Intercultural Analysis of Communication Anxieties Encountered by International Students in the United States

Song Wang
Harbin Institute of Technology

Xiujie Sun
University of Louisville

Changyuan Liu
Harbin Institute of Technology

This paper focuses on the intercultural and interpersonal aspects of communication between Chinese graduate students and American advisors in U.S institutions of higher education. It attempts to identify the intercultural communication anxieties expressed by Chinese graduate students and their American advisors in educational contexts and to compare differences in their communication anxieties. To achieve this, a questionnaire was developed and a follow-up interview was conducted. In all, 107 Chinese graduate students and 49 American advisors participated in this study. Among them, 10 Chinese graduate students and six American professors participated in the follow-up interview. The results showed that both Chinese graduate students and American advisors expressed a higher level of anxiety about students' language proficiency and communication in classroom settings. Culture-related behavior patterns appeared to be less a barrier than the English language to Chinese graduate students' ability to communicate with their advisors.

When international graduate students communicate with their foreign advisors in educational settings, both parties have different feelings, thoughts, worries, and expectations in terms of the effectiveness of their interaction. This kind of intercultural communication anxiety has become a very important variable influencing the instructional effectiveness of international education.

Like most international students, young Chinese men and women have finished their secondary or college education in China before going abroad—the United States in this case—to further their study. They have been well trained in the traditional Chinese communication style and teacher-student interaction patterns, as well as social norms, cultural norms, and values. When these students go to the United States to further their study, they take this heritage with them into the American campus setting, where people follow a very different communication style and adopt a different set of cultural values and assumptions about communication.

In American classrooms where the active participation of students is encouraged, and where group discussions are valued, Chinese graduate students may be at a disadvantage because they are not comfortable engaging in discussion, let alone making assertions that may contradict or challenge the American professor's point of view (Wong-Scollon & Scollon, 1990). They try to keep verbal interactions with their professors to a minimum, and, if possible, they avoid eye contact with professors as a display of the respect they think their teachers are due. However, this tendency to withdraw from classroom interaction can seriously affect the American professor's perception of the student's academic performance.

Communication is a two-way process of mutual and continuous exchange of meanings coded verbally and nonverbally. This process is greatly shaped by the culture in which the

communicator involved in the process was reared. When two individuals communicate with each other in face-to-face interactions, they may have some feelings, thoughts, worries, and expectations which represent the concept of communication anxieties. To extend the use of this concept to the situation in which they occur during interactions between two people coming from different cultures, we have the concept of intercultural communication anxieties. We use this concept in the current study to analyze the communication anxieties that exist in the interaction between Chinese graduate students and American advisors in educational contexts.

Some of the problems in communication between Chinese graduate students and American professors have been documented in past research. Most of the studies report that Chinese students are aware of their communication problems, and they sometimes experience anxiety and depression as a result of those problems (Feng, 1991; Funston & Funston, 1985; Young, 1992). Although these studies have identified communication problems from students' point of view, they have not probed into how deeply concerned these students are about communication problems. Neither have they probed into the issue from a faculty perspective. Some other studies (Perkins, Perkins, Guglielmino, & Reiff, 1977; Shankar, 1987) have also identified the lack of English proficiency as the main cause of the communication difficulties experienced by Chinese graduate students. Few have taken into consideration other important factors influencing communication, such as cultural disparities.

Literature Review

International students go to the United States in the hope of receiving a better education, which allows them more opportunities in their future professional lives (Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008). However, these opportunities come with unique challenges that are not experienced by American students. For international students, these challenges often result in less satisfying experiences (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005).

Academic Adjustment of International Students

The new cultural and educational system with different expectations and requirements poses new and difficult challenges for international students. In this sense, international students have to experience a broader range of adjustment and transition than their fellow U.S. classmates.

Almost all research on international student adjustment identifies the fact that language is the initial overriding concern for international students who study English as a foreign or second language (Huang, 1997; Qian, 2002). International students often lack the English language skills necessary for functioning effectively in their new academic and social environment (Huntley, 1993). In the process of academic adjustment, language takes up a considerable portion of the international students' time and effort. International students consider the lack of English proficiency to affect their academic performance negatively (Pruitt, 1978), decrease their interaction with U. S. nationals (Penn & Durham, 1978), and usually lead to feelings of dissatisfaction (Scanlon, 1990), as well as anxiety and depression

(Cho, 1988). Many studies on international students show that they perceive their limited English language ability as problematic (Holmes, 2005). Inadequate English and associated lack of confidence in self expression result in international students requiring more time than their host counterparts to accomplish learning tasks (Antanaitis, 1990), difficulty in class participation (Beaver & Tuck, 1998), fear that people would make fun of their attempts at communication, and fear that they might not be able to understand teachers and classmates (Holmes, 2000).

