CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

THE UNTOLD STORIES OF 21st CENTURY CHINESE STUDENTS IN

LOS ANGELES:

A MULTIMEDIA SERIES

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts in

Mass Communication

By

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ABSTRACT

THE UNTOLD STORIES OF 21st CENTURY CHINESE STUDENTS IN

LOS ANGELES:

A MULTIMEDIA SERIES

By Sisi Chen
Master of Arts in Mass Communication

This project produces a series of multimedia stories that reveal untold stories about these Chinese students studying in the United States. The stories focus on California State University, Northridge (CSUN), which has the most Chinese students of any Master’s Degree institution in the United States.

Three major issues that Chinese students meet in Los Angeles are depicted, including of cultural problems, academic troubles and driving issues,. The purpose of this project is for an American audience to better understand this population and perhaps help American universities, which so actively recruit Chinese students, better help them be successfully integrated into American educational institutions. These stories too may help Chinese students adapt to their new environment and lives in the United States.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the turn of the century, the United States has seen an unprecedented surge in the number of international students. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), 819,644 of them studied in the United States during the 2012-2013 academic year. This is 32% more than a decade before (Institute of International Education, 2013). Of all the countries sending their students to the United States, China is the leading source. The number of Chinese students enrolled in American universities was over 200,000 during the 2012-2013 academic year, meaning a quarter (28.7%) of all foreign students come from this one country (Institute of International Education, 2013).

Hundreds of thousands of Chinese students come to America seeking higher education and potentially a new future when they return home, a trend that has created its own nickname for those who return to China: sea turtles (in Chinese, the haigui 海龟) because they travel long distances from home. The largest number of these students has chosen California as their destination.

These Chinese students are a growing and unique population in the United States (and in China itself). But they have also been identified as a population that experiences far more difficulties adjusting than many other international students (Xueqin, 2012). However, this stress, which is both academic and social, is often unspoken and invisible stress due to Chinese cultural norms (Yeh & Inose, 2003).
Project Aims

The aim of this thesis project is to produce a series of multimedia stories that reveal untold stories about these Chinese students studying in the United States.

With this multimedia series, I want to tell stories that challenge the stereotypes that exist in the U.S media from the point of view of the Chinese students. The lives of Chinese students in the United States are not always easy. Pressures in their lives such as language barriers, culture shock, social isolation, and stress associated with visa status and immigration procedures are explored.

The stories will focus on California State University, Northridge students but also include other students in the Los Angeles area. Over 200,000 Chinese students are studying at American universities today. That’s double the number from six years ago. California State University, Northridge has the most Chinese students of any Master’s Degree granting institution in the United States.

My goal is to help American audiences better understand this population and perhaps help American universities, which so actively recruit Chinese students, better understand them. These stories too may help Chinese students adopt to their new environment and lives in the United States.

Research Questions

In this thesis project, I answer the following questions:
1. What are the biggest challenges faced by Chinese international students in the United States as seen through the eyes of California State University Northridge students?

2. Why do Chinese students study abroad?

3. How do Chinese students view their experiences?

4. What kinds of pressures and cultural issues do they face in the United States?

**Significance**

With its rapid economic development, China today plays an important role on the world stage. It is a country with a growing middle class and increasing numbers of young people who hold many different views of their own country and the world. Yet most Americans know very little about China and its people. Their main sources of information are news and entertainment media, and Western media representations of China have been negative. While that is changing, media still tend to stereotype and misrepresent China. It is important for American audiences to better understand China and Chinese people.
Overview of Thesis

The next chapter is the Literature Review and consists of three sections. The first section explores the concept of stereotypes and how this has been applied to Asian Americans in the American media and what are the mass media representations of China. This literature applies a theoretical framework of hegemony and the propaganda model. The second section addresses the history of Chinese students in the United States from the 1870s to the present. The third section discusses culture shock and common problems such as transportation, social isolation and discrimination that Chinese students face in the United States.

Chapter 3 is the methodology, which explains how the project was carried out. Chapter 4 is the transcription of the multimedia series, which contains three multimedia stories of Chinese students in Los Angeles. Finally, Chapter 5 is the conclusion of the project.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, I first explain mass media stereotypes, and then consider research that explores mass media images of China and stereotypes of Asian Americans in U.S. media. The literature review also seeks to explain how U.S media failed to be objective in its coverage of China and Chinese people by exploring the theoretical concept of hegemony and the Propaganda Model.

The second main section of the literature review discusses the history of Chinese students in the United States from the 1870s until the present. The third section focuses on the concept of culture shock and common problems such as transportation, social isolation, and discrimination that Chinese students meet in the United States.

Stereotypes

A stereotype is a condensed thought that reduces or even creates key attributes of a group (Zhu, 2007). According to Zhang and Tan (2011), “Stereotypes are often defined as oversimplified and overgeneralized beliefs about members of other groups” (p. 354). It is very difficult to change stereotypes because they complete cognitive functions such as illustrating the unfamiliar in a simple manner.

According to McGarty Yzerbyt and Spears (2002), there are three principles that lead to stereotyping, “firstly, stereotypes are aids to explanation, secondly, stereotypes are energy-saving devices; thirdly, stereotypes are shared group beliefs” (p.2). These indicate that stereotypes may help people understand a complex or
unfamiliar situation, and also identify and reinforce key criterion for social groups (McGarty Yzerbyt & Spears, 2002). Stereotypes are not only descriptive but also evaluative. They are not always directed at other, outside groups but have been found as well to be used by groups to think and talk about themselves. For example, Zhu (2007) states that, “When stereotypes are used to describe a group to which one belongs, they contain attributes that glorify that in-group” (p. 2).

Stereotypes may hold elements of the truth within them and consist of highlighting some attributes and leaving out others. As one example, Timberlake and Williams (2012) write, “The United States is a nation of immigrants is both a cliché and an historical and contemporary demographic fact.” (p.867). As it indicated in recent census count, approximately 12% of Americans are from a foreign country; the percentage is almost identical to a century ago. So the phrase “nation of immigrants” is true if one considers that number to be high. It is also a stereotype embraced by many Americans and has become part of their self-image.

