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Adjusting but not Assimilating:
International Students at East Tennessee State University

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology
East Tennessee State University

by
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December 2003

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Dr. Scott Beck
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Keywords: international students, cultural assimilation, cultural adjustments

ABSTRACT

Adjusting but not Assimilating:

International Students at East Tennessee State University

By

Yumiko Okuda Owens

As the number of international students grows, the importance of understanding them grows also. This thesis analyzes in-depth interview data from 17 international students from 12 different countries at East Tennessee State University who discussed their experiences as international students. Findings show that they are willing to adjust to the new culture and a new educational system, but they are reluctant to assimilate further. After they obtain their education, most of them want to return to their home country with their degree to work, even though situations are often better in the United States. These students serve as cultural ambassadors, but they will not be permanent immigrants, which contradicts popular assumptions about international students who study in the United States.

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CHAPTER 1
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AS IMMIGRANTS

Introduction

The United States is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. One of the reasons why it is so diverse is immigration. The country accepts many immigrants, including international students. Many people believe in the “American Dream” and come here to make their dreams come true; some dream about getting an education and come to the United States to attain educational and career goals.

I am from Japan and I am one of the international students here. I want to know how immigrants, particularly international students, live in the United States and how the country treats them. I wanted to compare my own experiences with adjusting to a new culture and a different education system with other international students’ experiences. Studying international students who come to the United States is important because the students themselves are valuable people as cultural ambassadors to the United States and to their home country. They bring their culture to the United States, which allows American people to get exposed to other cultures without traveling to their countries. And they also take American culture back to their home countries. With the increase in global economies in most countries, broad-based knowledge about other cultures is increasingly important and marketable. Television and the Internet provide some information about foreign cultures. However, nothing is better than actual interaction with foreign people.

When people get exposed to other cultures, they may experience culture shock because their taken-for-granted assumptions about the world are violated by seeing

people think and act differently and make different life decisions. Some see this as negative but others may interpret their new knowledge more positively. By avoiding a quick reaction to reject other cultures, they may gain a new respect for other people and their values. Thus, good relationships may arise at an individual level. International students thus offer the possibility for building positive relationships at the individual and the national levels. People who experience different cultures are flexible enough to work with diverse people from different backgrounds; they are needed today and in the future.

Since the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001, this country has become more strict about immigration issues. International students have been advised more and more about what requirements we need to meet in order to stay in the United States as full-time students. The rules will keep changing whether or not we have another terrorist incident. The United States must avoid making it impossible for international students to come and study here because that would magnify cultural and economic boundaries between people in different countries. One of the purposes of encouraging study abroad is the belief that the more people from different backgrounds interact and share time together doing similar things, the less people around the world will hate each other.

This thesis is a study of international students at ETSU. I hope to help American people understand more about international students. My thesis enables international students to share their different experiences with others and give international students some ideas of what it is like to be an international student in the United States. After reviewing relevant literature for this thesis, I will discuss the research methods I employed to learn about international students at ETSU. Chapter 2 and 3 report and

discuss the findings from my research. Chapter 4 concludes this research and offers suggestions for future research.

Review of Relevant Research

General Information on Immigrants

The United States has been one of the most open-to-immigration countries in the world. In the first three centuries after the American continents were “discovered,” immigration to the North and South American continents and the Caribbean was mainly from Africa and Europe. The biggest difference between African immigrants and European immigrants is that the former came to the countries by force, but the latter came by choice (Center for Immigration Studies: <http://www.cis.org/topics/history.html>; Kennedy, 1996).

Five million immigrants came to the United States in the 1880s. Seventy-three percent were from northern and western Europe. By the middle 1890s, immigrants came from mostly eastern and southern Europe. In the 19th century, the population in Europe grew from 200 million to 400 million even though 75 million people left Europe to live in other countries such as the United States. However, many of them had never intended to settle. For example, among the European immigrants in the United States in the 19th century, 60 percent of them stayed but 40 percent returned to their home countries. Their intention to come to the United States was to stay temporarily to make some money to support family back home. This immigration contributed to an increase in the American population, particularly big cities where many immigrants settled. In the 1890s, New York

City's population grew from 2.5 million to 3.4 million while Chicago's population grew from 1.1 million to 1.7 million (Barone, 1995; Kennedy, 1996).

Regarding early immigration laws in the United States, after certain states passed immigration-related laws following the Civil War, the Supreme Court declared the regulation of immigration to be constitutional in 1875. The Immigration Service was established in 1891 in order to deal with increased immigrants (Center for Immigration Studies: <http://www.cis.org/topics/history.html>).

From 1960 to the 1990s, the United States had new immigrants from Mexico and Asia including Philippines, China (including Taiwan), Vietnam, Korea, and India (Kennedy, 1996). During the 1990s, an average of more than 1.3 million immigrants came and settled in the United States each year, this number included both legal and illegal immigrants. The country admitted between 700,000 and 900,000 legal immigrants each year while approximately 500,000 illegal immigrants come to the country. In 2003, there are about 33.1 million foreign-born people in the United States (Center for Immigration Studies: <http://www.cis.org/topics/currentnumbers.html>). The Census Bureau estimated that eight to nine million of them are illegal immigrants. Illegal immigration grew steadily after 1965 and during the 1970s and the 1980s; millions of illegal immigrants live in the United States. One study estimates that as many as three to four million illegal immigrants were living in the United States in 1980. Moreover, this population grew by about 200,000 persons per year during the 1970s, and probably by roughly similar numbers during the 1980s. These facts and the number of people who tried to get visas for legal entry pushed lawmakers to enact the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986 (Phillips & Massey, 1999; Sorensen & Bean, 1994).

IRCA was intended to control the flow of illegal immigrants into the United States by penalizing employers who knowingly hired illegal workers. IRCA sought to reduce the number of illegal immigrants already in the country by discouraging employers from hiring illegal immigrant workers (Sorensen & Bean, 1994). After IRCA, border patrols got tougher, and people who crossed the border felt threatened and the number of people who tried to cross the U.S.-Mexico border declined. The wages of Mexican immigrants, especially of illegal immigrants, declined also. IRCA created a big gap in wages between legal and illegal immigrants, one that did not exist before 1987. Many immigrants returned to Mexico (Donato & Massey, 1993; Phillips & Massey, 1999; Sorensen & Bean, 1994).

There are mainly two reasons that both legal and illegal immigrants come to the United States. One is family. People came to the United States to follow family members. Legally, the family immigration program allows spouses, parents, and minor children of U.S. citizens to immigrate to the United States without limitation. There are also limited immigration chances for the adult children of U.S. citizens, siblings of citizens, and the spouses and children of non-citizens. Another reason for entering the United States is employment. For example, typical workers in Mexico make one-tenth what Mexican workers make in the United States where businesses hire illegal foreigners for cheap wages even after IRCA. In addition to these two reasons, there are legal immigrants who came to the United States as refugees or who won a visa lottery (Center for Immigration Studies: <http://www.cis.org/topics/illegalimmigration.html> <http://www.cis.org/topics/legalimmigration.html>).

International Students

In 1980, around 900,000 students left home to study abroad in the world. Ninety-five percent went to the industrially developed countries to study. The most popular destination is the United States because of the use of English as a world language, the persistence of the American dream, and the quality of education. Eighty-eight percent of Asian students believe that the United States offers the best education, after the United Kingdom (Blukhari, 1998). Currently, 30 percent of the students who study abroad go to the United States (Moreno, 2000). There were 582,996 international students in the country during the 2001-2002 academic year according to the Association of International Educators (NAFSA)'s website as well as Institute of International Education (IIE)'s website. They represent 4.3 percent of total enrollment in the United States' colleges and universities. (During the 1997- 1998 academic year, 58% of them were male while 42% were female; 46% of them were classified as undergraduates while 42% were graduates). The number of international students in the United States has been growing: there were 34,232 international students during the 1954-1955 academic year, which was 1.4 percent of total enrollment in the United States colleges and universities compared to 4.3 percent today. However, 28 percent of student visa applications were denied in 2001. If they were not denied, there would have been more international students here in 2001. Where do most of these students come from? Table 1 shows the top 15 countries of origin of international students in the United States during the 2001–2002 year.

Table 1. The Top 15 Countries of Origin of International Students in the United States

Rank	Country of Origin	Number of students (2001-2002)	Change from the previous year (%)	% of U.S. foreign student total
1	India	66,836	22.3	11.5
2	China	63,211	5.5	10.8
3	Republic of Korea	49,046	7.4	8.4
4	Japan	46,810	0.7	8.0
5	Taiwan	28,930	1.3	5.0
6	Canada	26,514	4.9	4.5
7	Mexico	12,518	17.3	2.1
8	Turkey	12,091	10.1	2.1
9	Indonesia	11,614	-0.1	2.0
10	Thailand	11,606	3.7	2.0
11	Germany	9,613	-5.1	1.6
12	Brazil	8,972	1.4	1.5
13	Pakistan	8,644	24.4	1.5
14	United Kingdom	8,414	3.4	1.4
15	Colombia	8,068	19.3	1.4

For the international students who attended school during 2001-2002 academic year, the most popular state with the largest number of international students studied was California, followed by New York and Texas. Speaking of institutions where international students are enrolled, New York University had the greatest number of international students (5,399) during the 2000-2001 academic year. Following institutions

in the same year were University of Southern California (Los Angeles, CA), and Columbia University (New York, NY) (Association of International Educators: <http://www.nafsa.org/content/PublicPolicy/DataonInternationalEducation/pdfgentext.pdf> ; Boukhari, 1998; Institute of International Education: <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/?p=35867>; Walker, 2000).

Regarding American students, 143,590 students from the United States studied abroad during the 2000–2001 academic year, which was a 10.6 percent increase from the previous year. The most popular destination is Western Europe, where more than half of the American students studied (Association of International Educators: <http://www.nafsa.org/content/PublicPolicy/DataonInternationalEducation/pdfgentext.pdf>) . France is the second most popular destination after the United States for all international students in the world (with 140,000 international students in 1996). However, the number of international students has been decreasing in France, while Australia, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Germany have been increasing their international student enrollment (Blukhari, 1998).

In Australia, which has less than a tenth of America's population, international students brought two billion dollars in 1999, or a third of what the country made on tourism, compared to America's 11 billion dollars in the same year. The success comes from marketing. Australians are the best recruiters of students in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. Australian universities co-own a recruiting firm, called IDP Education Australia, with a staff of 450. IDP stages promotions of Australian universities, all held in five-star hotels to attract the upper-crust families who can afford to send their children to study abroad, and guides potential students through visas and university applications. It

also opened information offices in some 40 countries and made it easier for international students to obtain a visa. Many people are attracted to this idea. When an associate dean of Columbia University's School of International & Public Affairs went on a recruiting trip to Vietnam in 1999, the students refused the offer because they already received a better offer from Australia (Blukhari, 1998; Moreno, 2000).

