

International Students in the United States: Developing Interpersonal Relationships for Cross-cultural Adjustment and Intercultural Maturity

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Introduction

American higher education is becoming more diverse now than at any previous time (Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005). Behind this trend are international students who constitute an increasingly relevant and important source of diversity on college campuses. During the past decade, American colleges and universities have witnessed a steady increase in international student enrollments. From 1958 to 2005, the population of international students enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions increased from 43,000 to over 560,000 (Open Doors, 2005). Among that population, Asian students comprise the largest proportion, approximately 58 percent, of all international enrollments (Open Doors, 2005).

This increasing population of international students, especially from Asia, in the United States faces special challenges in terms of adaptation to a new living and learning environment at host universities and colleges (Perrucci & Hu, 1995). In addition to academic pressures, many international students tend to experience a variety of adjustment concerns, including language difficulties, insufficient financial resources, social integration, challenges in daily life tasks, homesickness, and role conflicts (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Interestingly, several studies suggest that students from Asia have more difficulty adjusting to life in the United States than international students from non-Asian countries (Abe, Talbot & Geelhoed, 1998).

These difficulties in adjustment among Asian students may stem from the greater differences in cultural norms, values, and languages between their home countries and the United States, which results in alienating Asian international students from the host society. In order to avoid potential social alienation, developing interpersonal relationships may provide a powerful coping resource to overcome barriers to adjustment in a new environment for these students (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). In addition, based on the appreciation of cultural differences,

supportive social interaction with diverse others has the potential to enable Asian international students to develop intercultural maturity by promoting positive changes in their sense of self and relationships with others (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005).

This paper aims to address the importance of international students' building social support networks with diverse others as a coping strategy for adapting to American life. In addition, this paper will examine how effective these social supports are in facilitating their identity development and intercultural maturity. To this end, this study reviews existing resources that identified major difficulties in adjustment encountered by international students while studying in the United States and the impact of such social interaction on their adjustment and further identity growth. Drawing from the review of the literature, this study then interviewed first-year Asian graduate students who were granted Fulbright scholarships to examine the role of social support in their adjustment, identity development, and intercultural maturity.

Literature Review

Cross-cultural adjustment

For most international students, the experiences of studying abroad can be an overwhelming personal and cultural transition. Many researchers have sought to identify specific adjustment problems that international students have experienced. English language proficiency was recognized as one of the major adjustment issues for international students (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Surdam & Collins, 1984). Studies have found that international students encountered significant problems in communicating with Americans in English especially in academic settings.

Poor language skills were found to be detrimental not only to academic process, but also for social interaction (Huntly, 1993). Research has demonstrated a high correlation between poor English language skills and a lack of interaction with American students and the surrounding community as a whole. By contrast, students who are fluent in English and have American friends tend to have fewer adjustment problems during their stay in the United States (Schram & Lauver, 1988; Surdam & Collins, 1984).

In addition to language challenges, international students were often faced with the need to adjust to a variety of other cultural and social challenges as well, which often entails considerable psychological stress. Fatima (2001) found that many international students experienced significant adjustment-related problems in immersion to a new culture, manifested as anxiety, frustration, loneliness, helplessness, distrust and hostility towards members of the host culture, disruption of one's identity, and loss of self-esteem. These are common symptoms of the early stages of cultural shock (Zhao et al., 2005).

Students from non-Western countries were significantly more likely to experience more of these acculturation stresses than those from Western countries (Surdam & Collins, 1984). Compared to White and Black international students, Asian students were less engaged in active and collaborative learning activities and were less satisfied with their campus environment (Zhao et al., 2005). In the same vein, Abe et al. (1998) found that students from Asian countries experienced more challenges in adjusting to college life than students from non-Asian countries.

Using the University Alienation Scale (UAS), Schram and Lauver (1988) studied the relationship between international students' adaptation and social alienation. The UAS, designed to measure alienation of students, included items assessing powerless, meaninglessness, and social estrangement as aspects of alienation. They found that students from Asia had the highest

alienation scores, reflecting minimal social interaction with Americans and other international students. The concept of “cultural distance” (i.e. the degree of difference between home culture and host culture) has been suggested as having considerable explanatory power for these differences in adjustment (Parr, Bradley & Bingi, 1992).

