

## Academic Mobility and Reflection: A Qualitative Study of Chinese Visiting Scholars in an American University

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### Abstract

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In response to a dearth of research on the experience that Chinese Academic immigrants have in U.S. universities, this paper reports on a qualitative study involving 7 Chinese visiting scholars who were sent to or invited by U.S. universities to pursue academic promotion for 12 months. The aim of the study was to examine Chinese visiting scholars' motivations and expectations when they plan to study in the United States; to identify the challenges and opportunities these Chinese visiting scholars perceived, as well as the positive roles they played in the collaboration between the host and home universities; to analyze factors that promote or hinder their academic adjustment process; and, finally, to derive from these findings some recommendations and strategies to help future visiting scholars adjust to the new community and achieve their academic goals as soon as possible; to enlighten future visiting scholars and their host universities through the lens of personal reflection, raising awareness of the real difficulties visiting scholars may encounter and empowering them locally and globally to impact higher education all over the world.

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**Keywords:** Academic mobility; reflection; qualitative study; Chinese visiting scholars; American university

### Introduction

I, as an English teacher of higher education in China, have been dreaming that one day I would have an opportunity to go abroad, either studying or traveling for a short time. Fortunately, my dream came true. With the development of globalization and internationalization in higher education, sponsored by my home university, I was granted this valuable and meaningful opportunity to study at an American university as a visiting scholar for the period of one year. With great expectations and longing to experience a foreign culture and a bright future, I landed in a new country but experienced uncertainty, anxiety, non-academic and academic challenges firsthand. Many other Chinese visiting scholars have recounted similar experiences.

The term "visiting scholar" refers to mid-career professionals who are sent to/invited by U.S. institutions to pursue advanced training while contributing to ongoing research projects (Katherine, 1981). Since these scholars are visiting for a limited period, usually six months or one year, their time in the host university is very valuable. Therefore, under internal and external pressure, how soon and how well they adjust to the new academic and social environment in a new country directly affects their academic experience and accomplishment during their visiting time (Zhao, 2008).

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## I Literature Review

### 1.1 Globalization & Internationalization of Higher Education and Academic Mobility

Globalization is not equal to internationalization, but they are closely related. Globalization is the context in which economic and academic trends in the 21<sup>st</sup> century reside, while knowledge and education are the motivations for internationalization in the global academic environment (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Scott, 1998). Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley (2009, p.7), in their report to the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, note:

“Universities have always been affected by international trends and to a certain degree operated within a broader international community of academic institutions, scholars, and research. Yet, 21<sup>st</sup> century realities have magnified the importance of the global context. Internationalization is not possible for higher education to opt out of the global environment, since its effects are unavoidable.”

Research on the internationalization of higher education has steadily expanded over the last few decades. (Altbach, 2002; Altbach, 2004; Knight, 2006; Altbach & Knight, 2007; ven der Wende, 2010; Kehm & Teichler, 2007; Huang 2007; Christopher, 2014). Internationalization is defined as a process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension in the purpose, functions, or delivery of postsecondary education (Knight, 2003, p.2). Internationalization has been one of the most powerful and pervasive forces within higher education around the world, and has become a core issue of concern to higher education administrators (Deardorff, de Wit & Heyl, 2012). The internationalization of higher education is essential to our future and it is changing the world of higher education (Knight, 2004).

The internationalization of academia has significantly altered the global higher education environment (Kim, 2009). Academic mobility has become a key feature of higher education as the integration of world economies and societies intensifies (Balasooriya, Asante, Jayasinha and Razee, 2014). The term “academic mobility,” in a broad sense, is perceived as incorporating all higher education students’ and academic staff members’ mobility from their country of residence to another for the purposes of studying, teaching and/or research (Balasooriya, Asante, Jayasinha and Razee, 2014). Academic mobility in this paper is discussed in a broad way. The period of academic mobility spans a limited time, generally one year. The academics are required to return to their home countries after their visiting terms (at the end of the designated period), which involves temporarily settling students and academic staff members abroad..

