# Sojourner Adjustment: The Experience of Wives of Mainland Chinese Graduate Students

by

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ABSTRACT

Thousands of Chinese women from the People's Republic of China (PRC, or commonly known as Mainland China) come to the United States hoping to be re-united with their husbands and to support them in finishing their education. They all face similar kinds of experiences on arrival. They may or may not have had some contact with Western culture, but most of them grew up in a culture different from the West. Willingly or not, they left their families, friends, and careers to take up this odyssey in a completely strange land. The joy of re-uniting with their husbands is often clouded by uncertainties and a sense of loss.

In the area of counseling and student personnel services, there is little research on the adjustment experiences of these sojourner Mainland Chinese women who accompany their spouses to the United States. As a result, the higher education community is often taken by surprise when families or couples experience such situations as marital discord and domestic violence where remedial actions are expected of them. They also do not know how to plan effective programs for spouses of Mainland Chinese students.

The purpose of this study was to examine the sojourner adjustment experiences of Mainland Chinese women in the United States from their own perspective, and to explore the factors that affect their adjustment. This study identified adjustment to new settings, documented processes of adjustment, and examined the means used to deal with adjustment.

A longitudinal design was used with both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. In-depth individual interviews, phone interviews, questionnaires, daily activity record forms, and participant observations were used to collect data over a 9 month period. Eleven women were studied in depth.

The study showed that most Mainland Chinese women do not choose to come here in the first place. After their arrival,

they have great language difficulties which limit their daily activities and hinder their choice of career and/or further education. As a result, they experience an identity crisis. Language ability, attitude toward coming to the United States, and life events are the most significant factors that affect their adjustment to life in the United States. There is a lack of coordination in the programs offered by the university and the community in which this study was conducted. Most of these programs do not meet the needs of these Chinese women. Due to cultural differences and the lack of knowledge of Western professional counseling, they do not turn to professional counselors for help. Instead, they mainly rely upon other Chinese students in the community. If major problems occur, they turn to the administrative staff or faculty of the university, counterparts of their work unit leaders in China. A systems approach aiming at different facets of their problems in various levels seems to be the key in helping these Chinese women.

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# CHAPTER ONE
# INTRODUCTION

It was a long and tiring flight! Xin arrived at the airport tired, confused, and scared. She did not know which way to go, but her common sense told her to follow the crowd. When she stood in front of the immigration officer, she kept nodding and smiling even though she did not really understand what he said. After several minutes that seemed to last forever, he finally gave her passport back and pointed her to an exit. She took this as a gesture of approval and headed towards the exit as quickly as possible, fearing that he might change his mind. What came after this moment of relief was another wave of fear and confusion. What would happen next? What was this place like? What was she going to do? Thousands of questions flooded her mind. As she looked around to try to locate the familiar face of her husband, she saw a sign hanging up in the lobby. "Welcome to the United States!"

Thousands of Chinese women come to the United States hoping to be re-united with their husbands and to support them in finishing their education. They all face similar kinds of experiences on arrival. They may or may not have had some contact with Western culture, but most of them grew up in a culture different from the West. Willingly or not, they left their families, friends, and careers to take up this odyssey in a completely strange land. The joy of re-uniting with their husbands is often clouded by uncertainties and a sense of loss.

In the area of counseling and student personnel services, there is little research on the adjustment experiences of these sojourner Chinese women who accompany their spouses to the United States. As a result, the higher education community is often taken by surprise when families or couples experience such situations as marital discord and domestic violence where remedial actions are expected of them. They also do not know how to plan effective programs for spouses

of Chinese students.

Literature focusing solely on the adjustment experiences of sojourner Chinese women who accompany their husbands to the United States is non-existent. Research on international students and immigrant women provide some insights on the adjustment experiences of such Chinese women. However, the limited nature of the research makes speculation difficult.

Several writers (Amaro & Russo, 1987; Church, 1982; Lee & Cochran, 1988) stated that the adjustment experiences of women in general are subsumed under men and adjunct to male experiences in the literature on immigrants. Morokvasic (1984) pointed out that females are neglected in research studies on immigrants. Even when women are included, the overall findings are not always differentiated by sex (Jacobson, 1979). Hence female adjustment experience is an area that requires further exploration. Church, in his 1982 comprehensive review of sojourner adjustment literature, suggested that women may have more adjustment difficulties than men, and called for more research on women's experience.

Research on international students who are married and have families with them in the United States usually focuses either on the international students per se (e.g., Schram & Lauver, 1988) or treats the experiences of the couple as a unit (e.g., Ruetrakul, 1987). Thus the experiences of spouses are often over-shadowed by those of the students. Klineberg (1981) pointed out that the spouses of international students deserve much more attention than they have received. Since the spouses of international students are predominantly women, and women's experiences are speculated by some to be different (Yao, 1983a), it is important to study the adjustment experiences of the spouses of international students independently.

Manese, Sedlacek, & Leong (1988) stated that it is also important to investigate subgroups such as those comprised of one ethnic or regional origin within the diverse international

student population. This is also true in research on spouses of international students. There are two reasons for studying Chinese women as a group instead of grouping all sojourning international women.

First, many Chinese women have come to the United States as accompanying spouses in recent years due to an influx of students from the People's Republic of China (PRC, commonly known as Mainland China) after the Accord for Educational Exchanges was signed in July 1985 (Magner, 1988; Orleans, 1988). Before 1985, most Chinese students who studied in the United States came from the Republic of China (ROC, commonly known as Taiwan), Hong Kong, or Southeast Asia. Since then, however, many Mainland Chinese have been entering the United States with a "visiting scholar" status for educational exchange, and applying for student status after their arrival. This strategy makes obtaining permission for foreign study from the Mainland Chinese government much easier. As a result, the total Chinese student enrollment has increased dramatically in the past decade. As Chinese student enrollment has increased, the number of student spouses entering the United States has also increased. Orleans stated that it is easier for married individuals in Mainland China to receive approval for foreign study since marriage and family are important factors related to returning home after completion of study. Orleans also reported that there has been a large increase in visas issued to family members (mostly spouses) of Chinese students since 1985.

Second, due to the recent political changes in Mainland China and Hong Kong, it is more likely for these students, their wives, and their families to remain permanently in the United States. Although there are no official data on the overall percentage of Chinese students returning home upon the completion of their studies, informal sources such as various Chinese student associations suggest that students from Taiwan are more likely than those from other localities

to return home after they finish their studies due to: (1) incentives provided by the Taiwanese government to returning students; (2) economic stability of the society; and (3) recent technological advancements in the universities of Taiwan. Students from Hong Kong, however, are less likely to return because of the uncertain political and economic future of Hong Kong after 1997 when it becomes part of the communist regime. Of Mainland Chinese students, between 1979 and 1987, only one-third returned home immediately after completion of study in the United States (Orleans, 1988). Among the two-thirds who remained in the United States after graduation, there was a growing tendency to delay their return and remain in the United States indefinitely. The June 4th Massacre of 1989 increased the likelihood that Chinese students, especially those with families in the United States, would stay in the United States upon the completion of their studies.

Since an increased number of Chinese women are coming to the United States as accompanying spouses every year and, contrary to Furnham's (1987) speculations, are not likely to return to their home countries, understanding the experiences of spouses of Chinese students in the United States is an important task for those in the helping professions. This understanding is the first step in enhancing and developing the potential of this special population.

The sojourner Chinese women who accompany their spouses to the United States come from different localities such as Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Southeast Asia. There is no demographic information on the number and origin of sojourner Chinese women in the United States available. However, it is reasonable to speculate that the Chinese women from Mainland China out-number those from other localities due to several factors. First, the number of Chinese students from Mainland China has increased dramatically in recent years. Second, their average age is higher when compared to

the Chinese students from other localities (Orleans, 1988), and thus they are more likely to be married. Third, it is easier for married students to leave Mainland China and it has been somewhat easier for spouses to get visiting visas after 1985.

Most of the sojourning women from Mainland China grew up during the time when Mainland China was isolated from the rest of the world. Mainland China had been totally closed to Western nations ever since the Communists took power in 1949. These women had minimal exposure to western culture. Newspapers and magazines were controlled and censored by the government. It was not until the mid-1970s that television became common in ordinary households in Mainland China. Mainland China did not re-establish diplomatic relations with the United States until after President Nixon visited China in 1975. In spite of renewed relations with the West, the people of communist China have retained the perception that the United States of America is their worst capitalist enemy. These Chinese women have no basic knowledge about the West and the television programs they were exposed to were all focused on the negative side of capitalism such as crimes in inner city ghettos. They are totally unprepared for life in the United States. Since their adjustment experiences may be unique due to their background, it is important to acquire knowledge of their experiences as the helping professions in the higher education community will probably be working more with this population in the future.

The purpose of this study was to examine the sojourner adjustment experiences of Chinese women in the United States from their own perspective, and to explore the factors that affect their adjustment. This study identified adjustment to new settings, documented processes of adjustment, and examined the means used to deal with adjustment.

In this study 'sojourner' referred to those who are not citizens or permanent residents of the United States. Their

initial intentions are to stay in the United States for 6 months to 5 years with the specific or goal-oriented motive of supporting their husbands in obtaining a degree. However, it is difficult to determine whether they will actually return to their home countries after the completion of their goals.

In this study 'adjustment' was viewed as an ongoing process with an emphasis on understanding the dynamics of adjustment. These involve "psychological processes by means of which the individual manages or copes with various demands or pressures" (Weiten, 1986, p. 19). 'Adjustment experience' in this study was used as an umbrella term to include the adjustment problems, the process of adjustment, and the means of coping.

This study was conducted in a small university town in Virginia. Participants were all spouses of Chinese students attending a state-supported university with a student population of approximately 24,000. The Chinese population in the community, including students, professionals, and families was estimated to be around 700.

Church (1982) commented that previous research in sojourner adjustment relied primarily on cross-sectional and single data collection approaches. He argued that adjustment is a process that changes with time. A single data collection can only provide a snapshot, but not the dynamics of the process. Thus he called for more longitudinal research studies that can provide a better picture of the adjustment processes of sojourners in the United States. This study was designed to answer Church's call for longitudinal research studies. Data collection was a continuous process in this study. Data were collected using various methods in different periods of time over a 9-month duration.

This study adopted a triangulation design recommended by Greene and McClintock (1985). They defined triangulation as "the multiple employment of sources of data, observers, methods, or theories in investigations of the same phenomenon"

(p. 524). Multiple data collection methods, including participant observations, in-depth interviews, questionnaire, and daily activity record forms were used in this study. The purpose of this triangulation is to increase validity through congruence and/or complementarity of the results from each method (Firestone, 1987; Greene & McClintock, 1985; Mathison, 1988).

The design of this study demanded the researcher's role to be an integral part of the study. According to Wolcott (1990), it is important to have the role and presence of the researcher acknowledged in the reporting. Hence most of this study was written in the first person. This study consisted of numerous descriptive accounts of the experiences of these Chinese women. The names of these Chinese women had been changed for reason of confidentiality. They all expressed themselves in their native language - Mandarin. The Chinese language is different from English in that grammatical rules apply only to written but not spoken Chinese. In order to preserve the flavor of the Chinese language and the originality of the expression of these Chinese women, the quotations used in this study were not corrected according to standard English.

In order to understand the sojourner experiences of Chinese women in the United States, it is important to look at their backgrounds. Their past and the past of those who came to the United States ahead of them help shape their present experiences.

Chapter Two presents some general background information of Chinese women both in Mainland China and in the United States. A brief review of literature is also included in this chapter. Chapter Three summarizes the research design and the data analysis procedures. Chapters Four and Five focus on discussing the sojourner experiences of these Chinese women and the community services that are available for them. Part One of Chapter Four is a brief overview of the research

findings. Further discussion of some significant themes is presented in Part Two. Chapter Five includes a discussion of the university and community services available. Chapter Six is a summary of the results of the study and the implications and recommendations for those in the helping professions. An epilogue is included giving a summary of the present situations of some of the Chinese women in this study, and the personal experiences of the researcher.

## CHAPTER TWO

## LIVES OF CHINESE WOMEN: PAST AND PRESENT

This chapter is subdivided into three parts. The first section provides a brief historical review of the lives of Chinese women in the past 200 years in Mainland China. The second section presents a summary of social demographic information for contemporary Mainland Chinese women. The third section begins with a brief historical review of the lives of Chinese women in the United States since the late 19th century, and is followed by a literature review of the adjustment experiences of immigrant women and international students in the United States.

### Lives of Chinese Women in China: A Historical Perspective

#### The Pre-Communist Era (1800 - 1930)

Literature related to the lives of Chinese women before the Communist Revolution is very sparse despite the many centuries of Chinese civilization preceding it (Duley, 1986). Most literature available before 1949 consists of autobiographies of upper-class elite educated women, while accounts of the lives of working class women are rare (McElderry, 1984).

Traditional Chinese women lived in a strictly patriarchal and patrilineal society (Duley, 1986). Their social status was defined in relation to the men in their lineages (Curtin, 1975). Marriage signified the transfer of rights over a woman from her parents to her husband. Sheridan and Salaff (1984a) outlined several important life cycle stages for Chinese women. First, a woman entered her natal family either through birth or adoption. She then entered her husband's family through marriage. Her status in the family was low until she entered the third stage through the birth of a son. The final and climax stage was when she became a "dowager with adult sons and headed the domestic unit (chia) and uterine family" (Sheridan & Salaff, 1984a, p. 6). Curtin (1975) points out

that the role of a Chinese woman in old society was to bear male children to perpetuate the family name, and to aid in work. Failing to fulfill this task of giving birth to males led to disgrace and the possibility of being cast out of her husband's home and socially ostracized.

Upper class women remained inside the family compound, especially those young girls of a marriageable age. Footbinding was practiced through China with the aim of restraining women when they went out of doors (Curtin, 1975). They were under close chaperonage, and were only allowed to go out in well-concealed curtained sedan chairs. Married women and female children had more freedom. They were allowed to join the men and boys in important festival processions, such as the Spring Festival (Chinese New Year). The daily activities for upper-class women included gardening, sewing, and crafts.

Working class peasant women were exempted from footbinding due to the necessity of involvement in production. They always took part in some form of manual labor, such as transport work, construction work, stone-breaking, and road-building. They were involved in domestic chores as well, including spinning yarn, stripping corn, cooking, cleaning, and sewing. It seemed that they were expected to take up both the domestic and the economic roles at the same time.

The turn of the twentieth century marked the beginning of changes in the lives of Chinese women. They began to challenge tradition-bound ideas regarding their place in society. These Chinese women experienced a time of political turmoil. They experienced the collapse of the imperial system, the Republican Revolution of 1911, Warlordism (regional fighting and pillage), the Pacific War against the Japanese, World War II, and the Civil War. They were often left to raise their families and survive by themselves. As these changes took place, the barrier between working and upper class women began to melt. Women began to participate

in the 1911 Revolution, and in all aspects of the revolutions of 1926-1927 (Curtin, 1975; Kazuko, 1978/1989). Some Chinese women chose to break away from their families and support themselves.

The Communist Revolution (1930 - 1949)

Since the beginning of the Chinese Communist revolution, women's liberation had been part of the revolutionary process (Yao, 1983b). According to Curtin (1975), the Communist Revolution brought radical changes to the status of women in China by encouraging them to be politically conscious, and it was a gigantic step for the Chinese feminist movement. Curtin commented that it was the first time in the history of China that achievement of gender equality seemed possible since they no longer held solely domestic and familial roles.

During the early phase of the Communist Revolution, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) tried to integrate the goals of revolutionary and feminist movements through mobilizing women to participate in political and military struggles as a means of improving the social, political, and economic status of women in China (Croll, 1978). During the Revolutionary Era in Yenan (1936-1949), "work" had to be redefined in terms of production in order to allow the Party to survive the economic blockade imposed by the Kuomintang (KMT). Many of the women members of the CCP who accompanied Mao on the Long March later became prominent leading female figures in the Communist Regimes (Trumbull, 1968). The CCP had drawn Chinese women into military roles as well as agricultural and industrial labor supporting the war effort.

The Communist Era (1949 - Present)

The call for female participation in military and political roles did not end with the Revolution and the takeover of China by the CCP. The China Democratic Women's Federation was set up at this time to implement governmental policy toward women, and also to attend to complaints by women when the approved reforms were not being implemented (Curtin,

1975).

The New Marriage Law (1950, amended in 1980) of the People's Republic of China formally removed one of the traditional underpinnings of female inferiority (Duley, 1986). This law enabled young people to select their own spouse and marry without an exchange of money. It also prohibited concubinage, child betrothal, and interference in widow remarriage. The husband and wife had equal rights to possession and management of family property, inheritance, the use of family names, divorce, and free choice of occupation. The Land Reforms of the 1950s granted Chinese women the right to property.

In the early 1960s, Mao called on the nation's housewives to join the Cultural Revolution. In his tribute to women of the militia corps, Mao wrote:

> The gallant figure of a woman carrying a five-foot-long gun,
> Standing on the drill ground bathed in the first rays of the morning sun;
> Women of China nourish great hopes;
> They do not love to wear gay dresses. Instead, they love to carry arms.
> (Quoted in Trumbull, 1968, p. 174)

In this kind of political atmosphere, the women in China "abandoned the habit of dressing up in order to conform to the lofty ideals of the revolution" (Trumbull, 1968, p. 175). They did not wear make-up, and only dressed up on special occasions.

"Work" was upheld as the supreme virtue, and had become an important liberating force under the Communist regime. Women's direct participation in the labor force was believed to be the only road to equality. Thus, they were encouraged to join in a productive labor force. Communal child care, cafeterias, and medical services were established in work units to "alleviate the double burden of women workers with family responsibilities in order to free more of their time for wage labor" (Duley, 1986, p. 266). Other than the old

and the sick, all Chinese women were engaged in either manual or mental labor. Professions that featured a woman's glamor ceased to exist. Instead, women began to seek new kinds of occupations, such as tractor driving, taxi driving, etc. Sheridan and Salaff (1984b) point out that "work creates and sustains social life, but there abounds in the West a popular image of passive Chinese women who do not work" (p. 236). In reality, the Chinese women of today engage in a wide range of work. The range of acceptable jobs for women has expanded greatly in recent decades.

Despite greater economic self-sufficiency for women in Mainland China, and the claim that they have largely freed themselves from household chores and achieved equality, family economy seems to remain controlled by men, and social sanctions and political morality appear to keep women tied to the family (Sheridan & Salaff, 1984b). Wei (1989) points out that the two thousand years of patriarchal-feudal ideology of the old tradition still lingers in the minds of the majority of Chinese. As a result, Chinese women become "doubly accountable" for all work in the home as well as in production. They are vulnerable to criticism if they fail in either (Sheridan, 1984).

Historical circumstance seems to make it impossible for the feminist movement in China to exist outside the larger revolutionary movement as McElderry (1984) states:

> In the West, the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration on the Rights of Man had provided a moral framework within which women sought equality. The development of stable governments meant that women could attempt to gain their rights by influencing the government in power.....In China, on the other hand, there was no stable Chinese authority sympathetic to ideals of equality; nor was there an appropriate ideology that was already widespread. (p. 32)

## Social Demographic Profile of Contemporary Chinese Women in Mainland China (PRC)

According to the Chinese national census of 1982, approximately half of the total Chinese population is female. Approximately 18.5% of Chinese females are between the age of 20 and 49 (see Table 1). The education and employment aspects of women in Mainland China has changed considerably since the founding of the Communist Party in the late 1920s.

The women of Mainland China in the 1980s are more educated than before the Liberation of 1949, when the overwhelming majority of women could neither read nor write (Wei, 1989). Wei points out that the male literacy rate of China before 1949 was 20%, and the female literacy rate was even lower than that of males. Over several decades, there has been a rapid increase of educated females at different levels of higher education. Table 2 shows the percentage of graduate and undergraduate students in 1985 by age and educational level. There is a steady 20% to 30% of female students in both undergraduate and graduate levels and among various age groups. Wei (1989) points out that before the 1950s, female students were generally distributed in subjects such as teaching, medicine, and liberal arts. Beginning in the 1960s, there has been a rising trend in subjects such as engineering, science, finance, and economics.

Working women constitute 43.6% of the total labor force in China in the 1980s. Table 3 shows the percentages of total population by sex, work force, and occupation. In the service, farming, forestry, fishery, animal husbandry, and commercial sectors, women constitute nearly half of the labor force. According to government policy, males and females enjoy equal pay for equal work. Sex discrimination in salary and wages is absolutely forbidden. All workers of the state-run enterprises enjoy free medical service; however, women receive special treatment, such as regular gynecological check-ups, free medical care throughout pregnancy, and eight

Table 1

Total Population of Mainland China (PRC) in 1982 by Sex and Age Group

| Item | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|
| Total Population | 51.52 | 48.48 |
| Population by Age Group | | |
| Under 20 | 23.63 | 22.31 |
| 20 - 29 | 8.79 | 8.07 |
| 30 - 39 | 6.62 | 6.03 |
| 40 - 49 | 5.06 | 4.46 |
| Over 50 | 7.42 | 7.61 |

N=1,008,152,137

Source: Status of Women: China, by Z. Wei, 1989,

Table 2

Percentage of Female Literate Population by Age and Educational Level in 1985

| Age Group | Graduates | Undergraduates |
|---|---|---|
| 15 - 24 | 28.5 | 27.0 |
| 25 - 34 | 32.8 | 23.8 |
| 35 - 44 | 26.7 | 22.0 |
| Above 45 | 20.0 | 17.5 |

N=606,110,623

Source: Status of Women: China, by Z. Wei, 1989, p.33

Table 3

Percentages of Total Population by Sex, Workforce, and Occupation in 1985

| | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|
| Total Work Force | 56.31 | 43.69 |
| Occupations | | |
| Professional & Technical | 61.73 | 38.27 |
| Leading Cadre | 89.62 | 10.38 |
| Office Workers | 75.53 | 24.47 |
| Commercial Personnel | 54.14 | 45.86 |
| Service Personnel | 52.07 | 47.93 |
| Laborers (e.g., farming, etc.) | 53.21 | 46.79 |
| Workers (e.g., industries, etc.) | 64.58 | 35.42 |
| Others | 58.31 | 41.69 |

N=521,505,618

Source: Status of Women: China, by Z. Wei, 1989, p.27

weeks of paid maternity leave.

