe such an orientation is appropriate since this research is not concerned with issues of individual idiosyncrasy but with systematic cultural difference in interpretation that develops from the dialogue itself.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### 2.1 Introduction

Four Literature areas relative to this thesis topic have been selected as appropriate background for the discussion below. They are Cultural and Communication; Americans image of China and Chinese culture; Chinese images of the U.S. and American Culture; Cultural difference in Education; Culture and language teaching.

### 2.2 Culture and Communication

Culture is impossible not to mention when talking about cross-cultural communication. Then what is culture? Culture is a large and evasive conception, scholars have all tried to define culture in different ways. In 1952, Arthur Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn listed 164 definitions of culture that they found in the anthropology literature. Some definitions, for example, emphasized culture as a set of patterns of thought and beliefs; others emphasized culture as a set of behaviors. Some definitions focused on the nonmaterial aspects of human life whereas others focused on the material aspects of society. The proliferation of definitions has not diminished (Baldwin & Lindsley, 1994). However, all scholars of culture believe that culture is transmitted and maintained through communication and learning. "Culture is learned, acted out, transmitted and preserved through communication." (Samovar1998). Meanwhile, cultural values guide both perception and communication and the understanding of cultural values helps us appreciate

the behavior of other peoples.

The relationship between culture and communication is complex. They are interrelated and reciprocal. Traditional intercultural communication studies have been influenced mostly by anthropologists. Intercultural communication scholars use the broad frameworks from anthropology to identify and study cultural differences in communication. For example, researchers Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) studied contemporary Navajo and descendants of Spanish colonists and Anglo-Americans in the Southwest and identified five orientations, five categories of beliefs and behaviors that are universal. This means that all the culture have to work out solutions to these issues:

What is human nature? What is the relationship between human and nature? What is the relationship between humans? What is the preferred personality? What is the orientation toward time? According to Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, there are three possible responses for each question. The range of answers to these questions is shown in the following table.

Table 1 Value Orientation

Human nature	Basically Good	Mixture of Good and Evil	Basically evil
Relationship to Nature	Humans dominate	Harmony between the two	Nature dominates
Sense of Time	Past Orientation	Present Orientation	Future Orientation
Preferred personality	Being-who you are	Doing-stress on action	Growing-becoming
Social Relationship	Group-oriented	Individual	Collateral

The value in each type of society influences patterns of communication. For

example, individualistic societies tend to value direct forms of communication and support overt forms of conflict resolution. People in collectivist societies may employ less direct communication and more avoidance-style conflict resolution. Kluckhohn and Stodtbeck's framework is often used to map and contrast broad cultural differences between various groups. It also serves as a way of analyzing cultural differences in communication.

Based on this framework, Linell Davis gave the following detailed analysis of differences between basic Chinese values and basic American values. In terms of human nature, the Westerners believe good and evil exist side by side but should be separated. The good should be encouraged and evil be eliminated to the extent possible. In the western moral universe, it is necessary to confess the bad you do. You should admit to your mistakes and shortcomings. This is the first step to become good. In China, as in other Asian societies that have accepted the teachings of Confucius, people are believed to be basically good. Children are believed to be pure and innocent but may become corrupt as they grow older when they have more contact with society. Because of this danger, it is the responsibility of those in authority such as parents, teachers, and political leaders, to protect the morality under their care and to be models of virtue themselves (Davis 2001: 187-196).

With regards to the second value orientation "relationships of humans to nature", in the history of the west, nature was usually seen as either a wilderness or a paradise. The wilderness should be tamed and the paradise should be kept pure. In both cases, nature is outside of human society. As masters of nature, humans are encouraged to control it and exploit it to figure out how it works. However, western values are changing because people

now realize that the western mastery of nature philosophy causes problems as well as providing benefits. Americans, for instance, have a strong appreciation for Native American beliefs about the sacredness of nature. In the traditional Chinese view, humans are part of nature and should live in harmony with nature. The traditional Chinese garden is an example that reveals Chinese social attitudes about the relationship between human and nature. Pavilions, paved pathways, and other structures are integrated with natural features of water, trees and rocks. There is no sharp distinction between inside buildings and outside in nature. Many Chinese people view illness as result of an imbalance between Yin and Yang which combine to produce every occurrence of life. Medicine should work with body's own resources and restore the balance of Yin and Yang. The values that people hold toward nature usually extend to other areas of life. "If your culture teaches integration with nature, harmony and balance, you are likely to seek harmony and balance in social relationships as well. If you think you are separate from nature and can control it, then you probably think you are separate from others." (Davis 2001: 58).

As far as the sense of time is concerned, Chinese society is generally a past-oriented society, in which tradition has a strong hold. In Chinese society, the cultural memory is rich and deep and people often look back to the period when Chinese culture was at the height of its power and glory and may quote respected philosophers and leaders from the past as a guide for action in the present. People feel more secure when something new is defined as similar to something that occurred in the past. However, westerners are

good at projecting themselves into the future. For them the future is not something to dream about or fear but something made real through concrete actions and thinking. Their attitude is that people act today because that action is a step toward the future they are preparing for. In future-oriented societies, time is linear, which means that it moves only in one direction, from the past to the future. In past-oriented societies people are more likely to experience time as cyclical, as repeating itself according to some pattern. They may pay more attention to daily, seasonal, and historical cycles than does a future-oriented society (Davis 2001: 187-196).

Chinese people also differ with western people in terms of the fourth value orientation: preferred personality. Chinese culture is a “being” culture in which people often behave in ways considered suitable to their status, social roles and character. American culture is a “doing” culture in which stress is put on action. In a doing culture, there is often a sense of urgency about getting things done. Deadlines are important, as is the schedule (Davis 2001: 187-196).

Finally, Compared with American people, Chinese people also hold different attitudes about social relationships. First, Chinese culture is a culture with hierarchical values, so Chinese people are always aware of a hierarchy which may be based on age, family social position, academic achievement, or some other criterion. In both obvious and subtle ways, people’s relationships with one another are influenced by where they perceive each other to be in a number of different hierarchies. Second, Chinese culture is a culture

with group values. Chinese people often feel dependent on the group, safe within it, proud and competitive with other groups. The group acts out of concern for all its members, makes decisions by consensus and members are loyal to the group. People who are involved in a group relationship are expected to have duties and obligations to one another, preference is often given to in-group members. On the contrary, American culture is an individualist culture in which self-reliance and independence are given great importance. An individual's position in a society is seen to be the result of his own efforts and ability. Personal initiative is highly valued and failure to solve your own problems is your fault. Americans learn the social pattern of self-reliance early in life. Parents teach their children to express their individual desires and make individual choices when their children are very young. Equality is also an important element of American society. American people are more likely to act on principles that apply to everyone, principles that are universal and apply to associates and strangers alike. Because of the different cultural norms on social relationships, Chinese culture is named by some experts as "shame culture" whereas western cultures possess the characteristics of "guilt culture". In shame culture, the good is an ideal that everyone hopes to realize but may not be possible to achieve in every situation. What is important is that you live up to the expectation of a particular group of people to whom you have such a responsibility, otherwise, you will feel ashamed. In guilt cultures the person is expected to know the difference between right and wrong and feel guilty if he or she does or even thinks wrong. (Davis 2001: 187-196).

Although this cross-cultural study based on the Variations in Value Orientations Scale is insightful for us to understand the Sino-US differences on basic values, we must recognize its limitation. It has been criticized for its lack of ability to measure the degree and intensity to which a value is held (Robinson & Shaver 1973). Not everyone in a culture has the same basic values. Values differ somewhat according to age, gender, social position, occupation and region. We must keep the various layers of culture in mind when using this chart and expect to find differences within cultures as well as across cultures. Another reason is that each culture has developed as a result of influences from a number of different philosophies and religions, so each society has inherited different, somewhat conflicting values. Also, cultures change over time. Values and beliefs also change as societies respond to changing conditions.

It is impossible to review the past literature on similarities and differences of American and Chinese culture without mentioning Francis Hsu's *American and Chinese*. In *American and Chinese*, Hsu gave an insightful comparative analysis of the similarity and difference of American and Chinese cultural values and the historical roots that caused these differences. He contrasted relationships between parents and children, the attitude towards ancestors and posterity, the concept of success, and the ratings of prestige and many other areas of American and Chinese social practices. He then argued the American and Chinese ways of life might be reduced to two sets of contrasts. First, is the American individual centered way of life stressing individual predilections versus the Chinese situation centered

way of life emphasizing properness of an individual's place and behavior at home and in society. The second fundamental contrast is the prominence of emotions in the American way of life as compared with the tendency of Chinese to downplay personal feelings and emotions. He believes these two sets of contrasts are interrelated. Being individual-centered, the American moves towards social and psychological isolation. Being more situation-centered, the Chinese is inclined to be socially or psychologically dependent on others. He also proposed many social changes only happen on surface level, the two sets of contrast are deeply rooted in people's psychology and the two different ways of life continues as always.

Since World War II, America has indeed undergone many changes. However, Francis Hus believed the trend toward individual fulfillment and individual gratification is but an escalation of the American individual approach of life. In the case of China, with the reform and opening-up to the outside world, the traditional values and assumptions in China are faced with great challenges from western culture. Changes seem to have taken place in many areas of social life. But just as Francis Hus mentioned the whole question of fundamental versus superficial changes should be put in the longer- term context of the culture and dealt with carefully.

Hopefully, my research, which is focused on evaluating the extent and nature of psycho-cultural differences between American and Chinese college youth, can shed light on the question of tradition vs. change in contemporary China.

### 2.3 Americans' images of China and Chinese Culture

Although there is a vast library of literature interpreting American and Chinese cultures in the academic world, television programs, films or pictures, domestic newspapers and magazines, and popular books are still the primary sources for common people to gain knowledge about another culture. These forms of media to a great extent are shaped by political climates.

Colin Mackerras called on people to be wary of the influence of propaganda: the truth of regime. In his book *Western Images of China*, he provided an insightful account of how dominant images of China have tended to accord with, rather than oppose, the main interests of the main western authority of the day. In short, governments' impact on popular images is great. There is a general correlation between images U.S. holds of China and state-to-state relations between the two. According to Mackerras, during the Cold War, especially during the period of the Korean War, the American government fed a lot of anti-communism information into mass media. The series of widely known and bitterly anti-China books published in the U.S. are laden with American values and regarded China as an inferior civilization which should expect only to learn from the U.S. and the west. The improved Sino-US relationship and the 'opening-up' of China since the late 1970s has resulted in more westerners visiting the country, and more serious study of it. There is a gradual declining of ethnocentrism and Orientalism concerning the study of China. It follows that well-informed images can increase mutual understandings and overcome

prejudice between people of different cultures (Mackerras 1989).

Blum expounded that Americans most often receive news of China through three basic images: First is Political China, where everyone is preoccupied with the intricacies of political organization. "Visually, this looks like a row of grim, late middle-aged men either standing or seated, dressed in military garb or increasingly natty Western-style suits, listening to speeches or marching in a political ritual." The second image is the Big Bad Chinese State in all its manifestations: human rights violations, political prisoners, censorship, the Communist Party's fierce ideological grasp on people's beliefs. This one looks like prisoners on their way to execution, tanks threatening protesters in Tian'men Square, monks beaten in Tibet. In short, China is portrayed as "evil, a menace, not following the international rules" (Song et al 1996). The third image is the "Americanized business China," the most commonly portrayed China since the late 1980s. The images focus on joint ventures, numerous high-rise buildings, well-dressed and permed young people with cell phones, proliferation of McDonald's and KFC, increasing access to internet, and rising popularity of bowling as a form of recreation (Blum 2000).

However, to understand China and Chinese culture as an outsider is no easy task. One has to grapple with the influence of three major Chinese philosophies, centuries of dynastic history, decades of revolution and political upheaval, wide regional and ethnic differences, the global impact of China's reentry into the world economy, and the unprecedented organizational and ideological transformations that the post-1979 reforms

have engendered.

#### **2.4 Chinese images of the U.S. and American Culture**

After the Chinese Communist Party took over China in 1949, Marxist-Leninism dominated the Chinese society. According to Marxist-Leninism, the whole world was divided into two camps, socialist and capitalist. The United States was the leading imperialist power. The Chinese government played an important role in demonizing the U.S. from 1949 to 1979 in order to continue the Communist revolution against Western capitalism and imperialism. Since the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and the U.S. in 1979, the severe criticism of the United States in the official press are toned down and anti-Americanism began to decline.

An admiring image emerged among the non-Marxist intellectuals and average Chinese people due to the increased official, academic and public exchanges between China and the U.S. Many Chinese, especially the youth, admired American advanced science and technology, the political system, values and society. They considered America as a land of wealth, freedom, equality, mobility and opportunity. They praised America for their creativity and friendliness. Some even went to an extreme to compare the U.S. to paradise.

The trend of demonizing and romanticizing the U.S. continued until the late 1980s when a special group of books on the U.S. came into wide circulation. They are books in Chinese by Chinese who have been to the U.S. or by Chinese immigrants who drew upon their personal experiences either to inform the readers of the U.S. or to tell of their own

lives there (Liu 1996). Many Chinese readers only have access to books on the U.S. by Chinese authors because translated American books in Chinese on the U.S. are still few. Therefore, these books greatly shaped the present images held by Chinese about the U.S. and American cultures.

In 1993, an autobiography, Zhou Li's *A Chinese lady in Manhattan*, was acclaimed by public and sold rapidly in Chinese bookstores. Also in 1993, a television serial based on personal experiences, *A Native Beijinger in New York*, was a hit, adapted from the book carrying the same title, which portrayed the conflict between Chinese and American values. Two of the bestsellers in 1994 in China, Zhang Xiaowu and Li Zhongxiao's *I work as a lawyer in the U.S.* and Chen Yanni's *Tell You What the Real U.S. Is* were written by Chinese immigrants. *I work as a lawyer in the U.S.* was published four times in the first month of publication and had been reprinted and reviewed by 50 newspapers and magazines both at home and abroad (Liu 1996). In spite of the differences of authors' personal viewpoints, these books achieved consistency on the following points.

First of all, material wealth, advanced science and technology, high efficiency and good service are the dominant images of American society that have impressed the Chinese authors. They are frank in comparing the U.S. in terms of the degree of development with China. Their interest is focused on the convenient communication, transportation, and information network.

Besides their agreement on the material aspect of American society, the authors

reached a consensus on three American essential traits—the worship of material wealth, individualism and hard work. Almost all the books touch upon the worship of material wealth in the U.S. No matter how they view it, they all agree that “money talks” in the U.S. Wang Zuomin called the U.S. “the empire of dollars” when discussing the American election (Wang 1985:212). Wang Dawu remarks in his opening chapter the number one driving force for the operation of American society is money (Wang 1989:121). Duan Liancheng summarizes that it is the American lifestyle to earn a lot of money, spend it and make more money again (Duan 1993).

The second American trait that a majority of these authors feel keenly about is individualism. These authors comment on individualism differently, but they all regard it as one of the most essential American characteristics. Finally most authors are impressed by the American work ethic. They write in admiration of the tempo of work of Americans. Wang Zuomin even refers to hard work as “American temperament” (Wang 1985: 193).