The above-mentioned studies seem to support the general conclusion that English language ability does have an obvious and important influence on international students' academic performance. Yet it is far from being the only determining factor associated with their academic adjustment in the United States. According to Ngwainmbi (2004), communication in the learning environment is influenced by cultural factors and "involves the application of interpersonal and intrapersonal values" (p. 63). Therefore, disparities between cultures also account for the academic difficulties experienced by international students in the United States.

It is well known that the status of teachers varies from culture to culture and from educational system to system. Many international students coming from authoritarian educational systems expect that information and answers to questions come from the professors correctly and naturally (Huang, 1997; Qian, 2002). These students seldom question the teachers' authority and teachers' assessment of students' academic performance, especially in the case of China and Japan (Yee, 1995). This situation may cause confusion and frustration among U.S. professors who are used to getting critical questions from their students.

It is quite usual to hear U.S professors ask the question, "Why are Asian students so quiet in the classroom?" (Huntley, 1993, p. 6). In fact, these students may have their own opinions, comments, or critiques about the teachers' ideas or grades, but they would rarely go to the professor and express their ideas explicitly. However, for the U.S. professors, the students' silent responses and passive involvement could be interpreted as failure to meet the participation requirements for a course.

The differences often observed in the educational context reflect the disparities in communicative patterns across different cultures. According to Hu (2004), one's communicative patterns are closely related to his/her culture. Members of each culture have developed a particular set of rules and norms for communicating with one another. In cross-cultural contexts, people following one set of cultural rules and norms have difficulties communicating with others who follow a different set of cultural rules and norms, even though they may speak the same language.

In addition to language barriers and cultural differences, researchers have attempted to explore the impact of demographic characteristics on international students' academic performance. According to Huntley (1993), older graduate students manifested less flexibility than younger students, and students over 30 years of age encountered more academic problems. In other studies, however, there were no significant differences in self-reported adjustment problems across age groups (Wavomba, 1991).

In a study investigating international students' problems, Shankar (1987) concluded that female students had "more difficulty in dealing with a problem of study than did the males" (p. 130). However, according to Eid and Jordan-Domschot (1989), male and female international students showed no differences in their academic needs and performance.

Country of origin is consistently related to adjustment of international students. Scholars have noted that students exhibit problems peculiar to their own national groups. For example, Perkins et al. (1977) reported that Chinese students rated English ability, and Indian students rated finances, the most serious problem experienced.

Regarding the length of stay in the U.S., international students report that the longer they stay, the fewer communication problems they face (Shankar, 1987). Wavomba (1991) found no statistically significant relationship between length of stay and students' perceptions of adjustment difficulties.

The fields in which international students major may also determine the probability of their success in academic performance. Chongolnee (1978) found that engineering majors had the highest level of academic performance, and social science majors had the lowest. Also, fields of study influence the amount of academic interaction with peer students and faculty. As Shankar (1987) observed, international students preferred majoring in areas of science and technology where they could "get by with little verbal communication" (p. 33).

Student-Faculty Communication in International Education

Two-way communication, being essential in learning and instruction, plays a very important role in graduate education, since graduate students learn not only through formal classroom instruction but through hands-on experiences with faculty. Close, productive student-faculty interaction is, thus, considered a critical determinant of the extent to which desired outcomes occur (Kwong, 1991).