Over the past three decades, the numbers of students, teaching staff and researchers that cross borders are steadily increasing as they strive to achieve academic excellence in the global academic environment. Students’ researchers’ mobility in higher education, allowing them to study and do research outside their own country for a limited time, is regarded as one of the most important aspects in higher education internationalization (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). Over the past three decades, a considerable amount of research has focused on aspects of students’ mobility, for example, students’ living experiences and challenges abroad (Altbach, 1991; Carroll & Ryan, 2005; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Peelo & Luxon, 2007; Yuan, 2011; Henze & Zhu, 2012; Bensaid, 2015); however, as higher education has internationalized, the academic mobility--i.e. the mobility of academics including professors, lecturers, and researchers as opposed to students across the globe--has gained contemporary attention and perspectives (Guo, 2003; Byram & Dervin, 2009; Zhao, 2008; Zhu, 2009; Shimmi Yukiko, 2014; Zhang, 2016). Although some research on academics has been conducted, it is still rare that researchers focus on the academic adjustment and promotion of Chinese academic immigrants or visiting scholars during their academic mobility period, and little is known about their academic experiences, challenges and obstacles as well as the influencing factors that may impact their work in U.S universities specifically.

### 1.2 Internationalization of China’s Higher Education

Since the implementation of economic reforms and the open-door policy in 1978, huge changes have happened in the internationalization of China’s higher education (Huang, 2014). In 1978, the new Chinese leadership led by Deng Xiaoping pushed forward the open-door reform policy and pursued four modernization goals in industry, agriculture, defense, and science and technology. The Chinese government began to formally send students and scholars abroad for advanced studies to meet the shortage of highly-skilled experts and professionals in China. And from this time, policies for sending scholars and students abroad were drafted and carried out by the State Education Commission (SEC) of the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

As higher education internationalized, the government needed to establish new method of selecting visiting scholars and faculty members for advanced study (Huang, 2003). In other words, the new methods authorized other agencies in the central government and provincial governments, as well as individual universities, to choose and send the visiting scholar candidates and students to go abroad instead of being selected, sent and financed only by the SEC (Huang, 2003).

With the intense development of globalization and internationalization in higher education, the Chinese government encouraged Chinese higher education institutions to cooperate and collaborate with foreign educational institutions, and as a result, the number of visiting scholars has continued to grow rapidly. Visiting scholars go abroad for advanced study, teaching and doing research at U.S. colleges and universities, in order to obtain knowledge and develop skills in their field of expertise and establish valuable and collaborated contacts with U.S. colleagues and higher education institutions.

The Open Door 2016 report issued by the Institute of International Students indicates that the overall number of international students and scholars enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions increased by 7.1 percent, to 1,043,839 students and scholars, during the academic year 2015-2016. China remains the top exporting country, with almost twice the number of students and scholars in the U.S. as India (IIE, Open Door 2016 Report).

Higher education internationalization is one of the important factors in China's social and economic reforms (Zhao, 2008). The population of international visiting scholars can be relevant to the context of internationalization both at home and abroad (Yukiko Shimmi, 2014). International visiting scholars are regarded as a source of internationalization; however, their traveling experience and academic circumstances have not been given sufficient attention in previous literature, which emphasizes the necessity and importance of the visiting scholars' research contributions. Given their importance in building professional and educational exchange connections between the United States and China, the cross-border experiences and academic linkages that visiting scholars have will creates ripple effects years after their visits (Zhao, 2008).

## **II A Qualitative Study**

### **2.1 Statement of Purpose**

Previous research about Chinese visiting scholars has mainly focused on their psychological experiences in relation to their adaptation, which leads to difficulty in integrating into the new environment. In addition to their psychological experiences, the other studies have also paid attention to the features and aspects that Chinese visiting scholars bring to their environments. Few studies have discussed their academic adjustment experiences and explored the factors and the strategies influencing their academic goals.