Britain has put its efforts into recruiting, too. In 1999, Prime Minister Tony Blair announced an eight million dollars campaign, which included simplifying the visa process and promoting a better image of British schools, in order to recruit an additional 75,000 international students from outside the European Union within five years. The British Council already had been marketing in 110 countries (Moreno, 2000).

Japan has tried to put more effort into recruiting international students. Its ministry of education has decided to accept 100,000 international students by 2000, but they had only 52,000 students in 1996. The number might fall in the future. According to Akira Ninomiya, a professor at the University of Hiroshima, reasons include the high cost of living in Japan, the language barrier, and the complicated admissions process (Blukhari, 1998).

International students are important to host countries for four main reasons. First, international students are important as customers. In other words, they are buying services from a host country such as an education. For example, international students brought almost 11 billion dollars into the U.S. economy in 1999. According to IIE, 67 percent of international students support themselves financially personally or by family during the 2000-2001 academic year. International students contribute to each institution where they attend and purchasing other items while they live in the United States. Not

only the international students themselves but also their family members and friends contribute to the U.S. economy when they visit international students in the United States. Secondly, international students are important as clients who receive an educational service. These clients often give professors more work to do because they usually need extra help with language or educational concept. However, these clients are also producers, which is the third reason why international students are important to host countries. Not only do they receive educational services from the host country but also they share their knowledge with a host country. International students often bring new perspectives that American students have never been exposed to in or out of the classroom.

Lastly, when they finish school, they are even more important as a product. They are important people who understand at least two cultures and often speak two or more languages. Those individuals are considered to be a great resource in a labor market in both the host country and in their home country. However, the outflow of international students could be a serious loss to their home countries, especially African countries, Asian countries, and Latin American countries, where many students leave home and settle in a host country. The reasons that make them hesitate to return home are their fears of losing a high standard of living in the host country, including access to health care, quality education for their children, high salaries, and fears of running into a professional dead-end at home. The conditions of scientific work are difficult in developing countries, especially. Also, there may be political obstacles.

Whether they return home or not, however, international students are a profitable investment for the host country. When they become decision makers in their home

countries, they potentially control access to markets. If they settle down in the host country, they often provide energy and fresh ideas to the country. Because international students are important for these reasons, 20 percent of international students receive funds from U.S. colleges or universities while 4 percent of them are sponsored by their home government or university. (Blukhari, 1998; Gabbott, Movondo, & Ysarenko, 2002; Institute of International Education: <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/?p=35867>; Straw, 2002).

Although few studies exist, some international students have entered the United States illegally and then enrolled at universities and colleges. One study examined this problem at the City University of New York (CUNY). New York City attracts a large number of illegal immigrants, including students. Many illegal immigrants arrive in this country hoping to achieve a better life than they could in their countries of origin. Many immigrants find CUNY attractive for a variety of reasons, but mainly because of the cost. The tuition at CUNY is relatively low, which is good news for illegal immigrants who usually have limited income. CUNY does not require proof of a student's immigration status and does not know exactly how many illegal immigrant students are enrolled. But they estimate that about one percent of CUNY's 200,000 students are illegal. Thirty-six countries of origin were represented by illegal status students at CUNY. The majority (47%) were from the Caribbean, followed by Asia with 26 percent, and South America with 18 percent. Thirty-nine percent of the students are overstaying valid tourist visas while 61 percent of them entered the United States through other means. This latter group must have taken risky routes to the United States because obtaining a valid visa can be hard in many countries. (Dozier, 1995).

Political Problems after the September 11th Terrorist Attacks

The September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001 influenced immigrants as well as international students in the United States. For example, screeners at airports (the majority of whom are immigrants) were targeted after the attacks. The job was dominated by immigrants because it was a low-paid job and was easier for immigrants with low education level to get. However, these immigrants lost their jobs after the attacks because Congress required the screeners be the U.S. citizens. Instead of keeping these immigrants with several years of security experience, U.S. citizens with no experience got hired for the positions (Bacon, 2003).

Regarding international students, among the 5,500 Saudi students in the United States, 300 have gone home since the September 11th terrorist attacks, according to the Saudi Arabian Embassy. These students returned to their countries mainly because their parents were scared what would happen to their children if they stayed in the United States. For those who stayed in the United States, the Saudi Arabian Embassy sent notes advising students to perform well at school and respect traffic regulations in order to avoid being suspected as terrorists. The Embassy also told the students not to joke on the telephone or through e-mails because it could be taken seriously and misinterpreted. Despite these actions, many students from the Middle East have complained of harassment by immigration authorities since the attacks. Two students from Grossmont College in El Cajon, California were arrested, being thought to have ties to terrorists. One student was released later by federal authorities; however, the second student was sent to a federal facility, the Manhattan Correctional Center in New York. Mejgan Afshan, president of Grossmont College's Muslim Students Association said that this was a crime

against cultures, nations, and even humanity (Bedard, Makovsky, Simon, & Parker, 2002; Boulard, 2001; Nichols & Berlau, 2001). The terrorist attacks influenced international students who were already in the United States, especially students from the Middle East. In addition, the attacks reduced the likelihood of obtaining visas for all potential international students.

Research Methods

In order to better understand international students at East Tennessee State University, I chose to interview some of them. I wanted to interview 15-20 international students from different nationalities. Rather than randomly sample international students at ETSU and risk selecting students who were away during the summer of 2003, I asked Ms. Maria Costa, the international students' advisor at ETSU, to e-mail a research invitation from me to her list of international students. I asked for some volunteers who would be willing to be interviewed by me and discuss their experiences as international students. This enabled me to contact as many international students as possible. In my message, I mentioned that I needed to interview international students who were enrolled at ETSU either during 2002-2003 or 2003-2004.

After Maria Costa forwarded my message to international students at the end of April 2003, about 10 students responded to my e-mail. Several students from Asia, one student from Europe, one student from Africa, and one student from South America responded. This was a good start because I wanted to interview students from different countries. I contacted them and explained that I had to wait to interview them until my IRB proposal got approved and I promised them that I would contact them again once the

approval was official. After the middle of May, I contacted each of the 10 students and conducted interviews with them. Because 10 interviews were not sufficient, I asked some extra students in person whom I knew if I could interview them, all of them agreed. I thus gained three students from Africa and two students from Asia.

I interviewed the students between May 2003 and August 2003. With each student's permission, I tape-recorded the interviews. Most interviews were conducted at the ETSU library or outside if weather was nice, and I visited four students in their homes. Each interview began by asking them to read and sign the informed consent form and fill out a written questionnaire (see Appendix A), which asked them for basic information (pseudonym, nationality, age range, graduate or undergraduate, major, if their native language is English, length of time in USA, and length of time at ETSU). After that I asked them more open-ended questions (see Appendix B) and recorded them on audiotape. Each interview took about an hour, sometimes longer. I transcribed each interview afterward in order to analyze it better. By Fall 2003, I had 15 interviews and transcriptions done.

At the beginning of Fall semester 2003, I asked Maria Costa again to forward my e-mail to international students. This time, I asked for volunteers only from Europe and South America. One Russian student and a Mexican student responded that they could help me. I immediately set the date and time for us to meet and then I interviewed them in the same manner as the students from the summer. Table 2 shows basic information about the students who volunteered for interviews. Table 3 shows an unofficial list of the international students at ETSU.

After transcribing all of the interviews, I began analyzing the data. I grouped subjects that seemed important and tried to generalize their information. The findings are reported in the following two chapters.

Table 2. Participant Information

Nationality	Pseudonym	Gender	Age Range	Graduate or Undergraduate	Length of time in USA	Length of time at ETSU
Africa						
Kenya	Julie	Female	22-29	Graduate	1 year 6 months	1 year 6 months
Kenya	June	Female	30-39	Graduate	5 months	4 months
Ghana	Yao	Male	22-29	Graduate	1 year 6 months	1 year 6 months
Zimbabwe	Torenda	Female	22-29	Graduate	7 years 10 months	2 years
Asia						
China	Han	Male	30-39	Graduate	4 years	4 years
China	Yun	Female	22-29	Graduate	10 months	10 months
India	Deepn	Male	22-29	Graduate	1 year	9 months
India	Mary	Female	30-39	Graduate	4 years 6 months	2 years
India	Sarah	Female	22-29	Graduate	1 year 10 months	1 year 6 months
India	Tony	Male	40 or older	Graduate	7 years	7 years
Japan	Micky	Female	22-29	Graduate	1 year	1 year
South Korea	Ron	Male	22-29	Undergraduate	4 years	4 years
Europe						
Russia	Susan	Female	21 or younger	Undergraduate	3 years	2 years
United Kingdom	Bill	Male	40 or older	Undergraduate	3 months	3 months
Middle East						
Israel	Hanna	Female	22-29	Undergraduate	5 months	5 months

North America							
	Mexico	Vanessa	Female	22-29	Undergraduate	3 years 2 months	2 years
South America							
	Brazil	Joanna	Female	30-39	Graduate	1 year 6 months	1 year 6 months

Table 3. Unofficial List of International Students at ETSU

Nationality	Male	Female	Total
Africa	18	18	36
Chad	0	1	1
Cameroon	5	2	7
Central African Republic	1	0	1
Ethiopia	1	3	4
Ghana	3	1	4
Kenya	4	4	8
Liberia	2	2	4
Morocco	0	1	1
Nigeria	1	0	1
Rwanda	0	1	1
Somalia	0	1	1
Sudan	1	0	1
Western Sahara	0	1	1
Zimbabwe	0	1	1
Asia	40	30	70
China	9	5	14
Hong Kong	1	2	3
Indonesia	0	1	1
India	28	18	46

	Japan	0	3	3
	South Korea	2	0	2
	Vietnam	0	1	1
Europe		23	20	43
	Austria	2	1	3
	Bulgaria	0	1	1
	Finland	0	1	1
	France	9	3	12
	Germany	5	1	6
	Greece	1	1	2
	Hungry	0	1	1
	Macedonia	0	2	2
	Norway	0	1	1
	Poland	0	1	1
	Russia	1	1	2
	Ukraine	0	2	2
	United Kingdom	5	4	9
Middle East		5	6	11
	Iran	2	3	5
	Israel (Gaza City)	0	1	1
	Jordan	1	1	2
	Kuwait	1	0	1

Lebanon	0	1	1
Turkey	1	0	1
North America	6	11	17
Canada	3	8	11
Mexico	3	3	6
South America	15	13	28
Argentina	3	0	3
Bermuda	2	0	2
Bahamas	1	0	1
Bolivia	0	1	1
Brazil	0	3	3
Colombia	2	0	2
Costa Rica	1	0	1
Ecuador	0	1	1
Jamaica	0	4	4
Peru	1	0	1
Venezuela	2	1	3
TOTAL	105	94	199

CHAPTER 2

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCES

Coming to the United States

For most of the international students at ETSU, the process of studying abroad began before they actually arrived in the United States. The students had to choose schools and apply to them. They also needed to apply for a visa and get it approved. Lastly, they needed to physically come to the United States.