**Mass Media & Stereotypes**

Mass media have a great effect on the public opinion and the formation and development of stereotypes. Ross (2003) states that mass media are especially powerful when they depict events, groups, and affairs that people have no access to or have had no personal experience with. Thus, mass media are often the main source of stereotypes about foreigners and foreign places, since a lot of Americans have
spent little time in other countries (Harris, 2004). This means that mass media including newspapers, TV and Internet could be the only source for many people to access the information about other cultures. The media could significantly sway public opinion toward China and the media coverage could influence important foreign policy make processes.

Instead of providing objective and authentic information about other countries, many mass media outlets are more often engaged in creating, strengthening and aggravating stereotypes (Ross, 2003,). This is true of both journalism and of entertainment media as well where storytelling often relies on stereotyping as part of how they operate. Zhu (2007) states that, “in the entertainment media industry, stereotypes serve the need to quickly convey information about characters and to stimulate certain expectations about characters’ actions” (p.8).

**Images of Asian Americans: From the “Yellow peril” to the “Model minority”**

Of particular interest in this thesis are the images of Chinese people and Asians in general within the United States. As noted in the discussion of stereotyping, such images are often long-standing and appear across news and entertainment media. According to Zhu and Christie (2011), “the images of Asian Americans have ranged from the ‘yellow peril’ to the “model minority” (p. 7). The “Yellow Peril” stereotype comes from the description of early Chinese immigrants to the United States in the mid to late 1800s, when many Chinese came over to work on building the railways
and perform other sorts of jobs. Shim states that the expression, “yellow peril” was a caution to white Americans about Japanese and Chinese immigrants that were depicted as wanting to take over white American jobs and destroy white American culture (Shim, 1988). As Zhu and Christie (2011) summarize,

“The ‘yellow peril’ stereotype depicted Chinese immigrants as having crooked yellow bodies and speaking Pidgin English, their face was categorized as being ‘inassimilable,’ and their character ‘disgusting’” (Zhu and Christie, 2011, p.7)

In contrast to this negative image, the mainstream media have portrayed Asian Americans more recently as a “successful” minority. The first time that Asian Americans were portrayed as a “model minority” by the popular media was in the early 1960s (Wong, Lai, Nagasawa & Lin, 1998). Within this stereotype, Asian Americans are considered “to enjoy extraordinary achievement in education, occupational upward mobility, rising incomes, and are problem-free in mental health and crime” (Wong, Lai, Nagasawa & Lin, 1998, p.96).

However, Zhu and Christie (2011) argue that despite the positive characterization in the stereotype of the "model minority," it has the possibility of an inadvertent negative impact because of the undue pressure on Asian Americans to be perfect. Also, the image of “model minority” in some sense has the meaning of “quiet Americans,” meaning Asians are not expected to have a voice or speak up for themselves (Zhu & Christie, 2011). Both Yellow Peril and Model Minority
stereotypes negatively affect the formation of images about Chinese immigrants and visitors (such as students) in the United States. Overall, the “Yellow Peril” stereotype continues to be strong in Americans discourses about Chinese people (Shim, 1998).

**Theoretical Framework**

The idea of hegemony along with Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model can be used to explain where the bias in news coverage comes from. According to Marx, the ruling classes create the dominant ideas of a society, which means the class that owns and controls the material production mechanisms of a society also controls the mental productions of the society (p.9). In other words, they control how people see the world.

**Hegemony**

The origin of ideological social control through the media can be explained through the concept of hegemony. Gitlin (1980) defined hegemony as a ruling class dominating subordinate classes through affecting the daily practices and common sense of the public. Gitlin (1980) stated that hegemony is effective when the dominant class not only rules but also directs how people think: “when they not only possess the power to coerce but actively organize so as to command and win the consent of the subordinated classes to their continuing sway” (p.253).
According to Gitlin (1980), the dominant class does not directly produce and disseminate ideology and influence subordinate class. It influences the subordinate class through journalists, writers, producers, and bureaucrats. While American society is told that journalists should be objective and plays a watchdog role to monitor the power of the government and business elites, Gitlin argues that in fact they comply with the ruling class. To put it in another way, the ruling class gains the public consent in a liberal capitalist society not usually through force or violence but through convincing the public of their ideas. This is done through institutions such as education, religion and media, all of which are controlled by elites (Gitlin, 1980). Rather than challenging its core beliefs, the media reinforce the political-economic system. “At the same time, they are committed to their own particular economic and political advantage” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 259). That is, supporting the status quo can mean they will be financially and politically successful.

*Propaganda Model*

The propaganda model explains the inequality in command of resources and its multilevel effects on mass media choices and interests (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). According to Herman and Chomsky (1988), there is a monopolistic control over the media, which means they are controlled by a small group of dominant elites in capitalist countries.
Herman and Chomsky (1988) developed a propaganda model to explain how this works. In their model, there are five filters that affect the media’s choices of what is news and how it should be covered: firstly, the size, concentrated ownership, and profit orientation of the mass media; secondly, advertising; thirdly, sourcing used by mass media news; fourthly, flak as enforcement of discipline of the media; finally, anticommunism as a national religion and control machine (p. 2). These five filters can be used to explain biased coverage of Asian Americans and specifically Chinese people including Chinese students in the U.S media.

The first filter of the propaganda model is size, ownership, and profit orientation of the mass media. As Herman and Chomsky state, media are large businesses and they are in the control of wealthy and powerful people. Also, mass media outlets such as radio and TV require government licenses to broadcast, and so, in Herman and Chomsky’s words, they are “potentially subject to government control or harassment” (p.13).

The second propaganda model filter is advertising. Herman and Chomsky (1988) explain that because advertising pays for much of the news media within the United States, those buying the advertisements hold a lot of power over the news media.

The third filter is comes from the sources used by news media. Herman and Chomsky (1988) stated that, “the mass media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of
interests”(p. 18). In order to maintain the image of objectivity, the mass media need official sources that are believed to be accurate and trusted by audiences.

The fourth filter is called “flak and the enforcers”, that is to say, the mass media avoid provoking constituencies that may produce flak, or criticism of their work,. Herman and Chomsky believed that the majority of flak comes from the government regularly “assailing, threatening, and “correcting” the media (p.28).