Among the traditions that have woven the fabrics of the Chinese cultural value system, Confucianism claims most of the credit in shaping Chinese behavioral norms and social structures. In Chinese culture, teaching is one of the most prestigious professions. Teachers have great authority and command students' respect. On the other hand, Chinese students rely on teachers as sources of knowledge, guides for learning, and role models of moral and social behaviors. Another Confucian legacy in Chinese culture is the emphasis placed on conformity in the Chinese educational system. Conformity is viewed as an indicator of social harmony. In schools, students wear uniforms, sit at desks in rows in the classroom, and study standard textbooks (Samovar & Porter, 1991). The requirement that social harmony and conformity be maintained also affects the dimension of verbal communication in the Chinese culture. To maintain harmony in interpersonal relationships, adoption of an indirect mode of communication is preferred. In communicating with someone of higher status, Chinese people strictly follow the traditional communicative rules that prescribe that they not demand, refuse, assert themselves, or criticize the other party in a straightforward manner (Yum, 1991). When these principles are applied to the educational context, students are supposed to listen, not to talk; to follow instructions, not to question the instruction. It is their responsibility to infer and interpret the meaning of what teachers say instead of asking for

clarification, for teachers are always "right" (Yum, 1991). In teacher-student contacts, in most cases, it is the teacher who raises an issue and initiates a conversation while students' obedience is valued (Jia, 1997).

Not only in verbal processes, but also in nonverbal processes of communication, Confucianism exerts a considerable amount of influence. To preserve a proper social relationship, Chinese tend to communicate a great deal by means of nonverbal cues. Silence is a "sign of respect for the wisdom and expertise of others" (Ishi & Bruneau, 1988, p. 314). Naturally, Chinese teachers expect this sign of respect from students, and students are accustomed to offering this sign to authority figures. Even when teachers ask questions, students are expected to remain quiet for a while before answering the question to indicate that the question from the esteemed teacher is worth thinking about. In addition, silence indicates that the student has no intention of challenging the authority of the teacher, which is essential in maintaining the social harmony in Chinese teacher-student relationships (Chen, 1988). Another nonverbal sign indicating students' lack of intention to challenge the teacher is avoidance of eye contact. Direct eye contact on the part of people of lower status in Chinese culture is often associated with negative attributes. Therefore, students are trained not to look their teachers in the eye while talking with them.

According to the census data reported by the Institute of International Education (2005), China represents a very important culture in U.S. colleges and universities: "Over 60,000 students from Mainland China study in the U.S. and represent the second largest student sojourner population behind India" (Mortenson, 2006, p. 133).

The educational values and role expectations in Chinese culture could hardly be more different from those in the United States. Feng (1991) interviewed 52 graduate students from China at a southern university in the United States and found that they had difficulties understanding lectures, taking notes, answering questions, and writing papers.

Passivity among Chinese graduate students, exemplified in their lack of class participation, avoidance of interaction with faculty, and non-assertiveness (Wu, 1982), is perhaps, on the surface, a result of their language insufficiency. Though these students are seemingly far less communicative and tend to dialogue less than their American counterparts, this is not a result of a paucity of ideas or inability to use their limited English as much as it is a manifestation of their educational socialization in Chinese culture, which emphasizes respect for authority and social harmony.

Lack of autonomy in academic interactions is commonly reported as another communicative pattern of Chinese graduate students (Buys, 1992). They seem to lack the ability to participate in independent or unstructured learning and to make decisions on their own. Similarly, regarding the self-directed learning prized in the graduate education in the United States, Chinese graduate students are either not trained to learn on their own or do not feel comfortable in doing so (Smith, 1985).

The third communicative pattern likely to contribute to misunderstanding of Chinese graduate students is their indirect mode of communication. In interacting with American advisors, the Chinese communication style of "beating around the bush" and overwrought politeness may leave the impression that Chinese students are incapable of being well-organized, to the point, or even sincere (Buys, 1992).

Based on the research above and investigating Chinese graduate students' and their American advisors' concerns about these students' communication problems and difficulties in the instructional setting of an American university, the current study addressed the following research questions: (1) What are the major perceived communication anxieties of Chinese graduate students and their American advisors during their interactions in educational settings? (2) How do the patterns of Chinese graduate students' communication anxieties compare to those of American advisors?

Method

The purpose of this study was to explore and compare the intercultural communication anxieties of Chinese graduate students and their American advisors in educational contexts by assessing the anxieties expressed by the two parties regarding communication of Chinese graduate students.

Participants

The participants in this study were 107 Chinese graduate students and 49 American advisors who have had Chinese advisees. The demographic characteristics of the two groups are outlined in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively. Of the Chinese graduate students, about 59% were male and 41% were female. A little over one-fifth of these students were under 25 years old. The rest were evenly distributed across two age groups: 38% between 25-29, and 40% in their 30's or older. Regarding the length of residence (LOR), the distribution was quite even, with approximately one-fourth in each of the four subgroups.