The third consensus is on American social problems. The social problems given the most coverage are crimes and loneliness. They all maintain security is a problem that hunts many Americans. Zhou Li tells of her own experience of surrendering her own car to two armed bandits (Zhou 1993). Duan Liancheng also presents the fact that murder in the U.S. ranks the first in capitalist countries (Duna 1993). Loneliness is considered by most authors as another major American social problem. They hold that the American respect for privacy protects the individual’s freedom but also leads to isolation and loneliness. One author

elaborates that the family atmosphere familiar to every Chinese is missing, no matter how luxurious the house is.

To sum it up, these books contributed by authors of different backgrounds presented an understanding of American culture and images of the U.S. that were different from the earlier perceptions of America in China. Most of these books are not politically motivated. This is due to the new policy in China since 1978, which put less emphasis on class struggle and ideology. These books have been conveying their understanding of American society and culture to the average Chinese. As opposed to the press that served political propaganda by giving abstract theories or one-sided reports and rushing to the conclusions, most of these books strive to give all-around facts. Although their comments on and interpretations of American society sometimes are controversial, they challenge the myths of either demonizing the U.S. or romanticizing the U.S. These books have presented Chinese readers with a more realistic picture of the U.S.---- it is a developed country, but one has to work hard to survive and get ahead; it is a society with both advantages and disadvantages. They are popularizing a notion that the U.S. is neither heaven nor hell. These books do play a positive role in promoting the understanding of the U.S. in China, The two old myths, presenting a negative picture of the U.S. and a romanticized one, still exert influence on the minds of Chinese, but the contribution of these books is extremely important especially when considering that Sino-U.S. cultural communication is an irreversible trend (Liu 1996).

However, these books have their own limitations. The limitations are conditioned

by three factors: the first one is superficiality. Most of the books give a picture of the U.S. based on the author's experience during a specific period. Few provide reader with a historical perspective. Without the basic background knowledge of the other country's history, most of the authors fail to interpret the other country's value in the right context. The second factor is subjectivity. Most authors study American culture from the perspective of Chinese culture, so their observations and conclusions are tainted by their personal and cultural orientations. The third is overgeneralization. Not everyone in American culture has the same basic values. There are a various layers of culture. The concept of basic values is itself a generalization. People combine and give different levels of importance to various values.

In trying to give a frank and unbiased analysis of the way of life of another culture, Francis Hsu suggests every person who deals with another society and culture and wishes to convey his understanding of the society and culture to others must self-consciously strive to become something of a "marginal man" That is, he must not only be able to see other customs, institutions and artifacts of the society and culture as the natives see them, but also try to feel about these things as they do (Hsu 1981).

Hsu holds that there is no simple formula for achieving marginal-man-ship, but a beginning can be made via the comparative method. He believes that having both his own culture and the one not his own systematically compared provides the proper perspective for the researcher. (Hsu 1981: xxii)

## **2.5 Cultural Differences in Education**

Thus far this review has focused on the relationship between culture and communication, two approaches to the study intercultural communication, and how a culture is portrayed by the media of another culture. Since part of this research is on education-related issues, it is useful to examine cultural differences in educational settings. Culture manifests itself differently regarding teaching and learning styles. In the traditional Chinese view, the good learner is the student who listens well, who respects authority, who does not question the teacher; the students observe the teacher as a model in the teacher-centered classroom. Chinese textbooks are often considered very nearly sacred; students carefully study every sentence, in the order in which they appear. They approach textbooks as teachers and authorities. They expect the teacher to expound on the book, and they will learn through attentive listening. The western teacher, however, approaches the classroom use of textbooks as a resource that they exploit selectively, attempting to involve students in active discussion.

In contrast, critical thinking, judgmental questioning, and active initiation of discussion are expected from students in the American school system. American students have been taught to interact, to question the teacher and the texts as well as each other; these students expect to be contributors to and participants in the class (Hall 2000). They are taught to be independent learners, to be responsible for their own learning, to analyze and synthesize information. American teachers emphasize communication rather than

linguistic knowledge such as grammar and vocabulary, and stress pair and group discussions instead of teaching the students themselves (Swiderski 1993). In such a student-centered classroom, students may sometimes ignore the teacher, read the newspaper, eat or drink during the class, talk with one another, or confront the teacher with questions---all examples of insulting behavior for the Chinese.

The above different classroom practices can be related to different philosophical assumptions concerning communication, teaching and learning between China and U.S. Western educational philosophy to a certain extent inherits Socrates' view of education and teaching methods, While Chinese way of teaching is greatly influenced by Confucian methods. The main difference between Socrates and Confucius is that the former was interested in dialectic, the art of logical argument; whereas the latter was more concerned about authoritative and persuasive speaking. Socrates claimed his role in relationship to the youth is to lead him to the truth by means of questioning. In order to get at truth, he proceeds by asking a line of questions. Socrates made a virtue of thinking for oneself rather than following tradition. He was concerned with ethical character and conduct and the practical use of reason for the sake of justice. Dialogue is at the heart of the Socratic methods, which is alive today not only as a subject for law students and philosophers but in much of the day-to-day experience of discourse inside and outside the classroom (Hinkel 1999). Much of western education is preparation for such events as oral dissertation defenses and other examinations, and ultimately job interviews.

According to Confucianism, the role of teacher is to serve as a messenger and role model, to transmit wisdom and answer questions, to perfect virtue and assist in the development of talents. Confucius pursues the art of rhetorical persuasive speaking, most typically, his student asks a question, to which he responds with wisdom. He sometime responds to a student's question with a question, which he proceeds to answer. Rather than engaging in lengthy dialogue, he emphasized the importance of care in speaking. For Confucius, training in virtue meant passing on the best of Chinese tradition, which took precedence over thinking for oneself. The emphasis on reasoning was not a high priority of Confucius. One learns in order to gain wisdom so that one may act appropriately. Confucius conceived of man as a being who was realized and perfected through participation in the rites. Chinese philosophers focus on making distinctions, using social convention to condition appropriate attitudes and desires (Nieto 2002).

Another implication that relates to the Confucian tradition of reverence for authority is modeling. Confucian orthodoxy maintains the world is explained through the Confucian classics as interpreted by Confucian scholars. Students demonstrate their reverence for both the written texts and the scholars by memorizing and then reciting the respected authorities. Chinese students memorize model texts as exemplars of good writing. They also learn information by memorizing pages or chapters of textbooks. They write these memorized materials on examinations to show examiners that they have learned the course content, but they run the risk of being accused of cheating or plagiarizing based on

western standards (Sigsbee 1997). Therefore, proper instruction concerning this cultural difference must be given to the Chinese English learners to prevent plagiarism in their English writing.

In terms of writing style, due to different cultural models, Chinese and Americans have different notions of what constitutes good writing. What appears an incomplete and vague paper to an American may be brilliant to Chinese. Americans value writing organized in a linear fashion, moving in a straight line of logical thought through the subject to an explicitly stated conclusion. Their writings are often characterized by analytical and inductive thinking. A key topic word is often repeated in order to establish immediate relevance of the answer or comment. Comparing with American's linear and direct mode, Chinese attach more importance to association and metaphoric language. An event may be explained by pointing to another event which occurred at the same time, even though by western logic, the two are not connected. Although Chinese also stress logic and facts in writing, Chinese usually write circularly and discursively, coming back to the same point to show the interrelatedness of things. In other words, Chinese prefer to use a topic associating approach, and their writings often present a series of episodes linked to some person or theme. These links are implicit in the account and are generally left unstated. To Americans, the relational style of thinking might fail to separate the experiencing person from objective facts, figures or concepts (Nieto 2002). Even a Chinese journalist comment: "Humanities in China lacked basic training in writing. First the essay was often filled with

vague concepts without a well-defined context. Second, a hypothesis stated in a previous paragraph suddenly becomes a theory without further discussion and verification (Qian 2002: 83).”

## **2.6 Culture and Language Teaching**

Cross-cultural communication is also closely tied with language teaching. The goal of teaching a foreign language is an attempt to cultivate people in communication between different cultural backgrounds. So the teachers are required to teach not only language but also culture, and to help increase students' cross-cultural awareness so that fewer problems arise in their interaction with people of another culture.

The relationship between culture and language has been the focus of many theories. Arguably, the most salient of all theories is, perhaps, that of Sapir and Whorf (Whorf 1956) who hypothesized that the underlying pattern in which reality is categorized in a given language suggests the way in which the speaker of that language views the world, while how they view the world depends on the language system they have. Language and world view are thus inseparable. According to Sapir (Whorf 1956:5), “Language is essentially a perfect means of expression and communication among every known people. Of all aspects of culture, it is a fair guess that language was the first to receive a highly developed form and that its essential perfection is a prerequisite to the development period of culture as a whole.” Ferguson (1984:61) states “language is the unique vehicle of culture. Culture without language is animal behavior; language without culture is inconceivable.”

Language relies on cultural context for meaning, and can only be really understood in that context.

Rather than capitalize on the intimate relationship between language and culture, however, traditional educational systems often separate language and culture into two domains. Language courses usually focus on grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, while coursework dealing with culture addresses the learned patterns of beliefs, values, and traditions. It is often the case that second-language learners may acquire linguistic skills but those skills alone cannot guarantee that the learner will be able to function in all social settings in a different culture. Many international students have a difficult time assimilating into the host cultures where they study not because of a lack of language skills, but of cultural knowledge. They may be familiar with the vocabulary on a variety of topics, for instance, but not always know when it is appropriate to bring them up, or how. Just as what Hymes elaborated:

The same linguistic means may be organized to quite different communicative ends; the same communicative ends may be served by organization of, or by focus upon, quite varied means. Facets of cultural values and beliefs, social institutions and forms, roles and personalities, history and ecology of community must be examined together in relation to communicative events and patterns as focus of study. Together, social roles and situational prescriptions determine the order of precedence of speakers, relevant convention of politeness, appropriate formulas and styles of speech, and topic of discussion (Hymes 1964:3-4).

In order to be cross-culturally competent, one should be aware of culturally different ways of viewing the world, different ways of relating to people, different communication goals and politeness strategies, different sets of communicative conventions and signaling devices, different ideals and strategies of rhetoric, and different methods of generating meaning and eliciting response.

Therefore, the use of culture as a vehicle for teaching language can enhance cross-cultural communication, strengthen motivation to learn language, and improve comprehension of the language. According to Krashen, the study of a culture with its language fosters motivation for language learning, which is more important than aptitude. Omaggio indicates that the foreign language teaching profession began dealing seriously with the issue of infusing cultural goals into the curriculum in the early 1970's. She then provides readers with various strategies of teaching culture.

In 1999 the publication of *Standards for foreign language learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, attempted to stress culture as the core of language teaching:

American students need to develop an awareness of other people's world views, of their unique way of life, and of the patterns of behavior which order their world, as well as to learn about their contributions to the world at large and the solutions they offer to the common problems of humankind. Such awareness will help combat the ethnocentrism that often dominates the thinking of our young people.

Sitaram and Happanen believed an important rule of intercultural communication is

that each participant should understand the other's values. That understanding should precede any attempts to communicate interculturally. Because communicative techniques are manifestations of one's own values, the participants communicate differently. It is important to explore one's home values and to put them in a comparative perspective. In addition each should adapt his/her communication to the other's values. (Borden 1991). Adjusting one's own culture to the changing new world will be crucial for the development of a country in the new century. The adjustment, nevertheless, is difficult without understanding the native culture and the native speakers' values and beliefs, which follow from their cultural frame of reference.

To sum it up, an effective cross-cultural understanding as a two-way process has particular implications for foreign language programs. Foreign language teaching would benefit from including instruction regarding cultural differences, not only from their own but the target language's point of view. For example, foreign language teachers and students may avoid communication breakdown by learning how their own language and cultural conventions may be misinterpreted, as much as by studying what to appropriately expect from the target culture's point of view. Clearly, learning about differences in cultural assumptions and conventions and interaction patterns has an important role in developing both positive cross-cultural communications and linguistic competence.

## **2.7 Summary of Review of Literature**

This chapter reviewed the literature related to culture and communication and

comparative studies of Chinese and American cultures. A special focus of this literature review addressed how culture manifests itself differently regarding teaching and learning styles. Recent literature suggests that second language teaching has begun to focus more on communication skills and cultural understanding not just on linguistic functions. In order to have more effective cross-cultural communication, current pedagogy in this area increasingly stresses the importance of presenting the target language in its cultural context to increase students' communicative competence.

### CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

It is the intention of this study to understand informants' private, implicit cultural values and perceptions, so I chose Associate Group Analysis, a method of in-depth analysis of perceptions and attitudes, of dominant psychological dispositions that affect people's thoughts and behavior. However, it is hard to achieve a deep understanding of why people think and behave in a culturally specific way without multifaceted engagement and immersion among this group. Therefore, I used other ethnographic exploring approaches including in-depth focus group interviews and participant observation as my follow-up studies.

Two contemporary approaches to studying cultural values and intercultural communication are the social science approach and interpretative approach. The Social science approach is based on research in psychology and sociology. The approach assumes that human behavior is predictable and that the goal of the research is to describe and predict behavior. Researchers who take this approach use quantitative methods and they usually get data by questionnaires. Many of these social science studies have been useful in identifying how communication varies from group to group. They also have identified some of the psychological and sociological variables in the communication process. However the limitation is that we cannot identify all the variables that affect our value orientation and communication. Besides, the some methods used in this approach are not culturally sensitive and sometimes researchers are too distant from the phenomenon or people they are

researching. (Martin and Nakayama 1998)

The interpretive approach is devoted to descriptive studies of cultural and communication patterns within special cultural groups. This type of research uses methods derived from anthropology and linguistics: field studies and participant observations. It assumes that the researcher will be intimately involved in the research and may be good friends with members of the communities he or she is studying. The utility of this interpretivist approach is that it provides an in-depth understanding of cultural and communication patterns within a particular community.

I see the social science and interpretive approaches as operating in interconnected ways and describing cultural reality both objectively and subjectively. This is the theoretical approach I have taken in this thesis. The method I used combines these two approaches.

### **3.1 The Associate Group Analysis**

Associate Group Analysis (AGA) is a method of in-depth analysis of perceptions and attitudes, of dominant psychological dispositions that affect people's thoughts and behavior. The main units of analysis are subjective images and meanings.

AGA is an unstructured, open-ended approach. Rather than asking direct questions, AGA works by restructuring a group's psychological dispositions based on the distribution of free associations to selected themes. It is used to map systems of mental representation and to identify behavioral dispositions evasive to the more direct and structured methods of assessment and offers in-depth insight not available from other sources. The adaptation of

the AGA to the comparative analysis of underlying cultural assumptions followed the theoretical rationale described in the article "Verbal Association in the Study of Subjective Culture": "...word meanings representing the unit of analysis are conceived not as lexical meanings but as psychological meaning reactions of a particular person or group" (Szalay & Maday 1973). In this project, AGA was used to assess how different a certain subject, theme, idea, or issue is to Chinese students as compared to American students by analyzing responses they gave to it as a stimulus word.

