

## **“They Make No Contribution!” versus “We Should Make Friends with Them!”—American Domestic Students’ Perception of Chinese International Students’ Reticence and Face**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This project examined both quantitative and qualitative data about how American domestic undergraduates perceived Chinese international students’ (CISs) reticence and face concerns. A quasi-experimental design about American students’ ratings of a fictional CIS described in scenarios demonstrated that the reticent CIS was rated as more typical, less likable, and less socially-approved. A thematic analysis of American students’ impression about CISs suggested: 1) some Americans stigmatized CISs due to their poor English and reticence in classroom; 2) others were more open-minded to approach CISs’ reticence with intercultural communication competence by taking CISs’ perspective. The findings indicated: the stereotype that typical CISs are reticent leads to Americans’ negative evaluations of CISs; while perspective-taking skills resulted in better intercultural-communication experience.*

**Keywords:** American domestic students, Chinese international students, classroom communication, intercultural communication competence, positive and negative face, reticence, stigma

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**T**he last several years has seen a huge increase in the number of Chinese students matriculating at universities in the U.S. According to Institute of

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International Education (2016), 31.5% of international students in the U.S. are Chinese international students and China is the top place of origin of international students. Currently, many researchers are investigating how Chinese international students (CISs) adapt themselves to the American education system (Ching, Renes, McMorrow, Simpson, & Strange, 2017; Heng, 2016; Li, Heath, Jackson, Allen, Fischer, & Chan, 2017; D. Liu, 2016; J. Liu, 2002; Wang, 2009). One of the controversial topics for Chinese international students is their silence or apparent reticence in the Western classroom (Hwang, Ang, & Francesco, 2002; J. Liu, 2002; Poyrazli, Arbona, Nora, McPherson, & Pisecco, 2002; Wen & Clément, 2003). Other research links CISs' reticence with face concerns (J. Liu, 2002; Hwang et al., 2002; Zhu, 2014). CISs may choose to remain reticent in order to protect their face or to show respect to their classmates and instructors' face. However, little research has been conducted to investigate how American domestic students perceive reticent CISs and CISs' face concerns. A study about American students' perception of this phenomenon will help explore the direct consequences of CISs' reticence and face. In addition, few studies have examined this phenomenon using both quantitative and qualitative methods to extend the scope of understanding. Hence, this study takes both quantitative and qualitative approaches to exploration of American students' perception of CISs. The study begins by examining explanations which have been offered for CISs' apparent reticence and face concerns. Following this, research examining American students' responses to Chinese international students is discussed. The study design, methods, and results are described. Finally, implications about what can be done to resolve biased perceptions of American domestic students about CISs are discussed.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Chinese International Students' Reticence**

Burgoon (1976) discussed unwillingness to communicate and how it is related to reticence and communication apprehension. Unwillingness to communicate is defined as the predisposition to devalue the importance of communication and to avoid communication situations (Burgoon, 1976). However, the reticence for CISs is a different phenomenon rather than a predisposition. In the current study, CISs' reticence is assessed from a cultural-centered approach. J. Liu (2002) explained that although many second-language researchers equated CISs' silence with lack of communicative competence, silence itself might be embedded in Chinese

traditional culture and CIS identity. As Wen and Clément (2003) noted, CISs' unwillingness to communicate in public may be a cultural phenomenon rather than a linguistic competence problem. CISs' silence is not an indicator of the lack of active learning (Huang & Brown, 2009). Instead, good students should always listen attentively to their instructors according to Chinese values (J. Liu, 2002) rather than reveal their own ideas.

However, western instructors and students may attribute CISs' reticence to lack of English proficiency or the lack of initiative to participate in class. In addition, the belief that CISs are reticent becomes a common stereotype on U.S. campus. According to Ruble and Zhang (2013), American domestic students may think CISs either are bad in English or that they never speak English. Zhu's (2014) findings suggested that even in CISs' own eyes, CISs seldom participate in class discussion. Such reticence is positively correlated with typicality as a CIS and feelings of alienation (Zhu, 2014). However, only a few studies have examined how American students think about CISs' reticence. Ruble and Zhang (2013) found that American students mentioned several typical CISs' traits like "bad at English", "shy", and "never speak English". This suggested that American students may consider a typical CIS as someone who remains reticent during the whole class without making any contribution to class discussion. Therefore, this hypothesis is offered:

Hypothesis 1: Compared to a non-reticent participatory CIS, a reticent CIS is more likely to be rated as a typical CIS by American students.