In addition, school-related characteristics of Chinese graduate students, such as academic level, financial aid, and field of study, were surveyed. As shown in Table 1, more than half of them were enrolled in doctoral degree programs. Most of the student subjects were not on assistantship. Of those who were, eight students had teaching assistantships, and 30 had research assistantships. The distribution of the field of study clustered around engineering programs (43.0%) and education/social sciences (25.2%).

With respect to American advisors, the majority were male. Only seven were female, as shown in Table 2. Of these advisors, slightly more than half (57.1%) were considered experienced, that is, having five or more Chinese advisees. The distribution of advisors' fields of study, similar to that in the student sample, centered on engineering (49.0%) and education/social sciences (30.6%).

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Chinese Graduate Students Surveyed (*N* = 107)

Characteristics	Number	Percent
Gender		
Male	63	58.9
Female	44	41.1
Age		
Under 25	23	21.5
25 – 29	41	38.3
30 – 34	32	29.9
Over 34	11	10.3
Length of Residence (LOR)		
2 years and less	28	26.2
More than 2 yrs – 3 years	29	27.1
More than 3 yrs – 4 years	27	25.2
More than 4 years	23	21.5
Academic Level		
Master's	45	42.1
Doctoral	62	57.9
Financial Aid		
TAship	8	7.5
RAship	30	28.0
None	69	64.5
Field of Study		
Business	9	8.4
Education/Social Science	27	25.2
Engineering	46	43.0
Liberal Arts	9	8.4
Medicine/Nursing	14	13.1
Science	2	1.9

Instruments

The survey method has long been used to probe the perceptions of a group concerning a given phenomenon (Babbie, 1990). By asking individuals what they know, believe, or observe, a researcher can collect information that both describes respondents' sentiments and perceptions of a certain phenomenon and the characteristics of the group or groups holding such views.

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of American Advisors Surveyed (*N* = 49)

Characteristics	Number	Percent
Gender		
Male	42	85.7
Female	7	14.3
Experience		
Less Than 5 Students	21	42.9
5 and More Students	28	57.1
Field of Study		
Business	0	0.0
Education/Social Science	15	30.6
Engineering	24	49.0
Liberal Arts	1	2.0
Medicine/Nursing	6	12.2
Science	3	6.1

For the purpose of this study, the survey method was considered appropriate since it provided a general picture of the intercultural communication anxieties that Chinese graduate students and their American advisors had during their interaction or the problems they encountered when attempting to communicate with one another.

This study employed two types of survey methods to collect data: a written questionnaire and a semi-structured face-to-face interview.

First, an open-ended questionnaire was developed on the basis of the instruments used by Staton-Spicer and Bassett (1979). In all, 107 Chinese graduate students and 49 American professors at a Midwestern university in the United States participated in the questionnaire.

Then a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted after the administration of the questionnaire. The purpose of the follow-up interviews was two-fold: to confirm and/or clarify the communication anxieties identified in the questionnaires and to explore additional anxieties or comments related to Chinese graduate students' communication. Ten Chinese respondents and six American professors participated in the interviews.

The communication anxiety statements provided by Chinese graduate students and their American advisors in both the questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews were analyzed by means of Holsti's (1969) content analysis method. The frequencies of major communication anxieties are presented to provide a qualitative description of the data collected in this study. Frequencies were the summed number of times a particular key communication anxiety was expressed by the respondents. In addition, throughout the questionnaire administration and the face-to-face interview, quotations from the respondents are included to illustrate their actual expression of communication anxieties. The original statements containing grammatical or spelling errors were revised for readability.

The coding categories were first based on the classification system of the Communication Concerns Model employed by Staton-Spicer (1983). Realizing that it was time-consuming sorting and coding into categories the unstructured concerns statements, Staton-Spicer developed a series of relatively structured items to measure teacher communication concerns. Most frequently listed concern statements from the data gathered by Staton-Spicer and Bassett (1979) were selected. The instrument was then given to pre-service and in-service teachers. The result of the data analysis yielded a 15-item questionnaire representing three factors: *self*, *task*, and *impact*. The *self* domain was measured with five items, the *task* domain with seven, and the *impact* domain with three.