The importance of social support in adjustment

Researchers agree that social support plays an important moderating role in protecting international students exposed to a new environment against the deleterious effects of acculturation stress (Cemalcilar, Falbo & Stapleton, 2005). Since international students tend to lack their familiar support system when they come to a new culture, developing a new social support system may fulfill their desire to achieve a sense of belonging. In particular, for students facing stressful transition to an unfamiliar culture, Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) found that developing interpersonal relationships in a new environment provided a powerful coping resource to overcome barriers to adjustment. They found that social support from significant others was effective in buffering the impact of life stressors and promoted psychological adjustment. Schram and Lauver (1988) suggested that international students who have a strong social support system tend to adjust to college life in the United States more quickly and effectively than those who do not.

Social support from host nationals

The patterns of seeking social support among international students have been categorized into three potential sources: host nationals, co-nationals, and other international students. Several studies have indicated that more frequent and closer interaction with host nationals is a predictor of successful social and cultural adjustment (Perrucci & Hu, 1995;

Schram & Lauver, 1988; Surdam & Collins, 1984). Surdam and Collins (1984), who defined adaptation as the satisfaction of social and academic demands, found that spending more leisure time with Americans was significantly correlated with the adaptation of international students. A Similar study reported that international students who had more interaction with host nationals also felt that they had better cultural, academic, and social adjustment (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986).

Schram and Lauver (1988) found that social interaction with Americans was the best predictor of alienation, while less interaction was predictive of alienation. Based on this result, they recommended developing an orientation program that would encourage international students to become acquainted with Americans and provide opportunities for such interactions.

Barriers to Interaction with host nationals

Despite the benefits of social interaction with host-nationals, many international students experienced only superficial contact with Americans, and give up hope of establishing deep cross-cultural relationships (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). As was discussed above, English language deficiencies represented a significant barrier to meaningful relationships with host nationals. In particular, some studies have shown that Asian students have reported language difficulties as their major concerns in contrast to students from other regions (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986).

In addition to language differences, another potential barrier to cross-cultural relationships is perceived differences in core cultural values and communication styles (Lam, 1997). Asian students who were from collectivistic cultures, which highly value interdependent ties with their family and community, perceived American students to be more individualistic and competitive compared to their own culture (Perrucci & Hu, 1995). Furthermore, Asian

international students struggled to communicate clearly with American that their indirect communication style may be perceived as an unwillingness to disclose their private lives in contrast to the direct style of Americans (Lam, 1997).

Lack of opportunity to interact with Americans, the level of receptiveness to foreigners displayed by members of the host culture, and American ignorance about their home cultures may also significantly impact international students' social interaction with host nationals (Abe et al., 1998). Particularly, perceived prejudice and discrimination were negatively related to international students' adjustment and acculturation (Yoon & Portman, 2004). To overcome these barriers, Heikinheimo and Shute (1986) recommended that international students need to be receptive to cross-cultural learning, endeavor to learn English, and develop common interests to facilitate interaction with host nationals.

One of the major criticisms of previous research is the implicit assumption that social contact with people from the host culture is the only way to avoid social isolation and the adjustment-related problems, thus ignoring the importance of social support from co-nationals and other international students (Perrucci & Hu, 1995). Considering that most of this research was conducted before mid-1990s' when relatively few international students attended the U.S. institutions, this assumption may have been valid previously due to difficulties in organizing co-national student groups or international student groups as a whole. Currently, however, the numbers of international students, especially from Asia, have grown enough to provide social, cultural and academic assistance independent of the host culture (Perrucci & Hu, 1995). Due to this fact, growing social interaction among international students without involvement from host nationals is also significant in understanding adjustment of international students.

Social support from co-nationals and other international students

Faced with the challenges of forming ties with host nationals, many international students rely heavily on co-national students for social support. Enclaves of co-nationals provide support in coping with the challenges of adjustment by providing a sense of belonging and psychological comfort (Schram & Lauver, 1988). Due to the likelihood of shared language and values, support from a co-national is qualitatively different from that offered by Americans (Rajput, 1999). Establishing strong relationship with others from a common cultural background can raise self-esteem and consequently affect the adjustment of international students positively (Myles & Cheng, 2003).