### **Chinese International Students' Face Concerns**

An alternative explanation for apparent reticence among CISs is that their silence represents a concern for self and other face needs. Face plays an important role in Chinese culture (Ho, 1976; Hu, 1944; Zhai, 2011). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), there are two types of face: positive face which is concerned with the desire for social approval and others' appreciation, and negative face which focuses on the need for autonomy and freedom of action without being imposed on. People perform different communicative strategies based on the degree of threats to others' face in a given situation and in some cases, people choose to avoid communication at all in order to minimize potential face threat (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Face concerns may influence whether a CIS participates in class discussion or not (Hwang et al., 2002; J. Liu, 2002; Wen & Clément, 2003). Such face concerns may account for CISs' reticence in class simply because they do not want to be socially disapproved by their classmates.

CISs may choose to avoid participation in order to save their face or choose to participate in order to gain public face for themselves and their fellow Chinese classmates (J. Liu, 2002). They also may not say anything because they are trying to protect the face needs of American students in their classes and to show respect for the professor. Ruble and Zhang (2013) also found that a majority of CISs are polite, kind, nice and hardworking in American students' eyes. Both studies address a common phenomenon that CISs have a strong desire for being polite in order to receive social approval (positive-face gain). Hence, a second hypothesis is derived:

Hypothesis 2: Compared to a CIS with negative face concerns, a CIS who has positive face concerns is more likely to be rated as a typical CIS by American students.

Based on the discussion of both reticence and face concerns, it is unknown whether reticence levels (reticent or participatory) and face concerns may interact with each other to influence perceived typicality or not. Hence, the first research question is offered:

Research Question 1: Is there any interaction effect by reticence levels and face concerns on a CIS's typicality perceived by American students.

### **American Students' Evaluation of CISs**

Ruble (2011) and Ruble and Zhang (2013) provided a model for five common stereotypes about CISs held by American students: 1) CISs are smart and hardworking; 2) CISs are nice and friendly; 3) CISs are bad at English and not assimilated; 4) CISs are quiet and shy; and 5) CISs are oblivious and annoying. Ruble (2011) created five scenarios describing a CIS who possessed one of these stereotypes and asked American students to rate this CIS. However, the study showed few differences across these five stereotypes in terms of American students' feelings of anxiety, perceived communication accommodation levels, and rating of social attractiveness for the CIS (Ruble, 2011). One plausible explanation is that some descriptions in Ruble's scenarios may cause psychological reactance in American participants. For example, Ruble (2011) used terms like "conceited" or "annoying" which are emotionally-arousing descriptions. It may also be the case that the five stereotypes described by Ruble (2011) are not comparable because each stereotype involves several different features (for example, some stereotypes are most likely to be observed in the social and academic contexts, some only focus one of these contexts).

The current study investigates American students' liking and approval levels of a CIS who is depicted as having different reticent levels and different face concerns in the scenarios. Emotionally sensitive words are avoided in the scenario descriptions. Other elements except for what were manipulated in each scenario are controlled and comparable. Due to limited and mixed results (Ruble, 2011; Ruble & Zhang, 2013), these research questions are derived for investigation:

Research Question 2: What is the difference in terms of American students' liking level towards a CIS who has different reticent levels and different face concerns across different scenarios?

Research Question 3: What is the difference in terms of American students' approval level of a CIS who has different reticent levels and different face concerns across different scenarios?

Research Question 4: What is the relationship between perceived typicality, liking, and approval for the CIS described in the scenarios rated by American students in general?

### **Other Factors related American Students' Perception of CISs**

According to intergroup contact theory (see Pettigrew, 1998, for further discussion), if American students have previous contact with CISs, they may have a general positive attitude towards the CIS population as a whole, which results in a positive perception of a specific CIS too. Another factor related to American students' perception of CISs' reticence is the perceived norm regarding class discussion. If American students perceive that class participation is the norm favored in the U.S., then perhaps these American students may expect CISs to participate in class discussion. Therefore, these possible covariates (previous attitude toward CISs, and norms about participation in the U.S.) will be tested in this study. These variables are likely to correlate with outcome variables (perceived typicality, liking, and approval). Hence, the third hypothesis is offered:

Hypothesis 3: American students' general positive attitude towards CISs and their perceived norms regarding class participation in the U.S. are likely to correlate with outcome variables.

