A Grounded theory of Chinese students' leisure behavior in American university

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A Grounded Theory of Chinese Students' Leisure Behavior in American University

Introduction

The number of international students at colleges and universities in the United States increased to a record high of 623,805 in the 2007/08 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2008). Among them, 81,127 (13%) students were from China, which is the second-leading place of origin for students coming to the United States, trailing only India (Institute of International Education, 2008). Due to the importance of international students to culturally diverse make-up of colleges and universities, American institutions have developed support services to assist international students with a variety of special needs ranging from adjusting to the academic requirements, to dealing with cultural factors of being submerged in new societal settings (Higgins & Jackson, 2003).

The literature suggests there is one more element that is important in college students’ experience: leisure. Leisure forms a major component of active campus life, spanning a range of activities from daydreaming or drinking beer at the campus pub to tutoring disadvantaged children (Bloland, 1987). However, how international college students spend their leisure time and how their different cultures have impact on their leisure behavior has not been studied extensively. Few empirical investigations focused on international students and no theory or process model of leisure behavior of international students exists. Therefore, this study intended to develop a theoretic model of Chinese students’ leisure behavior in American universities. In the study, we selected the grounded theory approach to construct a preliminary paradigm model of Chinese student’s leisure behavior based on in-depth interviews.

Literature Review
Leisure may be defined as an "attitude or state of mind in which the individual subjectively believes that he or she is pursuing an activity for personal idiosyncratic reasons rather than as a result of external coercion" (Tinsley & Tinsley, 1982, p. 105). As Henderson (1996) suggested, explorations of leisure activities present an opportunity to better understand the perspectives of diverse segments of the college student population. Also, studies of the leisure activities of college students give information on the planning and construction of recreation sports facilities on campus (Hendel & Harrold, 2004). Therefore, there are already a plethora of leisure studies on college students which were done through quantitative methods (Hendel & Harrold, 2004; Shinew, & Parry, 2005; Hickerson & Beggs, 2007; Tsai & Coleman, 2007; Walker, Jackson, & Deng, 2007; Patry, Blanchard, & Mask, 2007) or phenomenology methods (Heo & Lee, 2007; Li & Stodolska, 2006, 2007; Kimball & Freysinger, 2003).

**Leisure behavior of Chinese people**

Cultural background, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (such as age and income) could all affect the ways in which individuals participate in, allocate time to, assign and derive meaning from, and feel constrained within, their leisure (Li & Stodolska 2006; Zhang & Gobster 1998; Gomez, 2002; Gramann & Allison, 1999). Therefore, Chinese people have different patterns of leisure activities in comparison with other ethnic groups.

There are lots of leisure studies focusing on ethnic groups, including Chinese immigrants in the West, indicating different patterns of leisure activities in comparison with other residents (Yu and Berryman 1996; Walker and Deng 2004). Yu and Berryman (1996) found that Chinese in general tend to be more work-oriented and many are unable to identify much in the way of American leisure in their lives. Walker and Deng (2004) explained it to be a sense of guilt which was often associated with leisure experiences among Chinese immigrants.
However, according to the studies of Li and Stodolska (2006, 2007), Chinese international graduate students were not only work-oriented but they also deeply valued leisure in their lives. Though their transnational status resulted in a variety of constraints on their leisure experience, such as lack of time, language barriers and cultural differences, lack of friends, and feelings of lack of entitlement to leisure, they adopted both behavioral and cognitive negotiation strategies to modify leisure experience and improve life quality.

**Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory method uses participants’ experiences as data to construct and validate the emergent theory (Schraw, Wadkins, & Olafson, 2007) and is used to generate theory where little is already known, or to provide a fresh slant on existing knowledge (Goulding, 1998). The product of grounded theory method is a paradigm model that systematically links antecedents, situational conditions, coping strategies, and consequences to the phenomenon of interest (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

**Methodology**

The method of this study is replicated and extended from the grounded theory study on academic procrastination done by Schraw, Wadkins, and Olafson (2007). We analyzed data through three phases of data collection using constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Creswell, 1998). Our goal is to identify motivation, activities, constraints, negotiation, and consequences of leisure behavior of Chinese international students in American universities and to developing a theory revealing plausible relationship among those components.

**Participants and Procedure**
Chinese international students from a large metropolitan university on the western United States will be chosen to participate in this study. Participants involved in Phase 1 are selected randomly from all Chinese international students; participants involved in Phase 2-3 are selected using theoretical sampling (i.e., selected specifically because they frequently pursued leisure activities). Table 1 summarizes the three-stage data collection strategy.

### Table 1 Three Phases in Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Participants (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Identify codes within categories for further analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Axial</td>
<td>Explore codes in detail: relate codes to one another to construct themes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Selective</td>
<td>Construct paradigm model and discuss themes in relation to model; establish story line that integrates paradigm model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Expected Results

The existing literature on leisure behavior of international college students lacks an explicit, testable theory. Given the wide contents of leisure phenomenon, a grounded theory will be the best way to identify all aspects of Chinese students’ leisure behavior and build relationships among all components. The expected results of this study will be a preliminary paradigm model of Chinese student’s leisure behavior which will not only present an opportunity to better understand Chinese culture implications in leisure, but also give information on the planning of recreation facilities on campus.