### **2.2 Research Questions**

The qualitative study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the motivations and expectations of Chinese visiting scholars in the United States?

RQ2: What are their experiences, including academic adjustment, social interactions, and leisure during their stays in the United States?

RQ3: What are the academic challenges and obstacles faced by Chinese visiting scholars and what are the resources and support available to them? And how do they handle the obstacles?

RQ4: What is the role that Chinese visiting scholars play in the international collaboration with U.S. universities as well as in cultural transmission?

RQ5: How do Chinese visiting scholars consider personal and contextual factors to affect their academic adjustment and goals?

### **2.3 Participants**

Seven Chinese visiting scholars voluntarily joined in my research. I gave them the pseudonyms for the privacy. All the interviewees were invited to study or do research at the XX University as a visiting scholar for one year. Among the interviewees, there was one male and six females.

One was studying educational technology within the School of Education, one was studying comparative translation in the School of Arts and Sciences, one was from the School of Public Health, and four were from the Department of Language, Society and Culture in the School of Education. All of them were in their 30s or 40s and with MD or PhD degrees. All the participants were from different provinces in China and all worked in higher education institutions in China.

## 2.4 Research Design

I interviewed the visiting scholars both in group discussions and through face-to-face interviews, and I also conducted the observations both informally and formally. All of the interviews were conducted both in English and Chinese. Then I translated their responses into English later. Data was collected through group discussion, face-to-face interviews, emails, and informally talking. The length of time varied with the types of interviews, usually ranging from 20 minutes to 90 minutes. In addition to interviews, the data presented were also collected through observation and participation, both formal and informal. All the data presented were collected between the months of August 2016 and March 2017.

## 2.4 Findings

In this part, my initial observations are presented in five aspects prior to presenting the dimensions of categories and themes I uncovered in the interviews.

First, despite the different higher education systems and areas they are from in China, each has almost the same identity in China, "Youth scholar who contributes a lot to their own university." Therefore, most visiting scholars are sent abroad with sponsorships from the China Scholarship Council (CSC), the Provincial Scholarship Program, or their own university. They were expected to accomplish a lot before they left for America and after they went back. Usually, they would sign a contract with the sponsor institution, which mainly requires them to serve their own country and university for an extra three or four years after they finish their visiting posts and also to publish some papers in international or national journals in their own research areas during their time abroad. In addition, through talking with them informally, I learned that the countries in which they plan to do research are not chosen by the sponsor institutions. Most scholars showed that they have no special requirement about the location to visit, which mainly depends on whether they can get the invitation letter, but they generally consider the academic institutions in the United States and United Kingdom preferable, due to their advanced academic conditions and academic environment.

Second, visiting scholars are a very diverse group—even though they are all from China and share the same cultural background experiences, it is easy to understand that they vary significantly. Many variable factors play a role in adjusting a new environment. Due to these variable factors, the experiences of being a visiting scholar in the United States and pursuing advanced academics can be extremely diverse.

Third, according to my observation, I found out one common thing about the visiting scholars; that is to say, they preferred to interact with Chinese scholars more often than with local people. Maybe this is because of the challenges and barriers they faced living overseas. One year in a new environment involves a period of adjustment for everything. These challenges involved adjusting their food habits, finding accommodations, experiencing culture shock, feeling a lack of interaction with local people, and so on. In addition, the biggest challenges come from the academic courses and research, such as a lack of systematic structure for obtaining academic mentorship and information, a lack of academic supervision or mentor support because of their unfamiliarity with American academic environments, and most importantly, a lack of sufficient English language proficiency, which, consequently, leads to their not fully understanding the courses and difficulty in expressing their own ideas clearly and concisely in classroom discussions.

Fourth, Chinese visiting scholars have fewer opportunities to be invited by the host institution to deliver speeches about their academic areas and/or Chinese cultural transmission. However, this is the key way to improve the international collaboration between the home and host institutions.