The fifth filter is the ideology of anticommunism. According to Herman and Chomsky (1988), communism is considered as the “ultimate evil” and the “specter haunting property owners” (p. 29). From this point of view, the revolutions of Soviet, Chinese, and Cuban were “traumas” for the capitalist countries.

The anticommunism filter can be used to against anybody that threatens property owners or advocates communist states. The anti-communist mechanism has a big influence on the mass media. As a historically communist country, China and Chinese people are considered as threats to capitalist countries. Overall, the ideology and religion of anticommunism is a dominant filter of the propaganda model.

**Mass Media Coverage of China in the American News Media**

With its rapid economic development, China has become a powerful country on the world stage. Due to China’s newly dominant position in the world and the strong economic ties between the United States and China, interaction between the two countries has grown quickly.
The mass media have played an important role in how Americans view China. According to Zhu (2007), the relationship between the United States and China may be viewed as going through four stages: early 20th century; World War II-era; 1950s to 1970s; and 1970s to the present. “Media stereotypes of Chinese and Americans in two countries have undergone changes as the relationship fluctuated” (p. 10).

Zhang (2011) states that the major focus of coverage on China by foreign media has changed in recent years from politics to economics and culture. American media coverage of China has become more diverse during the last ten years, According to Zhang, the range of topics through which China is talked about today include “economic development, the nature of the communist regime, democracy, human rights, Chinese expansionism, and the relations with Hong Kong and Taiwan” (p. 65).

Although the American media coverage of China has become more diverse, American opinions about China still tend to be more negative than positive. Wang and Hallquist note that, since the 1990s, approximately 40% of Americans have a positive opinion of China, and over 50% of people have negative views. In addition, the main image of China is negative (2011).

U.S. print media also predominately hold a negative rather than positive image of China. Zhang (2011) states that “power rivalry with the United States, human rights abuses, a repressive political system, social riot, strong commitment over Taiwan reunion, and corruptive leadership” are common themes in the negative coverage of China in American news (p. 65).
Nevertheless, there are also some positive images of China in the America media, usually focused on economic development in China and China’s complicated cultural issues. However, Liss (2003) argues that it is difficult for Americans to develop a positive image of China since the negative view of China is most familiar to American audiences.

Wang and Hallquist (2011) found in their research that the key image of China is evident in two major discourses focused on the rise of China and its global influence. These are the “China threat theory" and "China collapse theory", with the "China threat" theory more generally used.

Much of this media coverage and research however, focuses on China as a country and on its foreign policy and economic activities and how the media portray these. In contrast, there is little mass media coverage of Chinese people who are living in America, according to Zhang (2011).

In recent years, American mass media have not paid much attention to Chinese people as a distinct group in the United States (Wang & Hallquist, 2011). Instead, much research is focused on Asian Americans as a broad group, instead of Chinese as a specific category of Asians (Zhu &Christie, 2009). Zhang (2011) states that this lack of attention means few Americans are able to figure out the differences between Asian Americans and Asians from different countries that are living in the United States.
American Images of Chinese International Students

Chinese international students often are described as smart, rich and good at mathematics. In one of the few studies of its kind, Ruble and Zhang (2013) examined images of Chinese international students held by Americans, finding that generally Chinese international students are seen as bright, quiet, hard working, shy, studious and not social (Ruble & Zhang, 2013).

They carried out their study through an online survey of 146 American university students. They found there are five types of stereotypes about Chinese students within the United States. The first stereotype views those Chinese students as intelligent, assiduous, and hard working. “The smart and hardworking stereotype is a very common stereotype of Chinese” (Ruble & Zhang, 2013, p.208).

The second stereotype was that they are nice, friendly, courteous, and easy to get along with. The third stereotype indicated that Chinese students are not good at speaking English, not sociable, do not adapt well to American culture, and they prefer to make friends with their own language group.

The last two stereotypes consider Chinese students as timid, loners and lacking confidence. These stereotypes emerged for Chinese students for several reasons. One of them is that because it mostly comes from the actual experiences of participants when they were interacting with Chinese students, “rather than relying solely on stereotypes they have learned from media or other sources” (Ruble & Zhang, 2013, p. 208)
History of Chinese International Students in the United States

These mass media stereotypes of Chinese and Asian American may also extend to the image of Chinese international students. Chinese students have a long history of coming to the United States, dating back to the 1870s. In this section, I will discuss the history of Chinese students in the United States, from the 1870s to today; the reasons why they come to the United States, and why the United States ranks as the most popular destination country for Chinese students.

The First Wave: 1870s to 1880s

The first major wave of Chinese came to study in the United States in the 1870s and 1880s. The Qing government sponsored a number of Chinese youth during the period of the “Self-Strengthening Movement” for overseas education. The first group is also called “China’s first hundred.” However, due to various issues between America and Chinese governments, such as the conservative Chinese governors’ apprehension of the adoption of American lifestyles by the young students and the increasing anti-Chinese sentiments and actions in the United States, the first wave of Chinese students stopped abruptly (Ye, 2001).

The Second Wave: 1900

In 1900, the Qing government realized the importance of sending Chinese youth overseas to get a new type of education in order to expand China’s position in the world. Thus, the second wave of Chinese international students began (Ye, 2001).
Specifically, China sent university students abroad for them to gain advanced knowledge to help with the country’s modernization. These Chinese students who travelled abroad and completed their higher education played an important role in Chinese society at that time (Orleans, 1998).

Modern Times: 1960s to 1970s

From the 1960s to the first half of the 1970s, however, few Chinese students were permitted an opportunity to study abroad. This was because of a shift in the policies of the Chinese government. In the 1960s, “Chairman Mao made China into a near-recluse country by embarking on a long period in which self-sufficiency and self-reliance became the national bywords” (Orleans, 1988, p.21). Orleans (1988) states that after President Nixon visited China in 1972, Chinese scholars and students almost immediately began to come back to the United States.