During the coding process in the current study, we found that a considerable number of Chinese graduate students' anxieties had to do with others' communication with them. To accommodate these anxieties, the coding system was revised to include six categories: (1) statements showing anxieties about self as a communicator, (2) statements showing anxieties about the task of communicating, (3) statements showing anxieties about the impact of communication upon others, (4) statements showing anxieties about others' communication addressed to self, (5) statements showing anxieties not related to communication, and (6) statements showing no anxieties.

Findings and Discussion

Major Communication Anxieties Identified in the Questionnaire

For the coding system employed, Chinese graduate students expressed more task concerns than other categories. Of the 221 anxiety statements coded in classroom setting, 122 (55.2%) were about communication tasks, followed by 42 (19.0%) about impact on others, 32 (14.5%) related to self as a communicator, and 9 (4.1%) related to advisors' communication toward them. And of the 184 anxiety statements coded in conference setting, 98 (53.3%) were about communication tasks, followed by 34 (18.5%) about impact on others, 23 (12.5) related to advisors' communication toward them, and 18 (9.8%) related to self as a communicator.

In the task category, the distributions of the communication anxieties were similar in the two educational settings. Many respondents expressed anxiety mostly related to their performance as non-native speakers of English. The most common anxieties for students in class were (1) expressing their ideas clearly in English (e.g., "I can't express my ideas clearly."), (2) listening comprehension (e.g., "I can't understand a lot of sentences in lectures."), and (3) limited English vocabulary (e.g., "I don't know the right terms in English."). In one-on-one conferences with American advisors, they were mainly worried about (1) their English speaking skills (e.g., "I can't use the correct English to talk with my advisor."), (2) expressing ideas clearly (e.g., "I can't use English to express a complex issue."), and (3) listening comprehension (e.g., "I can't fully understand what the advisor says.").

In addition to language proficiency, Chinese graduate students showed a considerable amount of anxiety about being polite to their advisors and not offending them. This concern was reflected in the following comment, "I am worried whether he thinks of me as an eligible

doctoral student in terms of both my English ability and research competence, and whether I am polite." However, two anxieties were mentioned only in the conference setting. Chinese students were worried about whether they could understand or respond to the humor of their advisors. As one informant stated, "I want to say something to respond to my advisor's jokes, but I don't know how." The students also noted that they lacked appropriate topics to talk about with their advisors. This anxiety was clearly voiced in the following response: "I can't chat with my advisors like other American students because I don't know enough about sports or politics."

Among anxieties related to self as a communicator, Chinese graduate students tended to stress the importance of being well prepared in both educational settings. The anxiety was repeatedly mentioned in statements like, "I spent more time on preparing for my advisor's class," or, "I think over the questions he may ask in our meeting beforehand to be ready to answer his questions." Even though well prepared in advance, Chinese graduate students were still concerned about the adequacy of their own communication, particularly in the classroom. Statements, such as, "I don't want to give a stupid answer," or, "I am worried if I ask an irrelevant question," emphasized anxieties about exhibiting adequate communication behaviors.

Among anxieties related to the impact of communication on their advisors, Chinese students were mainly worried about being understood and the impressions they made on their advisors. Their anxiety about the intelligibility of their communication was illustrated in such statements as, "I am worried if my advisor understands what I say," or, "I hope I don't have to repeat myself to get my message across."

In addition to the anxieties about one's own communication, Chinese graduate students expressed worries about their advisors' communication to them. Such anxieties were related to the advisor's attitude. Some students stated their advisors might not be patient or show interest all the time. Some other students mentioned that their advisors did not always seem to be "willing to spend time in advising them."

Regarding the difference of communication anxieties in two educational settings, Chinese graduate students expressed fewer anxieties in one-on-one conferences with their advisors in general. They tended to relax to some degree about their language performance, yet they seemed to care more about how politely and appropriately they behaved in conference settings (see Table 3).

American advisors' concerns about Chinese advisees' communication focused on how students communicated, as 152 of the 174 total statements were related to the task category (see Table 4). In classes, they expressed worries about students' ability to understand their lecture or comments. Some advisors pointed out that they might "overestimate their level of familiarity with the English language and use words that may be unfamiliar to Chinese students." They also noticed that Chinese students failed to ask questions even when they did not understand what their advisors said. The following statements clearly reflected this concern: "Chinese student does not tell me when she does not understand an English phrase or word," "They don't understand what I am saying, and they are shy/afraid to ask questions," and "They may not ask questions despite being confused."