The above statistics demonstrate that women's educational levels and range of occupations have generally been increasing since 1949. Although there is no reliable information on the demographic profile of Chinese women who accompany their husbands to the United States, it is most likely that they are educated working women who are accustomed to the rising status of women in Chinese society.

## Lives of Chinese Women in the United States

### The "China Mary": History of Chinese Immigrant Women in the United States

#### Pioneering Women (1800 - 1900)

Few Chinese women came to the United States in the early 19th century due to cultural taboos, limited financial resources, and anti-Chinese sentiment in the United States (Chan, 1991; Mo, 1989; Yung, 1986). Another significant factor according to Chan was the effort of various levels of the American government to restrict the immigration of Chinese

women. As a result, an imbalance of the sex ratio in the Chinese population in the United States lasted for more than a century (Chan, 1991).

Mo (1989) divided early female Chinese immigrants into three categories. In the first category are the wives of successful Chinese merchants who accompanied their husbands. The second category consists of laboring women who left home to earn a living. The third category is mainly women who were forced into prostitution and slavery.

The merchant wives were one of the few classes who could legally emigrate to the United States after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (Chan, 1991). Chan points out that though they were the most "favored" group among the female Chinese immigrants, they still encountered tremendous difficulties in entering the United States. They only contributed to a small portion of the Chinese immigrant women in the United States. Mo (1989) describes the lives of these women as "quiet and secluded." They were mostly from middle and upper class families, and their husbands were wealthy enough to hire maids and servants to do housework for them. They spent most of their time doing crafts. They seldom went out, and were not allowed to participate in community affairs. Yung (1986) states that the Christian churches, which provided home visits and English lessons, were their only vital link to the larger society. Their favorite entertainment was to see Chinese classical operas in separate boxes from the men. Since lack of knowledge was a virtue in Chinese tradition, these women were not encouraged to have an education.

Laboring women spent most of their time in household chores, such as cooking, cleaning, washing, and taking care of children. But at the same time, they had to work at home to help support their families. They either engaged themselves in their husbands' businesses, or in sewing, fishing, or rolling cigars. They usually worked 12 to 16 hours a day for six or seven days a week. Their pay was low,

if they were being paid at all. They were only employed in the least-esteemed occupations, such as laundress, seamstress, miner and railroad worker, cook, or housekeeper (Mo, 1989). They had no leisure time for other interests or activities.

Prostitution within the Chinese community in the United States thrived due to a pronounced shortage of women in the Chinese population and the prohibitions against sexual relations between white women and Chinese men (Yung, 1986). Most of the prostitutes were "kidnapped, lured, or purchased by procurers in China, brought to America by importers, and sold to brothel owners" (Yung, 1986, p. 18). A very few prostitutes came on their own to search for higher income (Mo, 1989). They were frequently subjected to physical and mental abuse and led a demeaning life. The "fortunate" ones were either redeemed by wealthy clients or sold to well-to-do Chinese as concubines or mistresses. Other than a few exceptional cases, the only way out of misery and enslavement for most of these prostitutes seemed to be madness, suicide, violent death, or incurable disease.

These groups of pioneering Chinese immigrant women suffered harsh living conditions and discrimination because of their race and sex. With their courage and resilience, they "blazed a trail for those who followed" (Yung, 1986, p. 8).

Years of Struggle (1900 - 1945)

As China continued to experience internal turmoil and external suppression, many Chinese immigrants, who initially planned to return home, decided to stay in America. Despite various discriminatory laws passed in the United States to impose legal restrictions on Chinese immigration and humiliating treatment upon entry, many Chinese women still attempted to enter the United States. Those who successfully entered found, to their dismay, that life in America was no easier than life in China. They were immediately plunged into heavy responsibilities as wife, mother, and provider upon

their arrival (Yung, 1986). Chinese families in those days were large, with typically six to thirteen children. Due to language disabilities and a lack of skills, it was hard for Chinese women to find good jobs. Before the 1920s, Chinese immigrant women worked at home. They engaged in work such as weaving baskets, stringing beads, and making buttonholes. After the 1920s, they started to work outside the home in garment factories, canneries, and shrimp-husking shops. They were often left alone to take charge of the family and household finances while their husbands were away from home working at seasonal jobs. Family and work were closely integrated for these women. The depression in the 1930s made life even more difficult for them. They struggled to survive through hard work. They had no time to socialize and few opportunities to learn English or assimilate into American society.

During the 1940s war years, Chinese women were active in participating in boycotts against Japanese products, and in organizing fund-raising activities to support China's war effort and relief work. This patriotic fervor expanded to include the United States when it entered the war as China's ally after the Pearl Harbor attack. Some Chinese women served in the United States armed forces during World War II (Yung, 1986). Those who did not participate in the direct war effort volunteered their time to roll bandages, knit and sew, write to servicemen, and entertain soldiers. Yung (1986) points out that it was during the war years that Chinese women began to find jobs in private companies, civil service, and professional fields due to the shortage of men and the increase in job opportunities.

Contemporary Chinese Women (1945 - Present)

The rate of Chinese women immigrating to the United States increased after World War II. The male/female ratio of the Chinese population in the United States dropped from 2.9:1 in 1940 to 1.8:1 in 1950, and further to 1.3:1 in 1960

(Yung, 1986). These Chinese women immigrants were mostly young newly-married war brides, or older wives who had been separated from their husbands for a long period of time because of unfavorable immigration laws and the War. They shared similar background with the earlier generation of Chinese immigrant women; they were non-English speaking with a lack of marketable job skills.

Most of these Chinese women chose to live in established urban Chinatowns in such cities as San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and Boston since in such places they would be able to find supportive relatives, jobs, and familiar cultural surroundings. With limited English and job skills, they continued to engage themselves in long-hour, low-pay menial jobs in Chinatown restaurants and garment factories in addition to taking care of their families and children.

These Chinese women were grateful to be in America. However, they found adaptation to a new way of life difficult. They had to fight against "language barriers, cultural differences, strained family relationships, limited economic opportunities, and the pressure of daily survival" (Yung, 1986, p.81). Those who were married to more educated and assimilated husbands had an easier time. Their husbands were "able to take them shopping, taught them how to cook and dress in Western style, and enrolled them in English classes" (Yung, 1986, p. 82).

Other than wives, a sizable number of highly educated intellectual women also immigrated to the United States in the post-war era due to America's demand for their skills in helping the expansion of defense and technological industries in the United States. Many were students and professionals who had chosen to remain in or come to America under the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 or the Refugee Acts of 1953, 1957, and 1959. They were more able to assimilate into American society due to their educational background, ability to speak English, and previous exposure to Western ideas.

They were able to find work in academic and professional fields and housing in suburban communities away from Chinatown.

Although the majority of Chinese women did not directly participate in the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s, their lives were greatly affected by the Movement. The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 ended the restrictive quota system of 105 Chinese immigrants per year. It was in the years that followed the 1965 Act that the male/female ratio of the Chinese population finally approached parity (Yung, 1986). The social service programs established as a result of the Civil Right Movement benefited the Chinese immigrant women. It was the first time in the history of Chinese immigrant women that programs to help them learn English, acquire job skills, and help them cope with their new lives in America were available. Chinese women began to reap the benefits of "equal pay for equal work, the widening of career choices, and an improved image for minority women as a whole" (Yung, 1986, p. 98).

Chinese immigrant women of the 1980s come from a broad range of backgrounds and have diverse problems. Though there are success stories, for every successful one, there are thousands struggling to survive. A large percentage of Chinese immigrant women still find themselves engaged in minimum hourly wage dead-end jobs. Economic survival and cultural adjustment is their primary concern.

## Literature on Immigrant Women in General

There is not much literature on sojourning Chinese women who accompany their husbands to the United States. Though these women might not have the intention of immigrating, literature on immigrant women in general might be able to provide some understanding since sojourning women might share the same adjustment experiences and go through similar adjustment processes as immigrant women.

"Passive Dependent"

Immigrant women were viewed as "passive dependents" of male immigrants since they were not involved in the decision-making process of migration and they depended heavily on their husbands for the various aspects of life after migration (Morokvasic, 1984). It is only in recent years that research studies have been conducted on immigrant women (e.g., Freidenberg, Imperiale, & Skovron, 1988; Kim & Hurh, 1988; Lee & Cochran, 1988; Ong, 1987; Salgado de Snyder, 1987). Women play no role in the decision-making process of migration (Freidenberg et al., 1988; Salgado de Snyder, 1987). They follow someone else's decision. They usually do not want to migrate, and even after they arrive, they do not want to stay in the United States (Freidenberg et al., 1988). They simply "join the spouse" (Morokavsic, 1984).

Linguistic Handicap

Immigrant women have great language difficulties. They usually do not speak English or have limited English proficiency since they are not adequately prepared for life in an English-speaking society. Salgado de Snyder (1987) finds that proficiency in English is related to faster and easier adaptation, and a lower level of depressive symptomatology.

Career Development

Due to language problems, immigrant women usually do not find jobs in the United States (Salgado de Snyder, 1987). No matter how high their qualifications, since they cannot communicate well, they often have to either stay home and accept a dependent status, or work as unpaid workers in their husbands' or relatives' small businesses (Kim & Hurh, 1988). Some immigrant women are willing to take lower pay and lower ranking jobs, such as waitresses in restaurants. For those women who are lucky enough to find jobs, Lee and Cochran (1988) point out that they experience conflict between professional and family roles. Kim and Hurh echo this idea

when they discuss the burden of double roles in the wives of Korean immigrants.

Adjustment to the United States

Lee and Cochran (1988) in their research find that immigrant women feel trapped and polarized, and they experience great stress. Several writers (e.g., Freidenberg et al., 1988; Salgado de Snyder, 1987) state that immigration and the process of adaptation to another culture is an important life event change. This life event change is correlated with stress, and stress affects the physical and/or mental well-being of the individual (Miller & Harwell, 1983). In addition, females were more likely than males to have depressive symptomatology (Amaro & Russo, 1987; Salgado de Snyder, 1987).

In brief, most immigrant women do not come to the United States of their own choice, and they experience great language difficulties. Immigration is an important life event that changes their lives and creates much stress. This adjustment process is stressful to them, and affects their physical and psychological well-being.

Similar to immigrant women, female spouses of international students do not choose to come to the United States. They leave their careers and families behind, and they have no specific goals to work toward. They have language difficulties, and it is difficult for them to find jobs due to both language problems and visa limitations. Coming to the United States seems to be an important life event change to these women. It is essential to understand their adjustment experiences in order for counseling professionals to work with them effectively.

Literature on International Students

Except for academic problems, the Chinese women who accompany their husbands may have similar adjustment difficulties as international students in general, even though their adjustment processes may not be identical. Literature

on the adjustment of international students in the past three decades is abundant. Church (1982) reviews the literature in the 1960s and 1970s, and summarizes the adjustment experiences of sojourners into four different areas: adjustment problems, factors affecting adjustment, the adjustment process, and intervention and counseling.

Adjustment Problems

Church (1982) summarizes the adjustment problems of international students in three categories: academic, personal, and sociocultural. Table 4 outlines the problems in each category. The research studies on international student adjustment in the 1980s continues to verify the existence of these problems. According to Manese et al. (1988), the most commonly cited adjustment problems of international students in the literature are: lack of English proficiency, inadequate financial resources, social adjustment, problems in daily living, and loneliness or homesickness.

Spouses of international students probably encounter similar adjustment problems as the international students themselves, though the intensity of the problems they experience may be different. For instance, they may have more difficulties in language. They are not prepared to come to the United States to study. They may not have adequate training in English when compare to the international students. These spouses usually do not become students themselves when they first arrive, and consequently do not encounter problems in the academic area. However, they may still have other personal and sociocultural problems.

Factors Affecting Adjustment

Church (1982) categorizes the variables that affect international student adjustment into three areas: background, situational, and personality.

Table 4

Commonly Mentioned Problems of Foreign Students

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**Academic Problems**

Language
- Need to delay educational goals while studying host language
- Written and oral reports
- Understanding lectures
- Culture-bound professional vocabulary

Placement
- Inadequate prior preparation
- Inadequate academic orientation, advice
- Inadequate placement/credit for previous coursework
- Selection of institution and coursework

Adjustment to new educational system
- Frequent exams and assignments
- Classroom and professor/student informality
- Competitiveness
- Grading methods
- Credits system

**Personal Problems**

Loneliness
Homesickness
Depression
Arrival confusion
Maintaining self-esteem
Lack of personal guidance and counseling
Overambitious goals to succeed
Inappropriate motivations for overseas study
Somatic complaints
Family problems or loss of loved ones
Time pressure
Decision to stay or return home
Religious problems
Staying current with events at home
Adjusting to food, climate

**Financial/employment problems**

Financial difficulties
Housing difficulties (cost, noise, privacy, getting along with roommates)
Difficulties obtaining employment
Concern over employment opportunities on return home
Visa, immigration problems

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Table 4 (continued)

| Sociocultural Problems |
| --- |
| Adjusting to social customs and norms |
| Contrasting or conflicting values and assumptions |
| Balancing simultaneous culture group memberships |
| Defining role as a foreign student |
| Ignorance of host nationals about home culture |
| Political upheaval at home |
| Difficulty making social contacts |
| Problems with verbal and nonverbal communication |
| Superficial American friendships |
| Racial discrimination |
| Dating and sexual problems |

Adapted from "Sojourner adjustment" by A. T. Church, 1982, Psychological Bulletin, 91, p. 572.

A. Background Variables

1. Nationality/National Status

   Several writers (Church, 1982; Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Meloni, 1986) point out that Asian students have more adjustment problems when they come to the United States than do students from Canada and Europe.

2. Age

   Younger sojourners seem to have more personal and academic problems than older ones (Church, 1982; Meloni, 1986; Schrum & Lauver, 1988).

3. Gender

   Even though few research studies on gender differences in adjustment have been done, several writers (Church, 1982; Manese et al, 1988; Pruitt, 1978) mention that females have more adjustment difficulties than males.

4. Language

   Ability to speak the host language fluently is

important for adjustment (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986). Language proficiency has a positive relationship with the general indices of satisfaction and adjustment (Church, 1982). Language is the most frequently mentioned problem in the international student adjustment literature (Manese et al., 1988). Of the different nationalities in the international student groups, students from Southeast Asia
have the poorest language proficiency (Church, 1982; Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Meloni, 1986) because when learning English in their home countries, the emphasis is not on communication (Burnaby & Sun, 1989). Poor language proficiency is one of the reasons, cited by Church, why Asian students have more adjustment difficulties.

5. Previous cross-cultural experiences and preparation
Church (1982) concludes that previous positive cross-cultural experiences facilitate adjustment. Klineberg and Hull (1979) find that previous travel is related to better coping skills and fewer difficulties and problem areas. Church (1982) further points out that Asian students travel less than European students, and as a result, they have more adjustment problems in the United States. Bulthuis (1986) echoes this idea by saying that Asian students are the least prepared to study in the United States.

B. Situational Variables

1. Living arrangements
Living with Americans is helpful in improving language ability (Church, 1982; Yao, 1983a). However, few international students choose to live with Americans (Boer, 1981). For most married graduate students, it is likely that they will not

live with Americans. This limits their opportunities to practice English. Moreover, housing expenses are another major worry for international students (Klineberg & Hull, 1979). According to Pruitt (1978), the major problem faced by married international students is the cost of housing. Married graduate international students usually have to choose poorer living conditions in order to cut their expenses in housing.

2. Familial support

More familial support is related to less stress (Fischman, 1986; Lin, Simeone, Ensel, & Kuo, 1979; Sodowsky & Carey, 1987). Most international students do not have families in the United States. The only family they have is their spouse and children who to a certain extent depend on them.

3. Social Support

Several research studies (Alexander, Klein, Workneh, & Miller, 1983; Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Schrum & Lauver, 1988; Walter-Samli, 1978) find that international students, especially Asian students, have limited social contact with Americans, and like to stick together with co-national groups. Schrum and Lauver (1988) point out that this phenomenon is related to alienation. Literature in social support generally suggests that social networking with co-national groups is negatively correlated with better adjustment (Church, 1982; Hull, 1981). On the other hand, Kuo and Tsai (1986) argue that this notion might be too pessimistic, and that significant variables related to successful adaptation are being ignored. They further argue that social networking with co-national groups could reduce the psychological impairment resulting from adjustment difficulties.

C. Personality Variables

Church (1982) says that there are no consistent empirical findings concerning which types of personalities adapt better than others. The findings of Kuo and Tsai (1986) support the concept that hardy personalities can avert stresses associated with migration. Hardy personalities or hardiness according to them consist of three basic characteristics. The first characteristic is the belief that life events can be controlled or influenced by the individual. The second is a deep involvement or commitment to individual life activities. The last characteristic involves anticipating change as an exciting challenge that will promote further development. These characteristics enable the individual to behave constructively and in turn minimizes stress.

No studies were found on the correlation of marital relationships and the adjustment of international spouses. Studies on immigrant women in this area are rare. Freidenberg et al. (1988) point out, in their summary of factors affecting the psychosocial well-being of females in the United States, that in general, marriage acts as a buffer under stressful situations. Salagdo de Snyder (1987) finds that higher spousal support is related to lower depressive symptomatology. It seems most likely that marital relationships are an important variable which might affect the adjustment of international spouses.

In summary, it seems quite likely that international spouses may have limited previous cultural experiences. They are less prepared to come to the United States as compared to international students. They generally have limited language ability, limited social contacts with Americans, and may be less likely to live with Americans. Their marital relationships may be their sole source of help in adjusting.

Adjustment Process

Church (1982) outlines several approaches in the sojourner adjustment literature that describe the adjustment process of sojourners. The most used approaches are the stage model and the U-curve hypothesis of adjustment.

The stage model states that sojourners go through developmental stages in their adjustment processes. Oberg (cited in Church, 1982) lists four stages of sojourner adjustment: honeymoon, hostility, recovery, and acceptance. Bulthuis (1986) cites Smith's four stages: spectator, adaptive, coming-to-terms, and predeparture. Yoshikawa (1987) synthesizes Adler's idea and develops five phases: contact, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy, and double-swing. Though using different terminologies, the stages of development discussed are similar. They all agree that sojourners go through an initial period of excitement and speculation, then they will experience negative emotions such as hostility, and gradually they will re-integrate or "come-to-terms.

The U-curve hypothesis views the sojourner's level of adjustment as a function of time. There is an initial optimism and elation followed by an emotional dip. As time moves on, the sojourner gradually recovers from the dip, and achieves and maintains a higher level of adjustment.

These two approaches, though having different focuses, share a lot of commonalities. First, both approaches anticipate that sojourners go through an initial phase of excitement in which an exploration of the new environment is apparent. What follows is a period of confusion, depression, and frustration when they start encountering problems in different areas. As time goes by, they enter a final stage of putting themselves together and restoring their equilibrium.

It seems most likely that spouses of international students would go through a similar three phase U-curve

process in their adjustment. They feel the initial excitement of coming to the United States within the first few months of their arrival. They then experience a period of confusion, depression, and frustration as various problems begin to surface. Finally, as they start to put themselves together, they restore a higher adjustment level.

Intervention and Counseling

Despite the fact that the spouses of international students encounter many problems, their well-being has been neglected in orientation programs (Boer, 1981). Boer calls for special programs during and after the orientation period to help the spouses of international students. He recommends that these programs be in the form of small informal group meetings with alumni international spouses. The idea of using peers and a group approach has been a recurring theme in cross-cultural counseling literature (e.g., DeFreece, 1987; Ho, 1974; Mack, 1989). Peer and group counseling is more effective since several research studies (e.g., Kincaid & Yum, 1987; Manese et al., 1988; Surda & Collins, 1984) find that both international students and immigrants are reluctant to seek counseling in spite of a great need for professional help (Dillard & Chisolm, 1983; Mack, 1989). When they need help, they turn to friends and relatives (Miller & Harwell, 1983).

Summary: What Do We Really Know?

Based on the immigrant women and international student literature, it seems that the spouses of international students, who usually do not choose to come the United States in the first place, generally experience the following problems: language difficulties, homesickness and isolation, culture shock (adjusting to the food, climate, customs etc. of the United States), and stress as a result of the change in life events and occupational status. Though it is speculated that the spouses of international students have similar adjustment problems as international students and immigrant women, no research studies have verified this

hypothesis. Research is needed in this area.

It seems, from the above literature review, that spouses of international students may have a less satisfactory adjustment when compared to international students because they have limited language ability, limited social contact with Americans, poorer living conditions, no immediate family members (other than spouse and children) in the United States, limited previous cultural experiences and preparation, and are less likely to live with Americans. They go through a three phase U-curve adjustment process. No research has been done on the adjustment processes and problems of this group of spouses. All these factors may not be relevant and other factors may need to be identified. Besides, Chinese spouses as a subgroup may be different from immigrant women in general. Most studies on immigrant women have not looked at subgroup differences. Studies of subgroup differences should be conducted, and this is the primary focus of this study.