Wang (1992) highlights that the perceptions of America changed in China, from the corrupt capitalist country to the state of freedom and “gold” (money). Chinese scholars and students competed for opportunities to go to the U.S, in spite of the great uncertainties involved. Thus, the number of Chinese students coming to United States arose significantly after America and China agreed to exchange scholars and students in 1978 (Chen, 1988).
Since 1978, the government of China has actively promoted bilateral relations by exchanging international technology and scholars with America (2011). The number of Chinese international students in the US rose to 20,030 in ten years from 1978 to 1988, after the United States and China agreed to exchange scholars and students. “The figure was doubled by 1993, and was tripled by 2003” (Yan & Berliner, 2011, p. 173).

1990s - Present

According to Wang, Heppner, Fu, Zhao, Li and Chuang (2012), Chinese international students have become a growing and unique population in the United States, and today are the largest single group studying in the United States. According to the most updated statistics from the Institute of International Education in 2013, the number of Chinese international students comprises approximately over 25% of the total international students in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2013).

Line and Lasanowski (2007) have found that international students have mostly travelled to the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia for the purposes of oversea education during the past decade. With approximately 22% of the total number of all international students, the United States ranks first among the most popular destination countries (Line & Lasanowski, 2007).
Line and Lasanowski give two key reasons: First, America is an English-speaking country and many students want to improve their English, the United Kingdom and Australia are also among the most popular destination countries for overseas education. Second, the United States has developed some influential marketing strategies to attract international students.

**Cultural Issues and Adjustment**

Most Chinese international students in the United States today are undergraduates. In contrast, according to Orleans (1998), the Chinese international scholars and students who went abroad during the 1970s to the early 1980s were in their forties, fifties, and older.

Lampton, Madancy and Williams found the Chinese government once preferred to send older people abroad because “much more benefit can be derived from study abroad by older and experienced men than by the young” (Lamoton, Madancy & Williams, 1986, p. 18). Thus, compared with a few years ago, the Chinese international students in the United States today have tended to be younger and not supported by government scholarships.

The life of Chinese students in the United States is not easy. This is because they face a culture very different from their own., and one reason researchers give for their struggles adapting is their age. Their youth appears to contribute to their problem
adjusting. Zhao (2005) describes Chinese students in the United States that are happy and excited about their freedom, but also disoriented and disappointed. In particular, they struggle to adjust to the cultural and, particularly, religious differences between the United States and China (Zhao, 2005).

When individuals undergo many changes such as identity, relationships, routines, and ideologies about self, friends, and families, they may feel too much physical or psychological pressure to adapt, which can cause a unique type of affliction called acculturative stress (Ye, 2006).

Although each international student may experience more or less acculturative stress in the process of adaptation to the new environment, the greater the cultural distance, the more stressful the adjustment is likely to be (Furnham & Bochner, 1982). In comparison with students from Europe, Chinese foreign students in the United States seem to face more obstacles in their cultural adjustment process. This is likely due to discrimination, greater communication problems, and less support from American society (Wang, Heppner, Fu, Zhao, Li & Chuang, 2012).

As a consequence of the big differences in the social norms and educational patterns, Chinese students are seen as needing to make more of an effort to adjust to the new cultural environment in the United States.

Cultural Shock

When Chinese students first enter the United States for higher education, that not only means they enter a university but also indicates that they have connected with a
totally different cultural environment (Cheng & Erben, 2012). Lee and Rice (2007) stated, “Different food tastes, views regarding sexual openness, perceptions of time, and gender roles were just some of the cultural adjustments encountered” (p.386). Lin (2006) notes that most Chinese students have mixed feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and stress when they first come to the United States.

Yan and Berliner note that certain cultural values common to Chinese people contributes to culture shock for Chinese students, and many student “feel out of place and powerless” (Yan & Berliner, 2011, p. 64). In traditional Confucian society, Chinese attach importance to how others evaluate their behavior. “The shame culture,” which is also called “the loss of face,” has a long history in China. Face means one’s pride, self-esteem, and sense of social concern (Bedford & Hwang, 2003). In Chinese culture, it is shameful to tell others about your difficulties.

Lin states that Chinese students are also facing more commonplace problems such as housing and transportation, language barriers, and they feel it’s difficult to adapt to a new academic environment. However, these problems not only contribute to their pre-arrival uncertainty, anxiety, and stress, but also affect Chinese students’ mental health after their entry into the new environment (Lin, 2006).

Some stressors occur on arrival when Chinese students face housing and transportation issues. Wilton and Constantine found that because of language and cultural factors, Latin American and Asian students have greater levels of stress than other international students.
As Lin (2006) notes, in China, universities set up a registration desk at the railway station to provide a pick up service for incoming students, and lodging is already taken care by the university before students arrive at their campuses. Also, unlike the transportation system in China, there is little public transportation in many American cities. “Bicycling, a common transportation in China is rather dangerous along the major traffic roads” in the United States (Lin, 2006, p. 122). These issues also reflect social and cultural differences as American are expected to be more self-sufficient and independent.

**Social Isolation**

Chinese students come from a different cultural background. When they enter the United States, most of the familiar social indicators are removed and are followed by the feelings of frustration and anxiety. Because of their lack of social effectiveness, many Chinese students felt lonely, anxious and isolated (Yan & Beliner, 2011).

Yan and Berliner (2011) state that language skill is a major problem. Chinese students have the most difficulties in two areas, which are listening comprehension and oral communication (Yan & Berliner, 2011). Lin also notes that while most Chinese students are comfortable with reading and writing, they lack oral English proficiency.

Because of their difficulties communicating, most Chinese students remain at a superficial level when they come into contact with Americans (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). They feel nervous when they speak with professors, classmates, even house
managers and supermarket sales people. Language barriers keep them from communicating with Americans, and they are often limited to daily greetings except for class time. Many Chinese international students usually keep quiet in class, even though they are very talkative with their own language groups. They have little social interactions with American people because of the language barriers (Lin, 2006).

**Discrimination**

In addition to the historic patterns of discrimination discussed earlier, Lin noted that Chinese students also face discrimination in the United States because of political conflicts between the United States and China. When facing this kind of issue, some Chinese students are afraid while others sometimes feel angry about comments from their professors and classmates, yet they feel it is difficult to challenge others’ opinions (Lin, 2006).