The survey questionnaire was composed of 22 systematically selected stimulus words in five major domains: (Family, Perception of Other Country, Religion and Faith, Education, Health and Medicine) in the students' native language. The respondents were asked to write down, in response to each selected stimulus word, as many words as they could think of in one minute. The students' responses were combined and used for group analysis.

#### **Samples --- selection and comparability**

In the selection of the samples, comparability was the single most important criterion. The sample included 50 Chinese students and 42 American students. They were born and raised in their respective countries and went through essentially the same experiences as their contemporaries. The average age of participants was around 20. They were at the undergraduate level in a variety of major fields of study. American informants were recruited among study abroad American Students from Central University of

Nationality (CUN) and Beijing Language and Culture Studies University (BLCS). Ideally, the student population should have no prior exposure to Chinese culture in any form. This situation was highly unlikely, however, among university students with clearly articulated interests in China participating in this study abroad language program. To minimize the effect of students' existing knowledge about Chinese culture, I only chose the beginning-level students of Chinese who had never been to China before Fall, 2002. 22 students out of the 25 from CUN, 20 out of the 46 from BLCS qualified. Chinese informants were recruited from the Beijing Institute of Civil Engineering and Architecture. The Chinese student sample population was selected randomly based on the class name lists. Although the size of my sample is small, it is reasonable for the purpose of further exploratory analysis.

The survey questionnaires were handed out in their classroom outside of class time. The purpose of the research was explained to both groups of populations and the participation of this study was on the voluntary basis. No student was required to turn in a complete questionnaire and all the responses were anonymous. Of all the 100 questionnaires distributed, 73 were completed and usable, including 42 Chinese respondents and 31 American respondents. The average age was 20.8. Male students consisted of 48.4 percent of the respondents and 51.6 percent were female students. The survey instruments were developed originally in English. However, since the native language of part of the respondents was Chinese, the instruments had to be translated from English into standard

Chinese. The translation procedure included two steps. First, the instruments were translated into Chinese by an American teacher who had worked in China for five years and was fluent in Chinese. Then the Chinese version was translated back into English for meaning checks by a Ph.D. candidate whose major was American language and culture. The results of the comparison of the two English versions (the original English questionnaire and the English questionnaire translated from the Chinese) showed that two versions had only some slight difference but no major changes in meaning. Therefore, only a few refinements to the questionnaire were made after the procedure.

### **3.2 Data Analysis**

The association task produced a large quantity of responses to each stimulus word by each group. On the average, the subjects produced five to eight associations to each word. The group response lists provided an inventory of the various elements which made up each group's image of a particular theme.

The group response lists to specific themes offered me an opportunity to assess the extent to which the Chinese and American groups agree or disagree in their subjective images. To arrive at a concise and generic expression of the group meaning, content analysis was applied, and the responses were grouped into a few categories. Each category was described by a score and by a label to indicate its content. The sum of the response scores provided a category score expressing the importance of the category for a particular group and highly group-specific frequency distributions. It was important to choose clearly

different categories that do not overlap. Responses that did not seem to fit into any of the categories were put into a miscellaneous category. Responses that might be assigned with equal justification to two or more categories were recorded for further consideration. The final categories were selected to highlight the most characteristic aspects of the groups' responses to the stimulus word. Once the categorization was finalized, a final check was given to make sure that all the responses were included and that they had their proper response scores. The categories and category scores provided the primary data for cultural similarities and differences in their actual proportions and generated a natural curiosity for finding explanations.

In order to focus on the shared meaning for a particular group, the responses given by only one person were excluded from analysis. Dropping the idiosyncratic responses helped me to concentrate on more stable, shared responses. A systematic examination of such response lists showed that every response contained a piece of valid information about the group's characteristic understanding and evaluation of the stimulus word, including perceptual and affective details which were frequently unarticulated and below their level of awareness.

The sum of the scores of all responses elicited by a particular theme or domain was used to measure subjective importance. The priorities of different cultural groups were compared by looking at their dominance scores on the same concepts. Dominance scores revealed group-specific hierarchies of values not only on single issues but also for larger

domains.

In this study, I approximated a situation in which the critical difference between the groups is cultural background and focused on the views and values that were shaped by common cultural background and life conditions. The question of how much intra-social and regional variations exist in cultural images and meanings will be systematically examined in future research.

### **3.3 Focus Groups**

I chose focus groups because a major part of my research goals was to learn more about the range of beliefs and experiences that people have. In order to clarify, extend, qualify findings on the same topic produced by the questionnaire, I used focus groups as my follow-up research method. One advantage of focus groups was that the exchanges among the participants helped them to clarify for themselves what their opinions or behaviors depend on. As the participants in a focus group heard others talk, they could easily tell whether what they were hearing fit their own situation. By comparing and contrasting, they became more explicit about their own views; by answering questions from the moderator and other participants they started becoming aware of things that they had not thought about before. I, as the researcher, could gain insights into both the range of opinions that they had and the set of circumstances that would lead to one response rather than another. As Morgan and Spanish suggested "The interaction in the focus group can provided an explicit basis for exploring this issue and generating data on group meaning, and most importantly, group

norms. In the focus group, people take differing individual experiences and attempt to make collective sense of them.” (1984: 259).

The guideline of the discussion was mainly focused on the students’ responses in the AGA task. Some responses were elaborated on, and the degree of consensus was examined. For example, in the domain of family, “harmony” was mentioned by almost every participant in the Chinese group, so in the focus group, students were asked about why they thought “harmony” was so important in family.

Focus groups also provided a friendly research method that was respectful and not condescending to my target audience. The informal, natural group interview was an excellent technique for exploratory queries on interpretations of previously gathered data. It was a valid check on information gathered by my questionnaires. To sum it up, focus groups provided a larger database, further decoding and interpretation of data, and additional methodological rigor.

Four focus groups were conducted in this research, two for American students and two for Chinese students. My interest was to compare views of people with differing backgrounds and attitudes towards the topic of discussion, so I held discussions with separate groups, two Chinese and two American groups. I sent invitation letters to those who had responded to my survey. I recruited six informants for each focus group on a first-come, first-served basis. I also found two of my colleague friends to take notes for me while I guided the discussion. Each focus group discussion lasted two hours and each

person in the group was given a chance to talk around 20 minutes.

I requested participants to arrive fifteen to twenty minutes prior to the scheduled group start time. This allowed participants to get somewhat comfortable with each other. In addition it discouraged late arrivals from disrupting the group once it had started.

#### **3.4 Participant Observation (triangulation)**

I chose participant observation to triangulate my data. The informal interaction between the observer and observed and the free flow of information are the features which characterize participant observation as a method and cannot be achieved by any other methods. The participant-observation compensated for what was lacking in my interviews. Although it was very demanding to socialize, observe, question and take mental notes, as well as maintaining a fine balance between being a “participant” and an “observer,” ultimately this was probably the best method to check the authenticity of data collected by my interviews and questionnaire. Being a Chinese person studying in the U.S. and subsequently working with American students going to study in China gave me increased familiarity with cross-cultural differences.

#### **3.5 Limitation on Methodology**

The small size of samples cannot be considered statistically representative of the entire young population when considering the social, economic and educational differences, as well as urban- rural and regional differences. In addition, the fact that American students were participating in a study abroad program has to be considered before drawing broad

generalizations. Then again, if the study is to be used by International educators focused on increasing the exposure of the students to China, the sample is perhaps more representative than a broader sample would be.

## CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

This chapter includes the findings of the research project. The results will be organized around the following five themes: Family Relations; American and Chinese-Self and Other Images; Education; Health and Medicine. Under each theme, the data will be organized at two levels. The first level is the comparison of Chinese and American responses to the stimulus words in the AGA. The second level contains elaborations from focus groups and participant observation. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings.

### 4.1 Family Relations

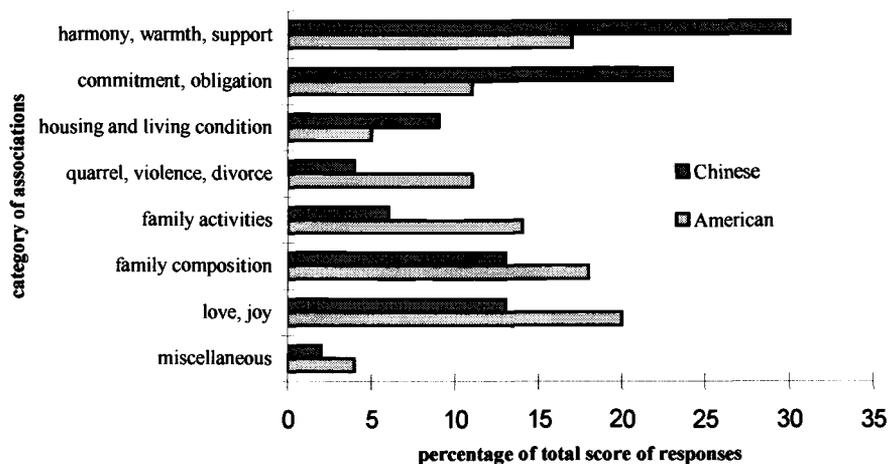
Family is the nucleus of life and the basic human organization common to all cultures. The great interest in family arises not only from its universal human importance but also from the fascinating diversity of inner-family relationships. These variations are deeply rooted in childhood experience, which involves processes of conditioning and learning. To study these differences can help us better understand culture and the origin of cultural differences. The present American-Chinese comparison promises timely insights into how the family functions in promoting perceptions and attitudes that characterize present Chinese society, compared to American society. It also provides an opportunity to assess how the change and transformation of society may influence people's perspective and frame of reference.

The comparative analysis of Chinese and American perceptions and attitudes regarding family relations encompass the following 5 categories: Family, Parents, Love and Marriage, Ancestors, and Me (self image).

#### 4.11 Family

Based on the AGA analysis, the most frequent response Chinese students gave to the stimulus word “family” was “harmony”, Next to harmony, responsibility and mutual obligation are also much on the minds of the Chinese students. In contrast to Chinese students who see family in terms of interpersonal relations in a framework of harmony and joy, American students think of family much more in affective terms of warmth and love. Supporting, sharing and security are frequently mentioned by American students.

Chart 1 Chinese and American responses to the stimulus word “Family”



Even though nowadays there are major changes in family structure from a male-dominated and father-oriented structure to a child-oriented one, Chinese students' responses still show continuities between traditional and modern society. The common thread has been the assurance of solidarity and prosperity in maintaining the family in a competitive and changing social world.

The emphasis on obligation and responsibility nowadays involves education and upbringing of children in the case of adult family members; in the case of children, it involves the obligation to care for their parents once they become old and sick. Modern Chinese parents consider education essential to the maintenance of status or upward social mobility. They sacrifice their immediate interests for the future welfare of their children and dedicate themselves to seeing their children's future is assured by being well educated. Their children's glories are their own glories and they strongly identify themselves with the success of their children. Chinese children, in order to express their gratitude and repay the kindness of their parents, usually show a strong achievement motivation directed toward the prosperity of the family and establishing and maintaining a good family reputation—values which reflect the old tradition in new forms.

Most Chinese students I interviewed expressed their appreciation of their parents' sacrifice for their education, and they were very aware of their responsibility to study and achieve. One of my Chinese informants said:

My family is poor, but my parents explored every possible source for my tuition. I know I must study hard and make them proud of me. If I score low in an exam, I feel so bad because I let my parents down.

Another one commented:

When I'm earning good money, I would like to do a lot of traveling. But I must be sure to give my parents a good life, because they will be retiring in 10 years or so. They have given me a good one and I must do the same for them.

Yet another said:

What I want for myself in life is a home where I can live with my parents. My dream is to provide for my parents someday, to give them a life where money is not a concern. I don't think that people in the west realize the importance of families sticking together. Family and friends are the things that make me happy. I'd like to be surrounded by people I love.

Generally speaking, Chinese students view a harmonious family as a source of well-being, happiness and joy. They express great concern about strife, quarrels within the family.

Unlike their Chinese counterparts who view family from the benefit it offers to the group or collective which is clearly expressed by the strong Chinese references to obligations, duties and responsibilities in general, Americans view family from the angle of their own emotional, social and physical needs. They view family positively as a setting that fulfills their needs and wants. An emotional atmosphere of warmth, love, comfort and stability is what they hope for. But they express concerns about family quarrels and divorce, and are anxious about pain and problems associated with family life, including

misunderstanding and negligence.

American kids are taught to be independent from the family at very young age. American's image of family is the combination of independent individuals. One American student mentioned: "Family members must accept the fact that life extends beyond the family for each of its members. This outside or other life must also be taken into consideration as one deals with another."

Contemporary American society also demands a highly mobile group of workers who will go where the jobs are. This desire to maximize economic opportunities often causes the breakdown of longstanding patterns of kinship interaction. In addition, the greater concern for individual advancement often takes precedence over interest in family ties and obligations. Many American students admitted that the greatest challenge is finding enough time to share with each other as a family, given the competition of work, community and volunteer activities.

#### **4.12 Parents**

AGA shows that the positive adjectives Chinese students often ascribe to their parents are "kind", "amiable", "caring", "nurturing", "hard-working", "tolerant", and "selfless". The following comments elaborating these responses to parents are culled from my interviews. One student said: "My parents love me unconditionally and support me in everything I do. When I fail, they encourage me, and when I disappoint them, they tell me how much they love me." Another recalled:

My father is always proud of me and would do anything he could for me. The other day, I wanted an English magazine called English Salon. I hunted in all the bookshops nearby but couldn't find a copy. On hearing this, my father went out, promising that he would buy me one unless there was none left. One hour later, he came back with the very magazine I needed.

The negative adjectives Chinese students associate with their parents are “meddling”, “overprotective” and ‘demanding”. When they are asked to further explain these words, One said : “My parents have a too high expectation of me, which sometimes makes me feel stressed out.” Another comments:

I want have my own privacy and space, but my parents often read my diary without my permission. When a guy called me, they will bombard me with all sorts of questions about the guy. I am old enough to use my own judgment.

Yet another said:

My mom hovers around me like an old hen caring for her chicks.” “She has a copy of my class schedule and never forgets to put the textbooks for my next day’s classes in my backpack the previous night. I am already a college student and no longer a kid.

While Chinese groups still think of the proper attitudes with focus on such traditional values as esteem, respect and filial obligation, they have a growing sense of equality in terms of parent-child relationship within the family. Many Chinese students pointed out a rather equal relationships existing in their family, which is different from the traditional hierarchical one. It is not uncommon that they challenge their parents’ authority

and they even become teachers of their parents in some cases. One of my informants said:

My father admitted that most of his knowledge of new technology, medicine and history came from me. I have become an important source of all sorts of information including news, cultural life and consumer information. Our capability to teach our parents mainly comes from our higher sensitivity to and acceptance of new things. Less restricted by tradition, we enjoy the convenience of getting social messages from media, advertising and markets.

Another one commented:

My parents felt embarrassed or even humiliated in front of me when I talked to them in the tone of a teacher. By and by, they became used to it and gradually overcame the psychological barrier in their minds. My father even confessed to me that the younger generation is more capable since we have so many channels to get knowledge and are much quicker in accepting and learning new things.