# CHAPTER THREE

# ENTERING THE WORLD OF SOJOURNING CHINESE WOMEN

## Gaining Entry to the Life of Chinese Women: Context, Contact, and Longitudinal Triangulation Design

### Context: A Rural Life

Chinese women sojourning in the United States come not only from a diversified background, they also enter a pluralistic society with a variety of life styles and cultures. The Chinese women in my study entered an environment which was in stark contrast to the metropolitan areas of New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago. Their experiences may be very different from those who come to join their husbands in big universities near metropolitan areas. Because the surroundings into which these women came were unlike those from which they came, I felt that it was very important to understand the context of their lives and experiences.

The setting for this study was a university town with a resident population of approximately 35,000. The university has a student population of approximately 24,000 and employs 10,000 staff and faculty members. The international student population is around 1,300 with approximately 250 Chinese students from different localities. There is no official data on the number of spouses and family members of Chinese students in the community, but the university estimates this number to be around 600. Official data on Chinese professionals with a Chinese background in the community is not available. The unofficial estimate of the number of Chinese professionals in the community is around 30. The total Chinese population in the community including students, professionals, and families is estimated to be around 700.

The Chinese women in this community come from a diverse background. Approximately half of them come from Mainland China and grew up in a communist society. The majority of the other half come from Taiwan, a society which is dominated by Chinese culture although Western influence is also evident.

A small portion of the Chinese women in this community are either from Hong Kong, a British colony greatly influenced by western culture for the past hundred years , or from Southeast Asian countries which have a mixture of different oriental cultural backgrounds. I anticipated that their diversified backgrounds might affect their adjustment experiences. Thus I was interested in studying Chinese women from various settings.

I originally intended to study Chinese women from different backgrounds who fit the following criteria: (1) they accompanied their husbands to the United States; (2) they had been in the United States for no longer than one year; (3) their husbands were students but they were not; (4) they were not employed full time outside the home; (5) they were not citizens or permanent residents of the United States; and (6) they had not been in the United States before. However, during the time of my study, there were no newly-arrived Chinese women from Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Southeast Asia who fit all the criteria. As a result, all of the Chinese women participating in my study came from Mainland China.

Contact: Identifying Chinese Women

Locating sojourning Chinese women proved to be more complicated than I originally anticipated. I went through three different procedures to identify potential Chinese women for my study. First, with the help of the International Center at the university, I obtained a list of all the new male Chinese students arriving at the beginning of Fall semester, 1990. But using this process, I was unable to identify any potential participants since the male Chinese students from Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia were for the most part unmarried. Those who were married did not have their wives with them at that time.

Second, I obtained copies of the membership directories from several Chinese student organizations on campus. I contacted the presidents of these organizations and requested

their help in identifying those members who were married and whose wives had arrived in the United States within the past 12 months. There were no married Chinese students from Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Southeast Asia. As for students from Mainland China, the president of the Association for Chinese students and Scholars told me that it was impossible for him to identify any potential participants for two reasons: (1) there were more than a hundred Chinese students from Mainland China at the university; and (2) wives of male Chinese students usually did not come with their husbands but arrived later, which made it difficult to keep track of who was coming and when. As a result of the first two unsuccessful attempts, I had to rely mainly on personal contacts to identify participants for my study. This "snowballing" procedure is recommended by Taylor and Bodgan (1984), and is commonly used in qualitative research studies (e.g., Rubin, 1979).

I successfully identified four Chinese women whom I personally knew, and who fit all the selection criteria. I started interviews with them while I continued to identify other Chinese woman. I also asked two former English As A Second Language (ESL) instructors at the university to recommend Chinese women who they thought might fit my selection criteria. I then called these Chinese women, introduced my study and conducted a brief screening interview to ascertain whether they fit all the selection criteria before I requested their voluntary participation. I identified three participants through these phone calls. When I began to talk with these women, I also asked them to recommend other Chinese wives to me. I identified two more participants through these personal recommendations. I later identified three more participants either through my personal contacts or the recommendations of other Chinese women. As a result of these strategies, I identified a total of 12 Chinese women, and they were all from Mainland China.

## Longitudinal Triangulation Design

I chose to use a longitudinal triangulation design in this study for two reasons. First, I view adjustment as a process that changes with time. I strongly agree with Church (1982) that a single data collection could not reveal the dynamics of the process of adjustment. In order to provide a better picture of the adjustment experiences of these Chinese women, I collected data using various methods over a nine-month duration.

Second, using multiple data collection methods makes possible a clearer understanding of the complexity of the adjustment experiences of these Chinese women. The triangulation design is recommended by several researchers (e.g., Connidis, 1983; Firestone, 1987; Greene & McClintock, 1985; Mathison, 1988). Greene and McClintock defined triangulation as "the multiple employment of sources of data, observers, methods, or theories in investigations of the same phenomenon" (p. 524). The purpose of this triangulation design is to increase validity through congruence and/or complementarity of the results from each method (Firestone, 1987; Greene & McClintock, 1985; Mathison, 1988).

The initial phone contact with each woman provided me with some basic demographic information. I also designed a simple Personal Data Sheet (Appendix One). I used four major tools to help me understand the adjustment experiences of these Chinese women. These tools included a questionnaire, in-depth interviews, participant observations, and daily activity recording forms. The questionnaire consisted of an adapted and translated version of the Social Readjustment Rating Questionnaire (SRRQ) by Holmes & Rahe (1967). In-depth interviews consisted of repeated face-to-face encounters directed toward understanding the adjustment experiences of these Chinese women. The term "in-depth interview" was originally introduced by Taylor and Bodgan (1984). The participant observation was an attempt to understand the

experiences of these Chinese women in their natural settings. This method was recommended by Kurz (1983). The daily activity recording forms were designed to quantify their use of time. Further discussion of these methods in some detail follows.

A Measure of Life Event Stress

Changes in life events may cause tremendous stress on individuals. For these Chinese women, coming to the United States by itself might have been a significant life event change. In addition, there may have been other problems and life event changes that followed or are associated with their initial arrival in the United States. In order to understand the significance of these changes in their lives and the stress they perceived, I asked the women to complete an adapted and translated version of the SRRQ.

The original SSRQ was developed by Holmes and Rahe in 1967 to measure life event stresses. Since then, investigations have been extended to the cross-cultural field with Spearman's rank order correlation coefficients ranging from 0.62 to 0.94 (Isherwood & Adam, 1976). For the past two decades, the SRRQ has been widely used with diverse, culturally different immigrants and international students in various settings (e.g., Isherwood & Adam, 1976; Kincaid & Yum, 1987; Kuo & Tsai, 1986; Masuda & Holmes, 1967; Valdes & Baxter, 1976). This is one of the standardized measurements of life stresses that has been widely used with culturally different groups.

There were a total of 34 life events in this adapted version of the SRRQ (refer to Appendix Two for details). The first life event, "Marriage", was given an arbitrary value of 500. These Chinese women had to assign a value to the rest of the 33 life events based on their perception of the degree of readjustment required in comparison to marriage. For instance, if they perceived "Leaving China" as requiring more intense and protracted readjustment than marriage, they

assigned a proportionately larger number to this life event; if they perceived it to be of equal readjustment, the same value of 500 would be assigned to this life event; if they perceived it to be of lesser and shorter readjustment, they assigned a proportionately lesser number. This procedure was recommended by the authors of SRRQ.

I revised the SRRQ based on the unique background of Chinese sojourning women. I added items such as leaving China (item #3), and separation from spouse still living in China (item #11). I also replaced Christmas with the Chinese New Year (item #30). A complete list of all changes is in Appendix Three.

I followed the translation procedures recommended by Sue and Sue (1987) to ensure the validity of the translated version of the questionnaire. The first draft of the translation was done by an experienced translator and former editor of a publishing company in Hong Kong. I then asked a sojourning Chinese wife in the community to make changes in wording and offer comments. I requested another experienced translator in the community to translate the Chinese version back into English. Both the original English version and the final back-translated English version were given to a former instructor of English As A Second Language at the university for comparison. I made a final revised Chinese version based on her comments.

After these Chinese women completed the SRRQ, I asked them to indicate by a check mark which of the 34 life events had happened to them personally in the United States within the past 12 months. I assumed that experiencing a life event personally might change their perception of how stressful that particular life event would be.

Journey to the Sojourner's World

I interviewed 11 of the 12 Chinese women in their homes. One interview was held at the university library. I conducted all the interviews in Mandarin. Sue and Sue (1987) pointed

out that using English or an informant when studying Asian Americans who either do not speak English at all or do not speak it well may create validity problems for the study due to the inherent differences between English and Chinese. The essence and accuracy of the information may be lost during the process of translation. Using Mandarin to conduct the interviews avoided this language problem. Eleven out of the 12 interviews were audio-taped with permission. I began the interviews by asking the women to describe their experiences in the United States in general. I chose this approach for two reasons. First, by taking this "low" and unobtrusive profile (McCracken, 1988), I gave the women an opportunity to tell their stories in their own language and terms. Second, according to Spradley (1979), the question-answer sequence is a single element in human thinking. Questions always imply answers and vice versa. Thus the interview process was also a process of question formulation. By using a descriptive question, I was able to develop more specific and structural questions concerning different aspects of their adjustment during the interview.

I had follow-up contacts during the 9-month period of my study with the 12 women through direct face-to-face interviews, phone interviews, and informal contacts during activities in which we all participated. Direct face-to-face interviews were audio-taped. I took notes while interviewing the women on the phone and immediately following informal contacts.

In addition to interviewing these Chinese women, I also interviewed several people who were responsible for providing different services to international women in the community. I had several interviews with the assistant director of the International Center. She was responsible for the orientation of new international students and their spouses. She also oversaw the various programs offered by the International Center. Many international students, and sometimes their

spouses, turned to her when they had problems. Thus she was also involved in counseling with international students.

I also talked individually with three women who were responsible for the YMCA "Mornings" program, the English As A Second Language (ESL) classes on campus, and the ESL classes at a local church to understand more about their programs, and to get an idea of the number of Chinese women in the community participating in these programs. These interviews provided me with a general picture of the social lives of Chinese women in the local community. This information enabled me to ascertain whether the social experiences of the Chinese women in my study were typical of this community. These were not formal interviews, but I met with them on several occasions when I accompanied some of the Chinese women as they attended ESL programs and other activities.

Recording Daily Activities

I originally asked the women to keep a diary of the activities they participated in, and any feelings and thoughts they had that might be related to their adjustment. However, they had difficulty in doing this. They either forgot or felt that they did not know how to begin. At that point, I realized that some kind of structure was needed. I then designed a form on which they could record their daily activities (Appendix Four). Each form covered a 7-day period with three sections (morning, afternoon, and evening) in each day. I gave them two identical forms for two consecutive weeks with specific dates marked on them together with a self-stamped, self-addressed envelope. I requested that they keep a record of their daily activities and then return the forms to me.

The "Taste and See" Approach

I attended some activities such as English classes, picnics, social activities, Bible studies, Chinese New Year celebrations, and a wedding with these Chinese women during these 9 months. I even went grocery shopping with some of

them. I managed to attend most of the activities at least once. I compiled observation notes immediately after I attended each activity. In addition to attending activities with them, I went to a spouse orientation workshop, and attended meetings at the university.

## From Scratch to Gourmet: Sorting, Analyzing, and Interpreting Data

I interviewed 12 Chinese women; however, I only used 11 cases for data analysis and interpretation. I omitted one case because the woman was unclear about her husband's status at the beginning, and then later, after further clarification, I found that her husband was not a student and did not intend to become one at that time. As this woman did not meet all the criteria of my study, I dropped her case.

Because I used multiple methods to collect different types of data, I used various methods of data analysis. All questionnaires were hand-coded and entered into a computer for generation of descriptive statistics.

I transcribed and translated at the same time in front of the computer. Tapes of 10 cases were transcribed, translated, and entered into the computer. The interview tapes of one case were not transcribed due to technical problems. Instead of transcribing and translating the tapes, I took notes and then typed the notes into the computer. I purposely did not translate the interviews into standard English since I wanted to preserve the flavor of "Chinese English" (also known as "Chin-glish" among the Chinese).

I developed a preliminary system for coding the data based on the ideas of Goetz and LeCompte (1984). After transcribing the first interview, I marked the themes such as experiences upon initial arrival, impressions of the United States, language problems, etc. that I identified along the margins of the transcript. After I went through the complete interview transcript, I grouped these themes into different categories such as personal information, career, life at home,

life in the United States, adjustment problems, etc. and assigned a group code (e.g., 600 for adjustment problems) to each of the categories. I then developed sub-categories within each category and assigned them a sub-code (e.g., under adjustment problems, I assigned 601 for homesickness, 602 for living conditions, etc.). After all categories and sub-categories had been assigned, I used this preliminary coding system to hand-code the first interview. Please refer to Appendix Five for a complete listing of categories. The system was then entered into the computer and a program (see Appendix Six) was written for coding the remaining cases.

All individual interviews were coded three times during the whole data analysis process. First, I used the computer to code all individual interviews using the preliminary coding system. New sub-categories and categories were set up for any information in the interviews that did not fit into the existing sub-categories and categories. After all 11 cases were coded, a complete coding system was developed, and I set up a coding file for each case.

Second, since sub-categories and categories continued to emerge as the coding proceeded, some information in previous cases had not been coded properly. For this reason, I went through all 11 cases a second time and searched for any information that had been omitted or had not been properly coded the first time and re-coded them using the final version of the coding system.

After I coded all the interviews, I proceeded to code the notes of all telephone interviews, participant observations, informal contacts, and interviews with service providers. These data were hand-coded using the same coding system.

The data analysis for the daily activity recording forms was done differently. I regarded each section of the form as one time unit. There were three time units in a day, and 21 time units for a week. There was a total of 42 time units

for each woman in a 2-week period. Two women failed to return the forms and two of the remaining nine were either incomplete or unclear. I contacted these women several times to talk with them about the forms. Some repeatedly lost the forms and asked to be exempted from this task. Others felt that they had nothing to record because their lives were very simple. Since the daily activity recording form was only one of several methods used to collect data, the loss of some data from this method should not invalidate the results of the study. Thus I did not insist that all of the forms be completed. As a result, I only used seven cases for the data analysis of the forms. The time units spent on different activities in each case were counted, compiled, and categorized.

Finally, after I had completed the initial coding of all data, I read through the printed transcripts of each case together with the coding files and other coded data from participant observations, informal contacts, phone interviews, other interviews with service providers, and the daily activity recording forms. Comments, observations, notes, similarities, contradictions, questions, themes, etc. were marked on slips of paper. These slips were then grouped and organized into general themes and patterns for interpretation.

# CHAPTER FOUR
# STRANGERS IN PARADISE
## Who are these Strangers?

This study examined the adjustment experiences of 11 sojourning Chinese women who came to the United States as accompanying spouses, and who had been in the United States for less than a year. They were all from the People's Republic of China (PRC, commonly known as Mainland China), and were born and raised there. None of them were American citizens or permanent residents at the time of the study. They had not visited the United States prior to this experience. One of the 11 women had studied in Italy for 2 years and returned to Mainland China for half a year before coming to the United States while the rest had not previously left Mainland China.

All the husbands of these women were Chinese, and none had American citizenship or permanent residency at the time of the study. Most husbands came initially as visiting scholars. They were either full-time students or in the process of changing from visiting scholars to full-time students at the time of the study. The husbands were all enrolled in graduate programs at the university where this study was conducted.

These Chinese women were not students themselves, and were not employed full-time outside the home at the time of the study. None of the Chinese women had accompanied their husbands initially. The foreign study policy of Mainland China does not allow families to accompany students abroad. Wives may apply for visiting visas to join their husbands only after their husbands have arrived in the United States and sent documents back to China. The whole procedure takes at least 6 to 12 months if everything goes smoothly. However, the process generally takes much longer because most women have to apply several times before they are granted a visa. These Chinese women arrived in the United States by themselves

6 to 24 months after their husbands' arrivals. One woman had been separated from her husband for 4.5 years before she came. All of these Chinese women still had family members in Mainland China, and only one of the 11 Chinese women had relatives in the United States.

Table 5 lists the detailed demographic information of these Chinese women. Their ages ranged from 25 to 40, with half of them under 30. Most of them had been married for less than 5 years; all were married in Mainland China before their husbands came to the United States. Eight of the 11 had one child at the time of the study while the rest did not have any children. None of these children were born in the United States. Two of the Chinese women left their children with relatives in Mainland China. The ages of children ranged from 3 to 13 with five of them under the age of 5.

Ten of the Chinese women came from large cities such as Beijing, Nanjing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai. Most of them had an educational level above high school and held professional positions in China. There were three physicians, a professor, a pharmacist, a nurse, and a teacher among the women participating in this study.

## Part One: Coming to the United States

### The "Choice" of Coming

Did these women have a "choice" in coming to the United States? To answer this question the implications of the word "choice" must be explored. When I asked these women about their decision to come to the United States, they all said that they "chose" to come. By "choice", they meant that they said "yes" to their husbands' request for them to come. When I asked Hui-jing how she felt about coming to the United States, she said:

> "we do not quite understand the lives here, and how the society is like in the United States. Thus I do not

Table 5

Demographic Information of Chinese Women Informants

| Categories | Subcategories | Range | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | | 25 - 30 | 6 |
| | | 31 - 35 | 3 |
| | | 36 - 40 | 2 |
| Years of Marriage | | 0 - 5 | 7 |
| | | 6 - 10 | 3 |
| | | 10 - 15 | 1 |
| Children | Number | 0 | 4 |
| | | 1 | 7 |
| | Age | 0 - 5 | 5 |
| | | 6 - 10 | 1 |
| | | 11 - 15 | 1 |
| | In USA | | 5 |
| | In China | | 2 |
| Length in USA (months) | | 1 - 3 | 2 |
| | | 4 - 6 | 2 |
| | | 7 - 9 | 2 |
| | | 10 - 12 | 5 |
| Background | Large City | | 10 |
| | Rural Area | | 1 |
| Educational Level | High School | | 1 |
| | Vocational | | 4 |
| | Bachelors | | 4 |
| | Masters | | 2 |
| Occupation | Cartoonist | | 1 |
| | Coal Mine/Factory Worker | | 2 |
| | Physician | | 3 |
| | Other Medical Professional | | 3 |
| | School Teacher | | 1 |
| | University Professor | | 1 |

N=11

> really want to come...but since I can come, I do not refuse to come."

These women were accustomed to sudden and frequent policy changes by their government, so they left Mainland China as soon as they received their visiting visas in case the governmental policy would change to prevent them from leaving. As a result, in most cases they did not have much time to really think about whether they wanted to come or not.

Most of them said they did not want to come since they had a good living and working environment and good family relationships at home. Xiao-fang said:

> "I am not that interested in going abroad since I feel that I am having a pretty good life at home. My life at home is more stable. My parents are still alive and they live very near to us. If anything happen, they can help. Another thing is I grew up with my friends and classmates, and we went to school together, and shared our lives together since we were very little. It will be easier to find solutions if we have problems."

In addition, the women did not speak English. They anticipated difficulties, suffering, and sacrifices after they came. This was a major concern for Ying:

> "I originally do not want to come because I do not know English. I know that it will be difficult to come here."

Theoretically, these Chinese women could have said "no" to their husbands' requests for them to come, but in reality, culture played an important role and made it almost impossible for them to say "no". The traditional Chinese cultural values define how a female should behave in every aspect of life. A good wife is supposed to be submissive and supportive, and to obey her husband. A traditional Chinese idiom states, "If you marry a cock, then follow the cock; if you marry a dog, then follow the dog". Bound by these traditional values, a Chinese wife is expected to follow her husband. For these Chinese women, coming to the United States to join their husbands was absolutely "the right thing" to do, and was what the traditional Chinese culture demanded of them. Thus, they

made a passive decision of submission rather than an active decision or determination to come. Xiao-fang said she came to the United States because:

> "...I get married and my husband is gone; I have to follow my husband."

Another Chinese woman, Ying, shared a similar viewpoint:

> "I definitely feel that I have given up a lot of things to come here. But I have no choice because my husband is here."

Several other Chinese women mentioned some secondary reasons for coming to the United States:

> "Everybody in China envies those who can go abroad."

> "...it is a good thing, especially for those who are in China, coming out to learn more things."

> "I will not have this opportunity (to study) again...I feel that when I return to China, what I learn here will be beneficial."

For them, coming to the United States was a "golden opportunity" that a lot of Chinese would trade anything for since it is difficult for them to leave China. Thus they felt that they should treasure this opportunity to enrich their life experiences and knowledge even though they did not "choose" to come in the first place. This mindset is in agreement with the literature on immigrant women that women, in general, are "passive dependents" who are not involved in the decision-making process of relocation and as Morokvasic (1984) points out, they simply "join the spouse".

## Preparation Before Coming

Most of these Chinese women were not prepared for lives in the United States before they left Mainland China. They listed several reasons for inadequate preparation before coming to the United States. First, due to the visitation policies of Mainland China and the difficulties of getting entry visas, they really did not think they could come. Ying said:

> "When my husband wrote me and asked me to come and

> support him to finish up his degree, I agreed to come. I thought at that time it was impossible for me to come because it was very difficult for spouses to get visas from the American Embassy in China. I just felt that I would go ahead and gave it a try."