### **Other Research Question**

Whether or not a fictional CIS will be able to stimulate participants' real feelings about CISs is unclear. In addition, the outcome variables measured in the study may not be directly related to American students' perception of

CISs in their daily life at all. Hence, an open-ended question is asked about American students' general impression about CISs on their campus.

Research Question 5: What are American domestic students' general impressions about Chinese international students at their university?

## **METHOD**

### **Participants and Procedures**

A pilot test was distributed to 92 American domestic undergraduates to test the reliability of key measures. Then the main study recruited 241 American domestic undergraduates (115 males, 125 females, one did not specify gender) with age ranging from 18 to 29 years (majority are from 19 to 21,  $M = 20.11$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ) from a Midwestern university where many CISs are enrolled. All participants earned extra points for completing the study.

The study employed a 2 (reticent or non-reticent participatory) x 2 (positive or negative face concern) between-subjects factorial design assessing CIS typicality, liking for, and approval of a fictional CIS. Participants were randomly assigned to reading one of four scenarios which manipulated the amount of participation (reticent or non-reticent participatory) as well as face concerns (positive or negative face concern) of this CIS named Zhang. In scenario one, Zhang is reticent with positive face concerns in order to earn social approval in class ( $n = 61$ ). In scenario two, Zhang is reticent with negative face concerns to maintain independence in class ( $n = 58$ ). In scenario three, Zhang is non-reticent and participatory with positive face concerns ( $n = 59$ ) while Zhang in scenario four is non-reticent and participatory with negative face concerns ( $n = 63$ ). In order to avoid possible confounding variables, the scenario did not identify Zhang's gender and other background information (the scenarios are available upon request from the corresponding author).

Participants were provided a link to access the online-survey (Qualtrics). First, they completed some questions regarding their general attitude towards CISs. After that, they were randomly assigned to one of four scenarios described above. After reading the scenario, they completed the questions about the typicality of Zhang as a CIS, their liking level towards Zhang, their approval of Zhang's communicative behavior in the class, their general impression of CISs in their university, and perceived norm of participation in the U.S. universities.

## **Key Measures**

The current study used seven-point Likert Scales for most measures where a score of 1 indicated strong disagreement and a score of 7 indicated strong agreement. American students' general attitude toward CISs and perceived norm regarding class participation in the U.S. were measured as covariates. American students' perceived typicality of Zhang as a CIS, liking level towards Zhang, and approval level of Zhang were measured as dependent variables. Scale-reliability analysis in SPSS22 was adopted to assess scale reliability and validity.

*American students' general positive attitude towards CISs* was measured by a seven-point Likert scale created by the authors. The six items showed a reliability of .84. Sample items included: a) I have some friends who are Chinese international students; b) I would like to get to know more Chinese international students; and c) I like having Chinese international students in my classes.

*American students' perceived norm regarding class participation in the U.S.* was measured by three seven-point Likert items created by the authors. The measure showed a reliability of .91. Items included: a) Students in the U.S. like to participate in class discussion; b) Many American students like asking questions and expressing their opinion during class; and c) It is typical for American students to actively engage in class discussion.

*The measure for perceived typicality* was adopted from Zhu (2014). The three-item measure showed a reliability of .94. Items included: a) In this scenario, Zhang is behaving as a typical Chinese international student; b) There are many Chinese international students in the U.S. I know who behave like Zhang when they are in class; and c) Zhang is just like some of my Chinese classmates here.

*American students' liking towards Zhang* was measured by five seven-point Likert items created by the authors. The measure showed a reliability of .88. Sample items included: a) Zhang seems to be friendly; b) If I see some Chinese international students like Zhang, I want to make friends with them; and c) Zhang is someone I want to talk with in the future.

*American students' approval of Zhang's behavior* is measured by five seven-point Likert items adapted from Zhu (2014). The measure showed a reliability of .95. Sample items included: a) I think Zhang's behavior in class is appropriate; b) I think Zhang is behaving respectfully; and c) I approve of Zhang's behavior.

## Qualitative Data Analysis

All participants were asked to complete an open-ended question “What is your general impression about Chinese international students here at (university)?” The current study adopted a thematic-analysis approach to search for patterns in qualitative data about American students’ general impression about CISs. The authors followed three fundamental aspects to thematic analysis suggested by Shank (2006): adopting an inductive approach, employing a feedback system to compare different themes, and examining whether the analysis reaches saturation or not. By doing so, the authors examined specific examples in the data and gathered similar examples together to find the general patterns, then different patterns (themes) were compared and contrasted. Overlapped themes were eliminated after this comparison. After that, the authors re-examined the major themes again to see whether these themes were inclusive enough to cover examples or not.