Despite its significance as source of support, frequent social interaction with co-national may insulate international students from opportunities to engage with host culture (Lam, 1997). The convenient opportunities to meet fellow nationals who share common language and cultural values may result in reduced social interaction with Americans, thus retarding adjustment to the new culture (Cemalcilar et al., 2005). Due to their greater difficulties in English proficiency and perceived cultural differences, Asian students tend to withdraw from social relationships with Americans and maintain insular mono-cultural social networks with co-nationals (Rajput, 1999).

With few students from their countries, support from enclaves of co-nationals becomes difficult to obtain. In this case, “shared foreignness,” sharing the experience of being a stranger in a new culture, encourages these international students to build social ties with other international students (Lam, 1997). In a comparison study of friendship preferences between international students and American students, international students tended to be friend with other international students, over 40 percent of whom had no American close friends (Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002). In addition, sharing similar cultural background and geographical regional

proximity positively influenced the establishment of social relationships with other international students (Rajput, 1999).

The literature reviewed for this study suggest that cross-cultural adjustment of international students is enhanced when they experience relationships with co-nationals, or establish connections with host-nationals and other international students. Unfortunately, Asian students seem to have more difficulty establishing intimate social ties with host nationals. As a result, interaction with co-nationals or other international students often becomes their primary source of social support.

Developing identity and intercultural maturity

Engaging in multicultural networks with host-nationals and other international students from different cultures, in addition to mono-cultural relationships, enables international students to develop intercultural competences. By interacting with diverse others, international students may come to understand and accept cultural differences.

To promote intercultural maturity in college, King and Baxter Magolda (2005) proposed three comprehensive dimensions of intercultural maturity: cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal maturity. Achievement of intercultural maturity in these three dimensions is demonstrated as follows: 1) cognitive maturity: complex understanding of cultural differences using multiple cultural frames; 2) intrapersonal maturity: the capacity to create an internal self that openly engages challenges to one's view and considers social identities in a global context; and 3) interpersonal maturity: the capacity to engage in meaningful, interdependent relationships with diverse others based on an appreciation of human differences (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005, p.576).

The third dimension, development of interpersonal relationships with diverse others, is especially relevant in the explanation of international students' patterns of social interaction. At the initial level of development, social relationships are grounded in one's primary social identity or affinity groups (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). This level may be applied to explain international students' initial experiences in the United States when they had few social relationships with host nationals, thus relying primarily on social support from similar co-national groups adapting to a new environment.

At the intermediate level, there is a greater capacity to explore cultural differences and to interact effectively with others, acknowledging the legitimacy of multiple perspectives and realities. The highest level of the interpersonal dimension is achieved by engaging in intercultural interactions based on cultural understanding, enhancing one's identity and role as a member of society (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). When international students, who move between different cultural perspectives, construct meaningful relationships with host nationals and other international students that are grounded in respect for cultural differences, this mature level of interpersonal competence enables them to promote intercultural maturity.

The interrelationships among the three dimensions of students' development lead to interpersonal competence facilitating cognitive and intrapersonal competence in a multicultural context (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). Beyond dependent relationships with similar co-nationals, building interpersonal relationships with diverse others will lead to cognitive and identity development of international students. International students' development of interpersonal relationships can be examined through the lens of intercultural maturity model in relation to their cognitive and identity development.

In summary, the literature on international student adjustment, social relationships, and intercultural maturity suggest that interpersonal relationships have a significant impact on cross-cultural adjustment and development of intercultural maturity. Engaging in social support networks with diverse others plays a key role in their acculturation process and obtaining intercultural competence based on the appreciation of cultural differences. Although most literature seems to indicate that interpersonal relationships with host nationals have the most positive effect on cultural adjustment, interaction with co-nationals should not be ignored since they provide a sense of belonging and comfort. In addition, despite a lack of literature, social relationships with other international students may also be important sources of support in adjustment, and provide enough contexts for developing intercultural maturity.

Despite the positive impact of cross-cultural relationships, the literature reviewed in this study consistently suggested that students from Asia tended to encounter more difficulties in cross-cultural adjustment and developing interpersonal relationships, due to the greater perceived cultural distance between Asia and the United States compared to the other Western countries. This indication of particular cross-cultural challenges for Asian students motivated me, an international student from Asia, to identify whether this result is valid and thus applicable to explain the experiences of other Asian international students. Hence, this study attempts to investigate Asian international students' cross-cultural adjustment problems and interpersonal relationships in particular.