Thus, they did not think that it was necessary to learn English and to know more about life in the United States at that time. Second, when coming to the United States became a reality, they were usually overwhelmed with packing, saying farewell to families and relatives, and buying gifts. They did not have time to prepare themselves at that point. Lastly, it was hard to get accurate information about the United States in Mainland China. Hui-jing told me:

> "the movies we saw in China about the United States was that the United States was really chaotic...I was really scared."

Hui-jung her husband did not tell her a lot in the letters he wrote home since he was afraid that his letters would be read by the government officers. As a result, most of these women only had piece-meal snapshots about the United States before they came.

## "Life Here is Just Different!"

### Life in China

Under the communist ideology, women must contribute to the society; thus Chinese women from Mainland China, except for the old and the sick, all work outside their homes. All of the Chinese women I interviewed worked full-time outside their homes for 8 to 9 hours each day, 6 days a week. Work had been a major part of their lives when they were in China. Life in China was simple for those who did not have children since they spent time with their families after work. Those who had children had child-rearing responsibilities in addition to working outside the home. In the mornings, they dropped their children off at day care centers, which were provided either by their work units or by their neighborhood, and picked them up on their way home from work. These women described typical days in China as:

"I had to work and take care of my daughter at the same time. Working in China is not that flexible. You have to work eight hours. Transportation is not that well developed. We had to ride bicycles. Whenever it rained or snowed, the roads would be slippery, and I had to push the bicycle all the way home after work with my daughter on the bicycle."

"I took my child to the day care center, and then went to work. I was not busy at work. At home (in China), I worked during the day. After work, I went to get my son, and played with him."

These women spent most of their time in the work place. They usually brought their own lunch with them, cooked with friends in the work place, or at the canteens run by their work units. This was one of the reasons that Xiao-fang said she did not know how to cook before she came to the United States:

"I ate in the canteen at work, and together with two good colleagues, one of them was a very good cook...We ate together...If some days we did not feel like cooking, then we would go to eat in the Canteen. Sometimes, we would go to eat in the restaurants."

Most of these Chinese women spent their evenings cooking (if they did not have mothers or mother-in-laws to do it for them), doing household chores, spending time with extended families, taking care of younger children and supervising the homework of older children. Those who did not have children usually ate with their parents or in-laws; thus most of these women did not have to prepare dinners. Xiao-fang was one of those lucky ones:

"When I went home (in the evening), my sister-in-law would do all the cooking...Sometimes, my sister would cook something and let me bring it over to the school (work place)."

Though simple, their days were full. Since bicycles or buses were usually their main means of transportation, travelling to and from their work places occupied a lot of their time. They usually did not have much spare time on weekdays, and most of their weekends were spent on household

chores. Ying commented on how she spent her weekends in Mainland China:

> "In China, we only had one day of rest per week, and usually there were a lot of things at home that we had piled up from the whole week, and we had to do that."

Although they were responsible for the household and child-rearing, these women were not full time homemakers or mothers.

Life in the United States

All of the sojourning Chinese women I interviewed stayed home at least part time during the period of the study, especially if they had children. The husbands of two of the women did not have any type of financial assistance from the university. One of the two women worked part-time in a Chinese restaurant and the other babysat at home to earn extra money. The husband of another Chinese woman earned $500 each month since he was still being paid as a visiting scholar at the time of our interview, and he did not as yet have to pay any tuition. The rest of the husbands had some kind of financial assistance from the university, earning an average of $1,200 per month. Of this $1,200, $150 was deducted as income tax and $450 was spent on tuition. Basically, these Chinese women and their families were surviving on approximately $600 per month.

In general, the standard of living for the 11 Chinese families in this study was different from that of the typical American family. Eight of the 11 Chinese women and their families shared an apartment with other Chinese students. Of the remaining three families, one lived in a one-bedroom apartment in the downtown area, another in the basement efficiency unit of a house owned by an American man, and the third in the house of an older American woman. Their average rent each month was about $200 including utilities, and their monthly grocery bills ranged from $100 to $150 depending on whether they had children or not. Even if they owned a car, they seldom used it during weekdays and they walked most of

the time; thus they did not have to spend much on transportation. Most did not have health insurance, so they avoided going to the doctor unless it was absolutely necessary. As a result, if nothing unplanned or unusual happened, each family was able to manage financially on the husband's income.

These women had ambivalent feelings about their lifestyles in the United States. On one hand, they enjoyed the conveniences of modern living such as electric appliances. These were things that they could not enjoy when they were at home. Yuan-hua said the thing she enjoyed most here was:

> "the living condition...In China, we still use coal. It is cleaner to use electricity. There is air-conditioning here, and there is no air-conditioning in China. The living environment here is much better."

On the other hand, however, they missed the feeling of having a "home" and the privacy of living by themselves. Juan recalled the feeling she had when she first moved into her apartment:

> "I felt that the apartment was so empty, and we had nothing...Our apartment in China was much bigger than this one...and we had everything...I just did not have the feeling of having a home here."

Though most of them stayed at home after they came to the United States, they did not choose to do so. Their primary role was the dual-earner of the family when they were in China, and homemaking was only a part-time secondary role that they took up after work. Thus the role of full-time "homemaker" was one that they were not trained for or raised with. They stayed home not because they preferred to, but because circumstances would not allow them to work outside the home. Xiao-fang summarized the frustrations of Chinese women staying home in a nutshell:

> "all the wives from Mainland China are dissatisfied. We want to do this and that. We want to study, but financially, it is not possible. Another thing is, our language is not good, and cannot be improved in a short period of time. But we are not satisfied with staying

at home. Thus, there are a lot of problems."

Their typical day in the United States included activities such as cooking, cleaning, reading books, watching television, taking care of children, and learning English. Typical descriptions of daily routines were:

> "I just stay home with two kids, do household chores, and read some books and learn English."
>
> "I have to take care of my kid, and I read books, and I have to do household chores at night."
>
> "I just read books and do household chores everyday."
>
> "I do not have other things to do at home other than household chores."

The results from their Daily Activity Recording Forms (refer to Table 6 for details) indicate that they spent an average of 40% of their time in activities related to learning English, such as reading books (for the purpose of learning English), attending English classes, and going to the library. These pursuits revealed how important mastering the language was.

In addition to learning English, these women spent approximately one-fifth of their time on household chores and grocery shopping. For those who had children, another one-fifth of their time was spent in child care. The remaining one-fifth of their time was spent in various other activities, such as in social gatherings with other Chinese people, or in watching television at home. One significant point was that they spent almost no time alone with their spouse. Only two indicated that a small portion of their time (2% and 5%, respectively) was spent with their husbands. The others had no time with their husbands at all. Their husbands were usually very busy. In addition to studying and working eight hours a day at school, the typical night schedules of most of these men were similar to that of Juan's husband:

> "He comes home for dinner, and then he goes back to school to study. Sometimes, he studies at home. He

Table 6

The Percentage of Time Spent on Different Activities by Chinese Women in A Two-week Period

| Activities | Case # 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 8 | 11 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Learning English | 45 | 24 | 43 | 45 | 38 | 10 | 76 |
| Time with Child | 0 | 22 | 12 | 0 | 19 | 0 | 0 |
| Time with Spouse | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Household Chores | 10 | 12 | 0 | 10 | 19 | 14 | 5 |
| Grocery Shopping | 10 | 5 | 7 | 10 | 4 | 5 | 7 |
| Social Activities | 17 | 7 | 14 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 5 |
| Watching Television | 17 | 21 | 12 | 5 | 10 | 12 | 2 |
| Other | 1 | 7 | 12 | 28 | 10 | 54 | 0 |

N=7; data from 4 other informants not available

> usually will get home around 11 p.m. or midnight. He will come home even later, if it is during the examination period."

With this kind of schedule, it was very difficult for them to share much time with their wives alone.

These women seldom went out by themselves since they either did not know how to drive or have a car. When they had to purchase groceries, attend English classes, or take their children to school, they would either walk or take the bus. Most women did not ride bicycles in the United States partly because bicycles are expensive, but also because they felt that it was not safe to ride bicycles here. They did not interact much with other Chinese women in the community due to lack of transportation and time. Most of these Chinese women did not have much interaction with Americans either. Other than those Americans who taught them English, they

rarely had American friends as they felt incapable of communicating with Americans. When Juan was asked about making contacts with Americans, she said:

> "I do not know much about them...I do not know what kinds of things I should do and what kinds of things I should not do. I am afraid that I do something wrong, it makes others feel unhappy."

## Coming to the United States: A Major Life Event Change

Table 7 contains the results of the Social Readjustment Rating Questionnaire (SRRQ). There are a total of 34 life events on the questionnaire. I asked each woman to rate the readjustment required of each life event in comparison to "marriage" which was given an average score of 500. A higher score indicates that more readjustment is required, and a lower score signifies lesser readjustment when compared to marriage. I chose to report the mode instead of the mean since the mean was not an accurate representation of the outcome due to the wide range of scores. Thirteen life events were perceived by these women as requiring less readjustment than marriage, five life events seemed to require the same amount of readjustment while the remaining 15 life events were perceived to necessitate more readjustment than marriage.

Several significant trends were apparent in the results of the SRRQ. First, those events that required less of a readjustment than marriage were life events that either were not anticipated in the near future, such as retirement (#13) or gaining a new family member (#16), or changes that they were not regarded as important enough to require a lot of adjustment, such as changes in sleeping habits (#5), or inability to make friends with neighbors (#23).

Second, life events that required as much readjustment as marriage were mostly items related to marital relationships (#'s 11 and 14). It was surprising to find that the Chinese New Year (#29) required as much adjustment as marriage. Chinese New Year is the biggest festival of the year in China,

Table 7

Results of the Social Readjustment Rating Questionnaire (SRRQ) Chinese Adapted Version

| item# | Events | Mode | Range |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Lesser Readjustment than Marriage** | | |
| 2. | Burglar came into my home | 400 | 100 - 1500 |
| 5. | Change in sleeping habits (a lot more or a lot less sleep, or change in part of day when asleep) | 50 | 50 - 1000 |
| 13. | Retirement from work | 300 | 100 - 800 |
| 15. | Nervous or emotional illness | 300 | 150 - 5000 |
| 16. | Gained new family member (e.g., through birth, relatives moving in, etc.) | 200 | 150 - 1000 |
| 17. | Change in financial state (e.g., a lot worse off or a lot better off than usual) | 200 | 100 - 700 |
| 23. | Unable to make friends with neighbors | 400 | 50 - 700 |
| 26. | Change in residence | 100 | 100 - 700 |
| 28. | Moving to another state in U.S.A. | 100 | 100 - 700 |
| 30. | Change in recreation | 300 | 50 - 700 |
| 32. | Change in personal habits (dress, manners, etc.) | 200 | 200 - 700 |
| 33. | Change in social activities (e.g., clubs, dancing, movies, visiting, etc.) | 300 | 100 - 700 |
| 34. | Serious noise in the neighborhood | 100 | 100 - 1400 |
| | **Equal Readjustment as Marriage** | | |
| 11. | Separated from spouse (spouse left for USA first) | 500 | 200 - 900 |
| 14. | Marital reconciliation | 500 | 200 - 2000 |

N=11

Table 7

Results of the Social Readjustment Rating Questionnaire (SRRQ) Chinese Adapted Version

| item# | Events | Mode | Range |
|---|---|---|---|
| 24. | Spouse changed job | 500 | 100 - 700 |
| 29. | Chinese New Year | 500 | 50 - 500 |
| 31. | In-law troubles | 500 | 0 - 800 |
| **More Readjustment than Marriage** | | | |
| 3. | Leaving China | 800 | 300 - 1000 |
| 4. | Death of spouse | 1000 | 700 - 6000 |
| 6. | Pregnancy | 800 | 200 - 1000 |
| 7. | Divorce/Marital Separation | 1000 | 500 - 1500 |
| 8. | Change in health or behavior of family member | 1000 | 500 - 2000 |
| 9. | Death of close family members | 1000 | 400 - 3000 |
| 10. | Miscarriage/Abortion | 800 | 100 - 2000 |
| 12. | Lost or quit job | 1000 | 100 - 1000 |
| 18. | Death of a close friend | 700 | 250 - 1400 |
| 19. | Not knowing English very well | 1000 | 250 - 2000 |
| 20. | Being alone without friends | 1000 | 300 - 1000 |
| 21. | Minor violation of laws (e.g., traffic tickets, working illegally, etc.) | 700 | 100 - 4000 |
| 22. | Increased quarrelling with spouse | 700 | 200 - 1000 |
| 25. | Disliked for being a foreigner | 600 | 100 - 5000 |
| 27. | Major personal injury or illness | 1000 | 500 - 4000 |

N=11

comparable to Thanksgiving and Christmas in the United States. It was during this time that the women were especially homesick, which may be why they found it more difficult to adjust.

Third, those life events (#'s 4, 7, 8, 9, 12, 19, 20, 27) scoring highest in readjustment were all events particularly related to life experiences in the United States. Life events such as the death of a spouse (#4) and a divorce or marital separation (#7) might also be stressful if they occurred in Mainland China. If these things happened in the United States, however, it meant more than just loss of intimate relationships. The legal status of each woman was based on her relationship to her husband. The end of a marital relationship meant loss of legal status in the United States. In addition, these women depended on their husbands financially. Divorce or separation would create financial problems. Since the women were separated from their extended families, occurrences such as changes in health behavior, or even the death of close family members far away in China (#'s 8 and 9) would create tremendous amount of stress and require a great deal of readjustment. Some life events, such as a major personal injury or illness (#27), or the inability to speak English (#19), would not be stressful life events if they occurred in China. Being unable to speak English in the United States was extremely stressful for the women since this effectively paralyzed their lives. A potential injury or illness in the United States created much more stress and required more readjustment due to a fundamental difference between the health care systems of Mainland China and the United States. Mainland China provides universal health care so that Chinese citizens pay no medical expenses. However, in the United States, these women were responsible for their own medical costs for the first time.

Fourth, the life experiences of the past year seemed not to have any effect on the women's perceptions of the amount

of readjustment required for a particular life event. I asked these women to indicate whether they had experienced any of the 34 life events in the past 12 months. Table 8 provides a list of the life events the women indicated. Not Knowing English (#19) was the only life event that was both experienced and perceived as requiring high readjustment. The women had not experienced most of the other life events that they had perceived as requiring high readjustment. Interestingly, some things they had all experienced, such as changes in sleeping habits, scored the lowest among all items.

The results of the SRRQ suggested that coming to the United States and readjusting to another culture was an important life event change for these women, a finding which is in agreement with the literature on immigrant women. This life event change created new stress such as an inability to function because of language handicap and ordinary stress was intensified as a result of the sojourner status as in the case of an illness.

## Adjustment Problems and Processes

### Adjustment Problems

These women did have adjustment problems similar to those experienced by international students, such as language difficulties, homesickness, loneliness, or loss of support. However, their problems were different in intensity and nature than those of international students. For instance, the language difficulties these women encountered were more on the level of daily communication rather than academic problems. In addition to sharing some of the problems of international students, these women had unique adjustment problems such as lack of work and dependence. A detailed discussion of some of these problems will be presented in the second part of this chapter.

Language. They unanimously chose language as the major problem in their adjustment to life in the United States. Some even thought of language as the only problem:

Table 8

Life Events Experienced by the Chinese Women in the Past Twelve Months

| | Events | N |
|---|---|---|
| 3. | Leaving China | 11 |
| 5. | Change in sleeping habits (a lot more or a lot less sleep, or change in part of day when asleep) | 8 |
| 11. | Separated from spouse (spouse left for the United States first) | 11 |
| 12. | Lost or quit job | 11 |
| 15. | Nervous or emotional illness | 6 |
| 17. | Change in financial state (e.g., a lot worse off or a lot better off than usual) | 7 |
| 19. | Not knowing English very well | 11 |
| 26. | Change in residence | 11 |
| 29. | Chinese New Year | 6 |
| 30. | Change in recreation | 7 |
| 33. | Change in social activities (e.g., clubs, dancing, movies, visiting, etc.) | 7 |

> "I do not feel any other major difficulties except language. I adjust pretty well to the lives here, and in other aspects. No major difficulties."

Without the ability to speak English, they could do few things independently:

> "Language is really a problem, I cannot have a better job...It is a bitter life for me. I cannot adjust to the language, and I cannot do anything outside."

> "After I come here, language is the most difficult problem. Since I do not know the language, I cannot communicate with others, and I cannot engage in any form of cultural exchange."

Mundane things, such as answering the phone, could become major obstacles. Xiao-fang described an unforgettable experience of hers:

> "At the beginning, we were living in a basement apartment of an American...A lot of people called the day when I arrived and asked if I had come. My husband was not

> home, and it was me that answered the phone. Thus, my mind set did not change. I only heard the voices of Chinese in my mind. Thus unconsciously I thought every time when I picked up the phone, I would hear people saying mandarin. Thus, I was really excited, and felt that I could talk with people on the phone. Later, after a few days...suddenly one time, when I answered the phone, the person spoke English, and he was calling for our roommate. But since I first came, the names of Americans were difficult for me...I could not understand what that person was saying. I did not know what to say."

A similar incident happened to another during the time of our interview. She also did not know what to say so she finally asked me to help her deal with the phone call. After this incident, Xiao-fang reached a conclusion:

> "the key of my problem is that my English is not good."

Homesickness. All felt homesick in the beginning. Since it was the first time for all except one to leave their birthplaces and families, leaving was very difficult. It was especially hard for those women who left their children in China. Hui-jing cried when she shared her feelings about leaving her son:

> "I miss him a lot. Especially when I see his letters, tears will fall...All mothers are like this, it is not just me...but there is nothing I can do. It is better for him. We made this decision for his sake."

Most of the women missed their parents a great deal. They tried to call home as often as possible, and they wrote home frequently. Receiving letters from home very often occasioned both joy and tears.

Change of Environment. The change in their physical surroundings created some adjustment problems. There are great differences between the lifestyles of communist and capitalist societies. Individuality and freedom of choice were unfamiliar concepts for the women since they were used to being told what to do and what not to do. Making all life decisions by themselves was something new and unsettling for some of the wives. Moreover, most of these women were used

to an above-average style of living in Mainland China, whereas in the United States they could only maintain a minimum living standard due to financial difficulties. Hui-jing was especially frustrated about this:

> "In China, people in our age group (mid 30's to early 40's) generally are in a higher social status. We paid very little rent, just a few dollars, for our place. My monthly income was 180 rmp (currency used in Mainland China) and my husband's was 220 rmp Our family of three only spent 150 rmp for food each month. In addition, even we had to get some extra things, we could save 200 rmp each month...I always thought that it was much better to be in our home country. Here, from my perspective, coming to the United States was like suffering."

Ai-fang shared a similar feeling when asked about her life in the United States when compared to that in Mainland China:

> "We did not earn a lot in China, but our lives were all right. At home, we did not think much about getting things for our son, but here, we will consider more. At home, when we went out, we would buy this or that for our son if he wanted something. We usually would not think much, just got it for him. But here, we will think about it, it is not possible to get him everything he wants, it may be too expensive. At home, we did not spend extravagantly, but it is not as tight as we are here. We spent our money more carefree at home but we were not those people who spent luxuriously. But we usually were more generous to our son."

Loss of Support. These women were used to having much tangible and psychological support from families, relatives, friends, and work units. Xiao-fang attributed the decision she and her husband made to delay having children to the lack of support in the United States:

> "if you want to have children, you can have children when you are in China...your in-laws or your own parents and family will take care of you if they live close by. You do not have to worry about labor and delivery, and also your recovery in the first month. You do not have to worry about a thing in the first month...if you had sudden financial problems...your family, both your in-laws and your family, they will support you financially. No matter how hard the situation for them will be, they will find some ways to support you. All your brothers and sisters are in one place. But since you come here, it is different, just you and your husband, the two of

you."

Other than familial support, Xiao-fang also mourned for the loss of old friendships and was frustrated about establishing new ones:

> "The old friends, I have known them for eight or nine years, and we grew up together. We have deep friendships and we can confide in each other. But of course you will like to continue to have new friends enter your life...However, your language is not good, and you cannot communicate with others."

After coming to the United States, the women suddenly lost everything, and it was difficult for them to build new support systems due to language and cultural barriers. In addition to the communication problems, most Chinese women were also afraid of embarrassment when interacting with Americans since they did not know much about American culture. Juan gave an example:

> "For example, if we invite them (Americans) to dinner, they will say 'yes', and they will be very happy about the invitation. But if somebody invite us (Chinese) to dinner, we will first say 'no' and say it will not be necessary, and it will be too much trouble. If we give Americans gifts, even though it is a small gift, they will be very happy. But for Chinese, we will say 'no', and say that it will not be necessary."

Lack of Work. Work was a very important part in these women's lives. Many anticipated finding a job after coming to the United States. When asked about her original expectations concerning a job situation in the United States, Juan said:

> "I did not think that I would get a very good job, but I thought that I could at least do something. I did not expect to stay home."

Most of these women stayed home and took up the unfamiliar roles of full-time homemakers and/or mothers reluctantly.

Loneliness. Staying at home full-time brought loneliness. The women were bored with no one to talk to, especially in the first few months after their arrival. Xiao-fang recalled those days:

> "When I was first here, I did not know the language, and I did not have a job, then I can just stay home. My emotions fluctuated the most during this period. I felt very bored and irritated. I did not have any place to go. My old friends were that far away, on the other side of the earth. The people that I saw everyday could not communicate with me. All the friends that I knew here were new friends, and I could not confide in them. I could only carry on superficial conversations. Then I felt bad that I did not have any work to do."