Students' Reasons for Coming to the United States and ETSU

Why do international students come to the United States to study? The obvious reason is to go to school, get educated, and get a degree. Twelve students among the 17 I interviewed finished their undergraduate degrees in their home countries (three of them also finished master's degrees) and came to ETSU to get master's degrees. They wanted to get a master's degree somewhere abroad. Julie, from Kenya, even explained that it is a trend to get an undergraduate degree in Kenya and leave the country to get a graduate degree. Her father got his master's degree in the United Kingdom and her two older sisters have been to the United States for graduate school. Two students did not want to come to the United States to study but ended up coming here. One of them, Ron (from Korea), came to the United States about four years ago, but it was not his original intent. His uncle, who was teaching in the United States, talked about the idea of him coming to college here. Ron was not interested in studying; however, he decided to come just to experience different cultures and learn English. After he came here, he decided to stay to

study. The other student, Mary (from India) came to this country through an arranged marriage to an Indian man working in the United States. They got married in India and Mary came to the United States with her new husband. Mary's reason for attending ETSU is another story. Even though she already earned a graduate degree in India, she wanted to study here because her dependent visa through her husband prohibited her from working in the United States. She chose ETSU because she and her husband lived in Johnson City.

Among my interviewees, there are two main reasons why the students chose to come to ETSU in particular. First, they had personal connections that drew them here. Many of the students already had family (siblings, uncles, or aunts) or friends in the United States, Johnson City, or even at ETSU. For those people, it was easier to come to ETSU rather than other schools in the United States or other countries. The personal connections made ETSU a potentially friendly or more familiar place, or perhaps they hoped it would make settling in easier.

Six students among the 17 knew someone who studied or taught at ETSU. In Yao's case (from Ghana), he had a sister in Nashville who knew some Ghanaians studying at ETSU. Even though he did not know them in person, he chose to come to ETSU because he wanted to be around Ghanaians rather than be somewhere by himself without Ghanaians. Julie (from Kenya) chose to come to ETSU because her sister, her other relatives, and her boyfriend were in Johnson City (her sister and her boyfriend were going to ETSU, too). In her case, her boyfriend helped with sending her the I-20 form and ETSU's application form, which encouraged her to come to ETSU rather than other schools where she had nobody to help her with the application process.

Two students chose ETSU because they knew someone in this area, even though they were not studying/teaching at ETSU. One of them, Hanna (from Israel), had no choice but to come to ETSU because her sponsor who paid her tuition and room/board was here. Another student chose ETSU because she was in Tennessee as an exchange student in high school. The familiarity with the area encouraged her to come back to Tennessee. Two other students came based on connections to the United States (but not specifically to ETSU) because they had siblings or friends in the United States.

The second main reason that students came to ETSU was tied to the availability of financial support. All the graduate students I interviewed received either tuition scholarships or graduate assistantships. Some of them chose ETSU due to their personal connections, but financial support from ETSU gave them added encouragement. Sarah (from India) first went to another school in Ohio, but transferred to ETSU after she spent a semester there because she could not afford to pay tuition. Susan (from Russia), an undergraduate student, got an academic scholarship that paid her tuition and room/board. She said that if she did not get a scholarship, she would have stayed in her country and studied longer there to qualify for a scholarship

None of the students chose ETSU due to its academic reputation or geographic location except one student. Micky (from Japan) chose ETSU because she wanted to study American history in the South. She earned a graduate degree in history in Japan, and read many publications from northern parts of the United States. She wanted to know what professors in the United States in the South thought about American history. She also said that if she decided to attend a Ph.D. program in the United States, she would be

more likely attend one in the North. Consequently, she thought ETSU offered a good chance to pursue a master's degree in the South.

Getting a Visa

Students must have a visa to study abroad. Some of my interviewees had no problems getting a visa while others had some difficulties. As a matter of fact, four students, from Israel, the United Kingdom, Zimbabwe, and Kenya, came later than planned due to difficulties in getting a visa.

Nine students told me it was somewhat difficult to get a visa. What makes it difficult for people to get a visa? Deepn (from India) believed that the chance of success was random. Some people believed that there was a higher chance for them to get rejected, but many of them considered themselves “lucky” when they got a visa. Yun (from China) and Deepn said it was difficult for them to get a visa because so many people in their countries wanted to get visas (especially in southern India, according to Deepn); only lucky ones get a visa. Julie (from Kenya) was one of the students who considered herself lucky. She even said it was God's plan for her to get a visa and study in the United States. Her brother was sick at the time she applied to school and for a visa. Julie did not want to leave her brother for the United States, but she came here believing that God wanted her to go to the United States (her brother passed later).

Another reason that made getting a visa difficult was lack of knowledge. June (from Kenya) and Torenda (from Zimbabwe) told me that it took them a while to get a visa because they did not know what to do. As Torenda said:

It was...it was difficult and then, difficult because I didn't understand the process, you know. None of my relative or nobody I knew ever [have] done it, so it was all

new to me. And there are lots of mis-communication between the college and the Embassy and me, I guess. (Interview)

Getting assistance from someone knowledgeable helped some students avoid visa problems. Tony (from India) and Sarah (from India) told me that it was easy to get a visa. Both applied through an agent. Sarah told me it was common to go through an agent to apply for schools and a visa. Otherwise, she would not have known the necessary procedures. Vanessa (from Mexico) was one of the students who did not have problems getting a visa. In her case, her father knew someone who worked for an Embassy who helped her get a visa.

However, even with luck and knowledge about the process, international students may still experience rejection. Julie believed that people got rejected by failing to show they had enough money for study and living expenses. During her interview at the Embassy, an interviewer (who was not nice to her) asked her if her parent had enough money to support her, given that her two sisters were already studying in the United States and her brother was attending college in Kenya. The interviewer's questions scared her:

I had two sisters already in the States, and my brother was doing his undergraduate. The lady asked me, "So all your siblings are studying, your mother can afford?" You know, I got scared when she asked me that. "Well, my mother still can afford my school because all my sisters have scholarships" and I kind of lied to her that my brother had a scholarship. He was funded by someone else. It was kind of scary. That was the only lie I made. But everything else has to be truth because they could catch you. (Interview – Julie)

Susan (from Russia) and Yun believed that Embassy officials look at your intention to stay in the United States after your graduation. Susan believed that she got approved for a visa because she did not try to stay longer during her previous stay in the United States, after a year-long exchange program in high school. Yun believed that she

got a visa because she had no family members in the United States. According to her, Embassy officials assume that having family members in the United States makes applicants more likely to stay after graduation; therefore, they grant such visas with reluctance.

Ron (from South Korea) shared the opinion that global politics influenced which nationalities got visas easily:

Actually I think between Korea and America, they have some kinds of situations, like economy or politics, also North Korea. America don't like North Korea, that's why Korean cannot get an advantage of America. We don't export many things from America, compared to Japan. Japan imports many things, like automobiles or electronics. The United States imports many things from Japan also. That's why Japanese people can get a visa easily more than other Asian countries. Number one country is Japan, and Europe. That's why America don't like other Asian countries. That's my opinion. (Interview – Ron)

Ron's comment may have merit. Micky from Japan told me that she had no problem getting a visa. When she turned in the application, she was supposed to turn in a statement about what she wanted to do in the United States or why she wanted to go to the United States. But she forgot to turn it in. When she called the Embassy later on and told them that she forgot it, they told her it was okay. She received a visa in about 10 days. She did not even have to attend an interview.

Hanna (from Israel) shared her long story about getting a visa. For her, not only getting a visa but also going to the Embassy was difficult.

Because I lived in Gaza City, and Gaza City and Israel soldiers, they have closed Gaza City and I cannot get out Gaza City. In Gaza City, we don't have American Embassy at all. We don't have it in Gaza City. So for me to get a visa, they required me to go and interview, and have an interview at the Embassy in... which is about two hours away from home. It was, it was for me almost impossible to get out Gaza City, you know. I lost home, I was like, no way, you know. Before, I think before, one year or two years, it was easier to get a visa because they didn't require you to get interviewed. You just send your papers and your pictures, whatever the documents they want, and you can get a visa. But you

know, this year, it's really really complicated. You have to meet a personal interview. You have to see somebody in there and talk to them. So it was very, it took me about two months to get the permit to get to Israel to have an interview. . . And not anyone can get the permit. Like, sometimes they don't give permit to patients to go, to get treated in a hospital. They don't. So it was like a miracle for me to come here. (Interview)

Although international students shared a process of leaving a home country to study in a different country, they did not experience the same degree of difficulty or ease in getting a visa.

Bringing Things from Home

I asked students to tell me what things they brought from their home country in order to learn what they might miss from home or what sustained their national or ethnic identity during their stay in the United States. Even though they were all excited about coming to a different culture and studying in a foreign country, most students wanted to preserve their home culture somehow.

Some of them brought some food and spices in order to maintain their diet from back home while others did not bring any food out of fear that they might be caught at the airport. Torenda (from Zimbabwe) did not bring any food but she wished she did. She experienced culture shock even when traveling on her way to the United States:

The food in American Airline from London to here, when they passed me the foods, I was like, "Oh my god, what is this. . . ." So took me a while to get used to the food. That's one thing I regretted that I didn't bring food from home.
(Interview – Torenda)

Han (from China) said that he did not bring any food, but he brought a Chinese knife to help him cook in the United States.

In addition to food or kitchen supplies, a few students brought their native music and several students brought their traditional clothes from back home. Some students said they did so to keep in touch with their own cultures in a foreign country but also to educate other people about their culture and their taste. Susan (from Russia) and Sarah (from India) brought some little souvenirs to give away to whomever they met in their new environment.

Some students tried to keep their traditional life style as much as possible when they traveled to a foreign country, while others tried to get ready for school in a foreign country. Some students anticipated language difficulties and brought dictionaries (English-their native language dictionaries). For those who already finished their undergraduate back home, they brought some textbooks from their undergraduate courses hoping these would help in their graduate courses.