Methods

Based on the previous review of literature, two data-gathering methods were used: individual interviews and participant observation. During the Fulbright Enrichment Seminar held in Chicago from March 23rd to 26th, 2006, I conducted participatory observations to examine the process of developing social relationships of international students. Under the objective of “*Building Trust in Diverse Communities*,” the U.S. Fulbright recipients who had study abroad experiences and international Fulbright recipients from 67 countries participated in this seminar. The participation in this seminar provided a rare opportunity for me to explore the process of developing social relationships among this diverse population. In particular, two outreach programs, a public school visit and a home hospitality event, were designed to encourage international Fulbright recipients to develop meaningful relationships with Americans in Chicago.

The public school visit gave international Fulbright recipients an opportunity to visit Chicago area high schools in small groups to experience a U.S. public high school and speak with local students. This visit allowed international students to share information about their home country and culture with local students and their teachers through exchanging ideas, perspectives, and experiences. The home hospitality program was organized by Chicago supporters of the Fulbright program who invited international Fulbright recipients for a dinner in their homes. This program provided a unique experience for international Fulbright recipients to be involved in typical U.S. family lives.

In addition to participant observation in the seminar, data were collected via individual interviews with six first-year Asian international graduate students who enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities, all of whom were participants of the Fulbright Enrichment Seminar. Interviews

were conducted in informal locations during the breaks at the seminar. The interviews included the following questions on the participants' patterns, preference, perceived differences of the relationships, influences on intercultural maturity and changes in identity:

1. How did you meet friends after arriving in the U.S.? (e.g. What has been your criteria for choosing friends?)
2. Where are your friends from? (e.g. are they Americans, fellow nationals, or other internationals?) If you have other international friends, do you prefer to become friends with students from a region close to your home country?
3. What are the main differences in your relationships with Americans, fellow nationals, and other international students? What causes the differences?
4. Describe your experiences of developing relationships with Americans. Do you think such interaction more helped your adjustment than other relationships?
5. Among your friends, who do you go for help easily if you have a problem? With whom do you spend time the most?
6. What do you think were the barriers and facilitators to these relationships?
7. How do you think your stay in the U.S. while developing these relationships has influenced your view of cultural differences and diversity?
8. If there has been any change in your sense of self facing cultural differences and diversity, describe them.

Table 1: Participant information

Pseudonym	U.S. Institution	Field of Study	Gender	Nationality
Sotith	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	English Language	Male	Cambodia
Mayumi	Duke University	Law	Female	Japan
Seungho	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	Human Resources	Male	Korea
Jehanzeb	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	Computer Science	Male	India
Wajeeha	Boston University	Computer Science	Female	Pakistan
Thanomkwan	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	Accounting	Female	Thailand

Findings and Discussion

Several themes emerged from the analysis of interviews and observation, including the process of adjustment to U.S. life, motivation to develop social relationships, patterns of building relationships, and influence of social support on identity growth and intercultural maturity.

Cross-cultural experiences and motivation to seek social support

Recalling their initial sojourn experiences in the United States, most of the interviewed participants expressed some degree of loneliness and social isolation due to leaving from their home culture, loss of familiar customs and behavior, and reduced contact with their family and friends. For them, loneliness was felt most acutely during the first few months of the stay. The fact that all participants were unmarried seemed to influence their feeling of loneliness the more.

Separation from their culture and society motivated the students to develop new social relationships in the host culture. Because they needed to receive both emotional and practical support to adjust to their new environment, such as asking for a ride to an airport or to go grocery

shopping, all of the participants sought assistance from a caring, trusting, and reciprocal relationship with new people, regardless of their nationality. They all agreed that they could develop interpersonal relationships with people from different countries if they shared similar personal characteristics, experiences, values, and beliefs.

Developing relationships with Americans

If they desired, all participants were able to establish some form of social relationships with Americans, co-nationals, and other international students. Unlike the literature that indicated particular challenges for Asian students in making American friends, most of them were not afraid of interacting with Americans. This contrasting tendency stems from their earlier living experiences in the United States before they came to attend graduate schools. Three of the participants had lived in the United States during middle school with their parents. Another two participants had benefited from undergraduate exchange programs which enabled them to study at U.S. institutions for a year. Their unusual earlier experiences in the United States contributed to their ability to communicate with Americans and experience less cultural conflict between their home country and the United States, which further facilitated the development of relationships with Americans. In this sense, these participants' experiences confirm the previous literature (Schram & Lauver, 1988; Surdam & Collins, 1984) that highlights the positive correlation between language fluency and interaction with Americans.

