

Academic Adaptation Experiences of Chinese Graduate Students at J. F. Oberlin University

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Abstract

The present study aimed to address following questions: what are the major difficulties faced by Chinese graduate students at J. F. Oberlin University in their academic adaptation; what might be the possible reasons for the academic difficulties; and how do they cope with the difficulties? A qualitative research strategy, using principles of case study, was utilized for the study. Individual semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 15 Chinese students enrolled at the Graduate School of Business Administration of the university. And data collected during the interviews were analyzed under focus questions and themes identified in the literature review and theoretical framework.

The study found that, in adapting to the new academic environment, the Chinese graduate students at J. F. Oberlin University encountered various difficulties, such as attending classes, writing theses, timely graduation and independent arrangement of learning and research. These academic challenges could mainly be attributed to the students' language competencies and their previous educational experiences, financial difficulties, insufficient learning support from the university, as well as gaps between the students' academic expectations and that of professors. In coping with the academic difficulties, most of them adopted a three-step strategy: independent hard working; seeking help from friends and approaching professors for help. The first step, independent hard working, was the major approach.

The study also found that such demographic characteristics, as educational level, age and length of residence in Japan, length of stay in the host university and in the graduate program were related to the students' academic adaptation.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Institutional background to the study

In 1983, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in Japan announced the “100,000 by 2000” plan, which was aimed at increasing the number of overseas students studying at higher education institutions (HEIs) in Japan to 100,000 by the year 2000 (Ebuchi, 1991).

Since then, to recruit more students from overseas has constituted a key component of internationalization of Japanese higher education (HE). It has been valued as a means to facilitate Japan’s intellectual contribution to the international community and to develop mutual understanding as well as academic enhancement of Japanese HE. In order to attract more international students, various reforms have been carried out at both institutional and national levels. These reforms emphasized on the improvement of university education as well as campus services for international students, financial assistance, Japanese language training, and security of student accommodations etc. (Ebuchi, 1991; Mozumi, 1997).

Reforms carried out at the institutional level have dramatically changed university programs, systems, and resource allocations to meet the international students’ needs and to facilitate their cross-culture adaptation. The goal of the “100,000 by 2000” plan was achieved in the year 2003. And there were 123,829 international students (defined as a student from a foreign country, who is receiving education at any Japanese

university, graduate school, junior college, college of technology, professional training college or university preparatory courses and who resides in Japan with "college student" visa status, as defined in Annexed Table 1 of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act.) seeking HE in Japan as of May 1, 2008, of which Chinese students account for more than 60% (JASSO, 2008a). And Japanese government in 2008 set up another goal to boost the number of foreign students in Japan to 300,000 by around 2020.

The dramatic increase in the number of international students and the government's ambition for 300,000 has presented special challenges to Japanese HEIs. There is some research evidence indicating that many host universities, especially private ones with limited financial support from the country, have found themselves lack of resources to meet the demand of increasingly enrolled international students. The resources include accommodations, language training, financial support, administrative and faculty staff capable of educating and assisting international students, etc. (Ebuchi, 1991; Mozumi, 1997).

Meanwhile, international students in Japan, uprooted from familiar environments and support networks and faced with living in a new and dramatically different culture, have not only to deal with academic challenges, language difficulties, but also with new customs, living arrangements and social life etc. Given the shortage of resources to meet their demand, they may have a more difficult time in adjusting to the new environment and the possibilities of an unsatisfactory experience are great.

In order to recruit more international students, there is a need for a deeper understanding of their academic and personal demand by Japanese HEIs. Only with the awareness of real needs of this student cohort universities are able to create a favorable environment for releasing their adjustment difficulties. Although they may encounter some common challenges in living and studying in Japan, international students, pending their personal and cultural background, seeking HE in different Japanese HEIs with particular settings and circumstances, may vary greatly in terms of experienced adjustment problems and level of stress so as to express different needs. Among international students in Japan Chinese students serve as the main source and research indicates that this cohort of students place a high value on the acquisition of knowledge and a degree and support is most needed in their academic life (Jou, 1993; Fukada & Jou, 1996). Therefore, it is both important and pragmatic to study the academic adjustment of Chinese students, which has practical implications for HEIs, for the development and success of the students and for the personnel working for international students.

1.2 Aim of the study

Previous research and studies on Chinese students in Japan have mainly devoted attention to stress or stressors encountered in their overall adjustment, social support for the students and the level of satisfaction with various facets of their transitional experiences. Such factors, as Language difficulties, visa applications, financial pressures, accommodations, and the award of PhD degrees, etc. have been identified as major challenges faced by these students. The work has provided us a whole picture for understanding cross-culture adaptation of Chinese students. However, much of the

research has been dependent on quantitative research methodologies; academic adaptation only accounts for one aspect/part of the investigation, lacking thorough and detailed considerations; moreover, undergraduate and graduate Chinese students have often been treated as a whole population (even in cases of undergraduates and graduates being studied separately, the undergraduate group is more frequently studied).

Therefore, on the one hand, for a better understanding of academic experiences of Chinese students in Japan, academic adjustment of the students needs to be studied in depth, distinguished but not isolated from other adjustment problems. On the other hand, as graduates and undergraduates may differ a lot in terms of age, marital status, learning styles, social skills, support system and financial status, etc., findings based on a mixed population or only on undergraduates may not be representative for graduate students, there is also a need to study adaptation experiences of graduate students separately. Finally, since institutional policies towards international students vary greatly from one university to another, it is limited and dangerous in practice to generalize conclusions drawn on quantitative research to a specific university. Taking all of the above into consideration, instead of carrying out general research, the current study attempts to do a qualitative investigation on Chinese graduate students' academic adaptation in a private university located in the capital of Japan.

The aim of the study is to add to empirical research on academic adaptation of Chinese students in Japan. Moreover, since global research on cross-cultural adaptation of international students has mostly been conducted from western perspectives, which is not adequate for holistic understanding of the issue, the current study also attempts to

contribute to the global literature by providing an empirical study from the Japanese perspective.

The present study will focus on a group of 15 Chinese students enrolled at the Graduate School of Business Administration of J. F. Oberlin University (JFOU) and listen to their voices, explore their specific academic adjustment experiences in a close and detailed way. The study will utilize semi-structured telephone interviews to collect data. Participants in this survey will be a convenience sample of 15 Chinese students enrolled at the Graduate School of Business Administration of JFOU.

With only having 2 or 3 years for graduate study it is important that these students adjust to the new academic culture rapidly so as to learn effectively. The present study attempts to build a bridge for JFOU and its faculty to understand difficulties facing Chinese graduate students by gleaning information from perspectives of the students. It is expected that the findings would contribute to improvement of graduate programs and campus services of JFOU for Chinese students to facilitate their adaptation.

1.3 Research problems

The study attempts to examine the academic adaptation experiences of Chinese graduate students at JFOU by focusing on the difficulties the students encounter in learning and research. Guiding this effort are following questions:

What aspects of academic life do they find the most difficult and stressful?

This question attempts to identify major stressors/difficulties the students encounter in adjusting to the new academic environment.

What might be the possible reasons for the academic difficulties from the students' perspective?

By asking this question, the investigator tries to find out which factors are the roots impeding the students' academic adaptation by causing difficulties in their learning and research. The question also helps to discover how the predictors presented in the International Adjustment Model (specified in 2.2.) are associated with these academic difficulties.

How do they cope with the academic problems identified in the first question?

Students adopting different coping strategies to overcome difficulties may have different propensities for seeking support. Whether a student frequently seeks for help and which of the accessible recourses he or she chooses to use in coping with the academic problems may significantly affect the adaptation outcomes and their satisfaction with university support. By asking this question, the investigator attempts to identify the coping strategies adopted by the students and to find out, how and to what extent social support and learning assistance provided by JFOU are utilized by the students in the coping process.

1.4 Limitations of the study

The current study has several major limitations. Firstly, interviews are conducted with

a small number of individuals (15 graduate students) at a certain university (JFOU); it would hardly be convincing to generalize the restricted scope of findings to other Japanese HEIs of their own distinct academic characters, different sizes, histories, traditions and geographical locations, thus making some specific details of the study unique to our situation.