## RESULTS

### Quantitative Data

The descriptive data and the correlations are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3. The first two hypotheses and Research Question 1 regarding typicality were examined using a two-way ANCOVA. Americans’ general positive attitude towards CISs was considered as a covariate since it was correlated with typicality. Hypothesis 1 predicted a main effect for reticence levels on typicality. The results yielded a significant finding,  $F(1, 236) = 132.55, p < .001, \eta^2 = .35$ . Participants in the two reticent conditions perceived Zhang as more typical ( $M = 5.15, SD = .98, n = 119$ ) compared to Zhang’s typicality rated by participants in the two non-reticent participatory conditions ( $M = 3.28, SD = 1.51, n = 122$ ). The data were consistent with the first hypothesis.

Table 1. Descriptive data ( $M$  [ $SD$ ]) for all conditions ( $N = 241$ ).

Measure	Reticent ( $n = 61$ )	Nonreticent ( $n = 58$ )	Positive face ( $n = 59$ )	Negative face ( $n = 63$ )
Typicality	5.11 (.98)	5.20 (.98)	4.20 (1.57)	4.21 (1.59)
Liking	3.85 (.96)	4.82 (.99)	4.45 (1.04)	4.23 (1.12)
Approval	3.88 (1.10)	5.47 (1.01)	4.70 (1.33)	4.67 (1.32)

Table 2. Descriptive data ( $M$  [ $SD$ ]) for all conditions ( $N = 241$ ).

Measure	Reticent ( $n = 61$ )	Nonreticent ( $n = 58$ )	Positiveface ( $n = 59$ )	Negativeface ( $n = 63$ )
Typicality	5.15 (.98)	3.28 (1.51)	4.20 (1.57)	4.21 (1.59)
Liking	3.85 (.96)	4.82 (.99)	4.45 (1.04)	4.23 (1.12)
Approval	3.88 (1.10)	5.47 (1.01)	4.70 (1.33)	4.67 (1.32)

Note. Reticent = two reticent conditions (condition 1 and 2); Non-Reticent = two non-reticent conditions (Conditions 3 and 4); PositiveFace = two positive-face conditions (Conditions 1 and 3); NegativeFace = two negative-face conditions (Conditions 2 and 4).

Hypothesis 2 predicted a main effect of face concerns rating positive face concern as more typical. The data were not consistent with this prediction,  $F(1, 236) = .07, p > .05$ . Average typicality in the two positive-face conditions ( $M = 4.20, SD = 1.57, n = 120$ ) did not differ from typicality in the two negative-face conditions ( $M = 4.21, SD = 1.59, n = 121$ ). The data were not consistent with the second hypothesis.

The results Research Question 1 regarding the interaction effect of reticence levels and face concerns on typicality was not significant,  $F(1, 236) = .03, p > .05$ . Americans' general positive attitudes towards CISs as the covariate, on the other hand, was significantly related to typicality,  $F(1, 236) = 6.88, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02$ .

Research Question 2 asked whether Americans' liking for Zhang changed across four conditions. According to correlational analysis, American students' general positive attitude towards CISs as whole and their perceived norm regarding class participation in the U.S. were significantly correlated with liking towards Zhang so these two variables were used as covariates in a two-way ANCOVA for investigating this question. The results indicated a significant main effect of reticence levels on American students' liking towards Zhang,  $F(1, 235) = 78.43, p < .001, \eta^2 = .20$ . American students liked Zhang more in the two non-reticent conditions ( $M = 4.82, SD = .99, n = 122$ ) compared to Zhang in the two reticent conditions ( $M = 3.85, SD = .96, n = 119$ ). The main effect for face concerns on liking level was also significant,  $F(1, 235) = 6.15, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$ . The liking level in the two positive-face conditions ( $M = 4.45, SD = 1.04, n = 120$ ) was greater than the liking level in the two negative-face conditions ( $M = 4.23, SD = 1.12, n = 121$ ). The interaction effect of reticence levels by face concerns was not significant,  $F(1, 235) = .99, p >$

.05. In addition, general positive attitude as a covariate was significantly related to American students' liking towards Zhang,  $F(1, 235) = 59.99, p < .001, \eta^2 = .15$ . Another covariate, the perceived U.S. norm regarding class participation was significantly related to liking,  $F(1, 235) = 7.56, p < .01, \eta^2 = .02$ . Those who scored higher on general positive attitude towards CISs and those who considered participation as a normal phenomenon in the U.S. showed more liking towards Zhang.