To most Chinese students, the favorite times spent with their parents are eating meals at home or in a restaurant, watching television together, staying overnight to play cards, shopping for clothing and participating in exercise or sports.

Compared with their Chinese counterparts in the AGA responses, American students' image of parents often centers more on "love", "support", "care-taking", and "friendship". While the positive responses far outweigh the few negative ones, they are more critical than the Chinese groups. They indicated feeling of hatred towards their parents. The negative words ascribed to their parents are "nagging", "annoying", "wired", and "abusive".

American students generally indicate in the interview that successful parents and successful children often result from an understanding of the different positions and perspectives they maintain. Parents and children must be sensitive to each other's respective concerns. For a good parent-child relationship, an atmosphere of understanding and sharing must prevail in the family. One student said: "I believe our family relationship is healthy and strong. We are truthful with each other, plan time alone together and enjoy laughing together." Another recalled:

I can do a lot of things with my dad, like playing football and going on trips. He really understands, and he can talk to me about everything. My mom knows exactly how I feel, and what I want. She's always there for me, helping me a lot.

Although American students are concerned about divorce, they see it as normal and do not treat it as seriously as their Chinese counterparts.

According to 1998 Census Bureau figures, fifty-three percent of the households in the United States were headed by married couples in 1998. This compares with 78.2 percent in 1950 and 61 percent in 1980. Among children living with two parents, about 80 percent of children living with a step-parent lived with their mother and a stepfather.

One of my American informants told me although only he lives with his mother and father, he has a 31-year-old half-brother who lives in California, and a 27-year-old sister in New York -- both from his father's previous marriage. Many of his friends have half-siblings as well. As a result, he sees his family as average within his peer group.

#### 4.13 Love and Marriage

With regards to love and marriage, Chinese and American responses bear a lot of similarities. They all think of love and marriage in terms of “happiness”, “warmth” and “support” and consider romance and passion an important part of love. Just like their American counterparts, Chinese college students now have a rather open attitude towards pre-marital sex and cohabitation before marriage. They think both parties to a loving relationship could have sex relations even if they didn’t go on to marry. The only major difference lies in their responses to marriage life. “Commitment” and “obligation” are major Chinese associations while “quarrel” and “divorce” are frequent American associations.

Generally speaking, a majority of both groups hold a rather romantic view about love. To them, love is the most sacred and holy human feeling. They believe marriage and soul mates are predestined and laugh at the current trend of placing or answering an advertisement for love. They think advertising for love represents the very bottom of the romantic ideal, the marketing of the most precious and mysterious part of human emotions. However, there are some students in each group who don’t take their dating relationships very seriously. They compare their campus dating to fast-food — easy come, easy go — and don’t see anything wrong with changing girlfriends or boyfriends frequently. They hold that doing so helps them get acquainted with more people and learn how to survive break-ups. Although they are not very serious about their dating relationships, they still expect to marry someone they truly love. One Chinese student said: “I’ve had quite a few

girlfriends but they've always been short term. I would love to marry my true love and be a father one day, but it will happen when it happens." Similarly, an American student commented:

I've been quite promiscuous in my past and I think most people of my generation have been. It's an irritating stereotype held among the older generation that just because we're promiscuous, we cannot be emotionally involved in our marriage. I'm in a serious relationship at the moment, someone I treasure and someone I want to marry.

When asked about their criterion of choosing a spouse, Chinese students mentioned that the major factors are complementary personalities and matching educational and social backgrounds. More than 70 per cent of the Chinese respondents put kindness and integrity at the top of desirable characteristics for a spouse. Besides that, for female students, a man's ability and job prospects are also attractions of an eligible candidate, while for male students, filial piety to parents and appearance are among other important considerations in choosing their future wives.

Compared to Chinese girls, American girls are less practical and set little store by factors such as job prospects and financial status of their future husbands. One American girl made the following comments:

Of course, in a few years I want to find someone whom I can love: Whether he has money or not is not important. Some of my older friends say that this is the view of a young girl, and that I'll soon find out how important the economic side is. But my parents have taught me to be independent.

For Chinese young men, while beauty is a desirable quality of their future wife, priorities are often given to other factors. However, for American young men, women's beauty and sexuality are more important. As a result, compared with Chinese girls, American girls have more pressure of trying to make a "good impression" when approaching a boy. They always prepare to use their womanly charms and are more likely to be pleased by any sign that their beauty is appreciated. Chinese college girls seem less bothered with the thinking "What's he going to think about me?" They are more confident in their relationship with males. "I feel I can go up to any boy, with the attitude of I am who I am, accept me for being that person." Compared with American youth who care more about their individual feelings and passions in the marriage, Chinese youth attach greater importance to obligation and commitment just as one Chinese student commented: "If a marriage is to last, it requires great efforts from both sides. Affection, a sense of responsibility, respect, understanding, tolerance and care, to name just a few, are all necessary."

However, at the same time they hold a more open attitude to the issue of divorce than their former generations. They challenge the traditional belief that one should remain faithful to one's spouse until the end. "We should consider divorce if something goes wrong" The quality of marriage is something that really counts." "We shouldn't sacrifice our happiness for an everlasting marriage."

Finally, with regards to cyber love, a trend that has picked up recently, both Chinese

and American groups are not very positive of its possibility leading to marriage. They all believe the weakness of cyber-romance lies in the dishonesty characteristic of web communication. One Chinese student commented:

People don't feel ashamed when they tell lies on the internet, because they think everyone else lies too. Covering the Internet with your sexual and psychological background may get you more dates, but it isn't going to change the chance of winning true love.

American students shared the same opinion and one American student added:

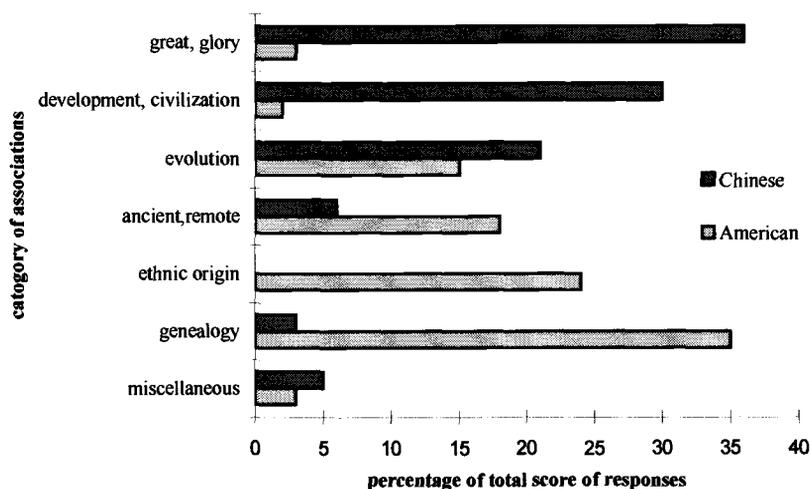
When people fall in love with someone who has been exaggerated in cyberspace and inevitably are disappointed when they meet their cyber-lovers in real life. Some even break off with their keyboard pal immediately or gradually after meeting.

#### **4.14 Ancestors**

Chinese students show two main images of ancestors in their AGA responses. One is associated with greatness, roots, blood ties, inventions, and civilizations; another makes reference to cavemen, apes, fossils, and Stone Age, which reflect the influences of Darwinism and modern evolutionary theory. Chinese students are proud of their long history, and view ancestors as the source of their history, culture and civilization. "Respect", and "veneration" are frequent associations of their ancestors' inventions and achievements. Quite a few Chinese students mentioned the Four Great Inventions in Chinese history, the making of the compass, gunpowder, paper and the art of printing., and obligations towards their ancestors.

To American students, the image of the ancestor is centered around family tree and its roots. Ancestors refer to one's forefather of diverse national and ethnic origins. The Mayflower, Europeans, pilgrims, and pioneers are the images that come frequently to their mind.

Chart 2 Chinese and American responses to the stimulus word "Ancestor"



In my interview, Chinese students expressed a similar strong historical awareness of and pride toward their Chinese predecessors, who were described as hardworking, intelligent, and productive people, and recognized for their role in developing the world's greatest civilization. They proudly pointed to the greatness of their ancestors to whom they attribute their national images. They have strong affective identification and emphasis on the historical past. They regarded Huangdi, Yellow Emperor, and Yandi, or the Fiery

Emperor as their earliest Ancestors. One student mentioned : “Huangdi invented the cart, the boat, the clothes, the script and the medicine, and Yandi taught people how to rake and till. I am so proud to be Yan Huang’s descendent.

On a parallel line, Chinese students firmly believed Darwinist Evolution theory, and traced the origin of human beings to apes. Quite a few students mentioned Peking Man (~500,000 B.C.) unearthed in Zhou Kou Dian close to Beijing, China. Ancestors are associated with primitive society and hunting and gathering.

Unlike their Chinese counterparts who take great pride in their ancestors, American students only relegate ancestors to the distant past, historic past, of little contemporary, practical relevance. Generally they show little interests in exploring their roots, just as a student commented “I have little knowledge about my ancestors, and it doesn’t matter to me.”

#### **4.15 Self Image**

In the AGA responses, almost all the Chinese students first identify themselves as college students whose primary task they believe is studying and gaining knowledge. Chinese students are proud of being college students because they have passed numerous examinations before being admitted to colleges. The identification of oneself with struggle and achievement related to schoolwork is prominent. Another dominant Chinese image of “me” is “Being Chinese”, which conveys their strong national identification. In response to the stimulus word “me”, Chinese students also tend to focus on their relations to others.

They tend to think of “me” in relation to parents (good daughter or son), and friends (faithful friend). They also like to weigh themselves on a scale of optimism and happiness. But less than ten percent view themselves inferior, contradictory and lonely.

Unlike their Chinese counterparts, Americans do not strongly identify themselves in terms of their student or national status. In contrast to the Chinese, Americans identify little with their schoolwork and progress in their responses. Their associations indicate they are more inclined toward introspection and focus on “self” rather than relation to others. They would like to judge how they feel about themselves in terms of positive and negative traits. Americans basically have a positive image of self and mention very few negative characteristics in their responses to “me”. Self-reliance and self-confidence are the two most important aspects of the Americans’ self image in the study.

In summary, mutual dependence vs. self-reliance constitutes the basic characteristic difference of Chinese and American family relationships and contributes to the Chinese and American perceptual differences in the family domain.

#### **4.2 Americans and Chinese --- Images of Self and Other**

In international contacts, people of different national backgrounds are frequently influenced by the collective images people and nations have of each other. These images generate strong subconscious dispositions that influence how words, actions and intentions are interpreted and understood. Comparison of the images held by Chinese and Americans reveals their perceptions and attitudes toward each other. In analyzing the dominant

perceptual and attitude trends, we can see how cultural influences become the source of different sensitivities and expectations. Finally, I'd like to reiterate that in this comparison American views are from the American students who are studying in China, and Chinese views are held by Chinese students who have never been to the U.S. before.

#### **4.21 United States**

In the AGA task, Americans think of United States in terms of freedom, space and privilege. Law, justice and materialism are among other attributes most frequently thought of. Chinese student think of U.S. first and foremost as a developed country with advanced science and technology. They are impressed with the rich land full of freedom and opportunity. Besides, they are attracted by American popular culture: "Hollywood", "Spider Man" "basketball", "Michael Jordan", "heavy metal", "Blues", "Disneyland", and "Coke" are frequently associated words.

In the interview, American students reached a consensus on the diversity of American culture. They believe one of the strengths of the United States is that it is truly an open society. This makes it easier for it to absorb cultural values and practices from other countries. They are also aware of the superpower status of the country. Although American express strong national identification with the U.S. at home, and are proud of their great country, more than half of American students I interviewed are critical about the current U.S. foreign policy. One student said: "There is a long history and a long sense of reasoning about why they act the way they do. I don't think U.S. should mandate our culture onto different

countries.” Another agreed:

I don't think it's the place of the U.S. to go and threaten violence or anything else against another country to enforce those rights we hold sacred here. Chinese have deep rooted culture values related to loyalty to superiors and the importance of community. They have different views with us on human rights issues

Under western influence Chinese youth like hip hop and jazz, watch Hollywood movies, and prefer their talk mingled with some English words. The fashionable youth also like to wear American brand name outdoor wear and eat in McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken. Starbucks is a good place for them to enjoy coffee and solitude. They enjoy western operas and ballet, which they think graceful.

While many Chinese admire American science and technology as well as their life style, and are friendly to Americans in person, they do not hesitate to criticize the United States from a distance. They criticize the U.S. rampant with crimes and disorders. In the interviews they frequently mentioned “Murder”, “violence”, and “drug abuse” in American society. .

Chinese students also expressed a strong resentment of American economic and political dominance. They opposed the U.S. government's interference in China's internal affairs such as human rights accusations. The following are four comments from my interviews:

What is good for the United States is not always good for other countries. We like the freedom of speech in the United States, for example, the media can criticize the government and celebrities. But I suspect the media are also supported by some financial groups. It is only the haggling of the powerful groups.

If people have too much freedom, like what I have heard about the shooting in the United States, if people have too much freedom and they can carry gun freely... China has people with all kinds of qualities. If they all have guns, the social problems might be more severe than that of the United States. What happened to Russia and Germany, after their systems have been changed? Russian people are living in the worse condition than they did it before.

Improvement related to human rights is happening in China. China's human rights have been improving. Nowadays, children have more rights for receiving education. "Hope Project" provides citizen a basic right for education. The government has put great efforts into it.

Many people do not care about the issue of human rights, because it is not highly related to their own lives. Even if the U.S. can solve the human rights issue, can you improve my life? It is distant, and people do not want the society to be in chaos. The fundamental right at present in China is the right to life and development.

In general, the Americans and Chinese show considerable agreement as well as some substantive differences in their image of United States. Compared to Americans who express a great deal of personal identification and positive feelings, the Chinese are predominantly positive in their attitudes as well but in somewhat different way. Chinese focus their attention on the advanced American technology, the high level of American progress and industrial development, and on American affluence and economic success, which they consider exemplary. However, Chinese youth hold a critical attitude about U.S.

foreign policies.

#### **4.22 American**

The dominant American self-images are “free”, “proud”, “privileged”, “rich”, and “strong”. On the negative side they perceive themselves as “ignorant”, “naïve”, “wasteful” and “tunnel-visioned.”

The Chinese view of Americans shows an acute awareness of racial differences, and Americans are described as tall, with blonde hair, blue eyes and big noses. In regards to personality and character, Chinese perceive Americans as open, simple, straightforward, candid, romantic, enthusiastic, energetic, independent and bold. Arrogance, haughtiness and self-centeredness are among the few negative associations from Chinese. Americans are also seen as represented by cowboys, TV serials, Hollywood movies and rock and roll music.

#### **4.23 China**

The American students’ image of China reveals a set of perspectives reflecting their experiences and priorities. First of all, China, the country, its size, its overcrowding and over-population and its traffic problems received a great deal of attention by the Americans in this study. The followings are the comments called from my interview.