Secondly, since the present study is most conveniently defined as educational research, the issue will not be studied from the psychological perspective. Thirdly, the research problems are only studied from the students' perspective and the perception of the faculty staff or the university is not included; the students' point of view may not wholly or truly reflect the reality. In addition, while the current study has been purposefully designed to focus on the students' own accounts of their adaptation experiences, there remain the possibilities that the students may not recall important information and there are differences between what the students actually experienced and what they recollect and say of their experiences.

Finally, interviews at the current study were conducted with a convenience sample. The interview materials (including interview questions and a covering letter) were first sent to Professor Tachi by e-mail, who is a professor at the Graduate School of Higher Education Administration; they were then delivered to Professor Kaneyama, who is a professor as well as the Dean of the Graduate School of Business Administration; and Professor Kaneyama finally handed the paper of materials out in class to about 30 Chinese students. The students, having received the paper chose to contact the author on their own willingness and have the telephone interviews voluntarily; thus the

convenience sample based on the ready availability of participants may not be truly representative.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework

In an effort to establish a theoretical framework for the present study, this chapter will discuss some theories and approaches to conceptualizing cross-cultural adaptation, followed by a presentation of the International Academic Adjustment Model proposed by Dunn (2006) for explaining academic adjustment issues of international graduate students.

2.1 Conceptualizing cross-cultural adaptation

This section will look into some definitions, models and theories used for conceptualizing cross-cultural adaptation.

2.1.1 Definition and terms

In defining cross-cultural adaptation the present study follows the approach adopted by Kim, Y. Y (1988), which refers to cross-cultural adaptation as “the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments, establish (or reestablish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments”(P. 31). This concept emphasizes the necessary condition of communication between individuals and the host environment. That is, adaptation takes place in the condition that individuals and the host environment communicate and influence each other reciprocally. It is worth to mention, that the same process are also referred to as “acculturation” and “adjustment”.

In the present study these terms will be used interchangeably.

2.1.2 Theories and models of cross-cultural adaptation

Research related to cross-cultural adaptation has been carried out in fields of different disciplines including psychology, anthropology, sociology and education. In these research and studies various models and theories have been developed to conceptualize cross-cultural adaptation. The main emphasis has been the problematic nature of the cross-cultural experience - whether to view cross-cultural adaptation as stressful and undesirable or as a process of facilitating learning and growth.

Early studies on “*culture shock*” from the psychological and clinic perspective laid an explicit emphasis on the unpleasant effects of cross-cultural experiences on individuals’ physical and mental health. The term of culture shock was first introduced by Oberg (1960), which is defined as “anxiety that results from losing all of our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (P.177) The notion has later been commonly used and developed in different ways.

Paul (2006, P.580) also points out that the early research on culture shock described the experience as a “stress reaction” resulting from disorientation regarding values, norms and expectations resulting from change and adaptation and a “deficit” of resources for an appropriate response.

Adler (1975) offers a more detailed definition of culture shock:

Culture shock is primarily a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one's own culture, to new cultural stimuli which have little or no meaning, and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences. It may encompass feelings of helplessness; irritability; and fears of being cheated, contaminated, injured, or disregarded (P.13).

This definition, again, highlights the negative consequences of cultural shock.

However, there also exist other models emphasizing the learning and growth-facilitating nature of the same process and contemporary approaches have treated the cross-cultural adaptation from more positive perspectives.

In developing *a model of transitional experiences* Adler (1975) argues, that culture shock, being a form of alienation, on the other hand suggests "the attempt to comprehend, survive in, and grows through immersion in a second culture" (P.14). Therefore, the anxiety, stresses, difficulties and frustrations encountered in the culture shock process can also serve as the source of cultural learning and self development. The process of transitional experiences is "a movement from a state of low self and cultural awareness to a state of high self- and cultural awareness" (P.15).

Another example is *the model of culture learning*, which states, that rather than adjusting to the new culture a major task facing a sojourner is to learn the salient characteristics of a second culture (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). *Social skills model* also suggests that culture shock may include positive outcomes by motivating skill-learning response, through which individuals develop language and communicative skills as well as learning appropriate behaviors. To sum up,

cross-cultural adaptation is essentially a process of learning appropriate behaviors, social skills and new culture norms. This approach of socio-cultural adjustment is suggested to be more influenced by factors such as length of time in the host culture, past experiences with cross-cultural relocation, and amount of interaction with host nationals (Ward, 1996, as cited in Ward, 2008).

The stress and coping model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) provides an approach of more relevance to the present study for understanding cross-cultural adaptation. The model has been commonly adopted in studies on international students' response to stress. This model suggests that adaptation experiences may precipitate a state of stress and engage coping strategies. However, levels of stress experienced and coping styles adopted by individuals vary depending on the individuals' cognitive appraisals of the situation as well as the availability of resources.

Stress is defined as a consequence of a transactional process in which people make cognitive appraisals of role demands in a situation. It occurs when the environmental demands are evaluated as exceeding a person's resources for coping with them (Lazarus, 1976; Wan, Chapman & Biggs, 1992). And coping, according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), is "the cognitive or behavioral effort by an individual to exercise control over an external and/or internal demand that is appraised by the individual as taxing or exceeding his/ her resources" (Chataway & Berry, 1989, P.296). The coping resources may include "health and energy, commitments, problem-solving skills, social skills, social support, material resources, locus of control, or existential beliefs" (Chataway & Berry, 1989). Individuals' cognitive appraisals of the situation are

formed through an interaction of multiple factors, including characteristics of the sojourn situation (such as culture distance and social support network) and person-related variables (such as individuals' role skills /competences, past experiences, personal values and goals, and demographic profile).

To understand the adaptation outcomes, a more comprehensive approach might be found in Berry's (2006) study on *acculturative stress* (the term is introduced by Berry as an alternative of culture shock). According to this model, acculturative stress is not entirely negative, but may include a positive force to stimulate long-term change. Acculturation may take place in both non-dominant and dominant cultural groups, and the results (longer term outcomes) may not necessarily be that individuals or groups change to become more like the host society, but "may involve resistance and attempts to change their environments, or to move away from them altogether" (P. 9).

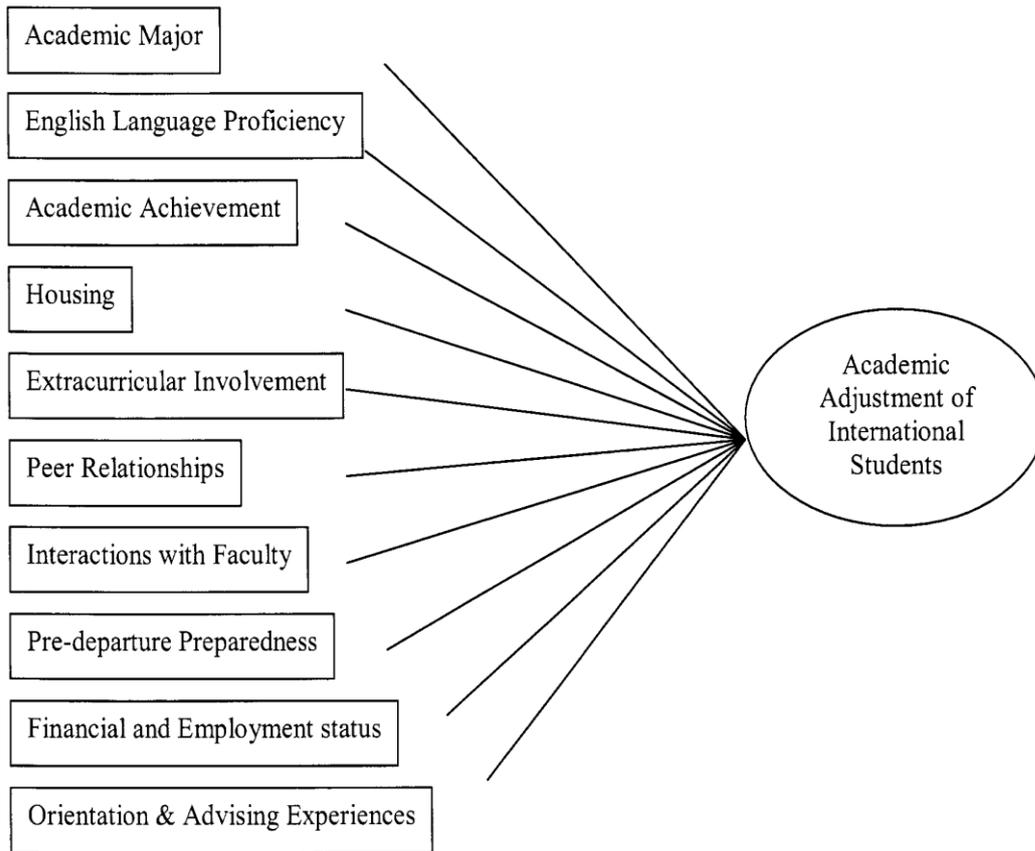
As cross-cultural adaptation is not a linear and unchangeable but a dynamic and vivid experience, various *stage theories* are developed to link the adaptation process to longitudinal sequence of stages. The one most commonly used might be the *U curve hypothesis*. The theory is originally introduced by Lysgaard (1955), who states, that cross-cultural adjustment as a process over time seems to follow a U-shaped curve, an individual enters the process with easy adjustment, followed by a "crisis" of disorientation and confusion, and eventually returns to equilibrium secondary to successful coping. It is further expanded to *W curve* by including the stage of readjustment to home culture (Gullahorn, J. T. & Gullahorn, J. E., 1963). However, empirical studies testing the stage theories have been inconclusive.