For the participants with strong English proficiency, the Fulbright Enrichment Seminar provided enriching opportunities for developing interpersonal relationships with Americans. Throughout the seminar, interaction with the U.S. Fulbright recipients seemed to be facilitated by their cross-cultural understanding. Due to their past experiences of being international students, the U.S. Fulbright recipients were open-minded to international students and displayed a

particular interest in learning about their culture and language. Some U.S. Fulbright recipients who had stayed in Asian countries, such as Thailand and Japan, were quite familiar with Asian culture and religion, and enjoyed asking questions about the participants' countries. In this case, their acceptance of foreign culture seemed to become a strong factor to facilitate cross-cultural relationships.

Furthermore, the home hospitality event facilitated caring and lasting interpersonal relationships between Americans and international Fulbright recipients. By inviting international Fulbright recipients to their home, the American supporters took the initiative to interact with international students, which was critical in building relationships with them. One of the female participants reported that her American host, who was a New Age musician, gave her one of his recent albums as a present. Because he played New-Age music that stems from the Asian spirituality, he enjoyed discussing the Asian cultural values surrounding his music with her. His interest and understanding of Asian culture were likely to build the long and lasting interpersonal relationships between them.

In their visit to public high school, each participant gave an informative presentation about their home country and culture in the classrooms. When the participants showed maps and pictures brought from their own countries, American students and their teacher seemed to be intrigued by the apparent differences, such as the appearance of people, landscape, and geographical distance. During the presentations, however, it was notable to observe the movement of their focus from cultural differences to intercultural similarities between their home and the United States. For example, when one of the participants from India discussed the caste system which divides people into separate social classes, American students, most of whom were African Americans, seemed to have much sympathy for the issue of social stratification.

Comparing the caste system to their experiences of racial discrimination in the United States, the American students and the participants shared the thought that all human beings should be valued equally regardless of their social class, race and ethnicity. By exchanging their ideas and perspectives with local students and their teacher, the participants seemed to be inspired by sharing common interest and similar concerns surrounding each country, rather than simply focusing on specific cultural differences.

Through these various trust-building activities, all participants seemed to enjoy developing caring relationships with Americans. The intercultural relationships between Americans and the participants stemmed from mutual interests as well as different, but similar experiences, along with respect for each other's culture. Indeed, these enriching opportunities for interaction with Americans, American acceptance and interest in foreign culture positively influenced establishing meaningful ties with Americans. These findings support the previous literature of Abe et al. (1998), indicating that opportunities for interaction, the level of receptiveness, and ignorance about foreign cultures significantly impact international students' social interaction with host nationals.

Developing relationships with co-nationals and other internationals

In addition to facilitating relationships with Americans, the seminar provided a diverse context to develop cross-cultural friendships among international Fulbright recipients from 67 different countries. In comparison to relationships with Americans, a "shared foreignness" seemed to connect the participants more strongly. Facing challenges in adjusting to a new life seemed to create a sense of connection and solidarity among them. In particular, having common concerns in academic achievement, relationships with their American peers and faculty enhanced the participants' supportive interaction by producing abundant topics to discuss. Some

participants who pursued Doctoral degree shared their anxieties on passing qualifying exams and keeping up with American peers in their academic studies.

Most participants showed a slightly higher preference to engage with other international students from regions that were geographically close to their home country. For instance, some participants from southeastern Asia appeared to enjoy more communicating with students from neighboring nations than those from distant regions. Despite their comfort with intercultural diversities, the cultural familiarity surrounding the region still seemed to unconsciously attract them like a long lost friend. As noted by Rajput (1999), similar cultural background and geographical proximity was an important factor that promoted social interaction with other international students.

Similarly, common cultures and languages played a key role in developing interpersonal relationships with co-nationals. Living in a foreign country, co-national friendships provided important opportunities to maintain a sense of belonging and identification with their home culture. Some participants reported that support from co-nationals was particularly helpful when they initially came to the United States without any familiar resources and social relationships. For instance, they received substantial assistance from co-national friends when searching for a new residence and selecting courses. In this sense, their experiences confirm the observation of Schram and Lauver (1988), who noted that relationships with co-nationals support the adjustment process by providing a sense of belonging and comfort. In addition, during the seminar, the participants from the same countries were more likely to be close friends than those from different countries even if they met the first time at the seminar.