Research Question 3 asked how Zhang's reticence levels and face concerns influenced American students' approval level of Zhang. A two-way ANCOVA was used to investigate this question. Americans' general positive attitude towards CISs was considered as a covariate since it was correlated with typicality. The results indicated a significant main effect of reticence on approval,  $F(1, 236) = 143.33, p < .001, \eta^2 = .36$ . American students were more likely to approve of Zhang in the two non-reticent conditions ( $M = 5.47, SD = 1.01, n = 122$ ) compared to the two reticent conditions ( $M = 3.88, SD = 1.10, n = 119$ ). However, there was no significant main effect of face concerns on approval,  $F(1, 236) = .56, p > .05$ . Approval of Zhang in the two positive-face conditions ( $M = 4.70, SD = 1.33, n = 120$ ) was not different from approval in the two negative-face conditions ( $M = 4.67, SD = 1.32, n = 121$ ). There was no interaction between reticence and face concerns,  $F(1, 236) = .05, p > .05$ . The covariate, general positive attitude, was significantly related to approval level,  $F(1, 236) = 17.05, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$ , suggesting that the higher scores were on general attitude towards CISs the higher approval level for Zhang.

*Table 3.* Correlation among variables ( $N = 241$ ).

Measures	1	2	3	4
USAttitudes				
NormParti	.12			
Typicality	.13*	.10		
Liking	.41**	.20**	-.32**	
Approval	.21**	.08	-.44**	.68**

*Note.* USAttitudes = general positive attitude towards CISs as a whole; NormParti = American students' perceived norm regarding class participation in the U.S.

\* $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\* $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

Research Question 4 asked about the relationship between perceived typicality, liking, and approval of Zhang in general. Perceived typicality of Zhang was negatively correlated with liking,  $r(239) = -.32, p < .01$ ; perceived typicality was also negatively correlated with approval of Zhang,  $r(239) = -.44, p < .01$ ; liking was strongly correlated with approval,  $r(239) = .68, p < .01$ . The results imply that the more typical a CIS is, the less likely American students would like and approve of this CIS.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that American students' general positive attitude towards CISs and their perceived norm regarding class participation in the U.S. should correlate with perceived typicality, liking, and social approval of Zhang in general. Analysis showed the following significant correlations: American students' positive attitude and perceived typicality of Zhang,  $r(239) = .13, p < .05$ ; positive attitude and liking towards Zhang,  $r(239) = .41, p < .01$ ; positive attitude and approval of Zhang,  $r(239) = .21, p < .01$ ; American students' perceived norm regarding class participation in the U.S. and their liking towards Zhang,  $r(239) = .20, p < .01$ . However, the perceived norm was not correlated with typicality or approval. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is partially supported by the data. If American students have higher general positive attitudes towards CISs, they are more likely to rate Zhang in scenarios as typical of a CIS and more likely to show liking and approval of Zhang. If Americans endorsed in-class participation norm, they are more likely to show higher liking for Zhang.

### **Qualitative Data**

The thematic analysis was used to answer Research Question 5, which yielded two major themes from the data obtained in response to the open-ended question asked in the study: 1) American undergraduates consider CISs' reticence in class as stigma indicating CISs' unwillingness to adjust to the U.S. culture, or 2) American undergraduates recognize the reticence as a potential problem but deal with it in a more open-minded way by taking the CISs' perspective. The details for the two main themes are discussed below:

#### ***Stigmatization***

Under this theme, Americans indicated a general negative tone towards CISs especially about their reticence and unwillingness to talk with Americans. Such negative tone is a stigmatizing process proposed in Link and Phelan's (2001) four-component model of stigma including labeling, stereotyping, separation, losing status and suffering discrimination.

One response indicated "they only associate with other Chinese international students. They have created their own community within the

university and don't strive to intermingle with the domestic crowd." Another participant said "They either keep to themselves or they surround themselves with other Chinese students. I rarely see them break out and join with American students by choice." In both of these examples, American undergraduates emphasized that CISs did not try hard to communicate with domestic students. In these Americans' eyes, CISs were reluctant to communicate with domestic students and never voluntarily chose to make friends with Americans. CISs were labeled as a silent group by Americans.