The dynamic process of cross-cultural adaptation may result in both pleasant and unpleasant outcomes and it takes place through a complex system of communicative interfaces. Given the range of literature motioned above, it might be expected in the present study, that Chinese mater's students at J.F. Oberlin University would encounter a certain level of stress and difficulties in adapting to a culturally new academic environment. In overcoming academic difficulties the students would adopt varying coping strategies by using social networks and university resources. The process and outcomes of academic adaptation are influenced by a number of intrinsic (personal) and extrinsic (environmental) factors. In consideration of relevance to the current study factors correlated with Chinese graduate students' academic adaptation will be introduced in the International Academic Adjustment Model developed by Dunn (2006) in the next section.

2.2 The International Academic Adjustment Model

Dunn (2006), in her research on the academic adjustment of Chinese graduate students in U.S. HEIs, proposed the International Adjustment Model (see Figure1), which demonstrates ten factors that are correlated with international students' academic adaptation. The applicability of the model was tested in the research using a survey with a population of international graduate students from Mainland China, who are enrolled in a major Midwestern university in the U.S. during the spring semester of the academic year 2005-2006.

Figure 1. International Academic Adjustment Model



A framework proposed by Dunn (2006, P.19)

The current study will adopt this model as a theoretical framework guiding the process of data collection and data analysis. This model is chosen because it is pragmatic and comprehensive. Firstly, this model has been proven applicable with the same population to the present study (however, in different host countries); secondly, it is developed quite recently in 2006; moreover, although the study focus lies on academic adaptation, the model does not ignore the potential influence of other adaptation issues (e.g. interpersonal problems, financial difficulties) on international students' academic adjustment.

Dunn's study with the Chinese graduate students shows that all the factors in this model except academic major are positively correlated with academic adjustment with academic achievement being the strongest predictor. These factors were proven to be valid predictors of academic adaptation for this group. The study also found that older students who had stayed longer in the U.S., at their current university, and in their current programs tended to be more academically adjusted.

The current study adopts the International Academic Adjustment Model as a theoretical framework by changing "English language proficiency" to "Japanese language proficiency" (since the language environment for the studied group is Japanese, either in academic or social life). Guided by the framework the present study attempts to find out, what are the Chinese graduate students' experiences related to each factor and how these experiences combine to influence their academic adjustment at JFOU. Although each of the factors covers a wide range of issues, only part of the issues are examined in the present study according to the needs of answering research questions and the availability of data. Therefore, factors under investigation in the current study could briefly be referred to as follows:

Pre-departure preparedness: stress facing a student and preparations for his or her future life in Japan before departure.

Housing situation: how the students search for accommodations; level of convenience of housing arrangement in terms of study and troubles with the living environment.

Academic major: mainly referring to the relevance of the current major studied by the students to their previous fields of study.

Orientation and advising experiences: information and materials provided by JFOU before departure as well as post-arrival orientation and counseling.

Interactions with faculty: mainly refers to experiences in classroom interactions with instructors and instructions from the adviser/supervisor, communicative obstacles, and the extent a student uses the faculty as a resource for coping adjustment problems and its actual availability. Most importantly, implications underlying the interactions: curriculum, teaching and learning approaches and gaps between expectations of the student and those of the faculty. Differences of the interaction patterns in JFOU from the students' previous educational experiences may constitute a main source of academic stress.

Peer relationships: the focus lies on relationships with fellow students built up through on-campus activities, particularly classroom interactions, cooperation and support in the study process. This may also, to some extent, reflect the teaching and learning approach.

Japanese language proficiency: the self-perceived difficulties of a student in using Japanese in academic and social settings. The student's self-perception may not refer to their actual ability.

Extracurricular involvement: a student's involvement in extracurricular activities, particularly, which are organized and initiated by JFOU- both in terms of content and frequency.

Financial and employment status: the way a student finances his or her living and studying in Japan as well as the status of holding a part or full time job on or off campus. Holding a part time job (mostly off campus) is a common phenomenon among both domestic and international college students in Japan. Therefore, employment status in the current study most possibly means one's part time work. Based on previous Japanese research on Chinese students, it might be expected that this factor would have significant impact on the participants' academic adaptation.

Academic achievement: a student's expectation about his or her academic performance (academic goals) and self-perceived adaptation status based on their actual achievement.

Chapter 3 Literature Review

International students, defined as individuals who temporarily reside in a country other than their country of citizenship in order to participate in international educational exchange as students (Paige, 1990), compose an important group of sojourners crossing cultures. Seeking education in a foreign country, international students are not only confronted with educational adaptation problems shared by local or domestic students but also with stress and problems involved in cross-cultural adaptation.

Previous research and studies on international students have provided abundant knowledge for us to understand the students' adaptation process. Most of them have been conducted in the Western nations, particularly the United States, Britain, and Australia. And Asian students, comprising the main source of international students in these countries, might be the most frequently studied group. This chapter will review the literature, which is relevant to the current study. It will first provide an overview on problems facing international students and their academic challenges, followed by a review of Japanese research and studies relevant to academic adaptation of Chinese students in Japan.

3.1 Adjustment issues of international students

Literature on international students has generally distinguished three domains of adaptation: psychological, socio-cultural and academic adaptation. However, problems of psychological, socio-cultural adaptation are found to be interrelated with those of

academic aspects (Zhou & Todman, 2008). To study academic adaptation first requires a general understanding of problems faced by international students. This part will start with presenting major problems facing international students found in the previous literature and move on to challenges related to their academic adaptation. Finally, it will further discuss some other important issues in relation, such as demographic factors, student expectations and coping strategies.

3.1.1 Problems facing international students

Living and studying in an unfamiliar social and educational culture international students are confronted with a number of problems including loneliness and homesickness, financial pressures, food and accommodations, language barriers, understanding lectures, learning social norms and customs and interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds etc. After reviewing 30 years research dealing with international student adjustment, on the basis of consistency of mention and expressed importance Church (1982) identified the most important problems encountered by international students. They are language difficulties, financial problems, adjusting to a new educational system, homesickness, adjusting to social customs and norms, and for some students, racial discrimination.

Problems experienced by international students are explained and analyzed by some scholars as a series of stressors (Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok, 1987; Fukada & Jou, 1996; Misra, Crist & Burant, 2003; Ying, 2005). A stressor is any condition judged by the student as “requiring some accommodation or readjustment in ongoing lifestyle or

behavior” (Spradley & Phillips, 1972). It could be viewed as “stressful life events that arise due to significant physical, cultural, social, political differences between the sending and receiving nations” (Ying, 2005). Stressors among international students not only have an impact on their physical and psychological well-being but also impede their ability to participate fully in cultural integration and learning experiences.

Fukada and Jou (1996) classified stressors among Chinese students in Japan as five factors: Interpersonal problems, Academic problems, Health/Living problems, Environmental problems and Financial anxiety. The academic problems constitute the focus of the current study. Identified academic stressors and the correlation of academic problems with other factors presented in this study will be further elaborated in the review of Japanese literature.

3.1.2 Challenges related to academic adaptation

In most of the literature, language proficiency is found to be one of the major challenges facing international students in academic adaptation. Such skills as understanding lectures and reading comprehension, note taking, oral communication, vocabulary and academic writing significantly influence on international students’ academic performance (Zhang, 2002; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Janet, 1987; Lewthwaite, 1996; Robertson, Line, Jones & Thomas, 2000; Wan & Xu, 1987).