If I look up and down the street at any time of the day, I see an endless stream of motion.” “Pedestrians, bicycles and cars mingle together and look like a chaotic tangle. Cars drive willy-nilly wherever they please, even on sidewalks, blowing their horns expecting everyone to get out of their way.

On campus, pedestrians walk abreast in large groups and it sometimes takes the skill of a circus performer to maneuver out of your way. Every now and then, you will have someone walk in front of you without even looking. Or somebody will brake quickly and, if you are not watching, you will go crashing right into them.

I had come face to face with the fact that I had known all along: "Beijing is crowded." I believe this is the biggest understatement that anyone can say about the city. Now, coming from "small town America", I was rather unaccustomed to major traffic congestion.

Also, the other major component of the American image identified China as a rapidly modernizing country blending the old and new, traditional and modern ways of life. One American informant said: "I was intrigued by the way the city's old sections, the Hutongs, merged with the modern business areas. The well-preserved cultural sites and ancient Chinese architecture boast of the past, even as progress forges on." Another agreed:

While Beijing is bursting with new construction, giant cranes atop high-rise buildings dominate the skyline, you still can see firsthand the places where emperors and empresses, and ancient officials carried out their ancient rituals. The feeling of sharing this modern city with ghosts of the past was overwhelming.

Another dominant component of the American's image of China has to do with manufacturing, -- various references which emphasize cheap products, cheap labor and the multiplicity of goods. "Here you can find almost everything at one sixth of the price at home." "I find some cosmetics are good as Estee Lauder and it costs only a fraction of the

French product.”

Although Americans are impressed by the low price of Chinese products, they also pointed out the poor quality of some products and suggested more professionalism and better quality control. Moreover, American expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of arrangements and organization in Chinese situation centered way of life. They prefer to have a clearly defined objective and time slot in accomplishing a task. The way in which Chinese people personalize their lives through connections is also unfamiliar to most Americans. They are surprised to find even in typically professional organizations such as hospitals and universities, people expect to receive better service and get the job done through connections.

The only other significant component in the Americans' image of China is the Chinese contribution of great popularity--- Chinese food. The following comments are called from my interviews.

Here you can find many varieties of Chinese food from different areas and ethnic groups. Choices of vegetables, meats, spices and methods of preparation all serve to make eating an interesting adventure.

Compare the average American restaurant menu with its Chinese counterpart: Even the menu at the classiest American restaurant will feature at most a couple dozen dishes, whereas even the smallest Mom and pop restaurant in an obscure Beijing Hutong routinely offers thirty or forty dishes of various kinds.

You could find pig ears as cold appetizer, sheep intestines, dog, even donkey, as well as a host of other dishes unheard of in America. I first heard what “tripe” meant when it was first served in front of me.

American students are also impressed by the Chinese ritual of eating:

You cannot imagine how fabulous and extravagant a real Chinese banquet could be. Eating is considered a collective activity. Everyone at the table shares the same dishes, drinking multiple toasts in unison, and everyone leaves the table at the same time. Even the after-meal cigarettes are passed out almost as a reflex when any one person wants to indulge in smoke.

Finally a new image is emerging in the context of China in contrast to their previous ones. More than 1/3 American students admitted that before they came here, they thought average Chinese are subject to human rights violations, allowed only to watch propaganda based television shows and subjected to army– marching music. They also heard China is a tightly controlled society without too much freedom. After they personally experienced life in China, they formed a contrasting image:

After I am here, I find out average Chinese seem to live their life as they wish. Even Baywatch, bordering on pornographic and Street Legal, coping with weighty legal and human rights issues, have been dubbed into Chinese and shown on national television.

Most of the remaining aspects of China in which Chinese people take great pride such as the sense of their country's greatness and glory, its power and history, make only a marginal impression on Americans.

In the Chinese image of China, the single most dominant feature used in their own characterization involves glory, national identification, pride, ardent love, and very strong

identification with the Chinese nation. Chinese students express immense national pride and patriotism.

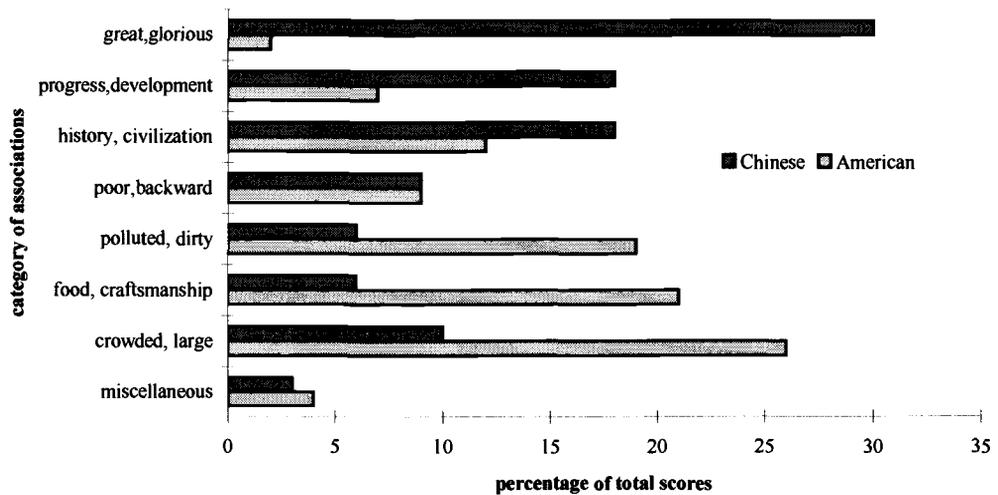
Another dominant feature of Chinese image of China is their perception of it as powerful and becoming prosperous. With regard to the present economic situation of the country, Chinese responses are often positive and optimistic. Meanwhile they are optimistic and express a great hope for the future. Two recent events: China's entry into the WTO and Beijing's success bid of 2008 Olympic Games were frequently mentioned by Chinese students as great opportunities for development.

Most Chinese students have consistently expressed their confidence that China can absorb western ideas and cultures without losing her cultural traditions and sense of identity. Although the college educated youth experience the benefit of western ideology and culture, they seem to have a strong sense of historical continuity, which produces a strong sense of belonging.

In terms of negative traits, other than a minor acknowledgement of poverty and pollution there is no indication of negative characteristics.

The greatest divergence of the two views is probably the contrast between Chinese perception of greatness and glory and prosperity and the American view of China as poor and lacking privacy and freedom.

Chart 3 Chinese and American responses to the stimulus word “China”



#### 4.24 Chinese

Americans think highly of the intelligence of Chinese and recognize their skills in math, their success with sciences, and their generally industrious approach to life.

Also, Chinese are perceived as collectivist. According to American students, Chinese like to take time to share their enjoyment with their family and others. “Strolling down the street on the evening, public places are full of activity, as families walk and play, old men play board games and groups of people enjoy dance practice together.” “On the streets, people do stretching exercises or just stroll and even more people can be found just sitting and chatting with each other.” “You can also see groups of old people performing traditional dances or Tai Chi together or singing their favorite arias from Beijing Opera.”

Friendliness and hospitality is another main feature of American image of Chinese

people. An American student recalled "Wherever we are, we found people more than willing to help us. One young man, who was obviously hurrying somewhere himself, went far out of his way to take us to the bus stop we wanted for the fear that we would be unable to find it on our own."

On the negative side, they were confused and frustrated about the Chinese social obligations.

"One of the most troublesome difficulties I have in my personal relationships here is the matter of social obligations." "It is overwhelming how many people want to be your friend and offer to help you in some way and I somehow don't quite know how to handle it." "I don't know when and how to return the favor I received."

Chinese are accustomed to dealing with people on the basis of social debts (Ren Qing) built up through a variety of personal relationships in the past. In accepting help, of whatever kind, from various people, the Chinese build up a reservoir of debt they owe to these people. By the same token, they also build up a bank of "receivables" from people they help along the way. Paying and collecting these social debts serves as the primary means of interpersonal relationships in China and is controlled by reciprocity. Failure to properly discharge social debts that are owed is regarded as one of the most dishonorable things a Chinese person can do. People who ignore it are regarded as uncivilized. However, most Americans do not realize that relationships in China ordinarily involve a system of social debts and credits. Even when they know the concept in general, they are frequently

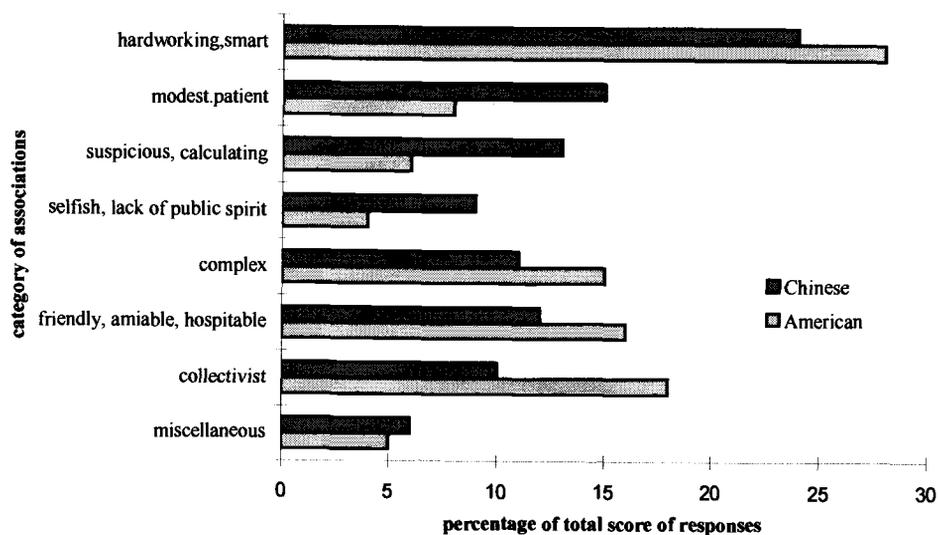
unaware of how it works in practice. They do not know when they are incurring a social debt in China and they often do not know what they need to do to earn social credit.

Americans are also intrigued by Chinese friendships. A friend in China is someone who, sensing that you are in need in some way, offers to assist you without waiting to be asked. In the U.S., you can certainly ask a friend to do something with you, but you could not expect a friend to recognize and respond to your wishes without stating them. There are also limits to what you can expect from a friend. Americans feel they impose too much if they ask a friend to respond to their non-urgent need and expect friends to be independent. But Chinese people can usually expect more from their friends. Chinese codes of etiquette require more formal and polite interactions with strangers and guests than is typical in the U.S., but in China, relationships with friends are much more informal than similar American relationships. Chinese people often communicate more indirectly compared to Americans. However, in close personal relationships such as the friendship, the opposite is often the case. "Talk between Chinese friends sounds too demanding and direct to me. We apologize to our friends for minor inconveniences. Even in close friendships we use polite forms such as "Could you..." and "Would you mind..." But Chinese do not use these polite forms in their close relationships."

Nearly a third of Chinese reaction relates to their self perception as being industrious and clever. Next in importance is their collective self-perception of being friendly, hospitable and amiable. This is followed by the self-image of being tolerant and

patient. The negative traits Chinese students mentioned about themselves are calculating and suspicious. They were also strongly critical of their being selfish and lacking in public spirit.

Chart 4 Chinese and American responses to the stimulus word "Chinese"



### 4.3 Religion and Belief Systems

The discussion of this chapter is mainly focused on the following questions. What aspects of religion impress the Chinese youth? How has the western influence modified Chinese beliefs? What impact do individualism and materialism have on the beliefs and practices of the two societies? Has the rapid rise in wealth in China affected the youth's faith and morals?

#### 4.31 Religion

Chinese response to religion is mainly a list of the names of three major world religions: Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Their knowledge of religion is minimal and superficial. Buddhism is the most frequently mentioned religion. But their association with Buddhism is only limited to Buddhist monks, head-shaving and special artifacts related to temple worship such as wooden drums, beads and bell. They show little familiarity with Christianity and other western religions, which seem so distant and foreign to them.

Confucianism does not emerge at all in connection with religion which essentially corresponds to the observation of some western scholars who claim Confucianism should not be considered a religion but a compilation of moral principles and moral values.

In the interview, most Chinese students show a lack of interest in religion, which they think calls for blindly believing in something that is not scientifically proven and perhaps deceiving. They are also concerned with the possible negative influences of religion through deceit of the ignorant. Some even equate religion to cult worship. In spite of the general negative attitudes towards religions, Chinese students are not against those religious persons who have exhibited benevolent behaviors and attitudes such as kindness and love.

Americans think of religion primarily in terms of faith in Christianity and show a detailed familiarity with Christianity. Some American students found in Christianity a component of love and fellowship and they hold a positive image of Christians, whom they consider to be good persons of dignity and whom can be counted on for help. According to

them, religion plays a role of instilling proper ethical values.

Individual Christian denominations are another focus of the American students. In their AGA responses to “religion”, they often mentioned a particular denomination such as Protestant, Methodist and Baptist.

In terms of eastern religions, American students are not familiar with either doctrine or practices of Buddhism. Peaceful Buddhist monks present the most dominant image among them. However, because of the aftermath of recent events, there is a growing interest in Islam among American students. They know Islam is an all-embracing of life and also have some basic ideas of the Islamic practices such as fasting in the holy month of Ramadan, almsgiving and pilgrimage.

Also, American students consider religion more a matter of personal passion and are more centered on individual introspection and conversion. But many hold that religious beliefs are moving towards an interest motive orientation, and people want God as much as they want individual happiness, success, wealth, health, prestige and power.

#### **4.32 Faith and Ideals**

In Chinese language “Faith” and “ideal” have fairly similar connotations except for “faith” sometimes conveys a message of lacking practicality or the possibility of realization. It is interesting to notice that few AGA responses to “faith” among Chinese students involved Communism and Marxism. An important component of perception of “ideals” among Chinese students had to do with goals and principles, where they emphasized

knowledge, material well-being and personal freedom. A higher value is now placed on the individual than would previously have been the case.

Chinese students interviewed are sympathetic to individualism and self-reliance, and concerned with developing their own interests and potentials. The following quotations are cited from my interviews: "I don't care what others think about me, and I just follow my heart and do what I think is right for me." "I'd like to live a life as I wish..." My dream is to establish a company of my own through my own efforts." When asked about their future career choice, many students think they will look for opportunities to develop their potential and so realize their true worth. In other words, they want a job not just to make a living but also as a stepping-stone to future development. Job security, which was given a high priority in the past, is witnessing a declining importance. In choosing where to work, the students are now much less attracted to the various government institutions and more favor occupations with higher salaries and more autonomy. Most of them admitted they would like to work for a joint-venture company.

The lure of materialism is also reflected in their responses to the question "Who do you admire?" More than half of the students choose "Bill Gates", "Dell" "Li Jiacheng" as their icons of the material world. However, they also hold "Pavel Korchagin", "Zhou Enlai" as their spiritual idols, which indicate they still place a value on moral qualities in selecting their idols.

Compared to Chinese students, "trust", "love" and "belief" are major responses

American students gave to the word "faith". Faith is also associated with a source of motivation, spiritual nourishment and power. American students believe faith can bring a sense of confidence, peace, comfort and safety, and engenders hope and optimistic confidence in the future. For some American students, faith is also related to religion, god and prayer.