One response indicated:

*...most of them tend to only talk to other Chinese students, and don't have many American friends. Whenever I see a Chinese student in a group, the group usually consists of other Chinese students. I get the impression that they are unfriendly, and don't like to communicate to other cultures, or don't know how!*

This showed Americans' perception that a typical CIS does not have many American friends, which makes CISs unfriendly in Americans' eyes. Interestingly, CISs are perceived as "don't know how!" to communicate with other cultures instead of lacking the willingness to communicate.

Other comments are more negative and showed strong stereotypes and prejudices. For examples, one participant indicated "They travel in packs, they are rude in classes, they cheat and I know not all of them are like this but the ones I have seen in a few of my classes are." Another only said "Annoying". It is evident that CISs as a whole group are experiencing negative stereotypes.

Some comments emphasized CISs' culturally-isolated experience and question whether CISs add to diversity on their campus:

*They are not friendly and are not here to get to know Americans. They group together with other Chinese students and do not add to or participate in any of my classes. Frankly, I don't understand why there are here. (University) strives to have a diverse campus, but the most diverse people do not even like to participate or get to know others. This does not contribute to diversity.*

This suggested a perceived cultural separation of CISs as "others" from American students who identified with the university identity.

Another participant has an interesting thought about CISs from a macro-level perspective concerned with the U.S.-China relation:

*To be honest a majority of them frustrate me. I have only really talked to a few, and I talked to more when I went to (another local college). To me it seems like many of them here are just here to get an education and leave, which honestly upsets me. Many come here and are very polite and nice people, but just like with any culture there are obnoxious and inconsiderate Chinese students and for some reason they get under my skin the most. I think I am most prejudiced to Chinese students for reasons I can't really explain. Maybe I feel like they take many of our jobs, and take our education back to China, while we as a country compete with China on a daily basis. I can't explain why I have a natural dislike for most of Chinese students but it's something I need to work on.*

Here, the potential competitive relationship between the U.S. and China is addressed and such global tension is reflected in CISs' classroom practice. This participant confessed that he or she did have prejudice against CISs and also admitted that that is the thing he or she needed to work on. Even so, the participant believed that CISs get under his or her skin the most, which is a strong blame that implied CISs' low status in this American students' eyes. Other accusations about CISs' taking Americans' jobs and taking American education back to China suggested that this participant expected maybe there is something which needs to be done to prevent CISs' threat. These accusations could legitimize institutional discrimination against CISs in U.S. universities for students who think along these lines.

In general, the comments about CISs under this theme were consistent with Link and Phelan's (2001) four-component model of stigma in which CISs were labeled, stereotyped, separated, and perceived as the low-status outgroup which should be discriminated against.

### ***Intercultural Communication Competence and Perspective-Taking***

Other comments are relatively positive towards CISs without strong stigmatization. American undergraduates under this theme appreciate CISs' efforts and recognize the potential cultural misunderstanding and linguistic obstacles. All of comments also demonstrate American students' high intercultural communication competence by taking CISs' perspective instead of criticizing CISs' personalities or unwillingness to speak.

One participant indicated: "They want to become friends with domestic students but are afraid because their English isn't that great and domestic students are often rude to them." CISs are not considered as unwilling to communicate with domestic students in this case. Instead, CISs want to

make friends with others but language barriers become obstacles. In addition, it is the domestic students who behaved rudely to CISs (which is so different from the first theme where CISs are portrayed as being rude).

Another said: "I think they are a good addition to (university) and they make our campus even more diverse. However, they don't add much to the classes." This participant still had a negative attitude towards CISs' reticence in classes but such negative attitudes did not make him or her stigmatize CISs (since he or she still thought that CISs contributes to diversity in their university).

One participant discussed how he or she overcame his or her stereotypes about CISs:

*My impression of Chinese international students is there is no distinct behavioral trait they have towards American students. I feel this way because almost all of the Chinese students here act introverted and interested in keeping to themselves at first. However, I have had specifically 3 scenarios happen to me (2 of which occurred while playing basketball on campus) where the Chinese person I dubbed "shy/introverted" ending up being very sociable and relatable. It all depends on the amount of effort both Chinese and American students are willing to go to break the ice.*

Instead of criticizing CISs' personalities (shyness or introversion), this participant argued that both sides need to make the effort to communicate with each other. In addition, with the help of communication like playing basketball together, he or she corrected the previous misunderstanding of CISs.