Their own food, clothes, dictionaries, and textbooks from undergraduate courses were things that they might not be able to find in the United States. However, some people brought things that they could have bought in the United States in order to avoid spending extra money. Torenda (from Zimbabwe) and Micky (from Japan) brought blankets, while Yun (from China) brought all her clothes to save money. She did so because, as a small person, she thought it would be hard to find or afford the right clothes in the United States.

Being an International Student

International students whom I interviewed were satisfied overall with the education they received in the United States. Some of them had a chance to go to college

back home, but they chose to come here for a better education. In Hanna's case (from Israel), it was very difficult for her to go to college back home due to political issues. So she was happy to be here and be a student. What she liked the best about the United States was "education."

Language

Students' experiences regarding language fell into three groups. The first group comprised people who thought they were prepared and they actually were. The second group comprised people who thought they were prepared but who experienced some problems. The last group of students were those who knew they were going to have some problems.

Even though Bill (from the United Kingdom) was the only student whose native language was English, students from India and Africa also spoke English back home. For them, English was not their native language, but they spoke English with their family members as well as friends. They also received their education in English. Therefore, they came to the United States thinking they were prepared, but their experiences differed as to whether their expectations were fulfilled or contradicted.

Only two students said that language was not a problem at all. Both of them were from India. Two other students from India had only minor problems as well as Bill. In Bill's case, he did not have any problems understanding people even though people in Tennessee have accents. He said their accents were easy to pick up. However, people had problems understanding his English due to his British English accent as well as how quickly he spoke. He needed to slow down for them to understand him.

Three African students out of four told me they had language problems even though they thought they should not have. One reason was due to their accents. Like Bill, they did not have problems understanding people here; however, people here had problems understanding them. The second reason stemmed from different vocabulary words and spelling between British English and American English. The three African students were trained in British English. Julie (from Kenya) had a professor who would check very carefully her misspelling, such as color-colour. Their third unexpected language difficulty was in writing English, such as writing papers for class. Again, their British-influenced education led them to write papers that were different in style from here. Therefore, writing papers here was difficult not because they lacked training in English but because they lacked training in American ways of writing papers. These students must have been disappointed when they found out that their English was not accepted as they expected. When you think you are prepared but you are actually not, it is hard to get your confidence back. They were made to feel that they needed to work more on their English. On the other hand, Julie criticized one of her professors who told her that he did not understand her English.

I have a lecturer who told me that, he has a hard time understanding my explanation. When he reads my paper, he can see where I am coming from. I have a good flow of thought. But my explanation, he doesn't quite understand my explanation, what I am trying to say, you know. So I looked at him, "Sir, this is my fourth semester in the program and you are telling me that." (omission) But we are from two totally different cultures. Totally different places. I was expecting more like you people try to understand where I am coming from, you know. This is an experience for me to be here. If you want to come to my country, people have a hard time understand your language because you can all speak fast or slow, whatever the words you use. (Interview – Julie)

The third group of students knew that they were going to have language problems. They mostly came from Asia other than India, such as China, South Korea, and Japan.

Two students from China, one from South Korea, and one from Japan all said that language challenged them the most since they came to the United States. In their home countries, their native language (Chinese, Korean, and Japanese) dominated the entire country. Even though they received English training, the emphasis was more on reading and writing than on speaking. With few opportunities to speak and listen to English, most of them experienced language difficulties.

These students described four major difficulties with English in class. The first major problem was to listen and understand English. Micky (from Japan) said that it was difficult for her to get involved in class discussion. She had a hard time understanding what other students were saying as well as sharing her own ideas in class. Han (from China), on the other hand, said that class was not very difficult. If he read textbooks ahead of time (which was his strategy to get prepared for class), he could have some idea as to what his professors were talking about. But he had problems when he talked to friends outside of class because he had no idea what they would say next. Micky had more discussion type of classes while Han had more lecture type of classes. Both of them found it easier to pick up professors' English rather than students' English because professors tended to speak clearly. Micky's strategy to conquer this problem was to watch TV to improve her English.

The strategy of watching TV is popular among international students, or other people who live in a foreign country. Ron (from South Korea) had the same problems in class. A strategy he found somewhat helpful was to tape-record class and listen to it later on. I tried this strategy in my first and second semester in the United States also. Someone recommended this idea. However, it did not help me much, nor Ron. At that

time, I did not understand what professors were talking about because they spoke fast and used some vocabulary that I did not know. When you do not know the words people are speaking at all, you can not figure out the meaning no matter how many times you listened to it. This was exactly what happened to Ron, this strategy helped neither of us.

The non-Indian Asian students' second language problem was to speak English. Again, Micky had a hard time voicing her opinion in class. Ron and Joanna (from Brazil) found themselves having difficulties doing a presentation:

Just language and like presentation, in front of everybody. I kind [of] like speaking in public, you know. I don't have problems speaking in public. But some words don't come out, so it is challenging, you know. (Interview – Joanna)

Ron's strategy for presentations was to memorize his entire presentation script because it was hard for him to speak and think simultaneously.

The third language problems concerned taking notes in class. Hanna (from Israel), whom I thought spoke English pretty well, told me that she had difficulties taking notes and Ron did so as well. Ron's strategy for this was to ask classmates for their notes. He noticed that American students did not want to share their notes with him unless they were good friends with him, which shocked him at first. He felt that he had no choice but to ask for their notes; otherwise, he would be totally lost. Actually this strategy helped me well in my first couple semesters and even later. I used to make friends in class because I knew I needed some help.

The fourth language problem was writing papers, an issue shared by some people who thought they were prepared for language, but who did not have a grasp of American conventions for writing papers. For most of the non-Indian Asian students, writing papers

was challenging because they possessed fewer skills in speaking English as well writing in English, let alone according to an American style.

Unfortunately, some students had bad experiences regarding language. Mary (from India) had no problems with learning and communicating in English. But she felt that some people degraded her knowledge just because she spoke English differently. She claimed that international students knew and were educated as much as Americans were.

Torenda (from Zimbabwe) felt the same way:

I felt discriminated against, like, it was one of my projects, group project. I just felt that some of American students thought that, since we are not Americans, we didn't understand English. How can you be a student in the United States and not know how to write in English. It's just hard for them to understand that we know as much as they know, you know. So that was kind of challenging. That happened a couple of times, I guess. Some students thought that because you spoke different, you are less than them, you know. You don't know much actually. Or your opinions doesn't come. (Interview – Torenda)

Yun (from China) had a bad first impression about American people. While traveling to come to the United States, a couple of people who sat next to her in the plane talked about her and laughed at her English while they thought Yun was asleep but she was awake. This incident offended her; her first impression about American people was that they were mean. Yun's bad experience connects another important category of the international students' experiences: how they felt about the people and culture they encountered in the United States and at ETSU, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Classes

Students need to attend class. Even though some of the students had language problems in class, all of them said they enjoyed almost all of the classes they took at

ETSU. They liked small classes here, which allowed them to ask questions easier. Bill (from the United Kingdom) said that back home, you had a lecture first, where you were not expected to ask any questions, and you had a seminar the following class, where you could ask questions. He liked the method here because he could remember what he wanted to ask and get immediate feedback.

Ron (from South Korea) claimed that they should have more small exams rather than a few big exams, so that students had more chances to get higher grades after they failed to perform well on one exam. However, Mary (from India) liked how they gave you two or three exams during a semester. Back home in India, you totally depend on your final exam to get your grade for the semester. So if you failed to perform well on your final exam, you would get a bad grade for the semester. She was pregnant one time when she took classes at ETSU. Even though she felt bad once in a while and failed to perform well, she still could catch up other times when she felt fine. She said it would be very difficult to be pregnant as a student in India.

Sometimes class can be difficult because of lack of knowledge. As I discussed in the topic of “language,” it would be hard to write papers if you did not know how you were supposed to write papers in American ways even though you knew English well. In the same way, June (from Kenya) found it difficult to do papers at first because she did not know how to search for books or articles at the library.

Professors

All of my interviewees liked professors at ETSU in general. They found them friendly as people, as well as professional and organized. Students who were not fluent in

English when they came mentioned that professors listened patiently to their English. Some professors even let them use their native language-English dictionary when they took tests.

What many students mentioned which I thought interesting was office hours. In some countries, such as China or Brazil, professors did not have office hours. Therefore, if you wanted to talk to them or had any questions to ask, you needed to catch them right before or after class. Joanna (from Brazil) told me that some professors even did not have their own office in Brazil. They shared a big room for teachers, where they had a closet to keep books and had a break when they did not teach class. Students found it much easier to approach professors here, and there were means to talk to them beyond office hours, such as e-mail or telephone.

Classmates / Friends

Students had both positive opinions and negative opinions toward their classmates, particularly American students. In terms of their classmates' attitudes toward school, some said that they studied hard while others said they did not take school seriously. In general, their opinions were that graduate students were more serious about school than undergraduate students. What they were impressed about some graduate students was that some of them had full-time job and at the same time, they were a full-time student.

I don't like lazy students. So there is some lazy students. They should not be here. I mean, they don't appreciate. They sleep in class, they don't come to class, they don't appreciate what they have in their hands. I mean, they just don't. But there is a very good student in the same time, you know. Like I know one student, and he is an American. He is working, I think he has three jobs and his family does not support for school. (Interview – Hanna)

I don't think they (undergraduate students) are very serious about education. You can tell who is graduate and you can tell who is freshman. Because I come to the library, like where we are (having an interview), you would expect to be fill with students, looking for seat. Because in Kenya, in my undergraduate university, there are always students in the library already. Every desk was filled out with students and just reading. Not necessarily that their exam is coming up, just reading and doing assignment. It's kind of different. Most of students go party, party, you know. (omission) I have a friend who is an undergraduate and you hear the grades they get, you know, Cs, sometimes Bs, some repeat courses. (Interview – Julie)

Most of them, they don't care, they don't take school serious. I think international students study more, and we are away from our countries, so we want to do a good job. Of course there is exceptions. (Interview – Joanna)

Surprisingly, many of them did not make friends in class except Susan (from Russia). She told me that her classmates were her good friends. She participated in an honor's program and she took many classes with same classmates for two years. Other students found friends outside of class. Some made friends in church or Bible study because they had something in common (religious beliefs). Some made friends in the dormitory where they live. Bill (from the United Kingdom) lived off campus back home. But he lived in a dormitory at ETSU, which made it easier for him to make friends. Vanessa (from Mexico) had been at ETSU for two years, but she found it difficult to make friends on campus since she lived off campus, even though she made some friends through her work on campus. Micky (from Japan) discussed that it was difficult to make friends in class, especially for graduate students, because many graduate students had full-time jobs or a family. They were not simply students. They were workers, wives, husbands, mothers, and fathers. That placed a boundary between them and international students who were mostly single and had no full-time job. Some interviewees were disappointed that people

did not hang out on campus. They disappeared after class. Many American students went home over the weekend. People did not attend functions on campus.