Dependence. All of the Chinese women had negative feelings about depending on their husbands both financially and in everyday routines. They were accustomed to total independence, but after their arrival in the United States, they had to rely upon their husbands even for ordinary routines such as grocery shopping, banking, and transportation around town. Many Chinese women shared the same feeling as Ai-fang:

> "The wives from China are used to work, we feel dependent when we suddenly do not have work. We do not feel good about this dependency. We feel that we have to depend on others for everything, and we are not used to this."

All these were actually normal adjustment problems which could be experienced by anybody upon arriving in a new place. What made it harder for these Chinese wives to adjust was that they did not choose to come to the United States in the first place, and they did not have the resources to help them adjust better and faster.

Factors Affecting Adjustment

Among all variables affecting international student adjustment listed by Church (1982), only language showed up in this study as a significant factor in the experiences of these women. The other two significant factors appearing in this study, attitude and life events, had not been documented in literature on international students and immigrant women. A detailed discussion of these factors follows.

First, their attitude toward coming to the United States affected their adjustment after they arrived. The more positive the attitude, the more positive and easy the

adjustment seemed to be. Yuan-hua's story was a positive one.

Yuan-hua had been in the United States for just 1 month when I interviewed her. I had some difficulty finding her apartment because she could not give me specific directions. All she could tell me was that her apartment was two bus stops from the final stop of the South Main Bus.

Both Yuan-hua and her husband were from Guangzhou (Canton). Her husband came to the United States as a visiting scholar. After he decided to continue his education during the next academic year, he proceeded to send documents for Yuan-hua to apply for a visa to join him. Even though Yuan-hua did not originally choose to come, she decided that coming to the United States was actually not a bad thing since she could be with her husband. She thought that since she was young and in good health, she could support herself and not be dependent on her husband. At the time of our interview, Yuan-hua's husband was still working as a visiting scholar. He earned $500 per month. Since they were sharing a two bedroom apartment with another Chinese family, they could still manage financially at that time.

Yuan-hua felt that her life here in the United States was fine. She was doing well emotionally, and did not find the adjustment hard. There were some inconveniences, such as sharing an apartment with others, and she was bored at times. She was dissatisfied with the public transportation system here and was homesick once in a while. But aside from these difficulties, she enjoyed being in the United States.

Yuan-hua was out a lot. She went to the university library to listen to audiotapes. She attended English class at the Baptist Church every Thursday, and she went to another English class three times a week, although she did not understand what was going on most of the time. I observed her in both classes. Sometimes she seemed to be daydreaming, and she usually did not know what the teacher expected of her when she was called on. She would occasionally go grocery shopping

by herself since there was a grocery store near her apartment. Yuan-hua said that she did not have any adjustment problems. She admitted that she had language problems, but she believed that she would do better as time passed. Besides, she could still get by most of the time, though her English was not good. For example, she could ride the bus and buy groceries without saying a word. She would have liked to work or continue her education in the nursing profession if she could, but she did not know what jobs were available to her, or what subject to major in if she went back to school. She said that things were fine at the present moment as long as she and her husband were together. She would think about the future later, when she really had to.

The second factor affecting adjustment patterns seemed to hinge on life events. Those Chinese women who experienced negative life events, i.e., divorce, poor marital relationships, or illness, were likely to have more difficulty adjusting. Xin was one of the less fortunate women among the eleven.

Both Xin and her husband were from Shanghai. At the time of our interview, Xin had been in the United States for three months while her husband had been here for a year before she came. They shared a three bedroom apartment with two Chinese male students. Their finances were stable as Xin's husband had an assistantship from his department.

Xin was a cartoonist in China. She was so used to working that she had a difficult time staying home after coming to the United States. Even though financially it was not necessary for her to work, she was eager to find a job because she was terribly bored at home. It was impossible for her to find employment drawing cartoons in the United States. She initially wanted to work in a Chinese restaurant, but there were no job openings in the kitchens of the local Chinese restaurants at that time. She was unable to work as a waitress due to her limited English, and this also prevented

her from being hired elsewhere. At the time of our interview, she was exploring the possibilities of babysitting or teaching young children how to draw cartoons. However, these also required a certain fluency in English. She was extremely frustrated by this, and said that she would do anything, just anything but stay home.

During the interview, Xin also shared with me that she had a hyperthyroid condition. Before she left China, her doctor gave her some medication and advised her to see a doctor as soon as she arrived in the United States. Xin did not follow her doctor's instructions because without insurance Xin's family did not have the money to pay for medical care.

Lastly, language ability seemed to play a significant role in the adjustment processes of these women. The better the language ability, the easier and faster the adjustment seemed to be. En was one of the few Chinese women in this study who had more advanced language skills. She was also one of the few who felt satisfied with her life in the United States.

En had been in the United States for nine months at the time of the interview. She stayed at home with her three-year-old son after they came to the United States. En worked in a hospital in China. Due to less than perfect English, she did not work full time after she came to the United States. She would occasionally work in one of the Chinese restaurants when they needed extra help.

En had recently started babysitting a 15-month-old boy for an American couple. The parents dropped the boy off at her apartment every morning before they went to work on weekdays, and paid her $20 per day. En seemed to enjoy this job and the extra income, and she did not feel bored. She said that she was pretty busy with two kids running around in the apartment.

En seldom went out. She had her driver's license but seldom drove because her husband usually had their car.

Besides, taking two children out was difficult. When she did go out, she went to the Baptist Church for English class, and occasionally to a nearby church to join a program. When she had to go to somewhere, she would usually walk with the two children.

En said that she was beginning to enjoy life in the United States. She felt that living here was less stressful than life in China. The only area in which she felt inadequate was English. She had no concrete plans for the future other than to improve here language skills. She hoped that when her English improved, she could take the TOEFL examination and explore the possibility of going back to school when her son was older. At the time, however, she was satisfied with her life here in the United States.

On the contrary, Xin, the woman mentioned earlier, was one of the least skilled in English among the 11 women, and was also the most dissatisfied. Xin studied English for one or two years when she was in high school, but her language skills, especially in spoken English, were very poor. She attended the Thursday afternoon English class at the Baptist Church in addition to another English class three times a week. I observed her in both situations and had to be her interpreter both times. In my observation notes, I wrote down the following:

> "When Xin saw me, she was so relieved. She immediately asked me to ask the old lady if there would be class next week. I asked Xin to do it herself. She said she already did, and the lady did not understand her. I asked Xin to think what she was going to say and find the right word. She said she did not know the English word. While we were bargaining, the old lady became impatient and asked me to tell her what Xin wanted.
>
> "Then Esther (the teacher) turned to Xin and asked her what her occupation was. Xin said, 'I am picture'. Esther corrected her and said she was an artist.
>
> "Esther repeated the assignment several times. Xin did not understand what was going on. Esther explained to her again. Hua explained to Xin in Chinese. She seemed

to understand then."

Xin's handicap in English language really frustrated her, and contributed greatly to her dissatisfaction with life in the United States.

Adjustment Patterns and Processes

There was no particular pattern of adjustment evident in the experiences of these Chinese women. Their experiences did not support either the stage models or the U-curve hypothesis proposed by various writers such as Bulthuis (1986) and Yoshikawa (1987). Many of the Chinese women experienced some adjustment problems upon their initial arrival, but a few indicated that, other than language, their adjustment problems did not surface until a later time. With the exception of language skill problems, the perceived intensity of adjustment problems changed over time. Language remained a constant concern for these Chinese women even after they had been in the United States for eight or nine months. Some problems such as dependence intensified as the women came into closer contact with the American culture's emphasis on independence.

As time went by, the perceived intensity of some problems, such as the change of environment, homesickness, loss of support, lack of work, and loneliness decreased due to their adjustment to the environment of the United States and the daily routine of staying home. However, this decrease in the intensity of problems is not a good indicator of better adjustment since the decrease in intensity does not mean that the problems were dealt with or even acknowledged. The original problems were simply overshadowed by other more "important" problems, such as language difficulties. These unresolved problems became time bombs waiting to explode when the necessary spark came along.

## Solutions to Adjustment Problems

The Role of Culture

Traditional Chinese culture values dignity. Classical Chinese literature glamorizes the success of those who "made

it on their own," and devalues those who "made it through their families." Thus, it is very important to a Chinese individual to "make it on his/her own." Dignity is especially important for Chinese intellectuals. There is a Chinese idiom which says "one will not bow for the sake of 50 kilograms of rice." Chinese intellectuals are expected to retain their dignity even if it means starvation. As a result of these traditional Chinese values, Chinese students and their families are reluctant to ask for help.

Moreover, traditional Chinese culture places great emphasis on an external world view. The history of China demonstrates the effects of nature and destiny in shaping the lives of people. For thousands and thousands of years, the Chinese have accepted fate and yielded to destiny. We tend to let nature and destiny take control of our lives, rather than making an effort to change our fate.

All had a feeling of helplessness. They did not think it possible to plan for the future because they did not know what the future would bring. They took one step at a time in hope that circumstances would improve. The women believed that nothing could be done to change their present situation, and that as time passed, they would feel better. If there was no improvement, these women simply endured whatever sufferings there were, and believed that this was only a transition to a better and brighter future. From this point of view, external help seems unnecessary since changes would occur naturally overtime. Most thought that the responsibility for helping them adjust fell on their husbands. They believed that their husbands would tell them all they needed to know. If they needed help, they turned to their husbands for it. Thus they did not believe that there was a need to seek help from outsiders. When it became absolutely necessary to seek help from others, they appealed to an established hierarchy.

Hierarchy of Help

Though dependence on extended family is discouraged in

Chinese culture, help from immediate family members in times of need is acceptable. Most received some help from their families when they were in China. Since none of these women had families in the United States, help from family members was not available due to geographical distance.

The second level on this hierarchy of help consists of relatives other than the immediate family. The concept of "family" in Chinese culture is different from that of the West. Extended family has been the dominant form of family structure in China for many centuries. The "family" may include uncles, aunts, and cousins. Hence when immediate family members, such as parents, in-laws, or siblings are not available, other relatives become the next available resource. Many had no relatives in the United States. For those who did, relatives became a major source of psychological support as well as tangible help at times.

The next level on the hierarchy involves Chinese friends. Since all Chinese share the same "root," they are all perceived as being from one big family. A Chinese idiom says "all Chinese within the four seas are brothers." It is acceptable for a Chinese individual to depend on the help of his family when he is at home; but when he is not, he can depend on the help of other Chinese. Chinese students in the United States form a very close network, and they provide a lot of help to fellow Chinese. The Chinese student associations in the community where this study was conducted take very active roles in helping Chinese students handle various kinds of problems. One of the Chinese student associations even elects an officer each year whose sole responsibility is to solve various problems among the local Chinese students and their families.

Born and raised in a communist society, these Chinese women were used to receiving support and help from the government and their work units. They received much tangible help, such as medical services, day care services, and

housing, and their supervisors and community leaders were also responsible for solving their domestic problems. When they came to the United States, they expected similar kind of services. The children (under 5) of most were on the Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) supplemental program. They usually applied for all the social services for which they were eligible. When domestic difficulties, such as marital problems, arose, they turned to the counterpart of community leaders or work unit supervisors who in most cases turned out to be the husband's faculty advisor or the international student advisor of the university. The case of Mei Li was a typical example.

After Mei was battered by her husband, she went to talk to her husband's advisor. For Mei, his advisor was the closest counterpart of the supervisor in her husband's work unit when they were in China. She thought that his advisor was the person who had authority over her husband since he financially supported him, and that the advisor could help. Mei was eventually referred to the international student advisor and the assistant director of the International Center of the university. Though Mei received some help from the university, she was still disappointed with her husband's advisor because he did not help directly. She expected his advisor to put pressure on him by threatening either to withdraw financial assistance or to keep him from graduating.

In some situations, these women would accept help from Americans or other international students in the community. Most of the women asked help from Americans in learning English. Several managed to get one on one tutorial sessions with American women. One woman purposely asked Americans to take her to church and other religious activities for the purpose of improving her language ability.

The hierarchy of help these women developed in the United States supported the common idea of peer counseling and group counseling in cross-cultural counseling literature. Since

these women lacked a basic supportive network in the United States and extended family members or relatives were usually not available, the next level of available help became peers who might have shared similar experiences. Peer counseling can achieve this purpose, and group counseling can offer these women a supportive network.

Intellectualization

One very significant means used by these women to deal with their adjustment problems was intellectualization. They shifted everything up from their hearts to their brains. They tried not to "feel" the problems, but to "think and explain" them. Traditional Chinese values do not honor emotional expressiveness. Besides, this group of Chinese women was educated and rational. They perceived the present situation as a "transition" to a brighter and better future:

> "I just have to suffer with him for a few years."
>
> "After he gets his Ph.D., it will be much better...Our social status will be higher than what we had, since in China, there are not that many people who will be able to come out and get a Ph.D."

The women believed that their situations were only temporary and they just had to learn to live with them for a short period of time. Moreover, they attributed most of their problems to language disability. They all believed that if they learned English, everything would be much better.

Professional Counseling

These Chinese women never sought professional help, even when one woman encountered serious marital problems. There were several reasons for not seeking professional help. First, for a Chinese to bring her problems out of the family to a stranger is perceived as a "shame." There is a Chinese idiom which says, "family shame is not to be spread out." In order to "save face," the Chinese will avoid letting outsiders know about their problems. Besides, the Chinese have no concept of Western professional help. There are no

counselors, social workers, or psychologists in Mainland China. Because counseling is not a profession in Mainland China, it was very difficult for these women to understand that there are strangers who get paid simply to listen to problems. Lastly, in Mainland China, counseling was done by unit supervisors or community leaders who were not considered "outsiders." This work was part of their jobs, not a separate profession. It was extremely difficult for these women to consider seeking professional help as they were accustomed to such a different environment.

## Part Two: Crisis Equals Danger Plus Opportunity?

### "My English...Not Good!"

#### Hui-jing, Ma: Starting All Over from A, B, C?

Hui-jing had been in the United States for 8 months when I interviewed her. I met her once when she first arrived here, and at that time she did not speak English at all. She and her husband were living in the house of an older American woman. They did not have to pay rent, but they had to do some yard work and household chores for this woman. Hui-jing's English had not improved much when I saw her the second time. During the time I spent observing her, she never talked with the landlady. She just smiled and nodded her head when the landlady spoke to her. Hui-jing told me that she did not understand what the old lady said most of the time although she could sometimes figure out what she wanted or said through her actions or body language.

Hui-jing was a coal mine worker in a rural area in Northern China. Even though she was a high school graduate, she did not really have a high school education. The Cultural Revolution (approximately 1965 - 1975) started soon after Hui-jing began high school. During that period, students in China did not have regular classroom lessons. They were engaged in revolutionary activities at all times. When the revolution was over, they were awarded a high school diploma and assigned to work units. Thus, Hui-jing believed that her educational

level was equivalent to that of a primary school graduate. Due to this gap in her education, she had never studied English. At that time, she did not even think that English was necessary for her to know.

Hui-jing's husband came to the United States as a visiting scholar. After a year, he decided to complete a doctoral program in Mining. It was then that he began to apply for Hui-jing to join him in the United States. Hui-jing had never thought of coming to the United States and was not thrilled with the idea. She knew that life would be difficult for her because she spoke no English. In addition, they left a 13 year old son in China because they did not want to interrupt his education by bringing him with them. This was extremely difficult for Hui-jing. Her eyes filled with tears when she told me that she cried every time she wrote home to her son.

Hui-jing was then working in the kitchen of a local Chinese restaurant. The job was low paying ($1.50 per hour), required long hours (12 hours a day), and was unstable because she only worked when the restaurant needed extra help. Her employment options were limited by her lack of English. Her husband did not have an assistantship or scholarship from his department. He worked in a Chinese restaurant during the summer months to save enough tuition for the coming academic year. They had enough money to cover his tuition and their expenses for the current academic year, but they had to earn money to save for the next year. Hui-jing said that she had no choice but to continue working in this restaurant.

Hui-jing occasionally went to English classes offered by a local church when she was not working. This was the only place to which she would go alone except for walking to work. She said that the people there were nice, but she felt that the class was still too advanced for her since she could not understand what was going on most of the time. She told me that she wanted to learn English but did not know how. She

was 38 years old and did not even know the 26 letters of the English alphabet. With her educational background and the financial burden that she was experiencing at the time, learning English was just too difficult for her.

English As A Second Language

Hui-jing was the only woman who could not speak any English at all before coming to the United States. The other women had taken at least one or two years of English in high school or college. For several reasons, all of the women thought that the English they had learned was not adequate for preparing them to survive in the United States.

First, the women all grew up during a period in which China befriended Russia and had no diplomatic relationship with the United States. English was not important during this period; therefore most of them learned Russian instead. Second, the quality of English teachers during this period was not good. Third, they were not motivated to learn at that time since they could not suspect that they would ever come to the United States. After they graduated, they had no time to learn English since they had to work full-time and simultaneously take care of their families.

Though they expected to come to the United States to join their husbands, learning English was still not a priority since all of their time was spent in obtaining visas and preparing for the move. Moreover, since the visiting policies of communist China changed frequently and a visa was difficult to obtain, the women left China as soon as their visa was approved. This left them little time to prepare for their coming. It was not until they arrived in the United States that they realized the importance of learning English.

There were several ways that they learned English. Most of them went to the free English classes provided by a local church and the community YMCA. Some women were fortunate enough to have one on one tutorials with American women. They also read books and watched television at home. Those who did

not have children went to the library to listen to audiotapes and watch movies whenever they had time. Though they were highly motivated to learn English, there were various psychological, socioeconomic, and linguistic factors hindering the learning process.

Psychological Factors. The Chinese approach to language acquisition is functional. The Chinese learn English because they want to take the Test Of English as a Foreign Language Examination and the Graduate Record Examination to meet the admission requirements of American universities. Though these Chinese women were not students at the time of the study, most of them had the intention of going back to school in the future if circumstances permitted. For this reason they desired to become literate in the language, but their actual need was to learn to speak English as a second language.

Second, their prior experience was a "copy book" education which generally emphasized textbooks. Their exposure to English before coming to the United States was book-oriented. As a result, the women all felt a strong need for the comfort and security of a textbook in their American English classes. However, the English classes that they attended were less academic and used a more audio-lingual approach. Thus some of the women felt that they were not learning anything.

Third, Chinese personalities are more reserved and shy. These Chinese women felt embarrassed when they were asked to speak English in class or in front of other people, especially Americans. Thus, they did not have much practice in speaking English. All of the women welcomed the idea of one-on-one tutorials, but there were not enough Americans available. As a result, most of the women felt that their listening ability was better than their speaking ability.

Socioeconomic Factors. For those women who had children with them, child care responsibilities sometimes conflicted with the English classes. This occasionally hindered their

attendance at the English classes. Moreover, most were living on a tight budget and would not attend any activities that required a fee. The quality of free English classes varied. They could not afford to pay for higher quality English classes offered in the community. Furthermore, most of the women lived with other Chinese speaking people. Eight out of 11 families were sharing an apartment with other Chinese students who were either single or married but whose families had not yet arrived. Thus, they continued to think, hear, and speak Chinese throughout the day. The need to use English was minimal. It was slower and more difficult to learn English in this kind of environment.

Linguistic Factors. The inherent differences between English and Chinese also created learning problems for these women. Chinese is a highly refined tonal language. There is no system of phonetics in Chinese, nor is there a way to combine characters to make new words. Each Chinese character represents a word and must be memorized, along with the particular vocal tone or pitch which helps determine the meaning of the word. Hence it is very difficult for Chinese to think in terms of a system of 26 letters which, used repeatedly in various combinations, represent an entire language. For instance, there is no singular/plural distinction for nouns in Chinese. The plural form is represented by adding other characters in front of the word to indicate quantity, such as "two book," or "many book," rather than "books." As a result, these women were very confused by English language systems, especially when they tended to think in Chinese and translate into English as they spoke.

Survival in A Stranger's Land

How did these Chinese women survive in the United States despite this language handicap? They adopted a 3D Approach, that is, Depend, Defer, and be Diligent.

Depend. They depended on their husbands a great deal.

The husbands would usually act as a buffer for their wives by maintaining multiple roles: that of interpreter, translator, chauffeur, household manager, etc. If their husbands were not available, the women depended on the other Chinese in the community to help. If help was not available, then they would either give up their attempt to get help, or wait until it was available.

Defer. Whenever possible, for tasks such as grocery shopping, the women would wait until their husbands had time to go with them. If they had to go places that were not accessible by bus and were too far to walk, they would wait until their husbands had time to take them. These women preferred to avoid tasks that were not absolutely necessary for them to learn, such as writing checks. They paid cash for everything, and if they ran out of cash, they would wait until their husbands had time to go to the bank. One finding of interest was that these Chinese women did not possess Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) cards or credit cards. They simply did not need them at least in their minds.