One participant argued that Americans should take the initiative to make friends with CISs instead of criticizing CISs' shyness and reticence:

*I think that Chinese international students would love the opportunity to make friends with other students. The issue here in my opinion is the American students. American students see international students as "quiet" or "shy". How would you feel in a new country with not many friends and not being able to speak English very well? I think it is the American students' responsibility to reach out to these students. I lead an international bible study every week and the individuals who come are all Chinese and Korean and they are an absolute joy to have. Americans need to broaden their horizons and start talking to these people.*

It is interesting to see the perspective taking in this excerpt in which the participant questioned what if Americans become international students and how they deal with themselves in a foreign culture.

Likewise, one participant said:

*I think it takes a lot of courage to come to a university from across the world. I respect the international students for picking up their lives and moving to a foreign country, I can't imagine how hard that could be. It can be frustrating to have them in class because they don't always understand; however, I empathize how tough it must be.*

The participant recognized CISs' linguistic obstacle but also appreciated CISs' effort to be in a foreign country.

In summary, Americans' responses under this theme showed a clear pattern that many Americans successfully addressed their prejudice and stereotypes with their intercultural communication competence. They wore CISs' shoes and showed cultural empathy, which also contributed to their intercultural communication experience with CISs.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **CISs' Reticence in the U.S. Class**

The results from the quantitative data suggest that CISs' reticence may result in American students' negative perception of CISs. American students agreed that a reticent Chinese international student is typical. The current study also explored potential negative consequences of reticence-related stereotypes in which CISs' reticence is related to less liking and less social approval from their American classmates. Given these perceptions, American students may be reluctant to try to communicate with CISs. If a CIS remains quiet in the classroom, he or she may not earn a positive rating from American classmates, which may finally result in this CIS's feelings of alienation and loneliness. Furthermore, such reticence-related stereotypes held by American students may increase the cultural distance between American and international students and may restrict potential intercultural communication between these two groups. Zimmermann (1995) found that international students' frequency of talking with American students was positively related to international students' communication satisfaction and their adjustment to American culture. Hence, this lack of communication between groups due to reticence-related stereotypes may result in a negative

effect on international students' satisfaction and their academic performance.

### **Typical CISs Were Unwelcome?**

The strong negative correlation between perceived typicality and positive evaluations (liking and approval) of CISs may imply a serious issue in which American students do not welcome a *typical* CIS. The more typical this CIS is, the less favorable the attitudes and social approval this student can receive. In contrast, less typical CISs (like Zhang in the two non-reticent conditions) earn more positive ratings. That is to say, American students feel better to interact with a CIS who gets assimilated into American culture. Domestic students expect CISs to be like domestic students who speak fluent English and express their opinions rather than being quiet in the classroom. However, the central problem is how can you tell a CIS that he or she should *not* perform just like a *typical* CIS in exchange for domestic students' positive perceptions since CISs want to continue to behave as typical CISs for maintaining their identification with their country and other CISs.

This situation creates a dilemma for CISs. They may realize that their American classmates welcome and appreciate their efforts to adjust to American culture by not behaving as a typical quiet CIS. However, CISs may regard such cultural adjustment to transform from typical CISs into non-typical CISs as estrangement from their culture, hometown, and their family. In CISs' eyes, their typicality as CISs may become their important cultural identity to provide them with emotional and social support so they would not easily give up their typicality as CISs. The better solution is that both American students and CISs should compromise with each other. CISs should learn to adjust to American culture step by step without becoming less typical CISs. American students should change their stereotypes about what a typical CIS is so they would not make negative judgment about the classroom behavior of a typical CIS. More importantly, American students should learn that they should not over-generalize a CIS simply depending on whether this student is reticent or not. Americans should also realize CISs' reticence may result from cultural values rather than the lack of the motivation to contribute to the class. Therefore, the staff in international programs should not only encourage CISs to participate in class discussion, but also help American students to understand the cultural explanation of CISs' reticence and to avoid stereotyping based on CISs' reticence.

## **American Students' Perception of CISs' Face**

Compared to the strong reticence manipulation, the face manipulations yielded a relatively weak effect on the dependent variables. Regarding the qualitative data, few comments addressed face concerns at all. The results suggested that Americans' misunderstanding of CISs' reticence in class may result from their limited knowledge about face in Chinese culture or they prefer different types of face concerns. For examples, Americans are concerned with self-face (or negative face) while Chinese are concerned with other-face (or positive face) (see Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Park & Guan, 2006; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991; and Zheng, 1994, for further discussion). Chinese students also may have little understanding about how face operates in American culture and this mutual misunderstanding is likely to result in both sides evaluating each other negatively. Americans may think CISs are overly humble, secretive and shy, whereas Chinese students may conclude that Americans are egotistical, aggressive and disrespectful. In such contexts negative stereotypes are born. An alternative explanation is that a face concern is difficult to be successfully manipulated due to the subtle nature of face. Therefore, future studies should develop and test new techniques to induce face concerns.