Table 3
Categorization and Frequency of Communication Anxiety Statements of Chinese Graduate Students

Coding Themes	Communication Anxieties			
	In Class		In Conferences	
	(*N* = 221)	%	(*N* = 184)	%
Self Category	32	14.5%	18	9.8%
Being Well Prepared	6		9	
Polite/Appropriate Behavior	4		6	
Adequacy of Communication	15		2	
Nervousness	7		1	
Task Category	122	55.2%	98	53.3%
English Ability in General	4		2	
Listening	18		15	
Speaking (Not Specified)	15		17	
Correctness	8		4	
Pronunciation	10		5	
Grammar	4		7	
Vocabulary/Usage of Words	17		11	
Fluency	16		3	
Expressing Ideas	27		16	
Effectiveness	3		0	
Conversation Topics	0		6	
Use of Humor	0		12	
Impact Category	42	19.0%	34	18.5%
Being Understood	22		5	
Advisor's Impression	13		18	
Respect/Not Offending	7		11	
Others' Communication to Self	9	4.1%	23	12.5%
Patience	7		11	
Willingness to Communicating	2		6	
Tone of Communication	0		6	
Non-Communication Anxiety	16	7.2%	7	3.8%
No Anxiety	0	0.0%	4	2.2%

In out-of-class conferences, American advisors expressed similar worries about their Chinese students' overall English ability to understand their words. For example, one advisor wrote, "I may overestimate their level of familiarity with the English language and they don't understand me." In addition, some American advisors observed a tendency toward over-politeness displayed by Chinese graduate students; for example, one noted, "During out-of-class conferences, they tend to be more worried about bothering me than I'd like."

Table 4
Categorization and Frequency of Communication Anxiety Statements of American Advisors

Coding Themes	Communication Anxieties	
	In Class	In Conferences
	(*N* = 88)	(*N* = 86)
Self Category	0	0
Task Category	79	73
English Ability in General	3	12
Listening	36	33
Speaking (Not Specified)	32	28
Correctness	0	0
Pronunciation	0	0
Grammar	0	0
Vocabulary/Usage of Words	2	0
Fluency	0	0
Expressing Ideas	2	0
Effectiveness	0	0
Conversation Topics	0	0
Use of Humor	4	0
Impact Category	0	3
Others' Communication to Self	0	0
Non-Communication Anxiety	8	6
No Anxiety	1	4

Major Communication Anxieties Identified in Semi-Structured Interviews

Among those who had returned their questionnaires, 10 Chinese respondents and six American professors participated in the follow-up interviews. A brief description of the interviewees' individual characteristics is presented in Table 5. The major communication anxieties identified in the interviews are displayed in Table 6. Consistent with communication anxiety statements from the questionnaire, Chinese students expressed more anxieties related to *task* category and *self* category. The four most frequently mentioned anxieties were, in descending order of frequency, being (1) well prepared, (2) their English proficiency, (3) the impressions they gave their American advisors, and (4) showing respect. Almost every Chinese student stressed the importance of being well prepared in advance and how this could affect their impressions on American advisors. As a male engineering student said, "If you don't prepare well enough, your advisor might send you back in a few minutes. And he will think you didn't work hard or you are not smart."

Regarding the two different educational settings, Chinese graduate students expressed fewer communication anxieties about out-of-class meetings with their American advisors than

Table 5
Demographic Characteristics of the Participants in Semi-Structured Interviews

	Chinese Students (N = 10)	American Advisors (N = 6)
Gender		
Male	6	5
Female	4	1
Age		
< 30	6	
≥30	4	
LOR		
2 yrs and less	2	
More than 2yrs – 3 yrs	4	
More than 3 yrs – 4 yrs	2	
More than 4 yrs	2	
Academic Level		
Master's	4	
Doctoral	6	
Financial Aids		
TA/RA	2	
None	8	
Fields of Study		
Science/Engineering	5	3
Other Disciplines	5	3
Advising Experience		
< 5 Chinese Students		4
≥5 Chinese Students		2

in the classrooms. As noted by one student, "I am not worried about my English during the meetings. I think my advisor understands me very well." However, in the follow-up interviews, Chinese students expressed more anxieties about the adequacy and the intelligibility of their communication. One informant, for instance, said, "I want to make sure my questions are good and demonstrating my progress of the research . . . I try to get to the point, but sometimes my advisor seems unable to understand my question." For the most part, the interview data confirmed the major communication anxieties identified by Chinese graduate students in their responses to the questionnaires.