Academic problems encountered by international students could also be attributed to unfamiliar teaching and learning approaches, uncertainty of academic requirements,

gaps between professors' and students' expectations (Robertson et al., 2000; Zhang, 2002) and failures of the students in utilizing available academic support and assistance (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Zimmerman & Pons, 1986). Underlying these factors are academic cultural differences between the host country and international students' country of origin. Other identified challenges include lack of academic and problem-solving skills, formation of helpful social networks, difficulty in interacting with the faculty and domestic students etc. (Adelman, 1988; Stoyhoff, 1997; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Wan, Chapman & Biggs, 1992).

3.1.3 Other issues: demographic factors, student expectations and coping strategies

Apart from adjustment stress and problems, demographic characteristics, such as nationality, level of education, gender, marital status, education completed in the native country, length of residency in the host culture and academic major are also found to be related to international students' adaptation (Bosher & Rowekamp, 1998; Church, 1982; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Hull, 1978; Vanfossen, 1986).

As is suggested by the U curve hypothesis, stress and difficulties experienced by international students are not necessarily stable across the entire time during the sojourn. Some longitudinal research also shows that international student pre-departure expectations may have influence on their post-arrival adjustment and level of satisfaction. Unmet expectations of international students may be either associated with negative or positive adjustment experiences. While negatively violated

student expectations might lead to poorer adjustment, fulfilled expectations and perceived positive violations (where things turn out to be better than that expected) may be predicted to produce positive evaluations and outcomes (Martin, Bradford & Rohulich, 1995).

Adjustment experiences and outcomes also vary according to different coping strategies adopted by international students. Positive coping strategies tend to result in positive adjustment experiences. Tseng and Newton (2002) identified eight coping strategies adopted by international students for positive adjustment, which include knowing themselves and others, building relationships, expanding their worldview, asking for help, developing cultural and social contacts, establishing relationships with advisors and instructors, English proficiency, and letting go of problems.

It is worth mentioning that social support provides a powerful coping resource for international students adjusting to an unfamiliar culture (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992).

3.2 Japanese research associated with academic adaptation of Chinese students in Japan

By reviewing Japanese literature on adaptation of international, especially Chinese students, this section will identify major difficulties faced by them and discuss some issues in accordance with the theoretical framework. While scholars came to shared opinions and similar findings, contradictory conclusions could also be found in the

literature.

3.2.1 Academic stressors

As is stated in 3.1., based on previous western and Japanese studies on transitional stress of international students, Fukada and Jou (1996) identified stressors experienced by Chinese students in Japan and classified them as five main problem areas. Stressors selected and analyzed for academic problems include: progress in one's research, writing a thesis, a presentation in a major course, classes, the possibility of graduating late or having to remain an extra year, no improvement in one's knowledge of the Japanese language, preparation for a college entrance examination or a graduate course.

The study found that among all the stressors academic stressors scores the highest and are positively correlated with all the other stressors. The findings have several implications: first, most of the stress experienced by Chinese students in Japan may derive from their academic life; second, according to the author, the students place a great value on their academic achievements-acquisition of knowledge and a degree; finally, the students' adjustment status in other aspects may have influence on that of academic adaptation.

3.2.2 Social support and academic adaptation

A large proportion of Japanese literature in relation to adaptation of Chinese students has been contributed to the social support for Chinese students. Social support could

be classified into four dimensions: social embeddedness (the number of members in the social support network and their characteristics), needed support (support required by an individual), perceived support (perceived availability of support) and actual support (support actually received in the past) (Jou, 1994). Previous studies and investigations in this area have provided several implications:

1. Actual support had a positive effect on adjustment. The more support was actually received by the Chinese students, the less stress they experienced and the better their adaptation was (Asakura & Chin, 1993; Jou & Fukada, 1995b). In contrast, the greater the students' need for support, the less adjusted they felt (Jou & Fukada, 1995a).
2. When it comes to their relationships with peer students and the faculty, Jou and Fukada (1995b) in a study on various sources of social support for Chinese students found that the poorly adjusted Chinese students expressed more needs of support from Japanese students; the other foreign students provided most of the support to the Chinese students; and the Chinese students who received more help and support from Japanese professors were better adjusted, while those who thought that the actual support they received from Japanese professors was less than that they needed reported being more poorly adjusted. Since research and study are the main occupation of Chinese students in Japan, the Japanese professors would have more influence than the other sources on the Chinese students' adjustment. Thus, support received from Japanese professors could play a very important role in Chinese students' adjustment.

3. With regard to the adjustment domains, support is most needed in the academic area(including support related to classes, presentations, examinations, learning and research, etc.) and it is also in the academic life that Chinese students are actually receiving the largest portion of help and service from the university (Jou, 1993).
4. While female students with more close friends may receive more social support, Chinese students with less social experience, fewer close friends and more Japanese language difficulties may have difficulties receiving enough support in their academic research as they expected and consequently experience more academic stress (Chen & Takataya, 2008; Jou, 1993).
5. Professors, Chinese counterparts (co-nationals) and sometimes senior students in the university serve as the main sources of support in the students' academic life, while host nationals play a more important role in their socio-cultural integration (Chen & Takataya, 2008; Jou & Fukada, 1995b; Sun, 2004) According to Inoue and Merino (2007), although Chinese students (especially graduates) admit that frequent interactions with Japanese peers(working in the same laboratory, for graduates) are necessary for their academic success, most of their friends, especially close friends remain to be co-nationals. Some Chinese students feel difficult to build up close friendship with Japanese peers and their interactions are mostly superficial (Asakura & Chin, 1993). Apart from having fewer communicative obstacles and the same cultural background, one possible explanation for co-national network as a main source of social support might be

that having experienced similar difficulties co-national could better understand their situation and give practical suggestions.

6. In Nakashima and Tanaka's (2008) research with 12 international students, Japanese social skills perceived by the students include: politeness, especially towards their professors; keeping harmony instead of insisting their opinions all the time; and steps for closeness, which means to take time to be close to others. The students use these skills when communicating with host nationals, with whom they are not intimate, especially with Japanese teachers, to whom they are supposed to show respect. Although these skills have a lot of similarities to Chinese culture, interacting with Japanese students and professors some of the Chinese students still encounter communication obstacles due to culture differences and language barriers (Inoue & Merino, 2007). Failure to understand and use the skills may lead to misunderstanding and influence the students' ability to build up useful social support networks. However, from the author's point of view, the perceived authority of professors, stress and uncomfortable feelings during face to face communications may also, to some extent, prevent the Chinese students to frequently seek the professors for help.

3.2.3 Frequently reported problems among Chinese students in Japanese universities

Japanese language barriers, financial difficulties, accommodations and obtaining a degree (especially for graduates) are reported by the Chinese students in previous

research as the most difficult and stressful experiences. Most of the stress and difficulties faced by the Chinese students were found in their academic life at any given stage of adaptation. And the longer they stay in Japan, the fewer problems they may face in interpersonal relationships (Jou & Fukada, 1995b).

① **Japanese language proficiency**

International research shows that international students, who are more competent in English language, appear to be more smoothly adjusted to the host culture. However, Iwao and Hagiwara (1987) suggested an opposite tendency in the Japanese case, that is, those more proficient in the Japanese language may prove to be less adjusted. This has been confirmed in the consequent research conducted by Takai (1989) and Tanaka, Takai, Kohyama and Fujihara (1994). The situation seems most likely to take place in the interpersonal adjustment rather than academic adaptation. As is explained by Tanaka, Takai, Kohyama and Fujihara (1994), gaining a mastery of the Japanese language could imply that the student would be treated by Japanese as a foreigner who passes from guest to sojourner to intruder, holding an increasingly protective stance as he or she learns more and more about the Japanese culture. As a result, the students no longer receive the special welcome as a “guest” but begin to experience nonaccepting attitudes of Japanese as an “intruder”, which would finally impede their adjustment.

However, not all the research yields negative findings about this relationship. Much of the recent research has testified that Japanese language proficiency correlates positively with international students’ cross-culture adjustment (Inoue & Merino, 2007; Mozumi, 1997; Oka, Fukada & Jou, 1996; Shibata & Yamaguchi, 2002; Sun, 2004).