Just like their Chinese counterparts, American students relate their ideal to material well-being as well. But among American students, there is a stronger motivation indicating the pursuit of ideals to be achieved by courage and persistence. One student said: "When I think about the future I think, God, I'm going to have to really bust a gut. It's going to be difficult. But you have to get used to it and work harder and harder." The other agreed, "The future might be messy and complex, disappointing and surprising, but I don't fear it. I am not the kind of person who doesn't take risks, I don't always hang back."

In contrast to Chinese students' passive attitude towards political and social reform, Americans are more involved in political and social activities. The following comment is a good example of this social activism: "I was the head of my university's gay awareness group, so I've done some activism things. I haven't really changed the world. But I think I've changed the world of my university — people think a lot more about these issues."

#### **4.33 Morals, Conscience and Guilt**

Chinese responses indicate that morality is often related to living up to a standard or criterion of behavior and playing defined social roles in a prescribed manner. There is also a

strong awareness among Chinese AGA responses of falling morality in present-day Chinese society. The most frequent criticisms are “a spiritual vacuum” and the “demise of morality”.

In the interview, Chinese students expressed the same concern about moral deficit and the loss of a spiritual home in contemporary Chinese society due to the excessive emphasis on economic interests. One student expressed his dissatisfaction: “Everyone for himself and the devil take the hindmost” -- a conduct condemned by communist ideology, but now is becoming an unspoken standard behavior.”

The students’ strong concern with moral corruption to a certain extent reflects an awareness of the prevalence of rampant official corruption and the “back-door” dealings as a means of circumventing laws. Before the 1980s, China was a power-based society. The factors that determined the relationship between one person and another were relative status and authoritative power of the individual in his family and society. Money might make small things happen, but it might not be able to do so for big things. Since 1980 when omnipotent political control was relaxed and the economic reform initiated, people started to strive for material benefits by fair means or foul. Bribery has become a common social practice to achieve personal gains, just as one student admitted: “If you want to get a good job, more often than not, you or your family have to invest in the “Guanxi” network and to enter from the “back-door”. I don’t want to do these things but I don’t want to limit myself either.”

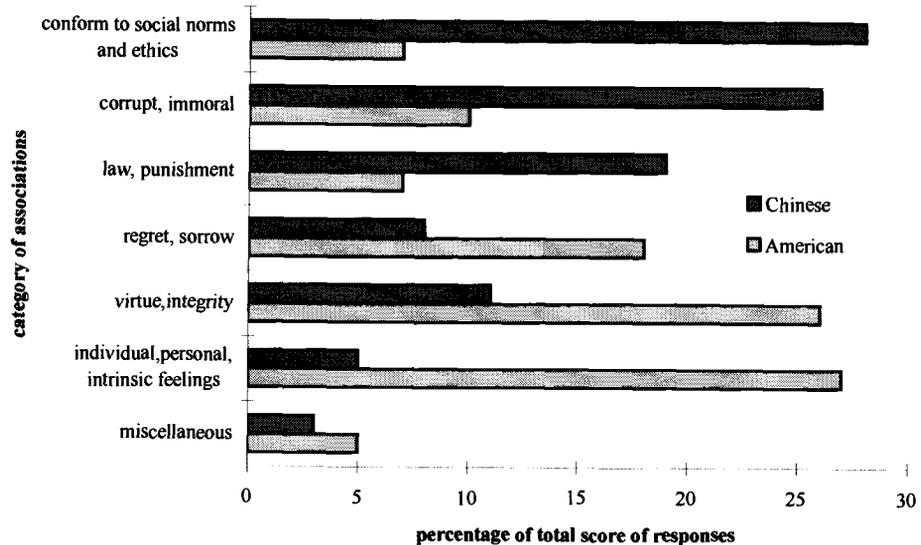
For Americans, morality is a self-created measure of goodness and love, and many

mention "honesty" and "decency" are indicators of morality in their AGA responses. Americans recognize the existence of external moral standards and the role played by public opinion and social pressures in deciding individual morality. Every person's own conscience is considered the ultimate judge of the correctness of his or her moral behavior. One student maintained: "conscience is informal laws and rules for me, an inner guidance in making moral decisions. When I make a bad decision, I will suffer from a bad conscience and a feeling of guilt."

With regards to conscience, Chinese responses place much more emphasis on behaviors or norms of conduct, their conformity and nonconformity with laws and regulations and standards. Individuals often go to great length to avoid being publicly humiliated. The motivation of conscience, the internal voice, is not examined or questioned. In general, Americans think conscience is related to self whereas Chinese think it in relation to society.

Finally, guilt in Chinese context refers predominantly to judgment made within the legal system, a crime committed against the society. There is little reference to personal thought or inner feelings, or mood. For Americans, guilt is accompanied by fear and anxiety and feelings of hurt, pain, sadness and sorrow. Guilt also results in bad feelings of embarrassment.

Chart 5 Chinese and American responses to the stimulus words “Morals”, “Conscience” and “Guilt”



#### 4.4 Education

Education serves a multiplicity of functions. It provides a set of guidelines and principles, and is a primary means by which a culture's history and traditions are passed from generation to generation. The comparison of the American and Chinese students on their perspectives offers insights into the interface of educational achievement and psycho-cultural dispositions in different environments that represent particular educational settings and philosophies. The similarity and difference of their perceptions on education can help us gain valuable insight into cultural variations.

#### 4.41 College and University

Among Chinese AGA responses, college is first regarded as a place to pursue knowledge, and a place where they should learn to be independent both in their studies and their daily lives. Chinese students also view college as a place, which prepares to earn money, acquire luxuries, and eventually establish an outstanding career. Books themselves are given great attention and library the least, which can probably be explained by their scarcity, inefficiency and poor collections of libraries in Chinese universities. Classmates and professors also assume great significance. In addition, dorm is another major Chinese association with college. In Chinese college, most students are far away from their parents and live in dorms with other 5 or 6 peer students, so they also have to learn how to communicate and get along with others and adjust to the new environment by themselves.

In the interview, Chinese students also express great interest in the college environment. They are impressed by the various organizations and activities in colleges where they can develop their all-round ability and get to know more people. Many students become members of university associations also because it is something extra to put on their resume, which can help later when they look for a job or apply to graduate school. One of my informants, a sophomore, found that he had learned much from being a member of the Computer Network Association and that the experience helped him when he applied for a part-time job months ago. He said the experience helped him get the post of campus marketing representative for Internet-go.com, a network knowledge training company in

Beijing. He also said the experience continued to be of benefit to him in his daily working life. "My experience of being a member of that association also taught me how to communicate effectively with others," he added.

Moreover, Chinese students frequently mentioned that in college they have to take more initiative and obtain knowledge by themselves instead of relying on teachers as they did in high school. One student commented:

It's your own responsibility to attend classes and hand in your assignment in time. Unlike high school teachers, university professors rarely take attendance and they won't push you to study. But that doesn't mean you can relax. If you don't discipline yourself to study, you might end up failing in the subject.

To Americans, college is a place of education, which should teach them to understand science and arts, and improve their critical thinking. They believe a college degree will help with career and job prospects. They believe going to university is a worthwhile experience. Books and libraries are important parts of college. Fraternities and sororities are frequent associations of campus life, as are sports, especially football. Comparing to the Chinese students, American students are more concerned about work (part-time jobs) and money. Unlike their Chinese counterparts who rely on their parents for tuition and living expenses, a considerable amount of American students have to support themselves through college lives. Finally, partying, fooling around and drinking all receive significant emphasis from American students. The following quotations are culled from my

interviews: "I attend too many parties and definitely get very worried about my work. I tend to cram at the last minute, but I'm going to have to change my attitude a bit." "I find that I can't understand what the professor says in class because I have skipped so many classes to organize my club activities."

#### **4.42 Student**

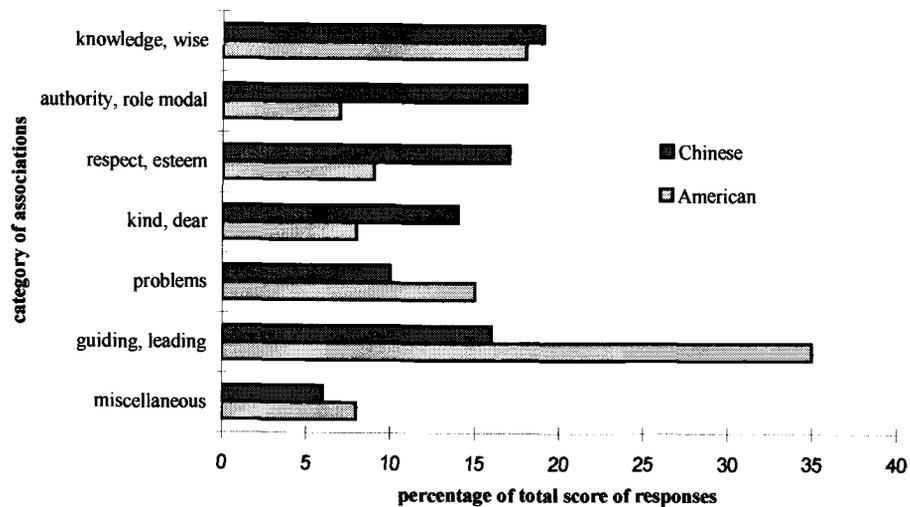
Based on AGA responses, both groups of students generally consider themselves happy and cheerful. Chinese associations are more focused on their status of being university students, the elites of their age cohort. However, American students do not sharply distinguish themselves from other people, other than considering themselves smart and intelligent. Chinese students also visualize themselves studying hard, and especially in preparation for examinations. Compared to American students, they are concerned more about their school records. The link between student and teacher is far more important for Chinese than for Americans, while books and discussions are more important to Americans.

#### **4.43 Teacher**

Chinese students viewed the teacher as an authority and a source of knowledge in their AGA task. The level of respect for teachers is nearly twice as high among Chinese students as among American students. They are more enthusiastic to cherish their teachers as their role models. They describe them as great and kindly persons and compare them to candles and gardeners. Chinese students are more impressed with their teachers' knowledge, wisdom, and diligence, while American students give teachers more credit for experience

and their role in guiding to learn and giving help. The main Chinese complaints against teachers were “boring” and “unfair”, while the negative words American students associate with teachers were “mean” and “despicable”.

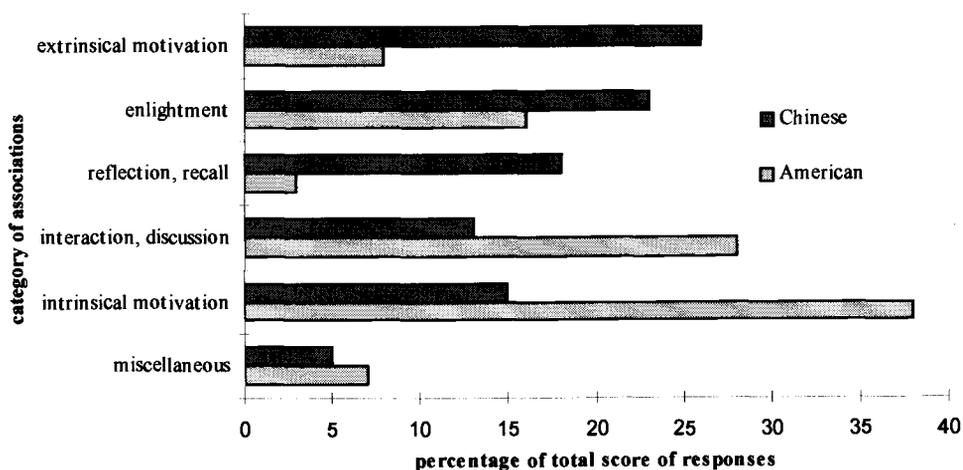
Chart 6 Chinese and American responses to the stimulus word “Teacher”



#### 4.44 Learning

Chinese AGA responses reflected Chinese belief of education leading to enlightenment and a better society. Chinese meanings of learning and education are not only limited to personal development and progress, but also extends to family prosperity and national advancement. However, American responses to the aim of education indicate a strong preoccupation with maximizing personal power, achieving one's potential and self-expression. American students are more focused on individually relevant utility of education and are more intrinsically motivated to learn. For example, many American students desire to succeed academically so that they can secure a good position and earn a good deal of money. Compared to American students, Chinese students are more extrinsically motivated by their families and groups. Individual success is desirable and humbly accepted, but those who succeed give credit first to their class, parents and country, only finally acknowledging their own contributions to personal success. In terms of learning process, Chinese students said their knowledge and skills are often acquired by reflection and recall, however American students think skills and knowledge are more effectively acquired by interaction in a problematic situation. Also, Chinese students attribute their performance more to their efforts, giving "efforts" as a response more often than "ability". American students on the other hand, assign greater importance to ability than to effort.

Chart 7 Chinese and American responses to the stimulus word "Learning"



#### 4.45 Exams

The dominant images of exam among Chinese group are "stressful", "nervous", Chinese students also often relate exams to degrees, diplomas and job prospects.

In addition, the College Entrance Exam is another frequent response among Chinese students. The current Chinese college entrance examination is composed of three compulsory tests, including Chinese, English and mathematics, and one elective. The elective tests are tied to the comprehensive test. Arts students take a comprehensive in politics, history and geology while science students do physics, biology and chemistry. The three days exam every summer will decide who can realize his or her university dream, and who loses the chance for a higher education. Because college education is not popular in China yet, only a minority can enter university. This brings intense competition and

increases pressure to both high school students and their parents. Some students may fail due to over nervousness, some may suffer psychological problems a the big burden. Now many universities are enrolling more students to improve the situation, but the increasing tuition fee has become a new problem that many students and their parents have to wrestle with.

After getting into college, students are faced with a new challenge: national English Band IV and VI English Test, which carry a lot of weight in students' graduation and in their future job hunting. One student said powerlessly:

I thought that I would be able to enjoy absolute freedom at university once without the pressures of the National College Entrance Examination. But In order to pass these required tests, I have found that I need to study even harder than I did at high school. I really wish I could runaway from the never-ending tests.

Almost all Chinese students interviewed showed great concern about the test-oriented educational system and hope reform in this area can be speeded up. They also showed a greater preference for the idea that school should teach them to be more creative in facing challenges than did their American counterparts.

Another overwhelming Chinese response to "exam" is cheating. In past decades, cheating has been on the rise in Chinese colleges and universities. Since test results often decide on one's job prospects, some students take the risk to hire ringers for their tests. College seniors who haven't passed the Band four English exam in their last year of college

usually cannot get a bachelor's degree. So they pay another person whose English is better than theirs to take the exam for them. There are other students who cheat just because they want to beat the system. The following quotation is an example of this: "I hate being dishonest at tests, but it seems to me that the university and teachers distrust us. They watch over us as if we were thieves. A friend of mine got away with cheating several times and he felt he had successfully challenged his school." This student's comments might somewhat help to explain the current increasing cheating phenomenon on university campuses.