Five, in spite of the diversity these visiting scholars bring to campus, they are doing research in American universities and they also have a great deal in common. For example, they have similar perceptions of American higher education.

Through my observation, they all showed surprise that the classroom atmosphere in a foreign context is informal, which is totally different from the classrooms they are used to in China because of the different cultural values and education system. Next, although they faced many difficulties in the new environment, they tended to be curious, courageous, and possessing an adventurous spirit and they are high-achieving learners in the new foreign context, which makes them capable of dealing with novelty as well as demonstrating their deep passion for research. They valued the one-year visiting opportunity and experiences to pursue the highest achievements.

Drawing on the specific categories and themes that emerged from the interviews' data, here is how I summarize the experience of being a visiting scholar in a U.S. university.

(1) *Motivations and expectations for visiting and studying abroad.* Although in the above observations, visiting scholars have no special requirements about the location to visit, they are still maintaining high expectations for their plans to visit abroad. Some said that they even hold two or three goals they want to accomplish when they come to America. Some of these goals from the interviewees are overlapping.

The scholars' visits have multiple purposes. PB, a lecturer, was sponsored by the CSC to come to America. She was a very young lecturer at her university and she was teaching several undergraduate classes. She said, "Studying abroad will be a very valuable experience and American higher education is better than China's." She noticed that every professor sent a syllabus to his students at the beginning of each semester, which showed the course goals and contents, the teaching and presentation schedules, suggested readings, the grading and assessment criteria, and so on. This makes it very clear for students so that they can know what they need to do, what they should do, and when to plan it ahead of time. In the classroom, the atmosphere is relaxed. This is the total opposite of the Chinese serious classroom. PB has since decided to change her teaching method, and she has tried to apply new techniques to her own classroom, which include making an effort to let students participate in the class actively.

Only one of the participants reported her expectations about the administration, service, and cooperation between the home and host institutions.

Before I left for America, I intend to learn as much as I can in different aspects including teaching, research, administration, and service. For example, what do the school, the faculty and the students do to integrate them into the community and society service? What are the research areas worthy of carrying out in future? What is the possibility for the two universities to cooperate with each other?" (PG, Professor)

Many visiting scholars indicated that they came abroad in order to study advanced theories, broaden their vision, improve their English proficiency, and enjoy the American culture. They thought America would be the greatest place in education, technology, and science. They wanted to learn advanced theories in the area of their research, as well as know what the American professors and educators in their research fields are doing in the era of globalization and internationalization.

PA, an associate professor, focusing on information and language education, said, America is my first choice to be a visiting scholar. It is a developed country in the world and I am pretty sure that I can get the best experience in the U.S., especially in the information technology area. America is one of the representatives in advanced education and technology. I can exchange ideas with professors and master the innovative theories. I planned to do some research and attend some courses. When I come back home, I will start a new course, apply for a new project and share my experiences with the college.

PG, a professor, expressed her points thus:

The education system in the U.S. is rather mature and well-developed, which focuses much on the cultivation of students' innovative ability. However, it is what has been really lacking in China. As a young teacher in the university, it is essential to enhance personal and professional development. I hope to learn some advanced teaching philosophy and research theories in the Western country, which could broaden my views and promote professional enhancement. All the participants showed that finding out that they have the opportunity to learn abroad was totally exciting news for them. They could feel the real English-speaking cultures and improve their English skills and proficiency, which are important, especially for the teachers teaching English as a second language in China. Living and studying in an English-speaking country would be a fascinating experience for them to share with their students.

Three of the interviewees indicated that they came to America holding one of the expectations that they could collect academic information and thoughts on their research, which would assist them in trying to publish some high-quality papers. For example, PC, a lecturer, shared her expectations:

I am busy at my home university. Teaching and taking care of a child and family give me less time to write papers, not to mention publish. We are all facing high pressure in our associate professor reviews and we try to meet the requirements of reviewing. I am not young. In my school, even the colleagues younger than me have already become associate professors. I feel so stressed. Coupled with the school policy, if I will not meet the requirements to become an associate professor, maybe I will no longer have teacher standing on the platform.