Especially when it comes to academic adaptation, the findings are consistent with the international research (as is specified in the first section of literature review). Japanese language barriers are among the major challenges faced by Chinese students in learning and research, in interactions with the faculty, and in building relationships with domestic students (Chen & Takataya, 2008; Inoue & Merino, 2007; Mozumi, 1997; Oka, Fukada & Jou, 1996).

② Financial difficulties

Compared to China, Japan has an incredibly high cost of living. Many self-financed Chinese students, who account for around 90% of Chinese students in Japan (JASSO, 2008a), have to work part time to finance their living and study. Holding a part-time job takes both time and energy away from learning and serves as one of the major reasons for academic stress and difficulties experienced by self-financed Chinese students. By contrast with those relying on private sources for funding, scholarship recipients prove to be better adjusted, since they are likely to have fewer worries about financial problems (Mozumi, 1997; Oka, Fukada & Jou, 1996; Sun, 2004; Tanaka, Takai, Kohyama & Fujihara, 1994; Xu & Kageyama, 1994).

Although Japan has been taking steps to improve financial support for international students through various channels, with the large amount of international enrollments, the available financial aid remains limited and competitive for Chinese students, especially for those enrolled at private universities. For instance, scholarships awarded to international students by the Japanese government in 2007 were fivefold of that in 1983, while the number of international students in 2007 was 11 times more than that in

1983. The percentage of scholarship students to the total number of international students actually decreased from 20% in 1983 to around 8.5 % in 2007 (Shao, 2008).

Although most of the Japanese literature has pointed out the financial difficulties and consequent burdens of part time jobs with negative effects on the Chinese students' academic adjustment, one could not ignore the possible positive influences of part time employment (in particular, on-campus employment) on the students' academic life. Some research evidence shows that holding a part-time job off campus tend to be associated with negative effects on academic outcomes, such as college GPA, knowledge of a field or discipline, timely graduation, and the probability of enrolling in graduate or professional school, while part-time employment on campus has more positive impacts on these outcomes by enhancing the students' involvement and integration in the institution (Ernest and Patrick, 1991).

③ Accommodations

Japan has a very high density of population (especially in the capital, Tokyo) and the expense on accommodations is particularly high for most of the Chinese students with financial pressures. Therefore another major challenge facing Chinese students is to find economic accommodations (Ebuchi, 1991; Mozumi, 1997; Shao, 2008).

Student housing set up by public corporations and schools in Japan is much cheaper than those privately rented flats or apartments. However the availability of these public accommodations is limited. As is shown in Figure 2, there were only 24.3% of international students living in the public housing leaving the rest of them to live in

privately rented accommodations (JASSO, 2008b).

The main factor determining the rent is the distance from the center of the city and the nearest railway station. The closer the apartment is, the higher the rent would be. Private accommodations are usually rented through specialized real estate agents and as a rule in Japan, unfurnished. The students may have to buy the furniture themselves. Moreover, rental contracts usually require the co-signing of a guarantor and various fees and deposits are required (Shao, 2008). Therefore, Chinese students usually have a difficult time searching for suitable (both economic and convenient) accommodations.

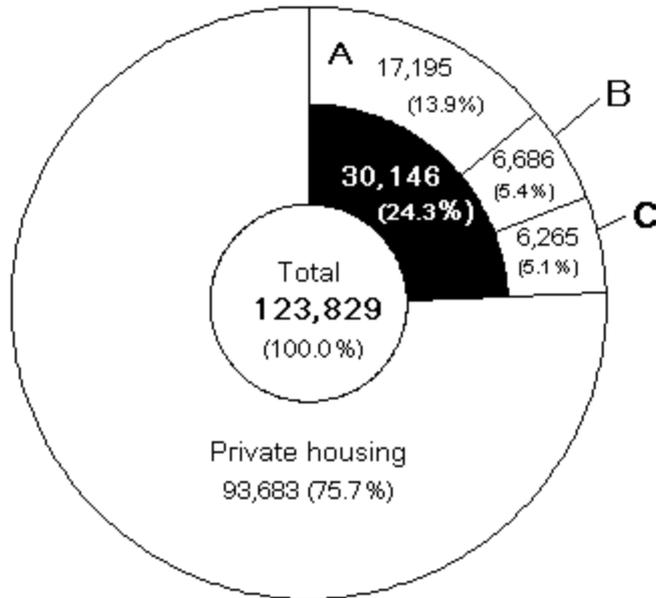
With respect to the relationship of accommodation types with Chinese students' adaptation, Chen and Takataya's (2008) study indicated that Chinese students living in the private housing are receiving more support in socio-cultural adaptation but less support in research and learning compared to their counterparts living in public housing. And the reason, according to Chen and Takataya, might be that the public accommodations set up only for international students (A and B in Figure 2.), to some extent, isolated the international students from Japanese nationals.

Figure 2. Number of International Students by Housing (as of May 1, 2008)

A. International student housing set up by schools

B. International student housing set up by public corporations, etc.

C. General student housing set up by schools



(Unit: person)

(JASSO, 2008b)

④ Timely graduation/ obtaining a degree

Chinese graduate students in Japan experience the most stress in graduation/obtaining a degree among all the academic problems. Obtaining a PhD degree, especially in the fields of social science and humanities is extremely difficult for graduate students in Japanese universities (Kitamura & Umakoshi, 1981; Umakoshi, 1991 & 1997), while obtaining a Master's degree is relatively less difficult.

Umakoshi (1997, PP.264-265) explained the problem as follows:

One of the major complaints among foreign students in Japan had been the extraordinary effort required to obtain a doctorate degree. The academic tradition was that a doctorate degree should only be awarded for major contributions to the field. To foreign students, the tradition was not only unreasonable but also created practical difficulties when they returned home – since they were unable to present any formal recognition of their training.

We should note that this tradition was already gradually changing in the

natural sciences and engineering. In these fields, the concept of the academic degree was moving towards the American Ph.D. model. The presence and the needs of foreign students helped to accelerate this trend. MESC also took various measures to encourage this move...

In Japanese HE the award of PhD degrees is based on strict evaluation with extremely high standards. Moreover, as is stated by Shao (2008), traditionally, only the well-established professors were honored with PhD degrees. As a result, only a limited number of international PhD students are qualified to be awarded PhD degrees after the completion of study, which becomes a major disadvantage of the students for future career development. In order to obtain a degree, more and more international PhD students choose to extend their study for one or two more years or even longer.

Besides the award of PhD degrees, Umakoshi (1991) and Mozumi (1997) also pointed out other problems with respect to Japanese HE for international students, such as the lack of systematic guidance and frequent interactions between students and professors, little integration of general and specialized education and too much attention devoted by the professors to research rather than teaching.

Chapter 4 Methodology

The current study utilizes a qualitative research strategy and a case study design to explore the academic adjustment experiences of Chinese graduate students in Japan. Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted for collect data. In this chapter, the research strategy, research design, methods of data collection and analysis adopted in the present study will be discussed, followed by an introduction of the research site and participants.

4.1 Qualitative research strategy

Quantitative and qualitative research strategies constitute alternative, but not mutually exclusive approaches to social investigation. The fundamental differences between these two approaches are traditionally explained in terms of their general orientation to social research, epistemological foundations and ontological basis.

Quantitative research could be constructed as a research strategy that emphasizes quantification (e.g. numerical and statistical data) in the process of data collection and analysis, which entails a deductive theory-testing approach; has incorporated the practice and norms of the natural scientific model (positivist epistemology) and embodies an objectivist view of reality as external to social actors (Bryman, 2004).

By contrast, qualitative researchers generate rich verbal and textual data to represent the social environment by using observations that yield detailed, thick description;

inquiry in depth; interviews that capture direct quotations about people's personal perspectives and experiences; case studies; careful document review, etc. (Patton, 2002, P. 40). The qualitative research paradigm usually entails an inductive exploratory approach; requires social scientists to understand the subject meanings held by actors and hence to interpret their actions and social world from their points of view (interpretivist epistemology); and embodies a constructivist view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individual's creation (Bryman, 2004).

Either quantitative or qualitative approach has distinct strengths for social research. The quantitative approach facilitates comparison and statistical aggregation of the data collected from a great many people and "gives a broad, generalizable set of findings presented succinctly and parsimoniously" (P.14). Compared to quantitative methods, the qualitative research strategy facilitates study of issues in depth and detail, produces rich data and detailed information about a smaller number of people and cases, without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis (Patton, 2002).