Diligent. Despite various difficulties, they took advantage of every free opportunity to learn English. They watched television, attended English classes, found one-on-one tutorials, went to Bible studies, etc. They usually lived within walking distance of the grocery store, and would either take the bus, or walk to buy groceries when they had to. Those who had children in school walked them to school every day. They learned to drive only if it was an absolute necessity. Basically, they would learn anything diligently if they could not manage without learning it. I accidentally ran into Juan when she was learning how to use the automatic teller machine. The follow is an excerpt from my observation notes:

> "When I entered the ATM booth, I saw Juan standing there. I thought that she was waiting for her turn to use the ATM...When the machine was available...I asked Juan to go first since she was already there when I arrived. She

said she was not using it...Juan said she wanted to learn how to use the ATM. She said she was about to apply for one, but she did not know how to use it. She told me that she came here to look at how people used it...She had a pen and a pocket notebook in her hands. She said she wrote down all the English words that were on the different color keys, then when she went home, she would look up the meaning of those words in the dictionary. I told her that I could show her how to use it since I had to get some cash...I showed Juan how to use it...Of course, I could not show her in detail. She asked me if all the machines were the same. I told her that there were two kinds of machines, it was a little bit different, but basically it was the same...When I left the booth, there was nobody using the machine. I looked back while I pulled out, I saw Juan standing in front of the machine, studying it, and copying something down."

The amount of time and energy that Juan had to put into learning such a simple thing was incredible.

## The Career Rainbow

### Ai-fang, Wang: The Passage of Dependence

Ai-fang had been in the United States for almost a year when I interviewed her. She and her husband and son lived in a small one-bedroom apartment in the downtown area. Though the apartment was old and too small for her family of three, she seemed to be satisfied with it since they did not want to share an apartment with other Chinese students and could not afford to live alone in a bigger apartment.

She seemed to adjust fairly well to life in the United States. They did not own a car, and Ai-fang did not know how to drive at the time of the interview. She walked her son to school and walked to the grocery store. She seldom took the bus, unless her destination was too far to walk. Even though she did not have major problems, she did not feel well adjusted to life here:

> "I feel like after I come here, there are something that I do not feel adjust to. It is like, I cannot find my place here."

Ai-fang's son was in school during the day. Ai-fang was actually in a better position than some other Chinese women in this study if she decided to work in a Chinese restaurant.

However, she chose not to work outside the home. She felt that if she got a job, there would be no one at home to take care of the family. Moreover, her husband did not want her to work for the same reason. Although Ai-fang chose to stay home, it was not easy for her. When asked about her feelings on staying home, she said:

> "Sometimes, I feel that there is not much meaning to stay here since other than my husband and my son, I do not have other people, and I do not have much social contacts. I feel quite meaningless. I feel that I do not belong here. It is just a temporary place for a short period of time."

Ai-fang was a physician when she was in China. Turning into a homemaker was a passage of dependence for her:

> "At home (China), I went out to work, and I earned money to support myself. But now, I do not go out to work...I cannot stand on my own feet here, I have to depend on him."

She felt especially bad when she saw other Chinese wives in the community trying to find any kind of work just to get out of the home, and told me:

> "...I see that everybody is working, and I feel (she laughed in an embarrassed way)...I am the only one that stay home and depend on others."

Ai-fang's husband tried to comfort her by saying that his money was hers too, and that she was not dependent. But still her feeling of dependency did not go away.

The Career Development Pattern of Chinese Women

The career development pattern for these Chinese women was unique. They had a stable career when they were in Mainland China but after coming to the United States, their career development patterns changed drastically from full-time career women to full-time homemakers.

Before coming to the United States, their careers played a major role in the lives of these women. Their primary role that of the dual-earner for the family. "Wife" and "mother" were secondary roles, and the role of "student" was almost non-existent. After they came to the United States they had

no career, and their major roles became "wife" and "mother." They also had to start adjusting to the role of student because they were studying English and contemplating the idea of returning to school at some point. This drastic change in career patterns was unanticipated, and it was certainly not a choice. When Juan was asked about her feelings concerning her change of careers, she said:

> "I did not know that it would be like this after coming to the United States...I did not think that I would get a very good job, but I thought that I could at least do something. I did not expect to stay home."

Xiao-fang voiced a similar frustration:

> "...But after I come here, I feel that all dreams are just empty talks, I have to take each step at one time realistically. Thus when you said think about this or that, "forget it!" Do not think about it, take one step at a time. If I can take one step smoothly and succeed, that is really good."

There were several factors other than language that influenced their attempts to re-establish careers. First, most of these women were educated professionals such as physicians, nurses, or teachers. The professional training they had received in Mainland China was not recognized in the United States due to the incompatibility of systems between the two countries. Second, most of the women were holding F2 visas (as spouses of F1 students). The Immigration and Naturalization Services of the United States prohibits this type of visa holder from working under any circumstances. Last, the system in the United States does not provide the support services for working women with young children that the system in Mainland China provides. With all these limitations, re-establishing a career in the United States was not feasible for the women.

What did this mean for these women? Simply, career development was abruptly altered by life circumstances not of their choosing, and the women were left to put the pieces together again all by themselves. This created a tremendous

amount of frustration for these Chinese women. For those who chose to work illegally in Chinese restaurants, work was equated with suffering:

> "I felt very bad before I started work, I really did not want to work. When I was in the restaurant, I wished that the restaurant would not have a lot of business today, and I did not want to earn the money. It was too tired. One day, I was the only one working there, and there were a lot of customers that day. I earned almost ninety dollars that day. I swore to myself that I would not earn this amount all by myself in the future. I was so tired. I did not have time for breakfast, and I did not eat lunch. The customers kept coming and coming, and I did not have time to eat. Sometimes, I could not even go to the bathroom. I was very busy. From my personal perspectives, I did not like this kind of life...Other than earning money, it was not that meaningful. Really, you would have a kind of fear, you did not want to do it. Right now, I just had to work until we knew the future of my husband. I felt quite peaceful now. I felt that one of us had to sacrifice as long as the two of us wanted to stay together."

> "My physical condition is not very good. This (working in the kitchen in a Chinese restaurant) makes me suffer from aches and pains. I am very skinny. The buckets that I have to clean in the restaurant is heavy, and after I clean that, I cannot get up, I have to get up slowly. Thus I say without the language ability, why am I coming here?...This type of work, actually I cannot do it, but I just force myself to do it, I have to do it."

## Continue Education: Dream or Reality?

### Hua, Huang: The Impossible Dreamer?

Before Hua came, she was determined to get a degree in the United States. For this reason she chose to leave her young daughter in China with her mother and came herself to join her husband. Hua said she would be unable to study if she brought her daughter with her. When I interviewed her, she had been in the United States for eight months.

Hua was a physician in China. She knew that it would be impossible for her to study medical science in the United States due to the differences in medical systems. Thus she

intended to study something related to medical science, such as chemistry, biology, or nutrition. Her husband had been at the university for one and a half years at the time of the interview. He was enrolled in a doctoral program. Though Hua did not know when her husband would graduate, she was hoping that she would have enough time to finish her own degree. She planned to apply to the same university. But if she was not accepted into the university, she planned to find other universities in the United States. She was determined to get her degree even if it meant she had to leave her husband for a period of time.

Hua did not speak much English before she came to the United States. She had studied English for 1 or 2 years when she was in high school, but she did not remember much. She started studying English after she arrived in the United States. Since she intended to return to school, she was very diligent about studying English. She attended two English classes each week and spent the rest of her time in the university's library reading books and listening to audio-tapes. She spent her whole day in the library and came home to sleep after the library closed at midnight. Sometimes she did not even go home for lunch or dinner. I asked if she felt that her English had improved. She said:

> "Yes...I have some progress, but I still feel that my English is not good. I still cannot speak in English and attend lectures in the classroom."

I observed her in both English classes, and she seemed to have better comprehension than the other Chinese woman. She also seemed to have a better knowledge of vocabulary than the other women. However, she never spoke in English during these times.

In addition to studying the language, Hua had to find ways to solve the problem of tuition. Her husband's assistantship could only support his tuition and their living expenses. She would have liked very much to have an

assistantship herself, but she realized this was unlikely due to her limited language ability. Thus she planned to work in a Chinese restaurant for a short period of time to save enough money for her tuition. At the time of the interview, she did not have any specific plans. At this stage, all this seemed to be more of a dream for her than a plan.

Jie, Lin: Determined to Beat the Odds

Jie's story was different. Jie had been in the United States for 10 months at the time of the interview. She already had a master's degree in China, and she intended to obtain a doctoral degree in the United States. I did not have an opportunity to hear Jie speak English, but she had no trouble communicating with Americans since she went to talk to professors at the university by herself. Jie never attended any social activities for international women, and she was not attending any English classes at that time. When I asked why, she simply said that was not what she wanted. She wanted something that could prepare her for the TOEFL examination by helping her with lectures and writing papers. Thus she would not waste her time on those classes.

At the time of the interview, Jie was in the process of applying for the doctoral program at the university. She had not yet sent in the formal application, but she was very busying finding different professors related to her field at the university and talking with them concerning the possibility of getting a research assistantship. She told me that the responses were positive. She said that one professor wanted to see some of her past work and to talk more with her. Jie seemed to be very encouraged by the whole process. All she had to do at that time was to take the TOEFL examination and file an application.

Barriers To Overcome

Continuing an education might be a dream more than a reality for these Chinese women. The difficulty was not that they were not qualified or capable academically to pursue

further education in the United States, but there were many barriers other than language to be overcome in order to return to school.

First, they were running against time. Xiao-fang described the typical dream of Chinese wives as follow:

> "A lot of Chinese wives have suffered. They work for two or three years (in Chinese restaurants), and then go to complete their master's education...the husband comes here for a doctoral degree, doctoral degree requires a minimum of three years, but generally it takes four years. So the husband studies for two years, and the wife first work for two years to save some money. Then when the husband starts the third year, she will start to go to school. Then when she graduates from her master's after two years, her husband is ready to graduate at the same time. Then the husband looks for a job, and she starts to have a child. If the husband can find a job, then everything goes smoothly...She gets her degree and it is not urgent for her to find a job after she graduates. She can have a baby first, and after one or two years, if she wants to stay home and take care of the baby, it is alright. But if she thinks that her husband's income are enough for them to hire a babysitter, and somebody is willing to babysit for them, then she can find a job at that time."

Their plans for further education had to match those of their husbands. Most of the husbands were enrolled in doctoral programs which took from three to five years to complete. These women had to master English and get a degree within this period of time. It was hard work to achieve this goal within such a time frame. If they failed to achieve this goal in time, they had to make the decision of whether to give up their education or separate from their family for a while. That was exactly what Hua planned to do if she could not get into the graduate program in the university or if her husband graduated before she completed her studies.

Finances were another big hurdle. All of the women were living within a tight budget and did not have the money to pay tuition for two people at the same time. Their husband's income, if there was any, was barely enough to support the family and the expense of his education. Some women chose

to work for a few years in Chinese restaurants to save money for tuition. Xiao-fang was among those whose sole purpose for working in the Chinese restaurant was to save enough money for her own tuition:

> "I should work more this year, and saved more money for my tuition...Our saving right now were for his tuition...I told my husband that once he has assistantship, I do not want to go out to work any more. I want to put all my time into preparing for my return to school."

Others chose to wait for their husbands to finish and get a job. Once their financial situation improved, they would be able to start school again.

Those who had young children with them were less able to go back to school. Their solution was to either wait until their children started school, or to leave their children in China. Since Hua was determined to return to school when she came to the United States, she left her daughter with her parents in China.

Even if these women could master the language, and overcome the limitation of time, money, and child care, it was still unlikely for them to be able to study in their chosen fields. They had to settle for the second best option. They usually planned to study subjects that were related to their profession.

## "Who Am I? What Am I Doing Here?"

### Xiao-fang, Lu: Identity Vs Identity Diffusion

Xiao-fang had been in the United States for ten months when I interviewed her. She had a bachelor's degree, and was a high school teacher in an agricultural school in China. Xiao-fang enjoyed her upper middle class status in China and admitted that she had problems accepting her situation after coming to the United States. She recalled her first month in the United States:

> "The first month when I was here, I was really bored, and I stayed home all day. At that time, my English was not good, and I was mad at myself. I felt that I was

useless. I had learned English before, though it was not much, and I also had a bachelor's degree before I came here, how come I could not do this, and I could not do that. Then I was really mad at myself."

The language handicap brought down her self-esteem. She was angry at herself for not knowing the language. She felt useless and lost confidence in herself. It was not until her language skills began to improve that she felt better about herself:

> "At the beginning when I first came here, I did not understand one sentence when I watched the television or listened to the radio. Sometimes, accidentally I might be able to comprehend a word or two. Gradually I discover that I can understand the whole story, then I feel that I have some improvement, and I start to have more confidence in myself."

For Xiao-fang, her own identity and self-worth was closely related to the type of job she was doing. When she compared her work situation in China with her work situation in the Chinese restaurants in the United States, she said:

> "in China, once I graduated with a bachelor's degree and had a good job, I was like a lady. Others would envy me...and I felt real good...now, I worked in a restaurant. I have to change my pride and dignity because...the first feeling I had was I had become a servant...when my boss was not treating me well, or other things happened, I felt real bad. I feel like actually in reality, I am no worse than he, how come I have to stand there and let him treat me like this. I have no choice."

Xiao-fang told me that many Chinese women shared this feeling. Those who had been in the United States longer tried to comfort those who followed. Xiao-fang said that the other Chinese women taught her to endure:

> "they said just endure it, and it would go away after a while. When they first started working, they went home and cried...they were angry and thought that they would rather go back to China."

Their hope was for a brighter future. Whenever she felt discouraged, Xiao-fang comforted herself as follows:

> "The most is that I have to work for one or two years, save some money, and start school, then I will forget

this kind of life forever."

The Re-emergence of Identity Crisis

Because of the language handicap, lack of career, and because they could not fulfill their dreams, these Chinese women experienced a re-emergence of the identity crisis. Before they came to the United States, they felt that they were doing something important and contributing to their families and societies. They all had careers and good support systems. Each had a relatively high social status, and maintained a relatively high living standard. Most important of all, they were financially independent.

After they came to the United States, they felt that they were no longer "functional" people. They could not contribute to society or to the family. They could not function independently in American society since they were no longer independent financially. They felt isolated. Even if they had access to a car, they did not know how to drive. They stayed home all day without any friends to confide in, and their husbands were away from home most of the time. They desired to be functional and independent but were not. They had dreams which were unlikely to be fulfilled. Their self-esteem fell to the lowest point. Xiao-fang presented a clear picture of this reality:

> "I can say that almost 100% of the wives of Chinese students, regarding their personal background, have very good background. They at least hold a bachelors degree, or graduated from vocational schools...After we come here, we do not have a job. We feel like all we have learned in China cannot be put to use, and we become a useless person. We feel like we have to depend on somebody else for support. This is very difficult to bear."

Ai-fang shared similar feelings:

> "The wives from China are used to work, we feel dependent when we suddenly do not have work. We do not feel good about this dependency. We feel that we have to depend on others for everything, and we are not used to this."

Amidst all of this, they struggled to rebuild their

identities. Most of the time they were forced to rebuild around their husbands and children. Juan described the new roles in the United States this way:

> "The husbands are here to study, if they (the wives) stay here, they can cook and do laundry for them. They (the husbands) are really busy, and they usually come home really late to sleep...the wives can stay home, know more friends, and learn English."

This new identity might make them feel better in the beginning, but it created more stress when their families encountered problems later.

## For Better Or For Worse?

### Ying, Su: "I Am Lucky To Have A Good Husband!"

Ying brought her daughter to join her husband in the United States after he decided to change his status from visiting scholar to student. At first Ying did not want to come since she did not speak English, and she had a good, stable life in China. She knew that coming to the United States would be difficult for her but finally she agreed to come to support her husband in finishing his degree.

Although Ying had been in the United States only five months when I interviewed her, she had already noticed differences in her marital relationship. She told me that in China, she and her husband would sometimes have disagreements on how household chores should be done and about the division of labor. After she came to the United States, however, her husband would do whatever he could to help her. Though he was very busy with work and studies, he would still take time for chores such as going to the bank or taking the family grocery shopping, both of which were supposed to be Ying's responsibilities when they were in China. Ying said her husband was more patient than before. She felt that her husband understood her feelings and what she was going through. This was very important to her. Ying's husband tried to save some time for her and their daughter. Since he was so busy, he would sometimes apologize to Ying because he

did not have much time to take her out. Despite not choosing to come to the United States in the first place, and encountering various difficulties after coming, Ying felt satisfied with her life in the United States. She said that she was lucky to have a good husband!

Mei, Li: Till Death Do Us Part?

Mei was very excited when she knew that she and her daughter were definitely coming to the United States to join her husband. For various reasons, she and her husband had been separated for four and a half years. She anticipated many things the whole family could do when they were together again. She did not anticipate abuse, further separation, and divorce.

It did not take Mei long to realize that her husband was having an affair with another Chinese woman. After she arrived her husband was seldom home, and he seemed not to be as excited as she was about her coming. In the beginning Mei thought that they probably needed some time to get used to each other since they had been separated for so long. But she soon realized that this was not the case. Mei learned through their roommate and other Chinese people in the community that her husband had been having continuous affairs with more than one woman since he had been in the United States. She was frustrated and upset, but for the sake of her daughter she decided to pretend that she did not know anything.

Several months after she and her daughter had been in the United States her husband began to treat them badly. He moved out of their apartment and did not buy any groceries for them. Whenever he was home he would either shout at his daughter or quarrel with Mei. These marital conflicts finally led to abuse.

Since Mei's husband did not assume the responsibility of helping her adjust to life in the United States, Mei had a very hard time in the first few months of her stay. She did not know how to drive and her husband kept both cars for

himself. Since she was often left without food, she had to walk or take the bus to buy small amounts of groceries. In the very beginning, she had to depend on maps to find places. Because of her unfortunate circumstances, many Chinese students and neighbors offered to help. Though she was thankful to receive this help, her ordeal was not yet over.

The Impact of Marital Quality On Adjustment

These women were separated from their husbands for time periods ranging from 6 to 54 months before they came to the United States. During this period of separation, they remained in the environment and society with which they were familiar. Their husbands, however, were exposed to a completely different culture and environment. The husbands had often changed a great deal by the time they were reunited, with the result that the longer the couple was separated the greater the possibility that they would have problems in their marital relationships.

After a couple had been separated for a long period of time, their reunion required much readjustment. Moreover, life after their reunion in the United States was stressful for both. The husband was under great financial and academic pressure. On one hand, he had to work hard to keep his assistantship, while on the other hand, he had to keep up with his academic work. In addition to these stresses, the husband also had to assume the responsibility of looking after his family. For the wives, a new life and environment created many adjustment problems in daily living. Sometimes tensions would grow between the husband and wife. Xiao-fang admitted that marital conflicts did occur:

> "Of course, after I come here, a lot of problems surface, and I feel depress. Then I will have some disagreements with my husband. No matter how good our marital relationship is, it is inevitable that we will have some arguments. Then I feel that it is not necessary for me to come here. But I come here because of him. I also feel like I have sacrificed some things."

Under communist influence, marriages in China were more

equalitarian. The husbands were less busy and generally shared the household chores and child-rearing responsibilities. The wives were more independent, both physically and financially. Marital relationships were more interdependent. After these women came to the United States, their marital relationships had to be re-defined. They moved from an equalitarian relationship into a more traditional one.

The roles of the husband and wife had to be readjusted. The wife was no longer the dual earner of the family, but rather became a "dependent" and the primary care-taker of the family. The husband became the sole breadwinner. Besides work and school, he had to take up additional responsibilities as a buffer for his wife and children by becoming an interpreter, chauffeur, and English teacher for the family. Things that in China were either the wife's sole responsibility or a joint responsibility, such as grocery shopping, going to the bank, or doctor's visits became the husband's sole responsibility.

These new roles created great stress for the husbands. These men were usually very busy with work and school. They spent long hours on campus every day for seven days a week. When they had time to spend with the family, the time was usually spent on errands such as grocery shopping. For those families with children, time spent with the children was more important than time spent together as a couple. Even those who did not have children had very little time to spend together as a couple. According to Juan, the reasons were simple:

> "My husband spends a lot time studying, and we do not spend much time together. All students are like that. They are really busy. Our roommate is like that too. He is busy studying all day, and he does not even have enough sleep. Thus they do not have much time, and they are really busy...It seems like they all just come home for dinner and sleep."

It seemed that for these Chinese women the better the marital relationship, the better their adjustment to life in

the United States. Since most of the women rebuilt their identities around their husbands and children and felt that they endured for the sake of their husbands, in the event of marital problems, the women were in a very stressful and disadvantaged position.

# CHAPTER FIVE
# UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES AVAILABLE FOR CHINESE WOMEN

I discovered no services specifically provided for Chinese women in the community. The diversity of a university town makes provision of services solely for a particular national group unfeasible. Thus, all of the services described below are based on data I collected from programs for spouses of international students in general.

## Orientation Program

Only in the past 3 or 4 years has the university started to provide an orientation program for the spouses of international students. The program is still in its experimental stage. Orientation programs in the past generally focused on the introduction of English As A Second Language (ESL) programs and YMCA programs for international women. They were all conducted in English. Generally, no information on life in the United States was provided.

In Fall 1990, the university provided a half day workshop for spouses of international students at the end of the international student orientation week. I helped to design and conduct this workshop as part of an internship. Eight to 10 spouses, mostly from Asian countries, attended. In Fall 1991, the spouse orientation program was incorporated into the schedule of the international student orientation program. It was in the form of a 1-hour workshop amidst other workshops provided for international students. Only one Korean family attended the workshop.