Heggins and Jackson (2003) found that it is very important to Chinese students to build an unofficial social network in the U.S. For those students who feel uncomfortable to use university support services when problems arise. They found that lots of Chinese students seemed lack trust in the professional avenues.

Lee and Rice (2007) also stated that most of the Chinese student describe their difficulties as issues of adapting or coping, which embodies the assumption that they bear the responsibility to persist, overcome their discomfort, and integrate into the host society.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is a detailed methodology that includes preparation for this thesis project, the project design, interview subjects, sample interview questions and the limitations.

Project Design

This project was a multimedia series about Chinese students in the United States who face multifaceted pressures in their daily lives, such as language barriers, culture shock, social isolation, and visa status and immigration pressure. Some Chinese students call their experience in the United States “a drifting life.” Because they feel like studying abroad is like drifting in a vast sea, where there is no end in sight.

Through this project, I interviewed Chinese students who have met obstacles, in order to find out what their main problems are. I also sought to find out how Chinese students adjust their lives while in the United States. This is important because Chinese students are growing as a group, and they need more attention by the American media and university communities.

Preparation

I earned my bachelor’s degree in broadcast journalism in China, which helped me to know how to select and interview sources. I also had experience recording and
editing video. I had several journalism internships in China with various news outlets, which provided me with practical experience working with professional news teams.

At California State University, Nothridge I have spent time with a lot of Chinese students talking about their personal lives in the United States in my job as a student life advisor for the university’s Intensive English Program. I’m also a Chinese student, and I have a number of friends who are also Chinese international students. My position has helped me establish key contacts with campus leaders who work with Chinese universities and studies, especially the director of California State University, Nothridge’s China Institute, Dr. Justine Su, and the president of the China Students and Scholars Association, You Wu.

**Interview Subjects**

The following is a list of people that I interviewed.

**Xin Lian**, Chinese international students at the Intensive English Program at CSUN

Xin has been in the United States just for three months. She said in China her parents almost dealing everything for her, so she didn’t need to wrong about anything. But once she is here, everything has to done by herself. She met a payment issue with the apartment that she lives in. New environment adjustment seemed very different for her, especially in the first three month in the United States.

**Huilan Wang**, Chinese international students at CSUN
Huilan is a 18 years old girl from China, and this is her second year in the United States, the problem that she had with her American roommate happened when she just arrived the United States. She said that Chinese girls are very traditional, so she felt awkward when her American roommate slept with her boyfriend in their dorm.

**Tianyu Li, Chinese students at the Intensive English Program at CSUN**

Tianyu has lived in the United States for just one week. He says that his overseas study agent cheated him. He was trying to go to a school in the downtown L.A, but his agent applied for CSUN for him, he felt upset because it’s very far away to his friends in downtown L.A, and also the public transportation here is not very convenient.

**Yajun Xu, Chinese students at the Intensive English Program at CSUN**

Yajun transferred to CSUN from the Intensive English Program in the Fall 2013 semester. He couldn’t understand anything during the lectures even though he had passed IELTS. He transferred back to the IEP program because he couldn’t adjust to the American university.

**Xiao Zheng, freshman at CSUN, majoring in Engineering Management**

This is his first semester at CSUN, he was overwhelmed when he entered the university. He feel it’s very difficult to follow the class during the lectures because the professors are talking to fast for him, and his classmates are all native speakers.
He had a car accident when he lived in the United States for one month, although it was just a slight fender bender, he felt like his sky had fallen on him, he felt very helpless when he had the accident.

**Jiawei Ban**, Chinese students at CSUN, majoring in CTVA.

Jiawei has lived in the United States for two years, he think language barriers is the biggest obstacle to study in the United States. He feels very depressed when he spent a longer time on the same assignment with his American classmate, but get a lower grade. It will take him double or even triple the time than Americans students to do the same assignment.

**Shuangyang Li**, a new student in the Intensive English Program, who has experienced academic problem.

Shuangyang is a typical Chinese youth from Beijing. It happened at the first week when Shuangyang just arrived the United States. He downloaded a article online and submitted it as his homework. He was shocked when he got a letter from school indicated that he need to go to the student conduct office, because he didn’t know that plagiarism is such a serious issue in American universities.

**Xuanjin Bi**, a graduate student at CSUN

Xuanjin got a ticket just two weeks after she got here. She didn’t have a driver license at that time, and she didn’t know the traffic rule very well. She got a ticket for
she didn’t stop in front of the stop line. However, the ticket went up to $600, because she paid it to the wrong court.

You Wu, President of Chinese Student and Scholar Association

You came to the United States in 2008. She worked for CSUN’s Chinese Student and Scholar Association for four years. She spends a lot of her time helping Chinese students with their problems.

Yukiko Bryant, Manager of the Intensive English Program at CSUN

The Intensive English Program is designed to help international students improve their English skills, and to help them to meet the English requirements of the University. Yukiko has worked for IEP for 13 years; she helped a lot of international students adjust their lives in the United States.

Bessie Karras-Lazaris, Director of the Intensive English Program at CSUN

Bessie is a director and professor with the Intensive English Program. She helps students understand American academic policies and academic culture.

Arthur M. Maturo, Instructor in the Intensive English Program at CSUN

Arthur has taught international students for 9 years. He understands the many problems Chinese students face and gives suggestions on how to be successful in American universities.
Dr. Justine Su, Director of the China Institute.

As the director of China Institute at CSUN, Dr. Justine Su has organized a lot of events and activities to help Chinese students and scholars to adjust their lives in the United States.

Interview Questions

1. What’s your name? How old are you?
2. How many years have you been in the United States?
3. What’s your major? Did you choose it by yourself?
4. Why do you come to the U.S to study?
5. What is your favorite memory of studying and living in the United States?
6. What is the worst thing that has happened to you while living here? Can you share your personal story about the problems you met in the USA?
7. What’s your personal goal after finishing your studies here? What do you plan after graduation?
8. What do you think about the USA and American people?
9. What do you usually do after school?
10. Do you have a lot of American friends? If so, how did you make friends? If not, why?
11. If gave you another chance to choose whether come here or not, would you still want to come to America to study?
12. When you meet problems, whom do you usually call for help?
13. Do you think this school has a sound system to help Chinese students?
14. Is there anything you’d like to add?