With respect to the American advisors interviewed, although still focused on Chinese students' listening ability, they were more specific in voicing their worries about Chinese students' communication than they did in the written responses. They mentioned worries

Table 6
Categorization and Frequency of Communication Anxieties in Semi-Structured Interviews

Coding Themes	Students (N = 10)		Advisors (N = 6)	
	Class	Conference	Class	Conference
Self Category				
Being Well Prepared	9	10	0	0
Polite/Appropriate Behavior	7	8	0	0
Adequacy of Communication	4	7	1	0
Nervousness	4	2	4	3
Task Category				
English Ability in General	10	7	1	0
Listening	3	1	10	8
Speaking (not Specified)	5	3	6	3
Correctness	0	4	0	0
Pronunciation	0	1	0	0
Grammar	2	5	4	5
Vocabulary/Usage of Words	0	4	0	0
Fluency	0	0	0	1
Expressing Ideas	6	10	4	7
Effectiveness	1	0	0	0
Conversation Topics	0	3	0	0
Use of Humor	0	2	0	0
Impact Category				
Being Understood	2	8	1	8
Advisor's Impression	8	10	0	0
Respect/Not Offending	9	8	0	0
Others' Communication to Self				
Patience	2	4	0	0
Willingness to Communicate	0	3	1	3
Tone of Communication	0	0	0	0
Non-Communication Concern	0	0	0	0
No Concern	0	0	0	0

about how students could more clearly express themselves (e.g., "Some do not speak English well enough to express themselves.") and feel freer to ask questions (e.g., "They may fail to ask questions when needed to understand instructions or assignments."). Besides, two additional concerns emerged in the interviews. First, there was a worry about the grammaticality of students' communication. One advisor explained that, "If this Chinese student is going to work here, I think he needs to speak at least grammatically correct

sentences." Advisors also recognized that their Chinese graduate students might be nervous speaking to them and thus adversely affect their performance. As one professor noted, "Some students, during the first semester, seem to be very nervous talking to me. I think their English would be better if they can overcome that nervousness."

Conclusions and Future Considerations

On the basis of the self-reported data from written questionnaires and a series of follow-up interviews, Chinese graduate students and American advisors expressed a high level of anxiety about students' language proficiency and communication in classroom settings. Culture disparity, according to the students' self-reported data, seemed to be a lesser barrier than English language to Chinese graduate students' communication because those students had poor intercultural communication sensitivity. Thus, they attributed many culture-related behaviors to language barriers. However, American advisors displayed some sensitivity to their Chinese students' cultural background and its impact on their communication.

A comparison of the communication anxieties reported by Chinese graduate students and American advisors suggested that Chinese students tended to report a higher level of anxiety about their own communication than did American advisors. Also, American advisors expressed a different focus on Chinese students' communication. They were more concerned with students' listening ability and the affective domain of communication.

The results of the study are supportive of the assumption that advisors and students have different foci in their communication anxieties and that language proficiency and cultural disparity represent the main barriers in international students' interaction with their advisors.

As any other study, this study has limitations. First, the results of this study were based on a sample of fairly small size and at one university. In addition, American advisors were identified by their Chinese graduate students. It is possible that those advisors who chose to participate and returned the questionnaires tended to care more about their Chinese advisees' communication than those who did not. Therefore, their responses appeared to be very understanding and culturally sensitive. In light of the restrictions in the current sample, future studies should be conducted cross-institutionally, employ a larger sample and a better selection process, as well as investigate the actual behaviors in order to supplement the self-reported data.

With increasing globalization, exchange of international students will be a more prominent phenomenon in higher education institutions across the world. Existence of differences between cultures and educational systems suggests that cross-cultural learners have to go through certain adjustment and transition in their learning experiences. Accordingly, it is important to conduct research on these adjustment experiences and help international students better adjust to their new academic life. A good understanding of international students' communication anxieties can contribute to better communication between international students and host institutions. Our study focused on Chinese graduate students' learning experiences in the U.S. and it is hoped that more similar studies will produce more research on international students of other national origins, thus enriching the literature on international education.

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