(2) *Challenges in setting up life in a new community.* Once arriving in the United States, visiting scholars encountered many challenges inherent in beginning a life in a new community, such as finding a place to live, arranging school for children, applying for bank cards, and purchasing medical insurance. The first challenge is to find an appropriate apartment and set up life in America. The location and cost of an apartment are their biggest concerns. They have no idea about the living experiences abroad and, therefore, they wished to obtain more support in finding an apartment. PE stated her challenges in finding a place to live. Even though the host institution provided the housing information online, I was still faced with a problem. I rented an apartment but learned that it was unfurnished. My son and I had to sleep on the floor for two weeks.

PF talked about her trouble in getting along with her roommate. "I just want to find a roommate to share the cost of the apartment. When we were getting acquainted with each other, we found we had nothing in common. We always argued for tiny things. I felt tired and was in a bad mood." PC came here facing the challenge that she was not able to charge her apartment's rent to her new bank card, and she was worried about her son's adjustment into a new community. All the participants showed that they all went through hard times at the beginning and these also lasted for a long time.

(3) *Language and cultural difficulties.* Among all the interviews, my analysis revealed language and culture difficulties as a widespread issue. Although all the participants had already achieved high degrees and have basic English skills, they also reported that it was the language barrier that hindered their communication in academic environments and influenced the degree to which they could express their ideas in class with the professors. For example: It is difficult to communicate with the professors. For example, I would like to join in the discussion related to certain research topics. I cannot express my ideas fully and fluently. (PF, associate professor) PD didn't have a problem talking to the professor, but it was hard for him to understand and communicate with the students. For example,

Understanding what the professor talked about was not difficult to me, but students' discussions drove me crazy, because the professor spoke in academic language, while the students used colloquial English. Other respondents complained about their language problems in reading and writing. They stated that engaging in a reading task is a heavy burden if one would like to conduct academic research. But because of the weak language foundation, it took a long time to finish reading one paper or one book. And sometimes "even though I have already finished reading, I didn't grasp the main idea or even had no clear thought about it, let alone have enough understanding to write the academic paper."

PC talked about how she lacked language training in writing. She admitted that in China, some problems exist in English education. Teachers and students paid more attention to grammar training in tasks other than speaking and writing, which led to students showing weakness in writing skills.

Language and culture are interrelated to each other. In casual conversations, cultural inadequacy can also cause problems in speaking and understanding. Visiting scholars have fewer chances to interact with native English-speaking Americans. Therefore, once an opportunity presents itself, it is important to value it. But it is a pity that the cultural differences make communication difficult and hard to continue.

Nonetheless, these cultural differences didn't have a deep influence on their academic areas aside from social interactions. PG felt puzzled when the culture shock was beyond her preparation. An independent personality, a religious culture, and the character of "business is business" is far more like what I have prepared. I was prepared to be surprised that Americans know little about the Chinese culture. "It is really hard for me to join in the circle of local Americans. I never imagined that race is such a big issue in the United States even today because the concept of race in my home country is quite ambiguous." PD felt that from experiencing the racial culture.

However, most participants expressed different views about the cultural differences. They indicated that, indeed, cultural adaptation existed, such as food, accommodations, and different lifestyles, among others. They still needed time to adjust to it, but they might not feel pressure about that, just as PE said: "I am just staying here for one year. There is no use to do anything about it. It will not affect me a lot."

(4) *Academic challenges.* Although many visiting scholars from different disciplines expressed their own different challenges, they all indicated their most prominent challenge and obstacle abroad was their academic adjustment and improvement. As the earlier anecdotes mentioned, all the respondents came here with the expectation of improving their academic achievements, no matter if they involved individual or collaborative research or if they entailed attending seminars to acquaint themselves with advanced theories.