While some students had more American friends than international student friends, others found it easier to have international students as friends, due to their common experiences:

There are lots of Indians in my class, of course I talk to them. It was much easier for me to get along with Indian students than American students. And I just found myself free to talk to international students. Much freer than approaching American students. (Interview – Torenda)

Some international students even hung out with mostly their own people. For example, Sarah and Mary (both from India) hung out with mostly Indians on weekends. Yun (from China) found a Chinese boyfriend here and hung out with him and another Chinese couple. However, Julie (from Kenya) and Deepn (from India) thought that international students should interact more and hang out more with students from all countries.

International students, they are not just from India, right? They are Chinese, Japanese, people from Africa. Like international students, they don't mix. (omission) I don't see them. I try to like speak to a couple of international students here, but they were like "hi" and "bye". They don't really care to come too close to talk. (Interview – Deepn)

Campus Housing

Some international students lived off campus while others lived on campus. As Bill (from the United Kingdom) said, it helped him meet people by living on campus and it was convenient. However, there were many complaints about campus housing. Bill complained about the noisiness of his dormitory, especially on weekends. People came over and sometimes screamed. Yao (from Ghana) complained how his heater was noisy:

Buc Village dorms. Man, they should change the heat system. It makes too much noise. When you study, you want to the place as quiet as possible. It's so difficult to study. I am telling you. (Interview – Yao)

Others complained that the buildings were too old. One of the dormitories for graduate students had pipes in the ceiling that sometimes leaked. A student complained several times to housing, but nothing was fixed. Han (from China) talked about his first roommate in a dormitory. His American roommate had served in the army and was stationed in South Korea. The roommate was more aware of Asian cultures than other American students. But Han could not understand how the roommate brought girls to the room that he shared with Han. He never complained to the roommate but he did not understand it. Han's strategy was just to keep distance from him.

Immigration Policy

As foreigners in the United States, the students had to comply with many immigration policies. Especially after the September 11th terrorist attacks, rules got strict. Maria Costa, the international students' advisor at ETSU, held a meeting for international students to inform them of the new immigration regulations in the spring semester of 2003. Some basic immigration policies that international students in the United States had to follow were: refrain from working off campus, obtain Maria Costa's signature in immigration documents whenever leaving the United States with plans to come back (without her signature, students could not return to the United States with a student visa), and provide an address whenever moving or traveling for longer than ten days.

Many international students whom I interviewed reacted negatively to the immigration policy. The biggest complaint was no employment off campus for these who

had student visas. Students could work on campus, but only for limited hours. Most of the graduate students had graduate assistantships on campus that paid adequately. But those who had tuition scholarships only and undergraduate students who held jobs on campus did not earn much money. Eight interviewees answered that it would be nice if they could work off campus. Among them, some accepted the regulations, but others opposed such strict rules.

Ron (from South Korea) criticized this issue. He argued that foreign people came to the United States and helped make this country, building railroads, digging in mines, or working in agriculture. But now, foreigners find few chances to work. For all immigrants have done, it seemed unjust.

On the other hand, Sarah (from India) said it was reasonable to ban international students from work off campus. She suspected that if international students could work off campus, many of them would quit school and just work, despite their educational goals.

In our interview, Bill (from the United Kingdom) completely forgot about this restriction. As a relatively new student, he considered working off campus, but had not yet attempted to do so. People assume they can work wherever they want until their status as “foreigner” subjects them to many rules. Over time he would realize more about the immigration policies, just as other students did.

Students stated that it was important to get along with these immigration policies. Yun (from China) and Tony (from India) had good experiences doing student work on campus. At that time, they only had tuition scholarships. So Yun worked in the cafeteria on third floor of the Culp Center to make extra money as well as to socialize and to

improve her English. Tony worked at the Cave in the Culp Center to make extra money, and he told me it was one of the greatest experiences he had in the United States even though he was not paid much. He said that he enjoyed making pizza and meeting different people every day.

Some students reacted negatively to the other restrictions. Having to get Maria Costa's signature on their immigration document whenever they left the country made students feel that they were watched all the time. Julie (from Kenya) felt a loss of privacy by always having to inform the immigration office of her whereabouts. Micky (from Japan) observed that her status as an immigrant exposed her to unequal treatment. For example, when she bought a cell phone, she had to pay a deposit, but American people did not. Sarah experienced that security people at the airport checked on her again and again after the September 11th terrorist attacks. She said she could understand that, but at the same time, it made her feel uncomfortable.

Finances

Because they could not work and make money off campus, how did international students support themselves? As I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, some of the students came to ETSU for financial reasons. As a matter of fact, all of the graduate students I interviewed received either a graduate assistantship or a tuition scholarship. Among the undergraduate students, one had an academic scholarship, one had a sponsor who paid her tuition and room/board, one had an uncle in the United States supporting him, and one got help from her father back home. Bill's (from the United Kingdom) case was unique. He came to ETSU as an exchange student from an institution back home. He

had a student loan and already paid tuition at his home school, which allowed him to study at ETSU. Thus, the undergraduate students had some means to pay their tuition, too.

In terms of their spending money, graduate assistants earned about \$650 a month (it was about \$550 in the year of 2001-2002). Some of them got financial help from family members or used their savings from back home, especially those who only had tuition scholarships or who were undergraduate students. As mentioned, some worked on campus as student workers to make extra money. Money was especially important at the beginning of a semester because of fees and books. Students did not really get support from their family members back home; rather, they got support from family members who lived in the United States, often their older siblings. If their home country had a bad economy, it was impossible or pointless to transfer money to the United States:

Our currency, the value of dollar, the currency is very bad. So it's crazy for my parents to even think to support me. (Interview – Torenda)

In some cases, students got support from back home even though they were from Third World countries. Many international students in the United States come from wealthy families. Parents may be doctors, lawyers, or have their own businesses. If students came from a poor family, they would be unable to come to the United States as a student because they must prove financial solvency to obtain a visa. Some of the students said that their parents had some money to help them, but they did not want to ask for money. They reasoned that their main purpose was to study, not live extravagantly. Therefore, they managed to survive with whatever money they get.

Even though international students are not allowed to work off campus, some of them do so anyway by getting paid “under the table” with no official record-keeping. One

of my interviewees shared his/her experience working illegally off campus. This student knowingly worked illegally; however, the student quit the job because school work became more demanding.

Vanessa (from Mexico) once considered working off campus. Some people even offered to pay her under the table, but she refused. She thought it was too risky, especially after she applied for her green card. She did not want to jeopardize her green card chances by getting caught working illegally.

Many of the students had enough money to travel within the United States during breaks. Most of them traveled to see their family or friends in the United States during the Christmas, summer, or spring breaks. Tony (from India) searched for low air fares or hotels ahead of time to make sure he got a good deal. Sarah (from India) flew every two months to see her brothers and fiance. In her case, they bought her a plane ticket. Joanna (from Brazil) could not afford to travel much, but she had friends who invited her to drive to visit them during breaks.

CHAPTER 3

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

Reactions to American people

Friendliness

Many of my interviewees agreed that people here are very nice and friendly. It was the first impression for some, and it was the favorite thing about the United States for others. Yun (from China) had a bad impression about American people from her plane trip; however, she changed her mind when she arrived in Johnson City. People were nice to her and professors were patient enough to listen to her English. Speaking of friendliness, some of the students were impressed with relationships between professors and students. Students can approach professors more casually, and they can even call them by their first names, which some of them could not do back home:

The relationship between students and teachers, it's more easy. Here it's more friendly. I've never called instructors by their first names. Even some of them told me to call them by their first names [in the United States], but it was difficult for me. So I just call them Dr. something. And then, who those are not Dr., I just call them their last name of something until I got used to call them by their first names. But that's something you don't do back home. (Interview – Torenda)

Fifteen interviewees out of 17 have only lived in Johnson City in the United States. Therefore, whenever they talk about "American people," they are talking about "East Tennessee people" because it is the only area they know, even though many of them have traveled to other states. Bill (from the United Kingdom) discussed that people's friendliness is not an American characteristic, rather it is an east Tennessee habit. He felt this way when he visited Washington D.C. and people were not as nice and friendly as in Johnson City.

However, Ron (from South Korea) and Julie (from Kenya) had mixed opinions about people in the United States and in Tennessee. They agreed that people were nice and friendly, but only for the first time. American people seemed nice and curious about them when they first met Ron and Julie. They asked many questions, they sometimes even invited them for lunch or dinner. But after that, they just stopped talking to them and did not open their minds to them. Julie wondered if they thought that she could not afford anything and were afraid that she would ask them for many things. This issue has something to do with the down side of “independence,” which some students usually viewed favorably when I asked them “what do you like the best about the United States?”

Independence

People are more independent here. Children leave home at an early age, which surprised some of my interviewees. Americans are expected to make their own decisions, not anybody else. Because some of the students came from countries where many restrictions existed, they liked independence here:

My parents decided that no sports are good for us (my interviewee and her sisters). So even [though] I was very good, they’ve never let me play. So, that’s [the] way. A lot of independence [is] here. I like the independence and I want my daughter to be independent. (Interview – Mary)

Micky (from Japan) also liked independence here. Back home, she experienced many restrictions and obligations. Now she is enjoying being independent; nobody can bother her private life and she can focus on only herself. However, independence could lead to cold relationships, as Susan (from Russia) explained:

Connection between people is not as, seem not to be as deep as in my country or other countries in Europe, I think. And between friends are also, first of all, you have to be independent. You have to be your own self, you know. You don’t need

anybody. You are cool if you don't need anybody, you know. You can just be by yourself, that would make you cool. (omission) I like it because it gives you... you are independent you can do whatever you want. But it also takes away from, just relationship and relationships between people. They are not as deep as a lot of times, you cannot share with anybody, because everybody is supposed to act like everything is fine, you know. Somebody asks you "how are you?" You are always supposed to answer, "I am fine, thank you," even [when] things are woeful, you know. (Interview)

Joanna (from Brazil) answered my question, "What do you like the least about the United States?" by saying:

The relationships. They are very cold, they are very fake, sometimes. Everybody [is] asking you "how are you doing?" but they don't care. It's just politeness. You know, it's just politeness. They don't have intimacy between friends and they don't talk [to] each other. If they have problems, they pretend nothing happened and keep going. So they don't talk to each other. I think the relationships are very vague. It's hard to get real friends. (Interview)

Family Customs

Some of the students discussed American families from both positive and negative sides. From both a positive and negative point of view, they mentioned independence, again. Children leave home at an early age and then they learn how to be independent to support themselves financially and in other ways. Yun (from China) talked about how parents would bother their children in her country. High school students are not supposed to date because parents believe that it would disturb their school/education, even though this idea has been changing lately. Parents do not believe that their children are old enough to be independent; they want to know everything about their children. Yun explained that even after getting married and starting a family, many Chinese couples still live with one set of parents to support them. This is an issue of parents' independence and children's independence. Yun liked how independence

worked in the United States. However, other students felt it could lead to many problems in the family, as with friendships discussed earlier.