Additional questions for You Wu of the Chinese Students/Scholar Association

15. When was Chinese Students/ Scholar Association (CSSA) founded?

16. How long have you worked for CSSA? Why do you want to work here?

17. How many people work for CSSA? Are they all volunteers?

18. What kind of activities do you have?

19. Do you have any unforgettable people or things that have happened with the organization?

20. How important is the CSSA to Chinese students studying at CSUN?

21. Does CSSA help Chinese students a lot with their lives and cultural adjustment in the United States?

22. What kind of support do you need for the development of CSSA?

**Equipment**

The recording device I used for my interviews was a Roland R-26 recorder, which is a professional recorder for both voice and music, and the digital camera I used was a Nikon D7000. I used it to shoot both videos and photos. The program I used or photo editing is iPhoto, and I used iMovie to edit the videos and photos.

**Limitations**

There are limitations and weakness in my project. Even though, my undergraduate background is broadcast journalism, this is the first time that I did a series of videos all by myself. I had few skills in filming and editing.
Most of the interviewees I have right were Chinese students at CSUN, and I could have expanded the range of interviewees such as Chinese international students in other schools in Los Angeles.
CHAPTER 4
TRANSCRIPTION OF MULTIMEDIA

In this chapter, I present the content for the multimedia section of my thesis. This includes a transcription of three videos.

The first video is titled, "The untold stories of 21st Chinese Students in Los Angeles: Living in L.A," and it explores general problems and troubles that Chinese students meet in Los Angeles. The second video is titled, "The Untold stories of 21st Chinese students in Los Angeles: Studying in the United States" and it explores issues that come up when the Chinese students study in the United States, due to a different educational culture in China. The third video is titled as “The Untold stories of 21st Chinese students in Los Angeles: Driving in L.A.”

The Untold Stories of 21st Chinese Students in Los Angeles:

Living in L.A

(Sound FX) Music

(Subtitle: Statistics)

Over 200,000 Chinese students are studying at American university today, that’s double the number from six years ago.

California State University, Northridge has the most Chinese students of any Master’s Degree institution in the United States.
I left my home, seeking my dream; it leaves me speechless, and then turns me into a storyteller.

(Longteng Chen & Mohammad)

Longteng Chen:

How are you?

Mohammad:

Fine, how are you?

Longteng Chen:

Good, I’m Longon.

Mohammad:

I’m Mohammad.

Nice to meet you, Longon.

Longteng Chen:

Nice to meet you. See you.

Mohammad:

See you.

(Translation SOT)

Longteng Chen:

My name is Longteng Chen, I’m from Shandong, China. I’m 20 years old.

Huilan Wang:

My name is Wang, Huilan. I’m 18.

Weiting Tao:
My name is Tao, Weiting. I’m 18.

Tianxi Wu:

My name is Wu, Tianxi. I’m 22.

Jiawei Ban:

My name is Ban. I’m 24, from Hebei, China.

Xin Lian:

I’m Lian, Xin. I’m from Dalian, China.

Yajun Xu:

I’m Xu, Yajun. I’m from Xian, Shanxi.

Ruibing Shen:

My name is Shen, Ruibing. I’m 18 years old. I have lived in America for one year.

Tianyu Li:

My name is Li, Tianyu. I have lived in L.A for just one week.

Jiawei Ban:

I have been in America for two years.

Weiting Tao:

I’ve been in America for two and a half years. I used to go to high school in Northern California.

The reason I came to CSUN is that I want to experience college life in Southern California. I felt like the campus looked nice.

Yajun Xu:
The reason I came to America was that I was bored in China, I wanted to check out what’s up overseas.

Tianxi Wu:

I think American education is the best, that’s why I came here. My parents gave me a lot of support (both money and spirit).

Tianyu Li:

And then, the reason I chose CSUN was because I was cheated by my (overseas study) agent. I wanted to go to Los Angeles, but I ended up in Northridge. I told my agent that I wanted to study in L.A because I have a lot of friends there, but when I got here, I found it’s very far from my friends.

(SOT Dr. Justine Su)

Dr. Justine Su:

Increasingly, I think more Chinese students are going to come (here).

Already the Chinese students I think are the largest international student population in the United States. And on this campus also, I think the Chinese students probably is the NO. 1 of the largest international students population here.

(Voice Over)

In China, when a student leaves home to attend university, they are met at the train station upon arrival in their new city and all the logistic of their lives -- room and board, transportation, and the like -- are handled by the university.
In the United States, Chinese students find they are in charge of their lives in ways they never could have imagined.

Coming to America, many have culture chock.

(Translation SOT Xin Lian)

Xin Lian:

I met a lot of problems and troubles, not only me, almost every Chinese students here has met problems and troubles. I feel like it’s extremely hard to completely adjust to life in America.

Before I arrived the United States, I thought it would take no longer than two or three months to adjust to American life. Then I would no longer be struggling with day-to-day life. But now I realize, even the easiest things such as buying a coffee, which is quite easy for Americans, is not simple to me, and it’s also not an easy thing for other Chinese students.

What I learned from school was “You can’t count coffee as one or two”, and then when I came to the United States, Americans always say, “one coffee and one milk” or “add one sugar or two sugar”. I realized I need a native speaker, who can help me out when I have questions, who can answer my questions one by one, and then I will be able to be fully integrated into American society.

Xin Lian:

Look, how much I overpaid for my monthly rent.
I have an agreement with the apartment management that every month I can get a discount of $150, along with a $125 coupon, which makes rent fit my budget. Because the area is good and safe, I paid two month’s rent.

Xin Lian:

I went downstairs to talk to them; the answer they gave to me was the coupons were printed wrong. It made me very helpless.

(SOT Dr. Justine Su, Director of China Institute at CSUN)

Dr. Justine Su:

Once they are here, I think the university administration should provide more support to create a structure of support for the international students, for Chinese students, for example.

We have a Chinese Student and Scholar Association, but right now still I think it’s not that strong. The students are very busy, I don’t think they have played the role that they should or they could play, if they can have more support.