When the participants were asked questions like "what kind of activities do you engage in during your visit? How do you spend your time in one week?" most of the answers involved research-related activities, such as auditing some courses in different levels, involving oneself in the host professor's research project, listening to several academic or non-academic reports, attending academic seminars and conferences, carrying out one's own research program, and writing papers at the library. PG, a professor with a PhD degree, said that "Carrying out my own research is one of the major activities I conducted during my visiting post. I went to the library and spent time collecting resources from literature, books, and documents, and I was engaged in writing a research article." However, these activities are not enough to avoid academic obstacles. Many reasons explained the academic obstacles.

Most respondents argued that there are fewer exchange opportunities with the professors in their field. PC had a deep feeling about the academic challenges in this category. She was faced with the pressure of professional rank evaluation. The biggest problem is that I have no one I can consult deeply about my research theory and methodology. My supervisor was busy with his courses and his own research, having no time to give me academic support. I feel confused and frustrated in my academic research.

PF, an associate professor, emphasized these challenges from the perspective of the host institution's support. The host institution has partial responsibility for the academic challenges encountered by the visiting scholars. There are fewer systematic supports and structures for obtaining the academic assistance. Supervision and mentor support are not enough or even not available. Only one of the participants talked about her positive academic experiences at the host institution. She mentioned, "I feel lucky to be supervised by my host professor. The host professor, as a native speaker, gave me warm help in revising my poster and research paper. It is beneficial for me to explore new research points with systematic theories and models. And it helps me to learn some research methodologies associated with social science."

Paper publication is the most difficult among the scholars' academic challenges. All respondents reported that paper publication not only needs a higher level of academic writing skill, but it also familiarizes scholars with the academic writing standard. PC was committed to writing a paper, then publishing it in English and in the international journals during her stay in the US. She explained her experience:

The formats and styles of academic writing between China and America are totally different. I need more time to learn and practice, especially the research methodology and literature review parts. That is just what I lacked in Chinese academic writing. And the international journals are not familiar to us. Additionally, some participants complained about the pressures they faced with an academic experience so different from their experiences at home. PA was conducting a course reform at her host institution, offering a course and discussion online, and advising several students to prepare them for the assignments and papers required for the course. She said, "It took up so much time to advise students on the courses and deal with assignments that I have less time and focus to dedicate to my academic writing, not to mention engaging in publishing it."

Also, other respondents also mentioned that their challenges came from personal and family-related reasons. Participants accompanied by their children mentioned that taking care of children took up too much time and caused them some limitations in academic schedules, although they hoped that their accompanying children and spouses would gain international experience from their visit. On the other hand, participants who came without their families stated that they felt lonely and homesick. It was hard for them to incorporate themselves into the academic circle.

(5) *International collaborations between the host and home institutions* the visiting scholars expressed mixed views on their roles in the international collaborations between the host and home institutions. All the participants agreed that visiting scholars should act as a bridge in culture and academic aspects between the two institutions, creating an international collaboration opportunity in the students' exchange program between the host and home university. However, it is not an easy thing to promote bilateral exchanges. When asked "Do you have any cultural or academic collaboration experiences? And what influences do you exert on the collaboration and cultural transmission between two institutions?", all the participants gave positive answers. But only one of them exerted a huge influence on the partnership and cultural transmission. PG expressed proudly: In the collaboration and cultural transmission aspects, I did a lot of work, such as cooperation with the faculty in my hot professor, speeches on traditional Chinese medicine.

Other participants commented that they did exert influence on the international collaboration, but in only a very small way; for example, they discussed Chinese education systems, Chinese food and calligraphy cultures in some seminars. However, in the academic arena, they had fewer chances to give a lecture or set up a close partnership. All the respondents felt pity over this.

### **III. Discussion and Recommendations**

In this part, we summarize the results and findings, reflect on the experiences and formulate recommendations for future visiting scholars and host institutions.