For the participants, a social network with co-nationals served as a secure base upon which they were able to build relationships with Americans and other international students.

One of the participants reported that the presence of his co-national student organization in his school provided a sense of pride in his own country, which significantly increased his interpersonal competence when communicating with Americans and other internationals. In contrast with the previous literature that suggests potential insulation from the host culture, these participants' engagement with similar co-nationals further facilitated interaction with diverse others. In this sense, the social ties with co-national were not a barrier, but a critical foundation in developing positive relationships with the host culture for successful cross-cultural adjustment.

Developing identity and intercultural maturity

During their stay in the United States, the participants appeared to achieve considerable personal identity growth by engaging in multicultural interpersonal relationships. All participants reported enhanced self-efficacy in managing relationships with diverse others. This was boosted by their increased sense of self by mastering the intricacies of a different culture and language. One of the participants reported that she could raise a sense of intercultural competence by coping with everyday cross-cultural challenges and engaging with relationships with diverse people from diverse countries.

In addition, a greater sense of appreciation for their cultural heritage, as well as for the host culture led to more balanced perspectives of both cultures. This made possible for them to integrate multiple perspectives into their identity development. One of the participants from Cambodia reported that he once regarded the United States as a far superior society to his home country. His perspective was changed when he wore his traditional costume on the Halloween party, where his American friends showed much interest in his costume and culture. He felt like wearing the costume and representing his own country and culture, which contributed to developing his identity with balanced perspectives on his home country and the United States.

The most notable outcome from the interviewees' diverse interpersonal relationships was to realize that people from different cultures were more similar to them than different, as manifested by interaction with American Fulbright recipients and programs such as the public school visit and the home hospitality event during the seminar. For most participants, interaction with Americans and other internationals throughout the seminar enabled them to acknowledge fundamental universal human characteristics across cultures. Such transformative experiences would be an important sign of intercultural maturity. Indeed, their participation in the enrichment seminar significantly contributed to their personal growth in their identity and intercultural competence.

Conclusion and Implications

Observations of the Fulbright seminar and focused interviews with six Asian international graduate students provided insights into the key role of social support in cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural maturity. Despite the relatively small number of interviewees, each of them offered valuable perspectives for examining the interpersonal relationships with diverse others and subsequent changes in their identity and intercultural competence.

By being separated from their home countries, participants suffered from loss of familiar systems and social relationships. This motivated them to seek new social relationships with new people. Due to the interviewees' high English proficiency and earlier living experiences in the United States, they found it easy to build social relationships with Americans. In particular, their interaction with Americans was facilitated by a variety of multicultural trust-building programs during the seminar. On the basis of mutual understanding and interests, the participants

developed caring relationships with Americans who showed sincere hospitality and acceptance toward them. Because Americans with multicultural interests are effective sources of support for international students, the findings of this study highlight the importance of providing opportunities for long-term contact with Americans, such as the Fulbright Enrichment seminar.

However, at the same time, the participants' earlier experiences in the United States and higher English proficiency separated them from the other Asian international students whose experiences and language skills may be different from them. Because the participants were not the general representatives of Asian international students in the United States, the opportunities for such interpersonal relationships with Americans may have disproportionately benefited these "extraordinary" students compared to the "ordinary" international students. This limits the findings of this study in generalizing to other Asian students whose experiences are similar to the students described in the literature.

The diverse members of the seminar from all over the world provided a rare opportunity for them to engage in friendships with other international students because the shared foreignness and common concerns created a sense of connection. Particularly, relationships with co-regional students were attractive in that they gave the participants a sense of cultural familiarity and comfort in a new environment. Seeking similarity encouraged them to develop interpersonal relationships with co-nationals, which was especially helpful during the initial adjustment period. For the participants, connection with co-nationals served as a secure ground in building relationships with culturally different others, which provided an impetus to overcome cross-cultural barriers and develop intercultural maturity.

Despite the limitation of the study, these sources of social support that benefited the participants in the United States significantly contributed to increasing understanding of their

identity development and intercultural maturity in a diverse context. With better appreciation for different cultures, they could strengthen their sense of self with increased self-efficacy in maintaining relationships with diverse others. Beyond the cultural differences, they discovered commonalities across human cultures. This was the most encouraging finding of this study.

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