## **Stigma and Perspective-Taking Skills**

The qualitative data were consistent with what were observed by Ruble and Zhang (2013) about CISs' reticence. The data also suggested two major themes. Regarding stigma, the evidence demonstrated that CISs were actually labeled as a stereotypically reticent and culturally-isolated group which threatened the university's identity and the U.S. as a whole, which is consistent with the findings from the quantitative data that reticent CISs are not welcomed. However, the qualitative data also indicated that many American participants developed high intercultural communication competence by taking CISs' perspective, which showed a promise for a better future in which CISs and American domestic students could achieve successful communication.

## **Recommendations for What Can Be Done to Improve this Situation**

American colleges and universities are going to jump on the bandwagon for admission of Chinese International Students onto their campuses, they must also embrace the responsibility for creating a climate of respect and friendly cultural exchange between American and Chinese students. Both groups have stereotypes about each other but this study shows that American students may harbor resentment against the

incremental presence of reticent CISs on their campuses. While this study did not measure perceived threat that Americans may hold about Chinese international students, anecdotal evidence of resentment is evident in the open-ended comments showing stigma. So, what can universities do and what are they doing to ensure that this experience of having Chinese students in American classes will enhance cross-cultural understanding rather than contribute to negative feelings and psychological reactance toward the outgroup? For example, the office of international students at the institution where this study was conducted sponsors several activities that are designed to bring domestic and international students together. Many international programs and activities initiated in this institution provided forums to exchange information about health care, immigration, friendship-dating, college sports and how to navigate the U.S. workplace. Even so, this is not enough and hostility still has occurred between domestic and international students in this university community (e.g., Only Chinese students' expensive cars were spray painted at an apartment complex near the university by an unknown assailant). One problem in the way that these programs promoting cultural diversity on campus are conducted is that they target international students and often exclude domestic students. Joint orientation programs for both sides are needed as what was suggested by Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, and Van Horn (2002). However, domestic students may not be interested in participating in such orientations and coercion does not encourage learning. All of these pose a challenge for academic institutions who accept international students into an unfriendly climate.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The current study did not discuss how Americans perceive reticent American students. A question remains about whether anti-reticence resentment is only directed towards CISs or whether it is a pancultural phenomenon. Some people may have negative ratings for anyone who seldom speaks in class regardless of culture and nationality. However, due to Chinese values (which de-emphasize verbal communication) and the prominent stereotypes about CISs, CISs are more vulnerable to negative attribution for reticence. This study does not claim that only CISs suffer due to their reticence. Instead, the study tries to explain how such negative ratings for reticent CISs are caused and what the negative consequences (e.g., stigma) are for a typical reticent CIS. Future studies should investigate how Americans perceive both reticent CISs and reticent domestic students to explore this issue. In addition, the current study only focused Americans'

perception of CISs in class so the future study should examine how Americans perceive CISs in other contexts. We might also ask how CISs perceive American students' expressive communication patterns. Another limitation is: even the study analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data, the data were not integrated together in a systematic way so the study was still not an actual mixed-methods design. This study only served as an explorative study to analyze both types of data in this area while the future study should truly integrate both methods in a more systematic way.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated American domestic students' perception of a CIS who has different reticence levels and different face concerns and explored what are Americans' general impressions about CISs. Reticent CISs were rated as more typical, less likable, and less approved. The strong correlation between perceived typicality, liking levels, and social approval of CISs may imply a serious issue in which American students do not welcome a *typical reticent* CIS. CISs were labeled as a stigmatized group due to their reticence in some Americans' eyes. However, many Americans addressed this issue with developing their intercultural communication competence via taking CISs' perspective. Future studies should investigate both American students and CISs' attributions about domestic and international students' reticence to explore potential cultural differences regarding making negative attributions about communicative reticence in the classroom context. This study concludes that if universities are going to admit increasingly larger numbers of Chinese international students, they should also commit resources to creating a climate of respect between international and domestic students. Most importantly, universities should mobilize *both* domestic and international students to learn what kind of communication behaviors are appropriate in class. On this scorecard, most universities have fallen short. The current study also examined quantitative and qualitative data together in this area while future research should continue this trend to conduct a real mixed-methods study on intercultural communication between American domestic students and CISs.

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