According to the university, there are several reasons for the low attendance each year in these orientation programs. First, spouses of international students may not arrive at the beginning of the Fall semester. They may come later in the year after their husbands are settled. Thus, in the beginning of Fall semesters, there may not be that many newly-arrived spouses. Second, language is again a major

concern. In general, the spouses' language abilities are not as good as the students' themselves. They often require interpreters, but most of the time it is not feasible for the university to provide interpreters for the spouse orientation program, and the husbands are usually too busy with their own orientation at this time to accompany them. Third, the orientation of spouses has a lower priority in the university than the orientation of students. Fourth, for those international students who have small children, it creates too much of a disturbance to bring the children with them, but it is very difficult for them to find babysitters. Most of the time, child care is not provided in spouse orientation programs.

None of the Chinese women in this study attended an orientation program offered by the university since they all arrived at different times of the year. Those who arrived at the beginning of Fall semester were not even aware that orientation programs were available.

### English As A Second Language Classes

The ESL classes provided by the university are for students only. Several community groups and individuals in the community provide ESL classes for international women. Most of them are free, but some charge tuition or the cost of textbooks and necessary materials.

The International Center of the university together with the YMCA in the community provide ESL classes for international women every semester. The tuition is free but the women have to pay for their books and workbooks. The classes meet three mornings each week for approximately 1.5 hours each session. In addition to classroom sessions, sometimes activities such as going downtown or grocery shopping are included as part of the class activities. The teachers are all volunteers who have experience in teaching English (but not English as a second language). The focus of the classes are on conversation and everyday English usage.

During the time of this study, two English classes were in session, and each had approximately 8 to 10 international women. The International Center also provides another series of classes which are more academic and advanced but are not free of charge.

Three of the 11 Chinese women in this study attended the English classes jointly offered by the International Center and the YMCA. Those who did not attend said they either did not know about the classes or were unable to attend due to scheduling conflicts. However, the most prevalent reason for not attending was that the women were not willing to pay the extra money to get the textbook and the workbook which were required by the class.

A church in the community also provides free English classes for international women every Thursday afternoon during the school year. Each session lasts approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. The instructors are all volunteers from different churches in the community who are committed to helping international women. The qualifications of the instructors vary. Some may have several years of teaching English as a second language experience while others do not. There are no designated text books. The materials and approaches are designed by the individual instructors. Approximately 50 international women were registered in these English classes during the time of the study but not all of them attended regularly. These women were divided into approximately 8 to 10 groups, and the proficiency levels of these small groups varied.

Nine of the 11 women in this study regularly attended the English classes offered by this local church. One did not go regularly due to time conflicts with work, while another chose not to go as she wanted to prepare herself for entering a doctoral program at the university and she did not feel that these classes met her needs. Though most of the women said that they did not learn much English through these classes,

they all seemed to enjoy them.

In addition to formal English classes, most of the Chinese women in this study received one on one tutorials from American women in local churches and religious groups. These one on one tutorials are free, and are not organized by any particular group. The Chinese women found Americans to teach them through the personal contacts of other Chinese women in the community or through their husbands. Due to time conflicts, I was unable to attend any of these one on one tutorial sessions. However, all of the women involved in these tutorials unanimously told me that this was the most desirable activity of all.

### Programs for International Women

I did not find any organizations in the community where the sole purpose was in providing programs and services for international women. The programs offered by the International Center of the university are open to both international students and their families. The focus of these programs is on cultural exchange. The YMCA "Mornings" program was the only program focused solely on international women in the community at the time of this study. The contents of the "Mornings" program included: cooking, flower arrangements, crafts, beauty tips, visits to farms, etc.

Most of the Chinese women in this study had never attended the programs offered by the International Center. When I asked them why, most said they did not know that there were different types of programs offered there. The main reason for this, according to the International Center was, that these women seldom looked at the International Center newsletters, and they depended on their husbands to give them this kind of information. In most cases, the husbands were either too busy to keep track of different programs or thought that since they were not interested in the programs themselves, their wives would not be interested in them either. Also, no other Chinese women had recommended these

programs to them. The women usually would not attend programs unless they were frequented by other Chinese women.

Three of the 11 women had attended the YMCA "Mornings" program once or twice. They all felt that they did not really understand what was going on. For this reason, they only went when they had nothing else to do on Wednesday mornings. Other women heard of the program, but did not have the desire to go as they thought that they would be unable to comprehend and communicate, and were afraid of embarrassing themselves.

## Professional Counseling

I could not find any specific counseling services geared toward the needs of these women at the time of the study. The international student advisors and the assistant director of the International Center at the university provide some forms of free informal counseling services, but they are mostly for international students. In exceptional cases, such as domestic violence, they do provide free counseling services for the spouses. In addition to the International Student Office and the International Center, counseling services are provided by the University Counseling Center as well as various community organizations.

Ten of the 11 women I interviewed never sought any form of professional help. They were unfamiliar with the western concept of counseling. I encountered some difficulty in explaining what my degree will be after I graduate. They did not think of counseling as a profession in itself, but as a function of leaders and supervisors. Anyone in authority can be a counselor in Mainland China as long as they are in a supervisory position, and no training is required. Even if they were familiar with the concept of counseling, traditional cultural values discouraged them from seeking help from strangers. Moreover, they did not know where to seek counseling and were unable to pay for it. Only one woman in this study sought help from the International Student Office and the International Center after domestic violence occurred.

## Difficulties Encountered By Service Providers

Interviews with professionals who provide services for Chinese women and for international women in general revealed several major difficulties in provision of services.

First, the spouses of international students believe certain myths concerning their adjustment in the United States. These myths to a certain extent prevent them from taking a more active role in helping themselves to adjust to the life in the United States.

Myth #1: The needs of spouses are secondary

The husband's academic concern is always the highest priority of the family. At first the husband is more concerned with his own orientation, and by the time he is finished orienting himself, he is too busy with work and study to help his wife. When wives arrive during the school years, husbands are usually very busy with school work. Thus, the wife's adjustment problems are usually unaddressed until the appearance of major crises such as mental problems, marital difficulties, etc.

Myth #2: "My husband will tell me all I need to know"

The husband feels responsible for the adjustment of his wife and family. He is also supposed to protect them. He therefore shows his wife how to find the grocery store and her English classes in order for her to be able to do so alone. He does not think other programs and services necessary, so that and as a result the wives are unaware of the available services and programs. The International Center commented that in some cases the monthly newsletter of the Center is thrown into the trash without even passing through the wives' hands.

Myth #3: Things will get better as time goes by

Many of international students and their spouses think that adjustment is a matter of time. They admit that they have some adjustment problems initially, but think that they will feel better once they get used to the environment. In the

minds of these students and their spouses, time is the best cure of all.

Myth #4: The root of all problems is language

All spouses of international students think that they have problems because they do not know the language. They believe that once their English improves, everything will improve. To a certain extent, some things do get better with their improvement in English. However, they seem to focus so much on language that they ignore other problems.

The second difficulty encountered by service providers is language. All programs presently provided for international women are conducted in English. Sometimes, the information provided by these programs cannot get through to the wives because of the language barrier. The language skills of most spouses of international students is not very good. In many circumstances, they have to have interpreters. Usually husbands are not good interpreters since they tend to filter the information before they translate it to their wives. In some situations, programs for spouses have become programs for husbands. However, due to the diversity of cultural backgrounds, it is hard for service providers to find interpreters for different language groups with a limited program budget.

Another difficulty is the scheduling of the programs. Most of the programs for international spouses basically follow the schedule of the school year. However, most spouses arrive at different times throughout the year. This creates difficulties for programs such as Orientation. Other programs have more flexibility but still are usually not available during the summer.

A fourth difficulty involves lack of resources. Money and manpower are the two big concerns of service providers. Most programs for spouses require support services such as child care and transportation. Many of these programs are provided with a low budget. Paid baby-sitters and

transportation are often impossible within the budget, and volunteers are usually hard to find. Programs for international women need more funding to enable provision of support services such as babysitting, interpretation, and transportation.

Fifth, coordination among different services is a problem. Services for international spouses are still a "grey" zone. The university acknowledges responsibility for the international students but not for their spouses. Thus, the services provided by the university for spouses seem to be remedial rather than preventive. They use a "patch the ceiling when it leaks" approach. The organizations in the community which provide services to international women very often do not understand their needs. The type of program provided may not be the type needed. As a result, the services are provided in a piecemeal fashion, and there is a lack of coordination and collaboration among various service providers.

The sixth difficulty is that the professionals both in the community and at the university do not have adequate training in cross-cultural issues and experience in working with international women. They may not know the needs of these women, and as a result, the services provided do not meet their needs.

# CHAPTER SIX
# SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## What Do We Know Now?

I examined the life experiences of 11 Chinese women who accompanied their husbands to the United States in this study. These Chinese women were identified through my personal contacts and their recommendations. Initial phone contacts were made to collect basic demographic information. Data were collected through multiple methods of questionnaire, in-depth individual interviews, telephone interviews, participant observations, and diary keeping. I developed a system to code data from individual interviews, participant observations, and the daily activity record forms. This coding system was revised during the data analysis process. Data collected using the questionnaire was hand coded and entered into the computer for generation of essential statistical information.

All 11 Chinese women in this study had been in the United States for no longer than one year and had not visited the United States prior to this experience. All of them were from Mainland China (PRC) and were born and raised there. None of them were American citizens or permanent residents at the time of the study. All of the husbands were full-time students at a state-supported university in Virginia at the time of the study.

These women were not students themselves and were not employed full time outside the home at the time of the study. They arrived in the United States by themselves usually 6 months to 2 years after their husbands' arrival. None of the Chinese women had originally accompanied their husbands. Their age ranged from 25 to 40. Seven of them had been married less than five years. Eight of the 11 had one child, but not all had their children with them in the United States. Ten of the women came from large cities and had an educational level above high school. Most were professionals in China.

The experiences of these 11 women suggested that Chinese

women, whose husbands chose to come to study in the United States, had no choice themselves as to whether to come or not. After their arrival in the United States, their life styles changed drastically. Many things which had not created stress before relocating, such as not knowing English or getting sick, became major stress factors after they came to the United States.

The Chinese women in my study encountered various adjustment problems, such as language, homesickness, change of environment, loss of support, loneliness, etc. Because of language problems, they became more dependent on their husbands and maintained minimal independent daily activities. They changed from career women to full-time homemakers and mothers. They experienced identity problems due to increased dependency and drastic changes in career roles. Even though they shared similar adjustment problems, there was no particular common adjustment pattern. Ease of adjustment depended on their attitudes towards coming to the United States, events after they arrived, and their language skills.

Although these Chinese women experienced different problems, most of them did not ask for professional help. The reasons were three-fold: cultural, conceptual, and psychological. Culturally, they were used to dealing with problems the "Chinese" way, which did not include professional help in a western sense. Second, they were not familiar with the concept of western professional counseling. Third, psychologically they tended to intellectualize and rationalize their situations, believing that the present situation was only a transition to a better future. Hence they thought professional intervention was not required.

The services provided by the university and the community to these Chinese women were piece-meal, and to a certain extent did not meet their needs to improve language ability, prepare for further education and/or career, and raise their self-esteem. Lack of coordination among services was one of

the major problems.

This study had several limitations. First, this study only looked at the adjustment experiences of 11 Chinese women. Generalizing the results to include all Chinese women should be done cautiously. Second, this study reviewed the experiences of these women in one particular context. Other Chinese women in a different context such as a metropolitan areas may have different experiences. Third, Chinese women in the United States come from various localities. Chinese women from Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Southeast Asia may have different experiences from these Mainland Chinese women.

## Implications and Recommendations: A Systems Approach

The results of this study suggest that sojourning Chinese women accompanying their husbands to the United Sates encounter various adjustment problems, such as language, homesickness, change of environment, loss of support, loneliness, loss of career, identity crisis, etc. due to a drastic change in lifestyle and inadequate preparation before coming to the United States. Most of these women do not seek professional help, and despite various efforts to provide services for Chinese women, professionals who work with them are unable to bridge the gap between the services and the service recipients. The adjustment experiences of these Chinese women suggest that this is a multi-facet issue which requires individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions at different levels to work together for possible solutions. The key to helping these sojourner Chinese women to adjust to their lives in the United States is the collaboration of the individual, family, university, community, and society.

### Individual Level

Though accurate information about the United States is hard to get in Mainland China, women who are in similar situations should take a more active role in preparing themselves before coming to the United States. They should make preparation a priority in their busy lives, and this

preparation should start when their husbands leave for the United States. Even though they can never be sure that they would get the visa to come, if coming to the United States to join their husbands is a possibility, then they should take the initial step, such as taking English classes or learning English through audio cassettes. They should not wait until after they come to the United States to start learning English.

Women from the Mainland China are accustomed to having things provided for them. After they come to the United States, they have the same mentality of expecting things to be provided for them. On the contrary, the United States is an individualistic society which expects individuals to assume responsibility for themselves. If Chinese women are going to live in this society, then they should accept the fact that they have to take responsibility for helping themselves to adjust. Going to English classes is a good start, but they should also seek opportunities to practice their English, and be brave in speaking and interacting with Americans. They should take the initiative in finding chances to interact with Americans in various settings.

Family Level

For those Chinese women who have relatives in the United States, their relatives are a very good information source. Chinese who have been in the United States for a longer period of time should share their knowledge about this society and culture to their friends and relatives in Mainland China, especially with those who have plans to come to the United States.

Since most Chinese women do not have relatives in the United States, their husbands become their major source of information. The husbands should send information about the United States and the lives in their particular settings back to their wives to orient them before they come. They should give them a realistic picture of what life will be like, what

kinds of career opportunities the wives would have after coming, and what kinds of educational opportunities are available. Communication between husband and wife before the wife comes to the United States is very important. The more the wife knows about life in the United States, the more realistic her expectations are, and as a result, she is better able to adjust to life after her arrival.

After the wives have come to the United States, the role of the husbands should not be to "do things for them". Rather, they should help their wives to be independent, and facilitate their adjustment to the life in the United States.

University Level

None of the Chinese women in this study had attended a spouse orientation program. Most of these women did not attend any activities other than English classes provided by the university and the community. They were difficult to reach. A review of services provided and the difficulties encountered by service providers suggested that the myths held by these women prevented them from actively seeking services. Also, service providers did not fully understand the needs of these women, and there was no central coordination for these services. In order to bridge this gap, it is important for professionals to destroy the myths, conduct research on the needs of Chinese women, provide services according to their needs, and coordinate these services more effectively.

Destroy The Myths

Education is the means of destroying myths held by Chinese women. The more sensitized they become to their situations, the more likely it is that they will open up to outside help. The key to success is to educate the husbands first, and then to approach the wives directly without passing through the husbands. Education can be fostered in several ways.

First, it is recommended that the Orientation Program for international students each year should include a compulsory

session on the difficulties of being a married international student with a family in the United States. The purpose of the session should not be to intimidate or discourage the students from bringing their families along but to give them a clearer picture of the reality of having wives and children in a totally different society and to prepare them for the difficulties they might encounter ahead. This session should also provide them with hope and assure them that help is available.

The second recommendation is that all international students applying for I-20s to bring their spouses and children to the United States should be required to attend one or two information sessions provided by the International Student Office at the university. These sessions should provide information to the students which would prepare them to help their families adjust upon arrival.

Third, it is recommended that the university should set up a central data bank for the spouses of international students. Their basic personal information should be stored and updated each year for communication purposes. Newsletters targeted especially to these spouses should be printed in several languages, and a comprehensive communicative network should be set up in order to ensure that proper information gets to these women directly without first passing through their husbands.

Research the Needs

Not much research has been done on the adjustment needs of spouses of international students in general, much less on the needs of Chinese women. Several areas of research are necessary based on the results of this study. First, further research is needed on the career development of these women, especially in the area related to the impact of drastic career changes on the Chinese women's psychological well-being. No career development theory in existence can state the impact of the phenomenon of drastic career change for these women.

Second, the problem of identity is an issue that requires further study. Classical identity development theories such as Erikson's developmental stages cannot explain the re-emergence of identity crises in these women. Also, the relationship of identity to adjustment has not been clearly identified. Third, research on various intervention strategies such as group counseling and peer counseling should be encouraged in order to further understand how the helping professions can serve these women better. Fourth, more research is needed to examine the differences and similarities of various groups of international spouses. It is important that professionals receive more funding to support research efforts in this area from organizations such as the National Women's Health Association.

Provide and Coordinate Services: The Institute for International Women (IIW) Model

In order to provide more effective and efficient services to spouses of international students, an independent organization is needed to take up the responsibilities of planning and coordinating services and research efforts. The purpose of the IIW would be to coordinate and provide preventive and remedial services to spouses of international students according to their specific needs.

Structure of the IIW. The staff of the IIW should include a director and a professional counselor at the very least. Both should have training and experience in multicultural counseling and should be bilingual. The main responsibilities of the director should be to: (1) secure internal and external funding for research and operation of the IIW; (2) coordinate services provided by different offices of the university and different groups in the community; and (3) plan for the development of the IIW. The counselor should be responsible for providing individual and group counseling services and for training peer counselors.

Programs and Services. It is not necessary for the IIW

to provide all the services and programs that are needed by spouses of international students. However, the IIW should set up a comprehensive grand program plan to coordinate various kinds of programs, such as ESL classes, individual counseling, peer counseling, and support groups, etc. The IIW should plan and implement orientation programs for newly-arrived spouses. The purpose for the orientation programs is twofold. First they should provide help upon initial arrival, and second, they should introduce the women to the IIW and lay the foundation for future intervention. The results of this study show that the Chinese have a different concept of professional help. They try to avoid seeking help from strangers. They would rather turn to authorities. The key to encouraging these Chinese women, and probably other international women, to seek professional help is to provide them with authority figures with whom they become acquainted upon their initial arrival. If an initial rapport can be established, it is more likely for these women to seek help from these authority figures when problems arise. These programs should be implemented in cycles that coincide with the semesters. A complete set of programs provided in fall semester each year should be repeated in spring semester and in the summer to accommodate spouses who come during different times of the year.

Training of peer counselors should also be a priority of the IIW. Literature on multicultural counseling indicates that peer counseling is an effective means of working with culturally diverse groups. Those spouses who have been in the situation before will probably be more capable of understanding the experiences of newly arrived spouses, and could act as role models. In order for these international women to help each other, training is needed to help them become effective peer counselors.

The Relationship between the IIW and the university. It would not be necessary for the IIW to be a part of the

university or run by the university. What would be most important is for the university to be in a supportive and collaborate position with the IIW. The university could support the IIW in several ways.

First, the university could help promote the services of the IIW through orientation programs and internal seminars and workshops for university personnel. Second, since most international women would like to eventually return to school for further education, it would benefit them if the university would recognize the credits they earned in English classes through the IIW, and count those credits in the future if the women became students in the university. Third, the IIW would need support from the university in facilities and other auxiliary services. For example, the university could provide office space for the IIW and allow the IIW staff to use facilities on campus. A good cooperative relationship between the two would be the key to successful provision of services.

Advantages of the IIW Model. The advantages of the IIW Model are that it is efficient, effective, appropriate, and far-reaching.

1. Efficient. Since one person (the Director of the IIW) would oversee all programs and services provided by various organizations, there would be consistency. Also, duplication of programs and services would be less likely to occur and resources and manpower would be used more efficiently.
2. Effective. This Model incorporates different effective means of working with international women, such as peer counseling. This would not only be more effective, it would also lower the demands on professional counselors, thus being more cost-effective.
3. Appropriate. This model would not only be able to meet the needs of international spouses for language development and the building up of a new support system, but it would also get them involved in the helping

process through peer counseling and other programs that could boost their self-esteem. Though it is unlikely that the IIW would be able to provide job training programs and help to solve career problems, enabling them to take English for credit that would count toward their future education could help them feel that they were doing something meaningful and important.

4. Far-reaching. The IIW would have a far-reaching effect on these international spouses. By providing them with authority figures with whom they could get acquainted before problems occur would enable them to come for professional help later when problems arose. The IIW would provide a place of refuge for these strangers in paradise when they encounter storms in their lives.

Community Level

The community's role in helping Chinese women to adjust to life in the United States should be encouraged. Community organizations, such as local churches and YMCAs should be encouraged to conduct activities, such as English classes, tutorials, cultural exchange programs, etc. Each community should encourage its residents to take a more active role in helping Chinese women in that community to adjust to lives there. The most appropriate way to know about the lives of the Americans is to see how Americans live. Interacting with Americans in daily living can be a very effective and eye-opening experience for these Chinese women. In a university-town setting, the community should have close cooperation with the university to enable better coordination and collaboration, to avoid duplication of services, and to increase efficiency.

Society Level

Both the Mainland Chinese and the United States governments should take a closer look at this issue, and determine their appropriate roles in helping these sojourner Chinese women to adjust to life in the United States. Since

more and more Chinese women are coming every year to the United States to join their husbands, it is imperative for both governments to take a more active role.

The Mainland Chinese government should acknowledge the reality of more and more Chinese people leaving China each year, and should take the responsibility to educate and help ease adjustment before these people leave China. The Mainland Chinese government should at least provide accurate information about the United States and the lives of American people to Chinese citizens. In addition, China should also initiate language classes or seminars on cultural adjustment for those Chinese (both students and spouses) who would be interested in going abroad.

There are many organizations sponsored by Americans, such as the Peace Corps, which are sending people to Mainland China to aid development through involvements in different aspect. Many Americans go to China to teach language, engineering, or science each year. The government of the United States should encourage these kinds of cultural exchange programs, and they should sponsor seminars on cultural adjustments for both Americans and Chinese in Mainland China.