#### **Motivations of Academic Mobility: High Expectations**

The United States enjoys a high reputation among all nations internationally for higher education research because of its advanced research facilities, diverse academic environments, and its willingness to embrace other cultures. All the academics in this study reflected on a range of advantages that influenced their initial decisions to move from one academic environment to another. They were motivated to become visiting scholars in order to learn advanced theories, engage in research activities, improve language proficiency, and promote international collaboration. They were full of infinite courage to deal with the adjustment process in a new community and they possessed a fierce ambition to enhance their professional development by setting specific goals. With high expectations, they imagined that the life in a new community would be amazing, positive, and fruitful. Overseas exposure would be highly beneficial in their personal and professional fields. Motivation is the driving force behind visiting scholars' goals for living abroad and gives them direction and the sustainable courage to meet the challenges and come up with strategies to overcome the obstacles. Therefore, it is vital for visiting scholars to know the purpose of their visits and have a clear sense of what they expect, which will prepare them to handle the unexpected in a new academic and social environment.

#### **Benefits and Challenges of Academic Mobility on the Lives and Academic Promotion of Visiting Scholars**

The second, third, and fourth research questions focused on the benefits and challenges of visiting scholars' living and academic experiences. By examining the participants' responses, the study found that the types of challenges they encountered varied over time. Undoubtedly, academic mobility has many benefits for visiting scholars, such as broadening the mind, human network building, gaining cultural experiences, etc. Mobility has a positive impact on academics' professional development, which is regarded as the facilitator of academic promotion.

They can learn advanced theories, study teaching methods, improve language proficiency, collect cutting-edge information, and attend international conferences, learning research methodology and so on; but how much they can obtain during the limited time and how and whether they can achieve their goals are matters worthy of attention. Even though they came to America with high expectations, as well as longing to shape a bright future for themselves, it turned out that a variety of challenges and obstacles associated with academic promotion outnumbered the benefits and all the visiting scholars faced these issues, regardless of if they had previous overseas experiences or not. Many visiting scholars were more motivated and determined to do well academically and socially. It is encouraging and rewarding to see the visiting scholars trying their best to overcome all the barriers. Once they arrived in a new community, the common challenges they faced mostly revolved around living issues. Finding an appropriate apartment, dealing with financial problems, purchasing medical insurance and health care, making cultural adjustments and school arrangements were all challenging and worrying.

These first-time visitors sometimes did not fully consider these non-academic issues or barriers before their arrival in the United States, which led to their taking a long period to adjust, settle down, and begin their new lives in the overseas community. Once they settled in the new environment in America, academic issues became their main focus. They appreciated and felt satisfied with the lower level of support and assistance from the host institution, as well as the advanced facilities and resources they could access at the beginning.

However, after a long period, visiting scholars found it challenging to develop networks with American colleagues socially and academically; to build new research networks in a new context; to conduct research independently; to exchange ideas with American professors; to participate in collaborative research; to write articles for publication; and even to familiarize themselves the higher education system, local practices, and, in some cases, the wider policy context in one's particular professional field; mostly because of their language proficiency issues and not feeling that they possessed enough multicultural communication competence, the most critical barrier in their academic pursuits. In addition, their brief time in the United States was also a potential obstacle in allowing them to engage in some projects. In the social environment, because of the cultural differences, different educational system, different communication styles, and customs, it was difficult for them to integrate into American society and keep a close relationship with Americans. It is a general sense of "not quite fitting in" and a lack of belonging that caused many visiting scholars to feel socially uncomfortable and lonely.

### **The Personal and Contextual Factors that Affected Scholars' Visiting Experiences and Academic Promotion**

Personal and contextual factors play an important role in the visiting scholars' overseas experiences. Personal factors mainly stem from positive motivations and high expectations. Before they left for America, all the scholars held positive views on the international experiences and opportunities for their academic promotion and professional development prospects when they came back to their own country. With these psychological resources, they applied for the position as a visiting scholar and did their best to receive invitations from the host institutions. They were full of blind confidence to prepare for the coming challenges and obstacles. However, few people will realize clearly what kinds of challenges they will encounter during their stays, as well as how much they will obtain in academic promotion if they don't prepare well for the challenges in advance. With the relaxed and blind psychological expectations, they may feel surprised, or even at a loss, while facing the unexpected challenges. After their arrival in the United States, facing the non-academic and academic issues, the visiting scholars, with their different characteristics and backgrounds, responded to the obstacles differently. Factors that affected the non-academic issues may involve whether the scholars had previous overseas experiences, their connections with former visiting scholars or colleagues who are familiar with American life, as well as whether they had their families accompany them.