(VOT)

Even when Chinese students are within the University environment where support is available, cultural problems come up.

(SOT Huilan Wang)

Huilan Wang:
My roommate was an American. I got well along with her when we first met with each other. But then I found out that she always took my stuff without my permission, such as eggs, rice and tableware.

She always slept with her boyfriend in our dorm, which made it even worse. We lived in the same bedroom, which made me very embarrassed. Chinese girls are very traditional. Also, I felt there were no privacy, and I got very upset, especially at night. So, sometimes I would prefer to sleep in the living room.

At last, I couldn’t bear it. I went to the RA to ask to change my dorm room. I was lucky that the RA accepted my request. I got a new room, living with three new roommates, one Korean, one Chinese and one American. The American was an Asian American. We all came from Asia, so we had similar customs. And then I got used to living in the United States.

(SOT Yukiko Bryant, Manager of Student Life of Intensive English Program at CSUN)

Yukiko Bryant:

The university, you know, there are thousands of students on campus, and so everyone is equal. The students need to really focus on themselves as part of the large group, so it’s not longer all about me.

(SOT Bessie Karras-Lazaris, Director of Intensive English Program at CSUN)

Bessie Karras-Lazaris:
Our program is designed to help international students, so this is the place that they need to come to get information. They can come and ask us for help in anyway possible, we are always willing and ready to give information to them. And even when they get into the university that they need some extra help.

They think the university is too big, they don’t know where to go, they can always come back and talk to us, we will always give them information, in order to for them to feel comfortable and in order to for them to do well.

(Translation SOT Xiangrui Meng)

Xiangrui Meng:

People in China think it’s a great honor to study abroad in the United States. My family members and my friend are all very proud of me. They think I’m lucky because I can watch the Laker’s game in person. But I feel it’s actually hard being here by myself.

At the end of the day, all I can think about is how much I miss my families, my friends and all the good memories that we had before. No words can describe feeling this kind of loneliness. That is the hardest thing for us to go through…

(Sound FX) Music

(Subtitle) More and more Chinese students have come to the United States
(Subtitle) Each one of them has an experience to struggle with living here.
The Untold Story of 21st Chinese Students in Los Angeles:

Studying in America

(Translation SOT Yajun Xu)

Yajun Xu:

I transferred from IEP to CSUN for two weeks, but I couldn’t understand anything during the lectures. I met an Asian guy from my class, I thought he was a Chinese. I went up to him, and talked to him in Chinese to say I was so happy to have a classmate that speaks the same language. Then I found out he’s Korean. I felt very awkward.

(Sound FX) Music

(Subtitle)

235,597 Chinese students were enrolled in American universities during the 2012-2013 academic year. They account for 28.7% of the foreign students in the United States.

(SOT Arthur M. Maturo, Instructor of the Intensive English Program)

Arthur M. Maturo:

I have been teaching international students for nine years. Any students entering universities for the first time are going to have a few challenges that they have to deal with it.
Life can be very stressful, and dealing with that stressful is a challenge, and again that is even true for native speakers. So it must be doubly true or even more so for international students.

(Subtitle)
Zheng, Xiao, a freshman at CSUN, majoring in Engineering Management.

(Translation SOT Xiao Zheng)
Xiao Zheng:

This is my first semester at CSUN, and it has been three months. I felt a lot of pressure when I just entered the university. I was overwhelmed. My classmates are all Americans, and the professors speak very fast during the lectures. I can only understand 50% of the lectures in my classes. When the professor raises a topic, the entire class got involved it except got me. I only listen but say nothing.

(Subtitle)
Ban, Jiawei, a junior at CSUN, majoring in CTVA.

(Translation SOT Jiawei Ban)
Jiawei Ban:

The biggest obstacle for me to study abroad is language. For instance, if I need to write a paper, firstly, I have to spend more time to do the research, to read, and to find articles than American students. Secondly, I need to spend
even more time to understand the readings. After all this preparation, I can finally start to write, and then I need to consider my grammar and spelling, and all the fundamentals reading and writing.

When I get an idea, I always think it in Chinese then translate it into English. After this, I need to spend double or triple the time than Americans students do to write the same assignment. If they need 50 minutes or one hour to complete one assignment, I will need the whole afternoon to do it. However, when the grades come out, theirs are always higher than mine. That makes me very depressed.

(Subtitle)
Wu, Tianxi, an IEP student at CSUN

(Translation SOT Tianxi, Wu)

Tianxi Wu:

Attending class is very in the United States. If I don’t go to class, I must let the instructor know and give a reasonable excuse. However, it will still be an absence, even though I have a reasonable excuse. It will affect on my I-20 (student visa) if I am absent too much, and I will be sent back to China.

It’s very different in China. When I studied in China, if I tell the instructor my reason for being absent, it won’t count as an absence. I don’t have to worry about being terminated from my studies in China.
Bessie Karras-Lazaris:

Students are studying in our program, we give them a lot of opportunities to be successful, but if they don’t come to class, if they don’t do their works, and if they don’t do well in their courses, we do have a very strict probation policy. The first session that they are here, if they are not attending classes, we try our best to call them into the office and warn them, and let them know what the consequences are going to be.

But if they continue to ignore warnings, and not do well in the second session, then they are asked to leave the program. If their absences are excessive and their grades are very poor, they maybe terminated.

And terminated means they not only leave the program, but they have to leave the country too. But, you know, we try our best to not let them get that point. We try to, let me say, inform them and call them in, give them some warnings, motivate them, and try to make them understand the importance of being here. And what we are trying to do for them. That is our only intent.

(Subtitle)

Li, Shuangyang, a new student in the Intensive English Program, who has experienced academic problem.

(Translation SOT Shuangyang Li)

Shuangyang Li:
The first week when I arrived in the United States, I got a bad cold and I couldn’t get out of my bed to do my homework because I was terribly sick.

But I had to finish my homework, so I downloaded an article online, and turned it into my professor. Then the professor found out my homework was downloaded from the Internet, so she reported it to the university. Then, I received an email from university says I need to come to the student conduct office before certain date, and talk to an officer (administrator).