In relation to the general topic of "education", dissatisfaction with exams came up spontaneously in the Chinese focus groups and not in the American focus groups. However, just like their Chinese counterpart, American students also use the term "anxious" and "grueling" to describe their feeling to exams. "All nighters" and "cramming for test" appeared frequently in their AGA responses.

#### **4.5 Health and Medicine**

Cultures differ in the way they explain, treat, and prevent illness. People who have grown up in different cultures have acquired very different sets of knowledge, beliefs, values and attitudes concerning health. As children grow up, culture teaches them what makes people sick or causes injury, how they should behave when they are ill or injured, and what they need to do or say to feel better. So it is interesting to examine how American and Chinese students differ in their perceptions with regards to the explanation and treatment of illness. Sensing this cultural difference can also promote communication in

cross-cultural health care encounters, which is especially important to American study abroad groups in China since, in one way or another, they may be part of a cross-cultural health care interaction.

#### **4.51 Illness and Medicine**

AGA findings indicate that both groups of students associate disease with an uncomfortable body, and lack of strength and flexibility to play and exercise. But for American students, disease is mainly viewed as the physical change of a biological system, for example, intrusion of germs, the break down of the body due to cold or fatigue, or the lack of proper food. Both health and disease are conceptualized as separate states of biological organisms. However, for Chinese students, illness or disease is also viewed as a result of imbalance between Yin and Yang, which combine to produce every occurrence in life.

In Chinese culture, all foods, medicines, conditions, and emotions are ascribed hot and cold qualities. Chinese traditional treatment involves prescribing hot remedies for cold illnesses and cold remedies for hot illnesses. According to traditional Chinese beliefs, once people's mental and physical well-being are restored to equilibrium, then good health, work efficiency, and prosperity will come their way naturally (Spector 1985).

Acupuncture (metal needles inserted into skin at precise points for regulation of vital energy, blood, nutrients, and defensive energy) and moxibustion (the application of burning or heating materials on body points for warming up the blood and energy to

facilitate the flow, supporting the yang principle and eliminating cold) are traditional Chinese medical treatment to restore the balance of Yin and Yang. Other traditional rehabilitation therapies include massage, breathing exercises (with its emphasis on achieving balance and harmony and peace and tranquility, this time-honored art helps relax people's minds and overcome stresses and strains), cupping (heating the inside of a cup to obtain negative pressure and placing it upside down onto points of skin to increase the volume of blood flow and eliminate stagnation and dampness), and spooning (rubbing a spoon against patients' body to activate blood circulation which often leave marks that may be interpreted as a form of abuse by Americans).

Although few Chinese young students admitted in the interview that they have received these traditional medical treatments, the names of these traditional therapies frequently appear among their associations with illness. However, most American students have reservations about those Chinese traditional medical practices, which are passed down from older generations instead of scientifically proved facts. For example, they have doubts about acupuncture: "Chinese acupuncture is based on a mystical kind of knowledge, and acupuncture pressure points cannot be explained through dissection." American students believe that effective treatment of a disease is to restore the immune system through killing germs and viruses.

When asked about difference between traditional Chinese herbal medicines and western medicines, most Chinese students think there is not too much of a difference except

that Chinese medicine is comparatively mild and more focused on the whole well-being of the body rather than only on the disease. As one of my Chinese informants mentioned:

If I was sick, the doctor would prescribe herbs not only for my affected part of body but to strengthen other parts which may be weakened by the disease. In this way I was told my body balance is maintained and a well-balanced body is thought to heal itself more efficiently.

However, a majority of the American students said they were unable to compare the two medicines since they have never tried any type of Chinese medicine.

Moreover, American students are impressed by the Chinese integration of traditional Chinese medical practices and western medical practices. One of my informants who is strongly motivated to study Traditional Chinese Medicine made the following interesting observations:

In China today you may walk up to the pharmacy counter and choose between Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Western Medicine, or you might choose a "traditional Chinese medicine" hospital over a modern western style hospital but no doctor or pharmacist could work here without knowing about the traditional Chinese perceptions of disease, its causes and its remedies plus the western approach to disease its "management". Even dentist in this country are given a course in TCM but on the same note, from grandmas to grandchildren, all grade school students have been given vaccinations to prevent epidemic diseases." "I realize in China you can't buy western medicine and perceive it to originate from a single tradition and say to yourself, "today I am going to buy a Traditional American Medicine Pill.

Finally, another dominant image Chinese students have about medicine is its fakeness. Low quality medicines have been processed and marketed illegally, and some

have even found their way into hospitals. Because of the recent increasing exposure of batches of substandard and fake medicines, Chinese students showed great concern about pharmaceutical quality and the malpractice of drug administrative professions.

#### **4.52 Health Care System**

In terms of the quality of medical treatment, there is widespread or serious dissatisfaction among Chinese students' responses. When Chinese students were asked how often they trust doctors to do the right thing for their care if they, or their immediate family, had illness or injury, some said that they trusted that individual just about always; others trusted that person most of the time. However, as high as one third indicated low ("only some of the time" or "none of the time") trust in doctors. Of those who rated the quality of their care as "only fair" or "poor," one in three did so because their physician "did not listen" to them or did not take enough time with them. Distrust also comes from some doctors unscrupulously asking for "Hongbao (money)" from patients before they perform their duties.

In contrast, American students viewed doctor and patient relationships more favorably. Doctors are often trusted to have patients' interest in mind and are concerned about patients' welfare. Most American respondents rated the "overall honesty and ethical standards" of physicians to be "very high." Physicians were highly regarded and considered as a fundamental strength of the health care system; they are seen as honest, ethical, and trustworthy. The cost of health care was a frequently cited weakness of the

health care system by American students. They also complained insurance companies often have too much influence over patient's medical treatment. However, their concerns about the cost of health care and about the affordability of health insurance far surpassed other concerns, such as a lack of choice in insurance plans, restrictions on the choice of doctors, and the quality of care and access issues.

In the interview, Chinese students also mentioned a lot about the ongoing reform of the health care system. China's public-funded medical care system for urban employees, after 50 years of service, is giving way to a new medical insurance scheme. Millions of urban residents who enjoyed almost free medical treatment now have to cover part of their medical expenses themselves. Chinese students were divided on this issue.

A majority was optimistic about the changes. They thought that the old public-funded health care system was inefficient because of its multiple loopholes. The following are the arguments culled from my interviews:

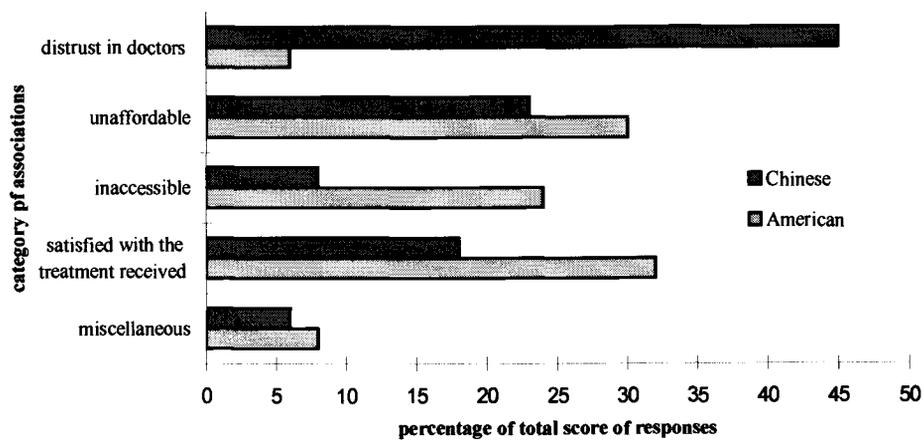
There were many cases of entire families getting medical care by making appointments under the name of the one member of the family who was entitled to enjoy public-funded medical care. Doctors prescribed more medicine than the dosage needed for their friends and relatives. Some patients then went on to sell the extra medicine they got from the hospital onto the black market, which I think, is one of the reasons of the boom in small illegal pharmacies.

As the old health system placed no limit on medical expenditure, many people who were entitled to free and government-paid care sought expensive and unnecessary treatments. This is a huge waste of medical resources.

Because government covered medical expenditure, we had little choice but had to go to assigned hospitals. With the new scheme, hospitals will be compelled to provide quality services and reasonable prices to attract patients in the face of increasingly fierce competition.

However, around one fifth of students were considerably less enthusiastic about changes that have raised the cost of health insurance premiums, they were not confident about the government and enterprises' responsiveness or effectiveness, either. They felt less secure with the new situation and concerned about expensive medical bills.

Chart 8 Chinese and American responses to the stimulus words "Health Care System"



## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Summary of findings and discussion

Data arising from this comparative study have uncovered systematic similarities and differences regarding worldviews and assumptions of American and Chinese youth. Neither group is exactly like the generations of their parents and grandparents, but while they are both exposed to global youth culture, my study has shown that the two cultural groups remain distinct in many ways. I will summarize and discuss these cultural specificities in this finding section.

In the domain of family, one major difference lies in the American view of family from the angle of their own emotional, social and physical needs and the Chinese view of family in a framework of harmony and mutual obligation. This divergence supports the argument of Francis Hsu who attributes some of the most characteristic differences in American and Chinese interpersonal relations to a contrast between American self-reliance and Chinese mutual dependence.

Chinese emphasis on harmony and mutual obligation has reflected the persistence of Confucian tradition. According to Confucianism, people can only define and establish themselves and achieve their values through other people and their relationships with them. Sacrifice of personal interests for the sake of group harmony is always advocated and appreciated. Family harmony is also closely tied in with Confucian hierarchical

relationships, which stress subordination of children to parents. Confucianism sees filial piety as the first step toward moral excellence. The way to enhance personal dignity and identity is not to alienate oneself from the family but to cultivate genuine feelings for parents. With social organizations centered in family and kinship, Chinese have traditionally held on to filial piety as their cardinal virtue (Slote 1998). Tradition dies hard, although affective bonds between parents and children are reinforced as compared to the old days. Parents still view obedience as most desirable behavior of their children, and children still perceive a parent's right to exert control and dominance over them as acceptable. The emphasis on filial devotion towards parents and demands of obedience to adults or superiors continues to play an important role in the pattern of child training in China. However, today's authoritarian control is related to a high level of parental involvement and sacrifice. It takes the form of extreme attention, overprotection, constant monitoring of a child's behavior, high expectations of school performance and future aspirations.

Another great divergence in the family domain is student views on ancestors. Chinese students express a strong historical awareness of and pride in their Chinese predecessors and recognize their role in developing world civilization. To Americans, ancestors refer to one's forefathers of diverse national and ethnic origins. American students only relegate ancestors to the distant historic past, and see them having little contemporary, practical relevance.

There are two possible explanations for the Chinese affective identification with

the historical past. First of all, the strong influence of Confucian culture combined with geographical isolation had fostered a “middle kingdom” mentality among Chinese people in history. Even today, it is still common for Chinese people to derive their sense of identity from the glorious history and many Chinese people are very proud of the fact that they are the source of so many cultural innovations. All other civilizations with which the Chinese had close contact borrowed heavily from China, so they are deemed inferior. In addition, Chinese students have been inculcated over the years with their ancestors’ great contributions to world civilization. They greatly cherish Chinese culture and wish to progress without relinquishing their own cultural values. Although communist ideals have failed to generate enthusiasm from this generation of college youth, patriotism accentuating the richness of Chinese history, culture, language, land, and people are still able to instill in them a strong sense of pride.

In terms of students’ attitudes towards love and marriage, in spite of all the similarities, compared to American students Chinese students attach greater importance to responsibility and obligation, and give more practical considerations to their future marriage, which indicates that the strength of cultural tradition carries on.

In the domain of self and other image, the greatest divergence of the two views on China is the contrast between the Chinese perception of greatness and glory of its motherland and the American view of China as overpopulated and lacking privacy and freedom. The Chinese students’ patriotic sentiment is largely attributed to the

government's continuous drip feed of positive news items and successful stories both in China's past and present. Although Chinese youth hold in awe American science, technology and business and are concerned with China's progress, a feeling of historical continuity mitigates the sense of inferiority in material things.

Generally, news media have been playing an important role in shaping students' perceptions of another culture. The American students admitted their stereotype about China was built up through the mass media. Chinese students' criticism of the U.S. also resonated with the general story told in the Chinese mass media.

In China, news media are more viewed as a catalyst for economic development and nation building. It intends to promote a sense of social consciousness and nationalism among the younger generation. Chinese news media also tend to be mindful of cause and effect and attach greater social accountability than commercial values. Compared with Chinese media, American news media are more perceived as the watchdog of the government and tend to be less mindful of consequence. However, in many cases they still represent the truth of regime and fail to present a realistic picture of China and Chinese culture.

The resentment of U.S. political and economic dominance initially promoted by the government now permeates the Chinese society under the influence of powerful official propaganda. This resentment was nurtured by past humiliation and new self-confidence, which was commensurate with China's rapid economic expansion and military power. The

resentment also holds clues to understanding common Chinese patterns of psychology in the milieu of a die-hard authoritarian, collective, nationalistic political culture.

Family metaphors are often used in China when describing relations with the government. Chinese youth have been indoctrinated since childhood to believe those governing are assigned more duties than are average persons. The government should serve as the parent of people and it has the obligation to take care of its people. A traditional nickname for a local official is "parent official". Fulfilling one's duties or obligations is one important measurement of one's worthiness and qualification to be in a particular situation in Chinese culture.

If the government allows other nations to meddle in Chinese native affairs, the government is said to set the nation up to be humiliated. Any attempt to give up the right to handle the nation's native affairs is thought to be betrayal. To be a good parent the Chinese government must take a stand and avoid humiliating the whole nation. In doing so, the interference from other nations is interpreted as far less acceptable and gives rise to justifiable outrage.

American students' perception of Chinese as restrained and collectivist is to a large extent related to broad cultural factors derived from Chinese traditional beliefs about self-control and group harmony. Today Chinese parents are still preoccupied with training children to control impulses and care about others' feelings. This preoccupation also prevails in schools.

As far as morality is concerned, American students do not feel a moral deficit in society as keenly as Chinese students do. The fact that Chinese students express a strong concern about money-driven society reflects the strong traditional influence on their minds. Traditional Chinese culture views money as morally corrosive. Confucian doctrines held that the superior man was concerned with what was right and the mean man with gain, even talking about money was seen as possibly rather shabby or at least an indication of a weakness in character.

Since the late nineteenth century, various reforms and revolutions, including the Western learning movement, the May Fourth Movement, the Nationalist-Communist struggle, the Cultural Revolution, and recent economic reforms, have leveled severe attacks on Confucianism. However, this ancient philosophy has demonstrated remarkable resilience, for it is ingrained in the Chinese mentality. One of the major elements of Confucianism is self-cultivation. While realizing the important role money plays, most Chinese students show great concern about the moral corruption caused by overemphasis on money. They are driven by materialism but at the same time they aspire to moral high grounds. This holds a mirror to the characteristics of modern youth. Their feet are firmly on the ground when it comes to material values; but their hearts are still drawn to a soaring spirit. Their worship of a secular or material culture, and longing for a comfortable life might also be related to the fact that they see their impact on society politically restricted.