Parents don't seem to have a strong hold to their kids in this country. It seems like such in a early age, you went to a store, kids are crying and "mom, I hate you, you didn't buy me this." Oh my gosh, if that was my child saying like that, they wouldn't even say it. Probably they don't show them which is the right way. So many kids, so spoiled kids. It's hard when you see parents let children do anything they want to do in such an early age, many kids move out from their home, have kids, get married...I don't know. (Interview – Julie)

This parent-child independence issue can be related to freedom, which some interviewees answered as one of the things they liked the best about the United States. When you are independent, you have more freedom. However, it can be a problem when you forget that freedom and responsibility exist at the same time.

Other than how parents and children related here, Hanna (from Israel) and Julie (from Kenya) discussed marital relationships. They were shocked at the high rate of divorce here. For Hanna, a Christian, it was hard to accept divorce. She believed that once a couple gets married, they must get along with each other and stay with each other forever:

We don't have [marriage] problems [back home]. We don't have divorce. We do have divorce, but mostly Muslims, not Christians. Christians cannot divorce. We don't have major problems, you know. If you have problems with your wife or husband, you just talk about it and finish it. But we don't have major problems in marriage. But Muslims, sometimes they do divorce and get second wife or third wife, you know. It's a little bit different than Christians. But Christians, they cannot. That was the big shock for me, because whenever I go, I hear about divorce and broken families. It kills me. (Interview – Hanna)

For Julie, it was hard to believe in divorce not because of her religious belief but because of the tradition in her country. However, at the same time, she understood that some couples need to divorce sometimes:

Broken family, divorce. It's such a high rate here. In Kenya, people don't really get divorced. They just separate. And couple who is separated, one in a hundred couples. You rarely hear things like that. Man could come home and beat his wife everyday, but...okay, slowly and slowly many wives [are] beginning to realize that, you should not take such a nonsense. You walk out with your kids and leave to somewhere else. But before, it was such a kind of life tradition, where women, regardless what your husband did to you, you stay in the home, you know. Regardless what the man does. (Interview – Julie)

Americans' Cultural Ignorance

In addition to their ambivalence with Americans' friendliness and independence, international students found Americans' level of cultural and geographical knowledge to be disappointingly low. All four African students had much to say about this issue. They mentioned that American people did not know much about other countries. Interestingly, three African students out of four said "they (American people) ask stupid questions":

You know, people ask questions like, let me see. One time, my friend asked how I got here. I mean, it's so obvious, there is no way than to fly. And when you think about it, of course you can ride a boat, it takes forever to get here...My friends would ask if, if lions are pets. "Is lion pet?" That was because people thought that we just live with wild animals. Lions can eat you, you know. And then I found that people just didn't know. The only information they had about other countries or Africa is what they see on TV. If you never have time to visit those countries, they would find out that. It was good because I thought it was a stupid question but I realized that some of those questions are general questions people are just wanted to know. (Interview – Torenda)

Sometimes you meet people who ask stupid questions. Somebody asked me if I saw white men before, it's stupid. (Interview – Yao)

People ask you questions. I was also glad that they want to know exactly what's going on. It's some kinds of ignorance. Some people ask stupid questions. Like, oh my gosh, "when you get here, did you have to take classes for English?" You know, "Well, I did learn pretty fast for me to just learn this much English (in this short time)," you know. (Interview – Julie)

Basically, these students revealed their high level of expectations about America and American people. People they encountered were just curious about Africa and about them

as Africans, but these three students thought they should have been more knowledgeable. They should have known that not all Africans live with wild animals as in TV shows, they should have known that there are white people in Africa, and they should have known that English was taught extensively in Africa.

Mary (from India) said that it was easier to approach international students or even her own people rather than American people, because American people knew so little about other countries. What made it even worse for some students was how Americans are often indifferent to other cultures, and thus, surprisingly ignorant about the rest of the world. Susan (from Russia) was one of my interviewees who mentioned Americans' ignorance. One time, a person asked her where she was from. She answered that she was from Russia. The person's response was that "Oh, that is where Saddam Hussein is."

As an international student, I had experiences similar to my interviewees. My first place to study in the United States was Eastern Kentucky, and people asked me some weird questions also. One of my dorm friends in college asked me, "Where are you from?" I answered, "Japan." I was already shocked at this time that she did not even know where I was from after we had been friends for several months. She then asked me, "Where in Japan are you from?" I paused for a moment to try to explain better, because my hometown is small and I did not think she knew my hometown. And then, she asked me, "Hong Kong?" I was amazed how ignorant she was. I told her that Hong Kong is not in Japan. But all she said was "I didn't know."

One of my friends from Finland had a similar experience. Someone who lived in her dorm asked exactly the same question what my dorm friend asked me. She answered

that she was from Finland. And then, the person asked where Finland was. My friend answered that Finland was in Europe. The next question the person asked was, “Where is Europe?”

These are extreme examples of ignorance. Other people know more than this, we hope. It remains that many international students thought that American people do not know much about other countries, and that some of them are not even curious about other cultures. Again, 15 interviewees out of 17 lived only in Johnson City. When they talked about “American people,” they were basing their opinions on interactions with “East Tennessee people.” It is not a good idea to generalize to all American people from their experiences in Johnson City and my experiences in Eastern Kentucky. This problem of cultural ignorance and indifference to world cultures may be experienced in other parts of the United States. I am interested in learning more about whether or not international students in other areas in the United States face this same problem, especially in bigger cities.

Food

Food plays an important role in our everyday life. Some of my interviewees had some difficulties getting used to food in the United States, while others enjoyed eating food here.

Those who had difficulties expressed criticisms about food in this country. One criticism is taste. The students did not like how American food or food in the United States tasted. Fresh food (such as vegetables or fruits) were not as good as in their home country. Susan (from Russia) missed tomatoes back home, which she said tasted much

better than tomatoes here. Julie (from Kenya) misses chicken back home, which had enough water to produce soup:

Back home in Kenya, chicken has soup to making...or you know, it's water inside it. But chicken here, you have to add so many things for you to taste good, you know. (Interview – Julie)

Yun (from China) said that food back home tasted much better than food here, even in the same fast food restaurants. Two Chinese students I interviewed (including Yun) missed Chinese food. They claimed that food in Chinese restaurants here did not taste like Chinese food back home. Although most of them did not enjoy the food here initially, many of them got used to it. They said that the longer you stay here, the less you have problems with food.

Students' second food criticism was health-conscious. Many of my interviewees claimed that food here was not healthy. They said that American food was greasy and unhealthy, especially fast food. Hanna (from Israel) criticized the unhealthy diet related to a busy lifestyle in the United States:

We do have some fast food (back home) but it's not big because our lifestyle is a little bit slower. People do cook at home all the time, most of the time. Here, everybody goes and eats outside, because they are very very busy...(omission) I do have kitchen. But as a foreigner student, ah....studying in second language....cooking is time consuming. (omission) Well, now, breakfast is cereal, milk or fruit or something. But for lunch, I fix my own dish. And dinner, I have to go somewhere else, you know. And I have to eat fast foods, because I cannot go to everyday to spend a one whole hour, or one hour and half in Chinese food or restaurants, sometimes it's expensive, you know. (Interview – Hanna)

Students' last criticism dealt with social policy. Bill (from the United Kingdom) discussed that there was no tax on food (and children's clothes) back home (the state of Tennessee taxes food and clothing). He believed that such taxes harmed the poor.

Under these conditions, international students tried to cook their own food, and the Asian students I interviewed especially enjoyed cooking. They had a network of Asian acquaintances who shared where to procure Asian groceries. Many of them went to an Asian grocery store in Knoxville once in a while that allowed them to cook their own food.

Three students mentioned their weight gain since they came to the United States. Two of them were willing to try all the food here, and ended up gaining some weight:

I like Burger King. I will be 200 lbs, or 250 lbs. I am not kidding. When I came from Ghana, I was 140 lbs. And now I am 165 lbs. (Interview – Yao)

Julie said that she cooked because she did not like the food here. However, she still needed to rely on fresh food or meats from local grocery stores, which she believed contain more fat. That was why she gained weight even though she avoided eating fast food or going to restaurants to eat.

Climate

Just as language was the most challenging thing to the Asian students except those from India, climate was the most challenging thing to most African students (three out of four). These three students' first impression about the United States was the cold weather in winter. There was only one African student who did not mention the cold weather; perhaps she experienced less of a surprise because she came to the United States in September, while the other three came in winter time (December or January). Yao (from Ghana) said that he had to make sure he wore five layers of clothes. June (from Kenya) said that she had never worn so many clothes. What made it even harder for Julie (from Kenya) was that she stopped at Hawaii before she came to Johnson City. Also, her

sister and boyfriend (also from Kenya) who were already in Johnson City had adjusted to this cold weather by the time Julie came:

I hated the cold because I came in January. It was so cold. It was cold, it gets into your ears. And but the things are, I didn't come to Tennessee first. I have gone to Hawaii for Christmas holidays. So that changes, it was tropical and when I came here, I've never felt that cold. I just wanted to stay in the house. And the problem was my boyfriend, I was staying with my boyfriend and my sister at that time. So my boyfriend and my sister already used to the cold, so they wouldn't put the heating up to the temperature. So I put it to 80, and my boyfriend and my sister are complaining that it was too hot. (Interview – Julie).

Other than the African students, Hanna (from Israel) was surprised at the cold weather. She also came to the United States in winter time. In her case, somebody told her that it would be cold here but she did not worry about it because they have winter back home, too. But when she came here, it felt totally different from winter back home. Her first impression about the United States was “cold.” She also said that it was one of the most difficult issues that she had to deal with:

I was like, no way! When I got here, I mean, the first minute I got out from the air plane, I thought like I was freezing. It was something. It took me a long time to get used [to] it. (Interview – Hanna)

On the other hand, Susan (from Russia) loved the weather here. She liked fall the best because it is pretty. But she also liked snow because school gets closed. Back home, it snowed for several months a year but school never closed, she said.