In addition, the first-timers have more trouble in adapting to the English language issues and cultural differences. In responding to the academic experiences, the environmental factors played the most vital role. Generally speaking, the American university enjoyed a high reputation among the scholars, who also said that the administrative staff were professional and the services were efficient. However, facing the academic issues the visiting scholars encountered, the host institution lacked systematic management and networks, which led the institutions to overlook the scholars' many needs. There were fewer systematic supports and structures in place for obtaining academic assistance. Supervision and mentor support were not enough or even not available. Faced with the academic barriers in a new environment, cultural differences, unfamiliarity with the theories and education, as well as the limited access to the faculty and their research projects, the scholars found that the host institutions' supervision and guidance were not sufficient.

### **Recommendations to the Future Visiting Scholars and Their Host Institutions**

Future visiting scholars were recommended to work closely with their host institutions and share their purposes and goals with their sponsors or supervisors, who can provide appropriate direction and assistance in support of the visiting scholars' academic pursuits. Before they left for America, it is strongly recommended that scholars work on improving their English language skills, trying their best to familiarize themselves with the culture, history, values, and social norms of the host country, as well as learning as much as possible about the host institution and its environment. It is important not to keep unrealistically high expectations and not to get lost in the blind imagination about the wonderful land to which they are traveling.

When they have arrived and settled down in the United States, they should hold a positive attitude in dealing with challenges they may face. It is necessary to set up their basic lives in the new environment and begin their academic experiences as soon as possible; after all, the visiting period is for a short time and the main goal of visiting is to obtain professional development and academic promotion. Scholars should take active steps to incorporate themselves into the academic activities instead of being only auditors/observers, and they should make full use of academic resources and services as early as possible. Another suggestion for future scholars is that they should seek opportunities to communicate with professors continuously and share their research interests and directions with them in order to obtain more ideas and inspiration. Building networks with visiting scholars and other professionals from other disciplines is also worth a try.

Additionally, for each scholar's host institution, if it is keen to establish international collaboration, it will be important to raise awareness of the real difficulties many of the visiting scholars encounter. Helping academic immigrants integrate more quickly into their new professional and wider social communities will be critical. They should make efforts to learn from visiting scholars and provide systematic support and assistance, such as offering orientation sessions and regularly addressing visiting scholar-specific issues relating to living, housing, and studying ; building a systematic academic advising, supervision, and support structure; granting rewards or recognition for successful academic communication, participation, and collaboration; providing the opportunities, courses, and support to promote diverse cultural engagement and English language skills; empowering visiting scholars locally and globally to impact the internationalization of higher education all over the world; and so on. In addition, creating a website at the university for the incoming visiting scholars could make a difference, and such a site should be regularly updated to alert the incoming visiting scholars about accommodations and academic adjustment resources.

#### IV Conclusion

Academic mobility has become a key feature in the internationalization of higher education. In the context of increasing internationalization of education, academic mobility appears as a potential source from both the home and host countries' perspectives (Tremblay, 2005). The mobility of academics brings many benefits and challenges.

This chapter highlighted the challenges and complexities of academic mobility, as well as the personal and contextual factors influencing the academic adjustment process, which were examined through the lens of visiting scholars' personal reflections; with this data the study derived from these findings some recommendations and strategies in order to enlighten future visiting scholars and their host universities and provide them some ways to make the visiting journey smooth and fruitful in a rapidly evolving global academic environment.

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