The qualitative research strategy seems to be more suitable for the current study, which attempts to answer the research questions by gaining detailed information from the experiences told by a small group of students and to understand the phenomenon of academic adjustment from their perspectives. It is expected that by using this approach, the present study could facilitate in-depth understanding of the participants' academic adaptation experiences as well as the case being studied. Moreover, based on the rich and unpredetermined data collected from the participants, this qualitative study attempts to explore, to what extent the theoretical framework proposed and

testified in Dunn's (2006) quantitative survey could be applied to the specific case.

4.2 Case study design

The present study utilizes a case study design, which explores the academic adjustment experiences of Chinese graduate students in the case of JFOU. Case studies are “research that provides a detailed account and analysis of one or more cases” (Johnson and Christensen, 2008, P.406). The case study research is concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question (Bryman, 2004).

Three categories of case study can be identified in terms of their broad purpose, which are intrinsic, instrumental and collective case studies (Stake, 1995 as cited in BERA, 2009). In an instrumental case study the study of the particular case is “to attempt to understand something else; the case study is a means to an end not an end in itself. The researcher might wish to focus on a case study as an instance of a wider phenomenon in order to obtain a better general understanding of it.”(BERA, 2009) Within this category, there are two subcategories: exploratory case studies, described by Bassey (1999) as theory seeking and explanatory case studies as theory testing. The current study might most appropriately be described as an instrumental case study, because besides analyzing the particular nature of JFOU, the study also attempts to gain better understanding of the academic adaptation experiences of Chinese graduates in Japan by using JFOU as an instance, that is, to whether issues. Furthermore, it is an explanatory case study, which could be used to testify, whether and to what extent the International Academic Adjustment Model as a theoretical framework is applicable for

the specific case in the Japanese context, and to support previous literature by generating correspondent findings.

4.3 Semi-structured telephone interviews

The methods of data collection typically associated with qualitative case study research are interviews, observations and documentary analysis (BERA, 2009). In the present study, the majority of the primary data, which reflected the personal understandings and opinions of the participants, was collected by using semi-structured telephone interviews.

An interview, designed for the purpose of improving knowledge, is a special type of conversational interchange, where one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions. It has to be planned and prepared for like other research activities. And for semi-structure interviews, what is planned is a deliberate half-scripted interview with questions only partially prepared in advance (Wengraf, 2001). Although the interviewer prepares a predetermined interview guide, semi-structured interviews unfold in a conversational manner, which offers participants the chance to explore issues they feel are important. On the one hand, the prepared interview guide increases the comprehensiveness of the data and makes data collection somewhat systematic for each participant; on the other hand, the outline form of topics and issues as well as the conversational manner mentioned above ensure the flexibility in the way issues are addressed by the interviewees (Patton, 2002).

Therefore, semi-structured interviews were judged to be appropriate and useful for the current study to gather in-depth data related to the research questions in the participants' own words. To facilitate a deeper investigation of the general research questions, an interview guide with ten interview questions (Appendix I) was formulated in advance on the basis of the International Adjustment Model. By utilizing this approach, an appreciation of each participant's perspectives on the interview questions was gained.

The interviews were conducted on telephone because the author was in Norway, while the participants were in Japan when the interviews took place. The paper of interview guide together with a covering letter (Appendix II) written in both Chinese and English was handed out by the end of April, 2009 to around 30 Chinese graduate students at JFOU with the help of Professor Tachi and Professor Kaneyama. The materials were first sent to Professor Tachi by e-mail, who is a professor at the Graduate School of Higher Education Administration; they were then delivered to Professor Kaneyama, who is a professor as well as the Dean of the Graduate School of Business Administration; and finally, on 27th, April, 2009, Professor Kaneyama handed the materials out in class to the Chinese students. The students, having received the paper, contacted the author on their own willingness and had the telephone interviews voluntarily. Fifteen students contacted the investigator and interviews were conducted with them in Chinese between April 30th and May 25th, 2009 with each lasting for approximately 30-40 minutes.

Most of the interviews took place between 20 and 23 o'clock of current local time in

Tokyo, while the interviewees were at home. Telephone interviews were conducted using Skype. Two interviews were interrupted for a few minutes due to internet connection problems, but it did not impede the interactions between the investigator and the interviewees. All the interviewees were highly cooperative and conversations were unfolded in a friendly atmosphere. Following-up questions with respect to the employment status-on campus or off campus, which were not precisely addressed in the first two interviews, were sent to the interviewees (Amy and Brenda) on 22nd of May by e-mail and responses were received one day after.

4.4 Method of data analysis

Data deriving from qualitative interviews usually take the form of a large amount of unstructured textual materials, which are not straightforward to analysis. And there are no clear-cut rules about how qualitative data should be analyzed. A key process in approaches to qualitative data analysis is coding, “whereby data are broken down into component parts, which are given names” (P.542) and categories are generated in the process (Bryman, 2004). In the current study, the investigator coded participants’ answers by extracting significant statements and phrases that were directly related to the interview questions and grouped them into categories. Relationships between categories were explored in such a way that hypotheses about connections between categories emerge.

As is shown in Appendix I, the interview guide is composed of ten questions. Questions 1 to 6 were designed to examine six of the factors identified in the

International Academic Adjustment Model as factors associated with Chinese graduate students' academic experiences; they are "pre-departure preparedness", "housing situation", "orientation and advising experiences", "extracurricular involvement", "financial and employment status" and "academic achievement"; questions 7 to 9 are key questions that are directly related to research questions of the current study; and the last question is about the participants' suggestions towards further development of the university support. With respect to the other four factors in the International Academic Adjustment Model, "academic major" is aware because all the participants are enrolled at the Graduate School of Business Administration of JFOU; and "interactions with faculty", "peer relationships" as well as "Japanese language proficiency" are referred to in different ways in the process of interviews. In analyzing data, questions are organized around interrelated themes, and similar answers for each question are extracted, summarized and categorized so that the key data are available at a glance for systematic observations (there may be a certain level of overlapping or cross references among responses to each question). Findings are then discussed to answer the research questions of the study.

4.5 The research site

JFOU is a private university located in Machida, Tokyo, which has a strong link to China in its history of development. The university has a tradition of recruiting Chinese international students and has set up a relatively well developed system of supporting Chinese students, which account for more than 80% of the international student enrolments. The university has 401(as of May 1, 2008) Chinese students on

campus, while about one third of them are graduate students.

The Graduate Division of JFOU was founded in 1993, originally consisting of a single program - the Graduate Program in International Studies. It has been gradually expanded to include six graduate schools: the Graduate School of Business Administration, the Graduate School of International Studies, the Graduate School of Language Education, the Graduate School of Psychology, the Graduate School of Higher Education Administration, and the Graduate School of Gerontology. One hundred and forty (140) out of more than 500 graduate students at the Graduate Division of JFOU are international, while Chinese students account for 95% of the international enrollments. The female to male ratio is 3:2. The majority of international students are enrolled at the first three graduate schools. And the Graduate School of Business Administration, where 95% of the 80 students are international, enrolls the most Chinese students (more than half of the overall enrollments) among all the graduate schools.

The Graduate Division offers for regular students 2 year Master's program and 3 year PhD program, which are mainly taught in Japanese. Although there are also some possibilities for international students to complete part of their coursework and write their theses/dissertations in English, all the Chinese students under investigation have chosen Japanese language as their working language.

Master's students are required to complete a minimum of 30 credits of graduate-level course work (4 credits of individualized tutorial by a thesis supervisor who is assigned

to the student after admittance into the graduate school), while for PhD students, except an individualized tutorial course, no other coursework is required. But in the event that classroom study with other graduate students is desired, the graduate school do offer some graduate courses taught partially in English (JFOU, 2009).

The characteristics or the aim of graduate education at JFOU are stated by the dean of the graduate school (Kazuo Koike, 2009) as follows:

... In order to prepare our graduates to respond to the diversity and complexity of modern society, we must ensure that they have solid disciplinary foundations coupled with a broad and complex knowledge base. Let us take a pyramid as a comparison. Broad, interdisciplinary knowledge forms its base, and advanced specialized knowledge corresponds to its elevation...