Convenience / Opportunities

As I mentioned in the section on classes, June (from Kenya) found doing papers difficult at first because she did not know how to search for books and articles in the library. She was not used to not only ETSU library but also the computer-based search. Once international students got acquainted with the library, however, many students liked

its convenience. Julie (from Kenya) was impressed about this technology. There are several computer labs available for students to do their papers. Some countries do not have these for students. Resources students need are always available over the internet. Some students answered my questions, “What do you like the best about the United States?” with “convenience” as a general concept:

Things are so convenient, you have this choice, so many things to choose from. I am trying to think of something that ah, okay, fast food restaurant. You know, here you drive through, you know. Wow, or bank, you want to go to deposit or make whatever, you drive through. You want to go pick up your medication, you drive through. Ah, I don't know. It's so convenient. (Interview – Julie)

Some students also found availability of information convenient, and many things that you could choose from:

If you want something, all you need to do is to call this number and someone [is] on the other line to assist you. And as soon as possible you have whatever you wanted. (omission) Choices of things. So many detergent to choose from, so many types of food to choose from. In Kenya, kind of limited. (There is only) one type of shoe polish, you know, the whole country knows that you can use. (Interview – Julie)

The richness of this country surprised some international students. Along with the richness, they were shocked by how many opportunities they had to obtain material goods.

Being a student in India, I could never think of living in an apartment where I live now, or owning a car, or, you know, all that stuff. When I was teaching in med school [back home] ...my living standard was lower than what I am [now] being a student. (Interview – Tony)

Opportunity was one of the things that my interviewees liked about the United States. They liked having better opportunities to get a scholarship and the opportunities to be whatever they wanted to be regardless of their age, gender, or nationality. In some countries, for example, women cannot be as successful as they can be here.

Health

For international students' health issues, they tended to rely on their own culture's forms of medicine rather than unfamiliar U.S. medicine. Ron (from South Korea) once had difficulty breathing. He went to the emergency room in Elizabethton thinking that it would take less time than Johnson City. However, they still made him wait for five hours, and he was seen by a doctor for five minutes. They charged him \$350 and they gave him a prescription for medication. He was unhappy with how they treated him and did not trust the doctor or the unfamiliar medication. So he requested the advice of one of his friends back home who practiced Chinese medicine. His friend told Ron to drink ginger tea because ginger kills bacteria. He followed his friend's advice and never went to the pharmacy to pick up the medication. When Joanna (from Brazil) had the flu, she called her father back home who was a doctor. She told her father about the symptoms and he advised her which medicine to take among those she brought with her when she came to the United States.

International students seemed more comfortable using familiar medicine. But most importantly, they tried to stay healthy. As I discussed in the section on "food," students claimed that they avoided unhealthy American foods. Also, many of them enjoyed going to the Center of Physical Activity (CPA) on campus. CPA is one of the most popular campus facilities among international students I interviewed.

Homesickness

Most of the students missed home. Those students who had family members here (either in Johnson City or in the United States) missed home less than others who did not have any family members around. Also, those students who left significant others behind missed home more than others who did not leave anybody behind.

For example, June (from Kenya) missed her two children whom she left behind. On the other hand, Bill (from the United Kingdom) did not leave anybody behind such as children or spouse. So when he missed home, he missed things like driving his own car or watching his favorite TV programs rather than people. Mary (from India) experienced extreme homesickness when she came to the United States because she left everything behind to enter an arranged marriage. When she came here, she had nothing but her new husband, whom she met four days before the wedding. She told me that her first year was very depressing. She had no car, no friends, no job, nor did she attend school at that time. All she did was stay home, do housework, and get to know her new husband. When you are bored, you are more likely to miss home compared to when you are busy. Susan (from Russia) said that she did not miss home when she was busy or having fun, but she missed home when she was depressed, sick, or something bad happened. Yun (from China) was very homesick when I interviewed her. She planned to go back home over the summer. But she was depressed about the possibility that she might not have been able to come back to the United States if she went home due to the SARS outbreak in China. Hanna (from Israel) wanted to go home during Christmas break. But first she had to see if she could afford the trip.

Unlike their American counterparts at ETSU who went home most weekends to see family and friends, international students could not easily go home whenever they felt homesick. For example, Han (from China), who had been in the United States for four years, never traveled home yet even once. Torenda (from Zimbabwe) went home only once since she came to the United States seven years and ten months ago. To deal with their homesickness, many students called home. Students' other solutions were to cook their own food, look at pictures from back home, listen to their own music, and try to pretend that they were home. But Susan said those solutions just made homesickness worse.

Most of my interviewees used the telephone to contact family members back home. Some students used e-mail to talk to their family members more often than telephone. Hanna e-mailed her family first to let them know when and what time she would call in order to make sure she could reach them. Many students had to take the problem of time zone changes into account. Their free time might be the time their family was sleeping or at work. Even though e-mail is so convenient today, some of my interviewees said that their parents did not know how to e-mail or lacked access to computers. Julie (from Kenya) said that she had to teach her mother how to use e-mail when her mother visited her this summer. Julie asked her to go to an internet café once in a while to e-mail her, which is cheaper than telephone calls. The old-fashioned way to maintain contact with family, letters, was unpopular among students I interviewed. Yun (from China) wrote two letters to her mother since she came here nine months ago. She said she was getting too lazy to write Chinese; typing was much easier and faster.

Looking to the Future

For international graduate students, most of them said that they wanted to get a job after they finished their degree, but two students said that they wanted to pursue a Ph.D. in the United States. For undergraduate students, one wanted to go to law school while others wanted to get a job. When asked where they wanted to get a job after they finish school, three said that they wanted to go home immediately after graduation; 11 said that they wanted to get a few years of work experience in the United States and then go back to their countries; five wanted to stay and work in the United States; and two said that they wanted to go to some other countries. Thus, 12 of the 17 did not see themselves as permanent U.S. immigrants.

For those who wanted to go home immediately after their graduation, they were here just to get an education. When it is time to work, they would rather work in their home countries. June (from Kenya) wanted to go home because she left her children behind. She was also planning to go back to her work where they gave her a leave to study. Joanna (from Brazil) was going home because she did not think she could easily get a job in the United States. If she went home, she would live in her parents' house and look for a job. But she would not be able to afford to just sit and look for a job in the United States. Hanna (from Israel) was worried about situations back home, but she missed home so much:

My future plans, I will go home. And I hope I will be able to get a good job. I think I will. Maybe in four years and three years, the things will get better. Maybe yes, maybe no. Yes, either way, I am going home. I am going home. I will start looking for a job. (Interview – Hanna)

For those who wanted to get some work experiences in the United States and go home eventually, they believed that not only American education but also work

experiences in the United States would help when they looked for a job back home. International students may apply for a work visa called Optional Practical Training (OPT), which allows them to work for a year after graduation. Most of them apply for this if they plan to look for a job in the United States. Some go home after a year when it expires, while others try to get a work visa, which allows you to work some extra years. However, obtaining a work visa is not easy. An employer must provide support, and one must pay for a lawyer unless the company pays for you, which is expensive. The seven students who said they would not mind staying in the United States if they found a good job thought that their economic situations as well as visa issues would be difficult. Also, they wanted to go home because they liked their own country better than the United States after all. Ron (from South Korea) said that he wanted to go home eventually and get married to a Korean woman:

Actually I have many dreams. I want to open up business (in Korea). I want to get married (in Korea). I don't wanna get married to an American girl. Ah, yeah, it's kind of, American people, I mean, yeah. They live here and I live in my country, so it's hard to understand their thinking. Even American girls are more free. But I cannot adapt. (omission) For example, they are smoking in any places and they are, for example, their sexuality, that kind of things, many sensitive parts. I cannot understand. I am the kind of conservative person here. (omission) I cannot adapt their thinking (Interview – Ron)

In Ron's case, he wanted to go home not only because he was homesick but also because he did not think he could adapt to the United States. However, his friends and his parents wanted him to stay in the United States because job situations were not good back home. Julie (from Kenya) was engaged with a man from Kenya who lived in California. They planned to get married next year and work for a while in the United States. And they were talking about going home one day. But she was also thinking about sending her children abroad to study like she did:

I am finishing in May. And I move to California to get my wedding planned and meantime, start looking for a job. Hopefully that's, my work permit comes through. And I get a job, and maybe stay in this country for a while before I decide to get back. (omission) We (she and her finance) have to see how things work out for us. Right now, our country is kinds of shaky. It's not yet to our expectation. So we hope in time, it will easier for us to get back home. Right now, it is not time.(omission) If they (her children) wanna come here (to study), there are different choices. I hear that Australia is a good place to study, I hear South Africa is a very good place to study also. And Canada is also a good place to study. I will give them a choice to think where they want to go. I don't want them to go where everybody else is going, you know. They have choice to make. I wouldn't mind for them to come here though. (Interview – Julie)

Five of the students wanted to stay in the United States. Among them, Vanessa (from Mexico) was going through the process to get her green card. She thought that job situations were better in the United States than in her country. Other students had the same opinions that they did not want to go home because of poor job opportunities. Mary (from India) said that she would stay in this country, but not because she wanted to. She needed to see where her husband would go next, but she suspected that they would stay in the United States for a long time or for good. For Mary, it would not be easy to stay here:

In India, we brought up in very very different manners. We consider to be very conservative society. So I had to, like my daughter grow up here, I have to do very broad-minded, like dating, having boyfriends, stuff like that. (omission) I thought it's (Indian society) better because we've brought up that way. The way we brought up here is very different from how people are here. I have never dated in my life. But twenty years from now, I had to change my views (since I have a daughter). Maybe I am not very too much into arranged married (like I did). I am open to other married but I am not open to dating and staying together. (omission) Thirty years of my life, I spent in India. If you ask me to change, it's difficult. No-one wants to change. I want her (her daughter) to follow my culture, my religion, like that. (Interview – Mary)

Ron's case, he wanted to go home because he could not adapt to American culture.

However, Mary could not go home just because she did not like the culture here. Her

husband was here and his job was here. She would like her daughter to have Indian cultures, but she knew it would be hard.

There were two students who wanted to work outside of the United States but not in their home countries. Both of them were so ambitious, and it seemed that they believed that they could do anything anywhere. Susan (from Russia) did not want to go back home because job opportunities were bad. Her career goal was to be a lawyer. She did not mind working as a lawyer in the United States, but she wanted to do so in Spain, particularly. She spoke Spanish also, and she fell in love with the country when she visited Spain this summer. She told me that it would be wonderful if she could be a lawyer in Spain. Sarah (from India) was studying Public Health. She wanted to get a Ph.D. degree in the United States and wanted to work in developing countries where they really need improved public health, such as Africa or possibly her country, India.