When I received the email, I only understood half of the content, though I noticed that I was in trouble. But I didn’t realized how serious the trouble was until I came to the office.

Shuangyang Li:

I think Chinese teachers always “look the other ways” regarding plagiarism in China, and it is also about the relationship between the professor and the student. But it seems like there is no room for negotiation here. It will get you into big trouble if you plagiarize.

(SOT Arthur M. Maturo)

Arthur M. Maturo:

Studying and knowing the university academic standards is very important. Plagiarism for example, is taken very seriously at American universities. They don’t even let you plagiarize yourself. So to speak, each essay, each assignment has to be a separate assignment.
Although it just look like academic, and American students do this all them time, they will take one essay from one class, change a few things and submit the same essay in a different class. It sounds ridiculous, and logically it is. But, the university does consider each assignment as a separate assignment. Therefore, each has to be a separate effort. If it isn’t, then it is considered really bad. So knowing plagiarism in detail is very, very important.
The Untold Story of 21st Chinese Students in Los Angeles:

Driving in L.A

(Subtitle)

Shi, Zhongrun, a Chinese student in the Intensive English Program

(Translation SOT Zhongrun Shi)

Zhongrun Shi:

It happened when I went to the Yosemite Park with my friends. I was driving over the speed limit on the way back. I didn’t notice that it wasn’t allowed by traffic regulations. It was very late at night; I was in a hurry, so I drove very fast. I got pull over by a policeman.

He asked me “Where are you going?”

I didn’t speak English very well, I was misunderstood as “Where are you from?”

So I answered “China”. The policeman was shocked by my answer.

He said “ Are you sure you are going to China by car tonight? ” Then he laughed.

My friends told me if you were pulled over by a policeman, you should pretend that you don’t understand English. Then the policeman asked if my friends in the car understand English, so they all said they didn’t know English very well. The police told us to be careful next time, and let us go.

(SOT Yukiko Bryant)

Yukiko Bryant:
One of things is that the students are not taking the parking tickets seriously, or speeding tickets seriously. And in California, within two weeks, about two weeks, the price goes up, and it keeps going up and up. If the students don’t pay it, they can actually be warned or arrested. It depends on what kind of ticket it is. Or if they continue to get tickets, they put something called a “bull” on your car and you can’t move the car, and then 24 hours later, they take the car away.

(Subtitle)

Bi, Xuanjin, a graduate student at CSUN, who overpaid $600 for her ticket.

(Translation SOT)

Xuanjin Bi:

It happened just two weeks after I got here, and I didn’t have driver’s license at the time. I had just passed the written part of the DMV test, and I was driving to school in the morning.

I didn’t know why I was being followed by a patrol car, so I didn’t stop. It followed me until I parked my car at the parking lot.

When I started to get out of my car, the policeman took out a gun and asked me stay into my car. He said a lot to me, but I didn’t understand very well. My English was very poor at that time.

He told me something about the stop sign blah blah blah. But I really didn’t know what happened. At last, he gave me a ticket. I thought I paid the ticket successfully, but after about three months, the court sent me a letter
showing that the ticket went up to $600 and ordered me to go to the court.

Finally, I asked my friends for help and paid the $600 ticket.

(Subtitle)

Zheng, Xiao, freshmen at CSUN, says his first reaction when he was rear-ended was to hope that the other driver was Chinese.

(Translation SOT)

Xiao Zheng:

The first time that I had a car accident in the United States was on the way to have dinner with my friends. I accidentally hit the car in front of mine.

Although it was not a big accident, it was just a slight fender bender. My mind went blank at that moment, and I wished the other driver was also Chinese, so I could communicate with him and solve the issue in Chinese. Unfortunately, the guy who got out the car was an American.

He spoke a lot of sentences, but I didn’t get any of them. I gave him my driver’s license, and then I didn’t understand the rest of things that he said.

I can still remember the feeling that I had at that moment. I was studying abroad without any way to get help from my family or friends, and I also had language barriers and I had a big problem. I felt like my sky had fallen on me, I had no clue how to solve it by myself.

(Subtitle)

These Stories are for the American audiences to better understand the real life of Chinese Students in the United States.
And perhaps to help American universities, which actively recruit Chinese students, better understand them.

This project is also trying to help Chinese students adapt to the new environment in the United States.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

More than 20 Chinese students were interviewed for this project. Each of them had met with problems while they are studying in the United States. Not one student could be described as a “model minority” or fit with other positive stereotypes often associated with Asian Americans. Many of their problems resulted from cultural differences with Americans, which make their adjustment to the United States more difficult than they expected and more difficult than their university community suspects.

All of these students were in the early 20, but because of cultural differences including the “one child” policy in China, most of them don’t know how to deal independently with their own problems and troubles. In America, students this age are expected to be more self-sufficient, whereas in China many decisions are made for the students and families help with any problems they encounter.

Families cannot be called upon to help when students are here because it violates a cultural norm of admitting to having a personal problem. Most of the students I interviewed did not initially want to talk about their problems, because of the Chinese “shame culture,” which would make them look like their experience in this foreign country is a “failure.”
The Chinese students interviewed here say that their families and friends are very proud of them, which encourages them to stay and study even when they have problems. They do not share with anyone their feelings of loneliness and helplessness while living in the United States. Therefore, they are under a lot of pressure, especially when they have troubles, since they have no one to share their feelings with or ask for help.

Most of the Chinese students interviewed here trust their friends not university administrators and staff because of the language barrier and being uncomfortable asking authorities for help. As a result, often the information that they get from their friends is wrong, which make their lives more difficult. This also leads to more isolation from non-Chinese students, administrators and who might be able to help the students.

**Future Research**

Universities could make more of an effort to help Chinese students, who they often heavily recruit to attend their schools, yet do not use any resources to specifically help them. It will make the Chinese students’ life easier if there are more systems in place at American universities that can offer better services to Chinese students. Both the American and Chinese university systems should work together to set up a cultural office for this big group.

In terms of journalism, future reporting projects need to consider that the stories they hear from Chinese students may not reveal the problems and difficulties they
face. Also, reporting needs to tell Chinese student’s side of the story when they come to the United States to study.
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