In the past, there was a tendency in graduate schools to over-emphasize research, but in recent years there has been a widely felt demand for an emphasis on education. However, our graduate school has from the time of its inception placed due emphasis on education as part of its policy of maintaining a proper balance between education and research. This fruitful tradition will continue to guide the Graduate Division in the future.

...We are not content merely to transfer knowledge or information. True education can only take place in the context of human relations. We expect our students, in their relationships with faculty, to learn and grapple with their research in such a way that their original research goals are met. At the same time, we also endeavor to promote and provide an educational and research environment that facilitates student learning and makes it easy to produce research results.

Intentions could be found in the statement to integrate general and specialized education; to maintain a proper balance between teaching and research; to encourage students to learn as much as they can from professors and to inspire full use of the

university resources by the international graduate students.

With respect to the financial aid, the university has a partial scholarship program for a limited number of selected students; however, for the graduate school to better evaluate and select scholarship recipients, financial aid for PhD students provided by the university is only available after completion of the first year's study. Other types of financial support provided by organizations such as JASSO, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture, etc. and various civic groups are also open for application but they are highly competitive.

4.6 Participants

Participants in the current study are five male and ten female Chinese students aged from 23 to 29 enrolled at the Graduate School of Business Administration of JFOU. The demographic information of the participants is demonstrated in Table 1 in the sequence of interviews. Pseudonyms are used referring to the participants for the assurances of participant confidentiality. One male participant (Ken) did not provide some of his demographic information and the lacking information is marked with “/”.

Table 1. Profile of the participants

Degree 1.-Bachelor degree in Business Japanese

Degree 2.-Bachelor degree in Japanese Language and Literature

Degree 3.-Bachelor degree in Business Administration

Participant	Gender	Age	Marital status	Level of education	Current year of study	Length of stay in JFOU	Length of stay in Japan	Highest degree obtained before coming to JFOU
1. Amy	Female	29	single	PhD	4th y.	5 y. 7 m.	5 y. 7 m.	Degree 2.
2. Brenda	Female	26	single	PhD	1st y.	3 y.	3 y.	Degree 1.
3. Carl	Male	25	single	PhD	1st y.	3 y.	3 y.	Degree 2.
4. Daisy	Female	25	single	Master's	2nd y.	2 y.	2 y.	Degree 1.
5. Ella	Female	25	single	Master's	1st y.	8 m.	8 m.	Degree 2.
6. Fiona	Female	25	single	Master's	2nd y.	2 y.	2 y.	Degree 2.
7. Grace	Female	27	single	PhD	3rd y.	4y. 5m.	4y. 5m.	Degree 1.
8. Henry	Male	24	single	Master's	1st y.	8 m.	8 m.	Degree 2.
9. Ivy	Female	24	single	Master's	1st y.	8 m.	8 m.	Degree 1.
10. Justin	Male	24	single	Master's	1st y.	8 m.	8 m.	Degree 2.
11. Ken	Male	/	single	Master's	1st y.	over 1 y.	over 3 y.	/
12. Lynn	Female	23	single	Master's	1st y.	8 m.	8 m.	Degree 2.
13. Maggie	Female	23	single	Master's	1st y.	8 m.	8 m.	Degree 1.
14. Nancy	Female	24	single	Master's	1st y.	8 m.	8 m.	Degree 1.
15. Oliver	Male	26	single	Master's	1st y.	8 m.	8 m.	Degree 3.

Chapter 5 will present findings from data collected in the interviews.

Chapter 5 Data Analysis

This chapter will analyze the data collected in the interviews by grouping, summarizing and categorizing similar responses from the participants to each question.

Findings will be presented in the sequence of interview questions and be organized in the form of eleven corresponding categories, which include: pre-departure preparedness; housing situation; orientation and advising experiences; extracurricular involvement and peer relationships; financial and employment status; academic achievement; academic difficulties; reasons for academic difficulties; coping strategies and the participants' suggestions towards further development of the university support.

5.1 Pre-departure preparedness

The participants' preparations for the future study and stay in Japan and the stress they felt before departure could be mainly divided into two categories, which are stress related to living independently and relative preparations, and stress associated with future study in JFOU and relative preparations. The two aspects will be presented in this part.

① Stress deriving from worries about living independently and relative preparations

Fourteen participants except Ken mentioned that before leaving for Japan, they were

worried about “living independently” in a foreign country and “speaking Japanese” in everyday life. Their pre-departure preparation is mainly about clothes, food, medicine, books, as well as practice of Japanese language and learning Japanese culture and customs.

Ken had been living in Japan for a long time before he was admitted by JFOU and he “had already been well settled down in Japan”, thus did not encounter any stress or difficulties in life arrangement.

② Stress deriving from worries about future study in JFOU and relative preparations

Eight participants expressed their tension of future study in JFOU. These participants were afraid that they could not adjust to the academic life in JFOU smoothly. And they prepared by briefly reading some relevant literature and books in this field. Nevertheless, the eight participants later found that their preparations were far from enough for them to understand the teaching content, to read and to compose academic theses after arrival.

Fiona said that “I only superficially referred to this field; it is far from enough for me to understand the teacher and to write.” Ivy also mentioned that “I searched on-line for some relevant articles and read them. However the preparation was too limited.” And Nancy noted:

I was worried for the lack of basic knowledge on the future field of study, because my undergraduate education was completed in Japanese language and I knew little about business administration. So I briefly read a few books

to gain some basic knowledge in this field.

5.2 Housing situation

Housing situation was examined in the interviews in the following three aspects: the process of renting a room, accommodation types and the participants' satisfaction with housing services.

① Renting a room

All the participants searched for accommodations by themselves through real estate agents and most of them used the information provided by the university. They consider that the process of searching for accommodations is troublesome but the information provided by the university is quite useful.

The representative response is:

The university provided detailed introduction and contacts of many reliable real estate agents. We had a variety of choices when looking for accommodations (of course, the process was somewhat annoying because many cheap apartments were not near the university). I and most of my classmates found our places using the information provided by the university. It is really useful (Lynn).

② Accommodation types - Convenience or economy

Most of the participants found it difficult to rent both economic and convenient housing in terms of the distance from the university. Only two students-Brenda and Maggie managed to live in the International student housing set up by public corporations, with which they are satisfied both in terms of convenience and economy; But as a rule, they are only eligible to rent the current apartments for three years and

after three years they have to search for a new place and move out, which they consider annoying.

Among the rest of the students, who all live in the private housing, only three of them (Justin, Nancy and Oliver) live nearby the university with relative higher rent so that it is convenient for them to go to school.

The other ten participants chose to live at cheaper places for saving money but they spend longer time on the way to the university. Although they feel that it is not convenient to go to school from where they live, only two participants, who live the farthest (have to spend more than one hour on the way), view this as a problem negatively affecting their study. Fiona said:

The cheap housing I found is quite far away from the university. I have to travel for at least one and a half hours to go to school; and during the rush hours the transportation is always crowded. It is really a waste of time, while I am busy at study.

And similarly for Carl:

Cheap housing I could find was usually far away from the university. Where I live now is cheap to rent but I have to spend more than one hour on the way when going to school. This is what I feel inconvenient. Anyway, I rent it because it is cheap. Living in Japan is expensive; I have to save money as much as I can.

③ **Housing services**

All the participants are very satisfied with the housing services. However, four of them mentioned about noise problems. For example, Brenda said that “The accommodations in Japan are poorly insulated from noise; sometimes I cannot fall asleep at night due to

the noise.” And Daisy had the similar problem: “The person living upstairs always makes a lot of noise. I complained several times but the problem, still, has not been solved.”

5.3 Orientation and advising experiences

This part will look into how the participants are satisfied with university orientation and advising towards living arrangement in Japan as well as for the graduate study in JFOU, followed by their suggestions in this aspect.

The participants are very satisfied with the university orientation and advice on living arrangement in Japan. They said that the university provided quite a lot of useful, detailed information and advice on how to live in Tokyo - information with respect to housing, food, transportation, medical treatment, assurance, part time work, entertainments, major events, and introduction of the university facilities and area around the university etc.

When it comes to the orientation for the graduate study, they pointed out, that they have got useful advice on course selection (guided by the advisor), information regarding facilities used for study and introduction about departments serving the international students etc. However, more practical advice designed for every individual student in learning and research as a graduate student in JFOU based on their diversified background and specific characteristics, detailed information about professors that might become their supervisors or instructors, as well as pragmatic

vocational counsel are greatly desired by over half of the participants. For instance, Henry commented that “Every student is different, has different problems and demands. If they treat us as a homogeneous group, how can I get genuinely helpful and suitable advice?” And Ivy also said that “The suggestions and advices on study sometimes were too general to solve my problem.”