## EPILOGUE

### A Revisit

Half a year had passed since I finished interviewing these 11 Chinese women. By the time I finished writing up this study, much had changed in the lives of some of these women. In order to make their stories complete, I felt that it would be appropriate to give a brief report of their present life experiences. Unfortunately, I was not able to maintain contact with all of the 11 women. Information on the present situations of six of the women follows.

Ying, Su

Ying is now working 4 days a week in a Chinese restaurant in a town 2 hours away from her local community. The restaurant provides living accommodations for her. She stays in that town when she has to work, and she returns home for 3 days per week. She still does not know how to drive. Since she and another local Chinese woman work together in the restaurant, the two husbands take turns in driving them to work every week. Ying has been working there for 6 months. She originally decided to work in a Chinese restaurant because her husband could not find a job after he graduated from the masters program and decided to pursue a doctoral degree. Due to budget cuts, her husband's department was unsure as to whether they would be able to continue his financial support. Hence she worked to earn his tuition. At the present time, though Ying's husband continues to have financial assistance, she continues to work in the restaurant as this provides them with some extra income. She also thinks that the owner of the restaurant is nice and enjoys working for him.

Since Ying cannot stay home with her daughter anymore, they send her to a Day Care Center during the day. When Ying is not in town, her husband takes care of their daughter during the night. Whenever Ying is in town she is still the primary caretaker of their daughter.

They have moved since I last interviewed her. They found

a cheaper but lower quality place because they wanted to cut back on their expenses. They are now living in a house on Main Street with four other Chinese families. Since Ying is not in town for most of the week, she no longer goes to English classes or other activities in church. Most of her time in town is spent grocery shopping and taking care of her daughter.

(Note: By the time I worked on the final draft of this chapter, Ying has returned to this community. She quit her job in order to come home and take care of her daughter, who will start kindergarten in the Fall.)

Juan, Liu

Shortly after I interviewed Juan, she went by herself to California. Her parents came from Mainland China to visit some relatives in California. She flew over to spend time with her parents. She wanted to use this opportunity to earn some extra money, so she worked in a Chinese restaurant while in California. Her husband is still studying in this university and lives in the same apartment as before. As it is expensive to fly back from California, she has not returned for a visit since she left.

(Note: Juan was back in this community when I was working on the final draft of this chapter. Her parents came for 6 months but she spent 11 months in California.)

Xin, Chen

Xin has had many medical problems since our last interview. Her hyperthyroid condition worsened, and she finally had to visit a doctor. Despite her medical condition, her husband still decided not to get health insurance, since he thought that his wife's medical bill in a year would not add up to the amount of the insurance premiums. The last time I saw Xin, her hyperthyroid condition was under control through medication, but the doctor still recommended surgery or iodine treatments to completely solve the problem. She was indecisive about both treatments.

In addition to her hyperthyroid condition, Xin has started having seizures. She has been to the emergency room several times. The doctor suggested that she undergo an extensive examination which includes expensive medical procedures such as a CT Scan. Since they did not have health insurance, Xin and her husband were not sure how they could pay for these medical expenses. At the time I saw her last, her situation was still pending.

Hui-jing, Ma

I did not have much contact with her after our first interview as she worked long hours and it was very difficult for me to get in touch with her. However, I knew indirectly that there were some marital problems between Hui-jing and her husband. They once had a big fight which resulted in Hui-jing leaving home for several days. Their marital conflict was finally settled through the help of Chinese students from the Chinese student association.

Xiao-fang, Lu

Xiao-fang had already left this town when I finished writing up this study. Her husband was admitted to a graduate program in another state, and the university there provided him with financial assistance. Since he was not able to get any financial assistance from this university, they decided to move there. Xiao-fang was very excited about the move. She was happy that she could finally stop working in the Chinese restaurant. She said that she would probably not work in a Chinese restaurant after they moved. She planned to rest for a short while, and then to prepare for the TOEFL examination.

Mei, Li

A lot had happened to Mei in one year. She had reconciled with her husband for a short period of time but then separated again. She moved to a cheaper apartment with her daughter, was living on her own savings, and depending upon the help of her friends. She had filed for divorce. The

divorce procedure was still pending. About the time I finished writing up this study, she was granted temporary custody of her daughter and was able to get a small amount of alimony each month. She was very frustrated with the divorce proceedings, and was disappointed and angry with her husband.

"I or They?" : The Researcher's Identity Problem

Before starting this study, I thought I was in the best position to conduct research on this population. I had several reasons to support my belief. First, I am Chinese and I grew up in a Chinese society. I understand Chinese culture, and I speak the language. Even though my mother tongue is Cantonese (the most popular dialect spoken in Southeast China and Hong Kong), I can speak fluent Mandarin (the National Language of Chinese), and I can write in Chinese. There should not have been any cultural or communication barriers between myself and the participants.

Second, I come from Hong Kong, which is a politically neutral zone. Since 1949, China has been divided into the People's Republic of China (PRC), commonly known as Mainland China or Communist China, and the Republic of China, commonly known as Taiwan. The two regard each other as enemies, and Chinese people from these two different places usually do not mix in the United States due to differences in political ideology and mutual suspicion. Since I come from a neutral zone, and originally I intended to find Chinese women from both places to participate in this study, I thought that the women would be willing to open up to me.

Third, before I returned to school, I stayed home for nine months as a spouse when I first came to the United States. I had been in the same position so I should be able to empathize with what the participants were going through as accompanying spouses.

Fourth, I received professional training in research and had the professional knowledge to enable me to remain objective. Besides, at that time I had been in the United

States for 5 years and was no longer experiencing the same problems as they were. For this reason I should not be overwhelmed by their problems or get over-involved in their experiences.

Based on these factors, I felt that I would be the most suitable person to conduct this study since I had enough background to enable me to understand the subjective experiences of these Chinese women, as well as enough experience to maintain a balanced perspective.

Although I did not have major problems finding participants and getting their cooperation, it did not take me long to realize that something was wrong. The research was not as easy as I thought it would be, and there was no such thing as "the most suitable" or "best" person to conduct the research. I came to a realization of several important facts both personal and professional.

First, I realized that professional training and differences in life experiences at that particular point did not make me immune to emotional involvement. I was forced to re-examine my personal feelings concerning my own life experiences. At one particular point in studying the women, I realized that I was no longer like them. I realized that subconsciously I had wanted to consider myself still one of them. I had thought of myself as experiencing one of the easier adjustments among them, but 5 years of Americanization had actually changed me great deal. I was leading a different and more Americanized life.

I first realized this when I went to an English class with several Chinese women whom I had interviewed. It was a cold winter day. After the class, we walked out of the building. I said "goodbye" and jumped into my car. I started the car and pulled out of the parking lot. The other Chinese women started walking down the street. As warm air from the car started blowing onto my face and I drove by these women, my tears began to fall. I wrote in my observation notes:

> "When I saw them walking in the cold, and feeling the warm air coming from my car, there was this sense of guiltiness. I felt that I was not one of them anymore (I thought I used to be when I was first here). I had adjusted so well to the American way of life (jumping into a car, never walk, or take the bus), would this blunt my sensitivity from understanding them? I felt that next time when I went with any of them to any places, I should walk with them!"

These realizations brought up many tangled emotions. I felt guilty because I had achieved what the other women were dreaming of achieving but they had not as yet been successful. It was as if we were all originally struggling to survive in a stormy sea and were very united because we had a common goal. But suddenly I realized that I was in a life boat all by myself watching them struggle in the sea. I felt that I had betrayed them. I presented myself as one of them and won their confidence, but in reality I was not what I claimed to be. I felt guilty because I survived!

I also felt sad because I had lost a part of myself of which I had once been proud. I mourned for the death of my past self and I was angry. I asked myself a very simple question: "Why do you let this go?" It seemed as if I could not forgive myself for driving a car instead of walking or taking a bus, for no longer staying home all day, and for not waiting for my husband to give me rides. At this point, I had to step back and attempt to put myself together again before I could continue with my research.

Second, I realized that it was almost impossible for me to separate my "real self" and my "professional self" in the research study. At first I thought I would be able to be an objective observer, but at the same time identify with the participants and enter their lives. I soon realized that it was impossible for me to be simply a "researcher". I was engaged in a person-to-person interaction. It was my life, my beliefs, my value systems, the whole "me" was brought into the research. Originally, I did not think that my personal

life and values would play a part in the research, but I was mistaken. The Chinese women were willing to open up to me because of who I am. The Chinese population in this community is not large. People often know who you are before they meet you. Most of the Chinese women I interviewed in this study did not know me personally before the study. With basically no knowledge about the counseling profession and social science research, these women trusted me because of who I am as a person, not as a researcher or a professional counselor.

Lastly, I realized it was almost impossible for me to maintain a balance between objectivity and subjectivity. I was recording the subjective experiences of these Chinese women. They were themselves the only appropriate people to interpret these experiences. Objective interpretation can sometimes create a false reality. For example, from an objective standard, a family of three living on $600 a month is below the poverty line and was deprived. But for most of these women, having $600 a month was a blessing and most of them could lead a decent life with this income.

Despite these unforeseeable problems, this research experience made me realize that subjectivity and feelings might not necessarily be something to avoid in qualitative research. They could be powerful tools, for I myself as a person could be an instrument for data analysis and interpretation.

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Appendix One

Case No : _____

**Personal Data Sheet**

Name of Participant : _____

Name of Participant's Husband : _____

Age : _____ Phone Number : _____

Address : _____

_____

Years of Marriage : _____

Country of Origin : _____

Length of Stay in U.S.A. : _____

Education Background : _____

Other Information : _____

_____

---

First Interview : _____

Follow-up Interview : _____

Activities Record :

_____

_____

Diary :

_____

Comments :

_____

## Appendix Two

The Social Readjustment Rating Questionnaire

Please rate the following list of life events according to their relative degrees of necessary readjustment. Event 1, Marriage, has been given an arbitrary value of 500. When you complete each of the remaining events, if you decide the adjustment in the next event is more intense and protracted, then choose a **proportionately larger** number and place it in the blank directly opposite the event in the column marked "VALUES". If you decide the event represents less and shorter readjustment than marriage, then indicate how much less by placing a **proportionately smaller** number in the opposite blank. If the event is equal in social readjustment to marriage, record the number 500 opposite the event. In deciding your values, **use all of your experience** in arriving at your answer. This means personal experience where it applies as well as what you have learned to be the case for others. Some persons accommodate to change more readily than others; some persons adjust with particular ease or difficulty to only certain events. Therefore, strive to give your opinion of the average degree of readjustment necessary for each event rather than the extreme.

| | Events | Values |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Marriage | 500 |
| 2. | Burglar came into my home | _____ |
| 3. | Leaving China | _____ |
| 4. | Death of spouse | _____ |
| 5. | Change in sleeping habits (a lot more or a lot less sleep, or change in part of day when asleep) | _____ |
| 6. | Pregnancy | _____ |
| 7. | Divorce/Marital Separation | _____ |
| 8. | Change in health or behavior of family members | _____ |
| 9. | Death of close family members | _____ |
| 10. | Miscarriage/Abortion | _____ |
| 11. | Separated from spouse (spouse left for the United States first) | _____ |
| 12. | Lost or quit job | _____ |
| 13. | Retirement from work | _____ |
| 14. | Marital reconciliation | _____ |
| 15. | Nervous or emotional illness | _____ |
| 16. | Gained new family member (e.g. through birth, relatives moving in, etc.) | _____ |
| 17. | Change in financial state (e.g. a lot worse off or a lot better off than usual) | _____ |
| 18. | Death of close friend | _____ |
| 19. | Not knowing English very well | _____ |
| 20. | Being alone without friends | _____ |
| 21. | Minor violation of laws (e.g. traffic tickets, working illegally, etc.) | _____ |
| 22. | Increased quarrelling with spouse | _____ |
| 23. | Unable to make friends with neighbors | _____ |
| 24. | Spouse changed job | _____ |
| 25. | Disliked for being a foreigner | _____ |
| 26. | Change in residence | _____ |
| 27. | Major personal injury or illness | _____ |
| 28. | Moving to another state in U.S.A. | _____ |
| 29. | Chinese New Year | _____ |
| 30. | Change in recreation | _____ |
| 31. | In-law troubles | _____ |
| 32. | Change in personal habits (dress, manners, etc.) | _____ |
| 33. | Change in social activities (e.g. clubs, dancing, movies, visiting, etc.) | _____ |
| 34. | Serious noise in the neighborhood | _____ |

Please indicated with a check mark ( ) in the blank whether you have experienced the following events in the past twelve months. Please only check those events that you have experienced personally (not those experienced by your spouse or other family members).

| | Events | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Marriage | _____ |
| 2. | Burglar came into my home | _____ |
| 3. | Leaving China | _____ |
| 4. | Death of spouse | _____ |
| 5. | Change in sleeping habits (a lot more or a lot less sleep, or change in part of day when asleep) | _____ |
| 6. | Pregnancy | _____ |
| 7. | Divorce/Marital Separation | _____ |
| 8. | Change in health or behavior of family members | _____ |
| 9. | Death of close family members | _____ |
| 10. | Miscarriage/Abortion | _____ |
| 11. | Separated from spouse (spouse left for the United States first) | _____ |
| 12. | Lost or quit job | _____ |
| 13. | Retirement from work | _____ |
| 14. | Marital reconciliation | _____ |
| 15. | Nervous or emotional illness | _____ |
| 16. | Gained new family member (e.g. through birth, relatives moving in, etc.) | _____ |
| 17. | Change in financial state (e.g. a lot worse off or a lot better off than usual) | _____ |
| 18. | Death of close friend | _____ |
| 19. | Not knowing English very well | _____ |
| 20. | Being alone without friends | _____ |
| 21. | Minor violation of laws (e.g. traffic tickets, working illegally, etc.) | _____ |
| 22. | Increased quarrelling with spouse | _____ |
| 23. | Unable to make friends with neighbors | _____ |
| 24. | Spouse changed job | _____ |
| 25. | Disliked for being a foreigner | _____ |
| 26. | Change in residence | _____ |
| 27. | Major personal injury or illness | _____ |
| 28. | Moving to another state in U.S.A. | _____ |
| 29. | Chinese New Year | _____ |
| 30. | Change in recreation | _____ |
| 31. | In-law troubles | _____ |
| 32. | Change in personal habits (dress, manners, etc.) | _____ |
| 33. | Change in social activities (e.g. clubs, dancing, movies, visiting, etc.) | _____ |
| 34. | Serious noise in the neighborhood | _____ |

Appendix Three

Changes made of the Original SRRQ

A. Retained items
1. Marriage
4. Death of spouse
5. Change in sleeping habits (a lot more or a lot less sleep, or change in part of day when asleep)
6. Pregnancy
8. Change in health or behavior of family members
9. Death of close family members
13. Retirement from work
14. Marital reconciliation
16. Gained new family member (e.g. through birth, relatives moving in, etc.)
17. Change in financial state (e.g. a lot worse off or a lot better off than usual)
18. Death of close friend
21. Minor violation of laws (e.g. traffic tickets, working illegally, etc.)
26. Change in residence
27. Major personal injury or illness
31. In-law troubles
33. Change in social activities (e.g. clubs, dancing, movies, visiting, etc.)

B. Re-worded Items
7. Divorce/Marital separation
12. Lost or quit job
22. Increased quarrelling with spouse
24. Spouse changed job
30. Change in recreation
32. Change in personal habits (dress,manners, etc.)

C. Added-on Items
2. Burglar came into my home
3. Leaving China
10. Miscarriage/abortion
11. Separated from spouse (spouse left for the United States first)
15. Nervous or emotional illness
19. Not knowing English very well
20. Being alone without friends
23. Unable to make friends with neighbors
25. Disliked for being a foreigner
28. Moving to another state in U.S.A.
29. Chinese New Year
34. Serious noise in the neighborhood

Appendix Four

| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. M. (7 - 12) | | | | | | | |
| P. M. (12 - 7) | | | | | | | |
| Evening (7 - 12) | | | | | | | |

Appendix Five

## Coding Categories

**000 Personal Information**

001 Age
002 Years of Marriage
003 Number of Children
004 Age of Children
005 Children in USA/China
006 Length of Stay in USA
007 Rural or Urban Background
008 Educational Level
009 Occupation
010 Personality
011 Relatives (in USA/other countries)

**100 Career**

101 Type of work at home
102 Working situation at home
103 Type of work in USA
104 Career/Study Plans
105 Working situation in USA

**200 Husband**

201 Visa status
202 Reasons for coming to USA
203 Duration of stay
204 Major/Level
205 Study
206 Plans after graduation
207 Work: teaching assistantship/research assistantship
208 Personal Information, e.g. age, personality, etc.

**300 Lives at Home**

301 Living environment
302 Family relationships
303 Friendship
304 Living standard
305 Social status
306 Family lives
307 Financial situation
308 Health situation
309 Medical aspects
310 Geographical differences
311 Household chores

312 Transportation
313 Daily Routines

**400 Coming to the States**

401 Getting visa
402 Reasons for coming
403 Decision/choice of coming
404 Preparation/Knowledge of USA before coming
405 Initial arrival
406 Feelings about coming to USA
407 Positive aspects of coming to USA

**500 Lives in USA**

501 Living environment
502 Financial situation
503 Food
504 Transportation
505 Insurance
506 Health situation
507 Medical aspects
508 Living standard
509 Social status
510 Family lives
511 Friendship
512 Daily routines
513 Household chores
514 Religion

**600 Adjustment Problems**

601 Homesickness
602 Living condition
603 Support system
604 Sense of Belonging
605 Identity problem
606 Looking for jobs/Career
607 Going back to school
608 Cultural differences
609 Loneliness/isolation
610 Feelings and emotions
611 Dissatisfaction/complaints/depression
612 Daily routines

**700 Language**

701 Knowing English before coming to USA
702 Problems
703 Barriers
704 Learning English

**800 Social Life & Activities**

801 Contact with Chinese
802 Contact with Americans/Internationals
803 Social activities
804 Grocery
805 Hobbies/Leisure activities
806 Contact with relatives in USA/other countries
807 Travelling

**900 Marital Relationship**

901 Changes in role
902 Changes in marital relationships
903 Marital relationships
904 Separation/Divorce
905 Time apart before wife came
906 Extra-marital affairs
907 Time spent with husband in USA
908 Marital relationship before coming to USA

**1000 Children**

1001 Child-rearing
1002 Adjustment problems
1003 Language (in USA)
1004 School (in USA)
1005 Arrangements at home (e.g. care-taker, etc.)
1006 Reasons for leaving children in China
1007 Pregnancy/plans to start a family

**1100 Impression about USA and Americans**

1101 Impression about USA
1102 Impression about Americans
1103 American culture

**1200 Problem-solving in China**

1201 Friends
1202 Family/Relatives
1203 Work Unit
1204 Others

**1300 Problem-solving in USA**

1301 American/International Friends
1302 Chinese friends
1303 Intellectualization
1304 Family/Relatives
1305 University: Professors

1306 University: International Student Office
1307 University: Other units
1308 Professional counseling

## Appendix Six

### Word Perfect Computer Coding Program

```
{DISPLAY OFF}
{ON CANCEL}{GO}end~~
{CALL}clear_var~
{LABEL}begin~
    {DISPLAY ON}
    {Block}{Search}.{Search}{Underline}
    {DISPLAY OFF}
    {IF}"{VAR 3}""="~{TEXT}1~Enter·code·:·~
    {ELSE}
       {ASSIGN}1~{VAR 3}~
    {END IF}
    {Search Left}{Underline}{Search Left}
    {Block}{Search}.{Search}

    {Move}12{Switch}{VAR 1}{Indent}{Enter}     {;}move·text·to·scr·2~
    {Search}.{Search}{Enter}{Enter}{Del}y
    {Switch}{Right}       {;}back·to·screen·1~
    {CALL}asknexttext2~
{GO}begin~

{LABEL}asknexttext1~
{ASSIGN}3~1~
{CHAR}3~{^]}1{^Q}re-code·?·:·0{Left}~
{IF}{VAR 3}=1~
    {GO}backtobeginning~
{END IF}
    {Backspace}y{Right}{Right}

{RETURN}
{LABEL}backtobeginning~
    {Search Left}{Underline}{Search Left}{Backspace}
{RETURN}

{LABEL}asknexttext2~
{ASSIGN}3~~
{TEXT}3~Re-enter·code·or·{^]}RETURN{^Q}·to·continue·:·~
{IF}"{VAR 3}""="~
    {Backspace}y{Right}{Right}
    {RETURN}
{ELSE}
    {Search Left}{Underline}{Search Left}{Backspace}
{ELSE}
    {Search Left}{Underline}{Search Left}{Backspace}
    {RETURN}
{END IF}
{RETURN}

{LABEL}clear_var~
{ASSIGN}1~~
{ASSIGN}3~~
{RETURN}

{LABEL}end~
{Backspace}y{QUIT}
```

## Vita

Waiping Alice Lo was born on October 10, 1961 in Hong Kong. In 1984, she completed her undergraduate study in social work at Hong Kong Baptist College. After working for one and a half years as a school social worker in a special school for physically handicapped children, she came to the United States in 1986. She entered Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University for her graduate studies in Fall 1987. She got her Master's degree in family studies from the Department of Family and Child Development in May, 1988. She entered the Counselor Education and Student Personnel Services doctoral program in Fall 1988. In March 1990, she received the National Graduate Student Award of the American Association for Counseling and Development. In June, 1990, she completed requirements for the Certificate of Advance Graduate Studies (CAGS) in Counselor Education and Student Personnel Services. She completed requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in January, 1993.