American and Chinese attitudes towards conscience are another example of the

contrast between American individualism and Chinese group orientation. Americans think conscience is related to self whereas Chinese think of it in relation to society. For Americans, conscience is a matter of mind and thought, an inner guidance in making moral decisions. For Chinese, conscience is related to behaviors or norms of conduct, their conformity and nonconformity with laws and regulations and standards.

Generally, individualism and self-reliance contributes to the formation of American students' perceptions and cultural assumptions. The strong individualism conveyed by American self-image and their attitudes towards family, values, morals and conscience supports the arguments of Francis Hsu who attributes some of the most characteristic differences in the American and Chinese interpersonal relations to a contrast between the American individual-centered way of life and the Chinese situation-centered way of life. In another words, the nature of psycho-cultural difference between American and Chinese population samples is closely related to the contrasting ways of life.

The economic, social and political changes in today's China to a certain extent have affected young people's images and cultural frame of references. They are now experimenting with independent thinking and are more concerned with developing their interests and potentials. They readily visualize their material goals and struggle for more personal freedom. However, in spite of the strong pull of western culture and materialism, Chinese students still find it hard to discard the traditional aspirations of "conformity," "group harmony," and "self-cultivation," reflecting the stability of community norms over

time. Both Communist ideology and Confucius-based traditional values, which emphasize achievement and restrictive conformity, have been part of their unconscious awareness since childhood.

Identifying the above repetitious, tacitly embedded cultural norms will lead to a better understanding of the commonly accepted ways of knowing, interpreting and behaving. In this research, patterns are illuminated through using both Associative Group Analysis and ethnographic methodology. AGA, a useful tool to explore and reveal the subconscious, combined with ethnographic interviews and participant observation has produced deeper and richer cultural information than would have been possible with any single research method.

## **5.2 Applications**

Chinese and American societies are highly complex and contain segments that have obvious differences. Likewise, there are great divisions among young people. This research focused on college youth, rather than youth in general, in order to have a slightly more homogeneous sample. My goal was to highlight unannounced assumptions and premises in the two groups. In comparison with previous studies, it also allowed us to see cultural changes. This study enhanced understanding as to how the youth respond to their daily life practices, the changing social, economic and political contexts, and those "taken-for-granted" values and ideology. As such it helps develop a deeper understanding of the youth needs and problems based on their own perspectives.

This study can be used to help American study abroad students identify those specific American predispositions that usually facilitate their interactions with their Chinese counterparts, as well as those that usually handicap them. It also may assist them to be more objective in appraising themselves as well as in evaluating their counterparts. In particular, it may enable them to be better prepared to separate cultural factors from idiosyncratic ones in themselves and in others. Their increased cross-cultural understanding will aid them to adapt their American modes of operations to a form appropriate to the local situation and to develop guides for their own behaviors accordingly. Moreover, the study of American students' underlying cultural perceptions along with its contrasting Chinese examples can better prepare future American study abroad students for the hardships of cultural shock.

This thesis also allows Chinese students to see China through American eyes and to reflect on their own society while learning about America. It can help Chinese students correct their misconceptions about the U.S. and Americans. As the findings suggested, quite a few Chinese students confuse America portrayed in popular fiction and Hollywood movies with the real America. Moreover, this study can be used in Chinese-American study abroad orientation classes as an introduction of Chinese and American cross-cultural values, norms and behavioral role expectations, as well as to highlight differences between Chinese university education-related domains and paralleled American university domains. Because of their limited knowledge about cultural differences in educational systems, Chinese students may misattribute Chinese cultural values and cognitive role expectations to both

American students and professors when they come to study in the U.S. For example, most Chinese students have become accustomed to just following guidance from their professors and universities who make all the decisions for them. In the U.S., they may feel confused and ignored by their professors when they are left to their own devices to choose classes and to do their own projects. They may also assume that Americans would understand their respect for group harmony from their indirect answers and silent avoidance of challenging debate. They may think that the non-verbal signals and social cues they are so familiar with in Chinese interactions would be understood by their American counterparts. This misattribution may lead to inter-cultural misperceptions and miscommunication, which will have a negative effect on their relations with their fellow students and professors.

Finally, the findings of this study suggest both American students' prior exposure to China and Chinese culture before they come to China, and Chinese students present perceptions of the U.S. and American culture are only fragmental. Although many of them are already fluent speakers of Chinese or English, they are not cross-culturally competent. Therefore, I feel that development of culturally based language curricula should be a professional priority. The intention of culturally based language curricula is to provide language learners with communicative competence, not just the use of vocabulary, grammar and syntax. A variety of sources of authentic materials, such as print media, songs, film, folk literature should be integrated into language class to introduce information relevant to daily life in another culture. Techniques for teaching communicative proficiency, for

example, mini dramas and portraying real life survival situations, should be included in language class to simulate cultural events and help place the target language in context. This thesis suggests areas of cultural differences that can be incorporated into the curriculum of language and cultural studies. Basing language study on authentic cultural materials helps students better understand native speakers' worldviews and perceptions.

### **5.3 Qualifications**

One of the shortcomings of this study is that some participants did not participate at all stages of the research process. Had all participants participated at all levels of the research process, results might have been more valid. In addition, culture will never remain static. As society and times change, so will cultural development. Changes in domestic and regional environments and a faster pace of living will continue to shape people's mindset and thinking. Because of the trend of cultural changes, the conclusions in this paper are inevitably time-bound and may become obsolete in the future. However, this study has also shown cultural traits can be very persistent.

Moreover, because of time constraint and the researcher's lack of expertise in fieldwork, demographic data concerning gender were incomplete. The researcher didn't seek information from each AGA participating individual's gender on his or her gender. As a result, a lot of later interpretations and analysis on informants' perceptions and views didn't reflect gender differences.

#### **5.4 Suggestions for future research**

The future research should give full consideration to gender differences and further examine the relationship of gender to perceptions and values. The next step in this line of research could also focus on the changed perceptions and practices of the American informants in this study after their further exposure to Chinese culture. Through their participation in future research, students will have opportunities to critically reflect on the changes of their own beliefs and experiences as well as their communicative competence, which will allow for a more accurate assessment of what students actually learned in their study abroad program regarding Chinese culture.

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**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A: LIST OF STIMULUS WORDS FOR AGA**

<u>English</u>	<u>Chinese</u>
1. Family	家庭
2. Parents	父母
3. Ancestors	祖先
4. love	爱情
5. marriage	婚姻
6. Me	我
7. China	中国
8. Chinese	中国人
9. U.S.	美国
10. American	美国人
11. Religion	宗教
12. Faith and Ideals	信仰,理想
13. Morals	道德
14. Conscience, Guilt	良心,罪
15. College and University	大学
16. Student	学生
17. Teacher	老师
18. Learning	学习
19. Exams	考试
20. Illness	疾病
21. Medicine	医药
22. Health Care System	医疗制度

**APPENDIX B: AGA RRESPONSES**

Main components and responses (The number in the bracket refers to the frequency of the response. Individual responses are not included.)

	American Associations	Chinese Associations
1. Family	love (25), happiness (18), mother (18), dear (17), father (17), kids (13), comfort(16), caring (16), warm (15), support (10), safe (8) close (8), home (6) fun (5), gathering (4) quarrel (3), meals(3), divorce (2), homesick (2) vacation(2)	和睦(32), 温暖(26), 父母(25), 孩子(16), 支持(15), 责任(15), 依靠(14), 支持(13), 拥挤(11), 团聚(9), 房子(8), 拥挤(7), 幸福(6), 争吵 (5), 暴力(4), 家具(3), 聊天(3), 家务(2)
2. Parents	loving (21), supportive (14) teacher (12), caretaker (11) helpful (11), kind (9), busy (6), strong (5) working (3), laugh (2) bread-earner (2), divorce (2) argue (2), fun(2), money(2) hurt(2)	辛苦(28),尊敬(23), 孝顺(14), 赡养(11), 严厉(11), 慈祥(10) 期望(9), 抚养(8), 宽容(5), 耐心(5), 疼爱(4), 坚强(2), 争吵(2), 约束(2), 无私(2)
3. Ancestor	distant (16), past(14), immigrants(10),ties(8), family tree (6), mystical(4) stranger (2), Mayflower(2) little knowledge(2), deceased (2), pilgrims(2), forefather (2), pioneers (2) Europeans (2), slaves(2)	伟大(20),,华夏文明(18), 龙 (12) 四大发明(10) 血脉(8), 光荣(6), 原始(6), 周口店(6), 钻木取火(3) 猿人(3), 石器时代(3) 聪明(3), 勤劳(3), 勇敢(3) 化石(2), 历史(2), 传统(2)
4. Love	essential (10), caring (8), trust (6), dearest (4), soul mate (3), romance (3) sex (2),emotion (2), hate (2) snuggle (2),kiss (2), family (2), complex (2)	婚姻(11), 浪漫(7) 缘分(6), 幸福(5) 快乐(4), 钱(3) 性(2), 虚假(2), 感情(2), 欺骗(2),

	American Associations	Chinese Associations
5. Marriage	happy (14), warmth (8) support (6), husband (4) wife (2), kids( 2), house (2), chores (2) divorce (2), responsibility (2),	家庭(12), 伴侣 (6), 责任(6), 幸福(6) 红娘(2), 婚礼(2) 财产(2), 琐碎 (2), 支持(2), 孩子(2), 离婚(2), 钱(2)
6. Me	individual (10), independent (6) happy (6), energetic (3), curious (3), complicated (2) dynamic (2), confident (2) earnest(2), knowledgeable (2) anxious (2) confused (2)	快乐(14), 智慧(11), 活泼(9), 自信(6) 大学生(6),上进(4) 希望(4), 理想(3), 幻想(2), 叛逆(2), 激情 (2), 压力(2) 烦恼 (2), 责任(2)
7.China	crowded (12),polluted (6) food (6), cheap (6), not well organized (5), rapidly modernizing (4), history (4), tradition (3) medicine (2), arts (2) crafts (2), beautiful (2)	祖国 (20), 发展(12) 繁荣(6), 文明古国(6) 历史悠久(4), 贫穷(4) 落后(3), 腐败(2) 2008 年奥运会 (2) 资源短缺(2) 人多(2)
8. Chinese	smart(11), restrained (9), industrious (8), collectivist (7), friendly (5), mysterious (3) hidden (3), slow (3), stranger (2)	勤劳(14), 智慧(13) 谦虚(8), 热情好客(6) 自私(4),算计(3), 无知(2),迷信(2) 多疑 (2)
9. U.S.	freedom (12), privileged (9) law (5), materialistic (5) domination (5), clean (4) spacious (3), beautiful (3)	发达(22), 富裕(18) 犯罪(10) 暴力(7), 竞争(7), 自由(6) 霸权(4) 恐怖活动(4), 好莱坞(3) 自由女神(2) 微软(2), NBA(2) 摇滚(2),重金属(2), FBI (2) 可乐(2), 卖当劳 (2)

	American Associations	Chinese Associations
10. American	individualistic (16), independent (12), fortunate (7) rich (4), strong (4) self-centered (4), ridiculous (2) arrogant (2), naïve (2), ignorant (2)	自由(13), 狂傲(12) 热情(8), 想象力丰富(8) 外向(7) 自我(7) 大胆(4), 单纯(3) 好斗(3), 友好(2) 诚实(2)
11. Religion	shared belief (10), divine(8) spiritual (6), Church (6) personal (5), God (4) beautiful (2), priest (2) abuse (2), Buddhism (2) Islam (2)	迷信(13), 欺骗(8), 寄托(6), 逃避现实(5) 教堂(4), 佛教(4) 基督教(3), 穆斯林(3) 法轮功(3), 庙(3), 和尚(2), 信仰(2) 愚昧(2), 布达拉宫(2)
12. Faith	important (9), hope (8) dignified (5), trust (3) strength (3), powerful (3) love (3), beautiful (2) prayer(2), lies (2) persistent(2), childlike (2)	动力(10), 精神寄托(6) 崇高(5), 理想(5) 目标 (4), 宗教(3) 遥远 (2), 梦想(2), 希望 (2), 理想(2) 信念 (2)
13. Morals	value (8), judgment (6) virtue (5), conscience (5) ethics (5) guilt (3), love (3), honesty (3), upright(3), wrong (3), good (3) religion (3) sin (3) standards (2), rules (2)	社会 (9) 沦丧 (8) 高尚 (5) 约束 (4) 法律 (4) 教育 (4) 建设 (3) 道德经 (3) 犯罪 (3)
14. guilt	wrong-doing (7), regret (6) self-pity (4), conscience (4) gut-wrenching (2), succumb to fears (2) mistakes (2), immoral (2)	惩罚 (10), 法律 (10) 监狱 (6), 伤害 (4) 抢劫 (3), 凶杀 (3) 暴力 (2), 腐败 (2) 打击 (2)

	American Associations	Chinese Associations
15. university	education (16), knowledge (10) books (8), professor (8) student (6), library (5) degree (4), money(3) work (3), societies (3)	知识(11), 老师 (11) 学生(10), 宿舍 (8) 食堂(6), 考试 (6) 社团(5), 学费(4) 文凭(4), 工作(4)
16. student	happy (7), cheerful (5) study (5), smart (5) energetic (3)	大学生(8), 愉快(5) 学习(5), 考试(4) 老师(4), 聪明(4) 压力(3), 紧张(3)
17. teacher	professor (10), knowledgeable (6) wise (4), guiding (4) lecture (4), biased (3) unfair (2), respect(2)	尊敬(8), 传授(6) 辛苦(5), 作业(5) 讲台(3), 讲课(3) 渊博(2), 表率(2) 责任(2)
18. learning	knowledge(6), books (6) research (4), courses (4) thinking(3), understanding(3) discuss (3), question (3) profession (3), grow (3) boring (2), job (2)	成绩(8), 书本(7) 复习(5), 记忆(5) 文化(4), 素质(4) 繁荣富强(3) 应试教育(3), 累(3) 发展(3), 听讲(3) 笔记(2)
19. exam	stressful (8), nervous (6) grueling (5), helpful (4) all nighters (3), cramming (3) degree (3), graduation (2)	紧张(16), 忙(8), 成绩(7), 多(7) 改革(6), 方法(5) 教条(4), 负担(4) 无用(3), 毕业证(3)
20 illness	lack of strength (6), uncomfortable (6), cancer (5) AIDS (4) suffering (3), death (2) misery (2), hospital (2) doctor (2), surgery (2)	痛苦(13), 难受(10) 治疗(8), 医生(6) 吃药(6), 打针(4) 输液(3), 医院(3) 癌症(2), 上火(2) 感冒(2)

## American Associations

## Chinese Associations

21. medicine	prescription (8), effective (5) recovery (4), expensive (3) antibiotics (3), unnatural(3) bitter (2), side effects (2) dangerous (2), useful (2)	苦(6), 中药(5) 生病(4), 贵(4) 假药(4), 治疗(3) 有用(3)
22. Health Care	necessary (8), expensive (6), health care plan (4) coverage (4), inaccessible (3)	医院(7),大病统筹(5) 涨价(4), 贵(3) 医生(3), 红包(2) 医德差(2), 医疗事故(2)