Where international students wanted to get a job depended on their priorities. For those people whose first priority was to be around their family or friends and live in their home country, they wanted to go home even though job opportunities were better in the United States. On the other hand, for those students whose first priority was to get a good job, they would want to stay in the United States even though they still missed home. No one mentioned that they wanted to stay in the United States because they loved the country itself.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Discussion

Based on my own experience as an international student, I expected that international students liked to be around their own culture, such as food or people. But I did not expect that so many students had no longer-term plan to stay in the United States. Before conducting my research, I assumed that European students would have few cultural adjustments to make compared to other international students. (Williams, 2001 for an analysis of European students' experiences at ETSU). Being a foreigner in the United States is challenging to all international students no matter which country they are from and no matter what language they speak in their home countries.

In general, my research shows that those international students I interviewed came to the United States mainly to study, get educated, and get a degree. Therefore, they tried hard to adjust in order to do well in school. Fortunately, all of them were pleased with their classes and professors. Beyond school, however, they did not embrace American culture and they tried to maintain an identity tied to their home country. Even their choice of where to study, for many, did not represent a full commitment to learning about American culture, because they favored a school near their family members or friends. If their main purpose was to learn about a new and different culture, they should have gone where they had no personal connections to shield them. Another way that the students expressed their commitment to school but their reluctance to understand Americans can be seen in how they handled problems. When they had some issues with American

people, they kept their distance or just let it go instead of working it out, quite unlike how they dealt with school problems.

Even though some of them had many American friends, most of them hung out with their own people or with other international students. If American people were more aware of other cultures, a problem many of my interviewees mentioned, this pattern might have been entirely absent. On the other hand, international students could have been more willing to share their own cultures with American people. Their expectations about American people were high; therefore, they were quite disappointed with Americans' cultural and geographical ignorance. It might be important for international students to approach American people as if they knew nothing about other cultures, and then, they would not have to suffer such disappointment with them.

In short, international students at ETSU were students first and “cultural ambassadors” second. Some tried to learn about different cultures and people in the United States, but they found it difficult to adapt. What they enjoyed about the United States mostly related to independence, freedom, convenience, and better opportunities. But were these amenities worth the tradeoff of the things they missed from home? Apparently not. Most of the students eventually wanted to go back to their home countries with their American degrees in the future. However, their interactions with American people or other international people will not stop once they leave the United States. They will hold leadership positions requiring them to work with diverse people from different backgrounds. Their study in the United States will help them no matter where they end up.

It is important to keep one's own culture as well as to adjust to a new culture when one goes to a foreign country. International students I interviewed adjusted well in a new environment, especially in a school setting, but they are reluctant to assimilate further. It is natural because even though they chose to come to the United States by themselves, they had lived in their home country for many years. They would need the same amount of years to adjust even better and further assimilate in the United States. One article discussed that first-generation immigrants were not expected to assimilate to a new culture entirely compared to second-generation immigrants or even "1.5 generation immigrants" (foreign-born immigrants who migrated to the United States in their early age). It is hard for first-generation immigrants to adjust well and assimilate to a new environment because they have many barriers to overcome such as a new culture, a new language, and, sometimes, discrimination. If international students stayed in the United States and have a family, their children would have foreign parent(s) but they would adjust better and assimilate further to the American society. The children will be second-generation immigrants and they will be expected to have fewer barriers to adjust to the society compared to their parents, who are first-generation immigrants (Harker, 2001).

Suggestions for Future Research

My research sample was 17 international students at ETSU from 12 different countries. I was able to obtain a lot of interesting information from them. However, the sample was limited to these students, most of whom have only lived in Johnson City, Tennessee, even though many of them have traveled to other states in the United States.

A study using a different sample from different geographical locations is suggested for future research.

A study of international students in a bigger city in the United States would be interesting and different from my study of international students at ETSU, which is located in a small city far from large metropolitan centers. Unlike international students at ETSU, international students in a bigger city might have chosen a school they attend for its geographic location; many people are attracted to bigger cities, such as New York City or Los Angeles. Difficulty or ease in obtaining visas would not differ because I do not think it matters which state or city you are going to as long as it is in the United States. If it was hard to get a visa to go to ETSU, it would be hard also to go to another school in New York City. However, international students in a bigger city might not have the same problems with food as my interviewees because they would have more access to their own food in a bigger city. More importantly, their experiences with American people would be different because it is likely that people in a large metropolitan area would know more about other countries than residents of east Tennessee. In such a study, it would be important to assess the degree of cultural adjustment international students make in a big city compared to a small city. Would they assimilate even less, but enjoy being in the United States even more and want to stay longer?

A study of international students in high school in the United States is another suggestion to study for future research. They might have more language problems because they are younger than college students, especially people from non-English-speaking countries. However, they might experience English improvement quicker than college students due to their younger age and flexibility.

I am also interested in research on American students who are studying abroad. If it was difficult to go abroad to do this research, we could focus on American students returning from abroad. This topic interests me because I have not met many American students who have studied abroad. Comparisons between international students in the United States and in other countries around the world would be valuable as well.

Another suggestion for study regarding international students is to study native students' attitudes toward international students. From my study, international students thought that American people knew very little about other countries and were not even interested in them. That is what international students think. But what do American people think about it? Do they really not know about other countries? Are they not interested in other countries at all?

The topic of international students is limitless. As globalization of economies continues, more issues regarding international students will arise in the future. I hope that the study of international students will continue, and that it will lead to good relationships between people as well as between countries around the world.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

WRITTEN QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Your pseudonym.
2. Your home country
3. your age range: 21 or younger / 22-29 / 30-39 / 40 or older
4. Are you an undergraduate or graduate student?
5. Your major.
6. Is English your native language? Yes / No
7. How long in total have you lived in the United States
8. How long in total have you attended ETSU so far?

APPENDIX B
VERBAL QUESTIONNAIRE

I. Questions about international students before they left their home country.

1. Would you tell me how you got interested in studying in the United States?
2. Would you tell me the process by which you came to ETSU?
3. Did you ever go to another countries for school?
4. Have you studied anywhere else in the US?
5. How did you prepare before you left your country?
6. What did you bring from your country?
7. What was it like to obtain a visa? How long did it take?

II. Questions about their experiences and opinions.

1. What was your first impression about the United States?
2. What do you like the best about the United States in general? What do you like about that?
3. What do you like the least about the United States in general? What do you not like about that?
4. What was your first impression about ETSU?
5. What do you like the best about ETSU? What do you like about that?
6. What do you like the least about ETSU? What do you not like about that?
7. What do you think about the courses you have taken at ETSU?
8. What do you think about professors at ETSU?

9. What do you think about students at ETSU?
10. What campus facilities do you like?
11. What campus facilities do you think need to be changed? How?
12. What do you do during break? (when school is closed up)
13. What do you do on weekends?
14. Have you had any language problems? If yes, how have you dealt with them?
15. Have you had any cultural problems? If yes, how have you dealt with them?
16. Have you had any problems about food? If yes, how have you dealt with them?
17. What is the most challenging thing you have experienced since you came to the United States?
18. Have you ever been sick?
19. Have you been homesick? How have you dealt with that?
20. How do you contact with your family/friends back home?
21. What do you find similar here and in your native country?
22. What do you find different between your native country and here?
23. Would you tell me about your friends here?
24. How do you support yourself financially?
25. What do you think about immigration regulations?

III. Questions about their future plans

1. Would you tell me about your future plans?

IV. Additional question

1. Is there anything I have left out that you would like to discuss?

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent / Tape-Recording Interview

East Tennessee State University Informed Consent Form

This Informed Consent provides information about your participation in a research project. It is important for you to read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to participate in the research.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Yumiko Okuda Owens

TITLE OF PROJECT:

A study of international students at East Tennessee State University

PURPOSES:

The purposes of this study are to investigate how international students at East Tennessee State University adapt to a new environment, including a new culture, new people, new foods, a new school, and occasionally a new language. The study also intends to investigate what these students think about immigration regulations.

DURATION:

Interviews for this project will begin as soon as the study is approved and will conclude by December 2003. During this period, the principal investigator will interview about 15-20 international students at ETSU. Interviews will last 30 minutes to an hour, but could be longer if desired by the interviewee. The study will be completed by December 2003.

PROCEDURES:

The principal investigator will send an e-mail to international students at ETSU and ask for volunteers to participate an in-person interview. The principal investigator will select participants according to their gender, age range, and nationality in order to have interviewees from different backgrounds. Each interview will be tape-recorded with the interviewee's permission. Interviews will last approximately 30 minutes to an hour, but could be longer if desired by the interviewee. Each interview will be transcribed in full to permit the principal investigator to analyze responses in the interviewees' own words.

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PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Yumiko Okuda Owens

TITLE OF PROJECT:

A study of international students at East Tennessee State University

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with a participant's involvement in this study. Participants may freely choose not to answer any questions that are difficult or uncomfortable for them to answer. Participants are free to end the interview at any time.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS and/or COMPENSATION:

Subjects may not benefit directly from their participation. However, results from this study, in the form of my thesis, may help us better understand international students at ETSU and other schools in the United States. It will eventually help schools with international programs work better with international students, which will help international students live and study in the United States even more comfortably.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS:

If you have any questions and/or problems at any time, you may call Yumiko Okuda Owens at 423/433-3430 or Dr. Martha Copp at 423/439-7056. You may call the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at 423/439-6134 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Every attempt will be made to see that my study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at East Tennessee State University for at least ten years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the East Tennessee State University Center Institutional Review Board, and my advisor in the ETSU Department of Sociology and Anthropology will have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will be not revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

COMPENSATION FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT:

East Tennessee State University (ETSU) will pay the cost of emergency first aid for any injury which may happen as a result of your being in this study. They will not pay for any other medical treatment. Claims against ETSU or any of its agents or employees may be submitted to the Tennessee Claims Commission. These claims will be settled to the extent allowable as provided under TCA Section 9-8-307. For more information about claims call the Chair of the Institutional Review Board of ETSU at 423-439-6134.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Yumiko Okuda Owens

TITLE OF PROJECT:

A study of international students at East Tennessee State University

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:

The nature, demands, risks, and benefits of this project have been explained to me as well as are known and available. I understand what participation involves. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to ask questions and withdraw from the project at any time, without penalty. I have read, or have had read to me, and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A signed copy has been given to me.

Your study record will be maintained in strictest confidence according to current legal requirements and will not be revealed unless required by law or as noted above.

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER

DATE

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

DATE

VITA

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