And most of the participants suggested, advices given by the Chinese graduate students, who share the same major as them but are senior/junior to them and experiences of these students should be added to the orientation. They hope to know about “practical experiences of senior Chinese students” and to listen to “their advice about how to adapt to the new environment effectively”. According to them, the information and advices that they have received from these students with respect to studying and living is very useful and helpful because they are facing many similar problems, difficulties and sometimes have the same interest and demands.

5.4 Extracurricular involvement & peer relationships

This part will start with the participants’ attitude to relationships with peer students and their friendship networks. It will further move on to the status of their involvement in extracurricular activities in terms of content and frequency.

① Peer relationships and friendship with nationals

All the participants mentioned that they are satisfied with their relationships with classmates because the absolute majority of their classmates are Chinese. However,

for the same reason, they have few chances to get to know Japanese students at school. Most of them expanded social networks by their own effort. They usually make the acquaintance of Japanese people at work, through their friends (Japanese friends of their friends) or by involving in extracurricular activities. For instance, Ken and Maggie both noted that “I knew most of the Japanese friends out of the university, mostly at work.” And Grace said: “I got to know most Japanese friends through social events.”

All of them expressed their willingness and intentions to make friends with Japanese. And over half of them talked about their disappointment with the unexpected fact that they have “too many” Chinese but only few Japanese classmates. For example, Henry said:

There are few opportunities to get to know Japanese. I go to school, where the absolute majority of classmates are Chinese. Even if I want to make friends with them, I do not know how. Most Japanese friends of mine are those who I got to know before coming to Japan. And after I came, when we went out together, I made acquaintance with some of their friends.

All the participants have made some Japanese friends in various ways mentioned above. Meanwhile, the majority of them feels comfortable communicating with their Japanese friends and found them helpful in providing useful information and deepening their understanding of Japanese culture and society. Nevertheless, for all of them, close friends remain co-nationals, that is, their Chinese peers.

There are three obstacles identified by the participants in communicating and making friends with Japanese nationals: one is Japanese language barriers, different way of

thinking (for instance, Japanese seldom express their opinions directly, because they think it is rude; therefore, some participants do not know the implications underlying the words of their Japanese friends and cannot figure out their real thoughts.) and the last but not the least: according to most of the participants, although Japanese people “appear to be polite and friendly”, they “always keep a distance” from the Chinese students and only maintain a “superficial relationship” being reluctant to get closer.

② **Involvement in extracurricular activities**

The status of involvement in extracurricular activities differs greatly among participants. They could be roughly divided into two categories.

The active participants are Amy, Carl, Daisy, Ella, Grace, Maggie, Nancy. They take active part in different kinds of extracurricular activities and are fairly satisfied with their extracurricular involvement. All the scholarship recipients interviewed and three of the PhD participants (except Brenda, who work full time) fall into the first category.

All the participants in this category except Carl, Ella and Grace, are involved in both extracurricular activities organized by the university (such as school clubs or associations and various university events, such as parties, trips, visits...) and those initiated by themselves or their friends. For example, Nancy talked about her experience: “I am a member of club of tea ceremony and participant in every event, trip (including study trips) or party organized by the university; besides, I go out with friends and take part in different city events with them.”

Carl, Ella and Grace seldom take part in extracurricular activities organized by the university. However, they frequently involve in different social events.

Carl said: I am satisfied with my extracurricular life. I am not a school club member and seldom participant in school events because I am busy with work and study and also, do not like to be restricted. If I feel like doing something, I just gather up all my friends and we do whatever we want-short distance trips, parties, etc...In this way you are free to decide what you want to do or where you want to go.

And Ella responded: I do not take part in school events, there are not many extracurricular activities for international graduate students and even some events are organized, at the time I may have to work or stud. But Japan celebrates a number of different kinds of festivals and I actively engage in them. Therefore, I am satisfied with my extracurricular life.

Grace is very satisfied with her extracurricular activities but she shows little interest in those organized by the university. Instead of attending school clubs, she is a member of a social club on Japanese poems and takes active part in activities organized by the Japanese network of Chinese students. Besides, she travels around Japan using longer holidays and goes for short distance trips with Japanese and Chinese friends. In her words: “The university does organize some, although not many, events for us, but I am busy with my own arrangements, do not have time to participant.”

The other eight of the interviewees are relatively passive participators. They are not quite satisfied with their extracurricular involvement. They seldom take part in the extracurricular activities organized by the university. Most of them had a feeling that “there are not many extracurricular activities designed for graduate international students in the university” and on the other side, many of them are too “busy with part

time work and study” to participate while most of the events take place.

What is more, they are so busy with work, study and life arrangements that they rarely have time or chances to explore or expand their social life out of the university. For example, Brenda and Ken both noted that “I am really busy with study and still have to work a lot, so I do not have much time for extracurricular activities.” Justin also said that “I nearly do not take part in any extracurricular activities in the university. I work, study and arrange my living, do not have much time and energy for it.” And Henry mentioned that “There are few events organized by the university. Most of the time, I just look around alone.”

5.5 Financial and employment status

This part will look into how the participants fund their study and living in Japan as well as the employment status of these students. The participants are divided into two categories according to the source of funding, and employment status refers to the jobs held by the participants- full time or part time; off campus or on campus.

① Financial status

The participants are categorized into two groups based on their financial status.

Six of the participants (Amy, Daisy, Ella, Grace, Maggie, Nancy) are scholarship recipients. Amy and Daisy are receiving full scholarship, which could almost cover all the tuitions and fees as well as living expense. The rest are receiving partial

scholarship, which could only cover part of their living expense.

It is worth mentioning that Brenda and Carl are first year PhD students, so they are not receiving scholarship according to the university rules. However, Carl used to receive partial scholarship as a Master's student. And they would have a chance to apply for full scholarship in the next academic year.

The other nine participants are all self-financed students. Except for Henry, all of them rely on private sources for funding - partly from the support of their families and partly from earnings by working full or part time. Henry is funded all by his family, while the others rely both on their families and themselves (part time work).

② **Employment status**

Except for Henry, all the participants are holding a part time job. All the participants could be divided into four categories according to their commitment to part time job.

Brenda works around 50 hours a week, which could be regarded as full time. Moreover, she is holding more than one job.

Henry expressed a strong wish to work part time and wanted to work as much as he can. However, by the time of the interview he had not found a part time job yet.

Amy and Daisy work less than 10 hours a week. Amy works 5 hours and Daisy, 9 hours a week.

And all the rest of the participants work between 20 and 30 hours a week.

Among them, only Amy, Brenda and Daisy are holding on campus jobs. Brenda is holding both on campus and off campus jobs.

All the participants working part or full time admitted that despite the financial pressures part time work plays an important role in their social-cultural adjustment: it is a way for them to make Japanese friends, to learn Japanese culture and to improve their Japanese language. However, except for Amy and Daisy, twelve participants considered that holding a part-time job greatly (negatively) influenced their study. Amy and Daisy work less than 10 hours a week on campus; they thought it is good for their study because their brains “need a rest” and the on campus jobs are helpful for their learning. This will be further discussed in 5.8.⑥.

5.6 Academic achievement

For confidential reasons, the investigator does not have the right to access the grades of the participants. Neither did the participants offer the information (their grades) during the interviews. However, every participant has mentioned about the academic goals they aimed to achieve during their study in JFOU and their self-perception of academic adaptation status based on the level of stress and number of difficulties currently faced by them during study. The two factors will be analyzed in this part.

① Academic goals

Ten participants expressed their expectations of academic achievements as producing a qualified thesis/dissertation and obtaining a degree. Nancy also mentioned that she hopes to seek further education as a PhD student in this university. Not surprisingly, all the four PhD students (Amy, Brenda, Carl, and Grace) under investigation describe their academic goals in JFOU as composing a professional dissertation and successfully obtaining a PhD degree.

Fiona, Ivy and Oliver hope to achieve high grades in their study, while Fiona and Ivy said that they had not achieved their goals yet.

Henry, Justin and Ivy (who mentioned this besides achieving high grades) stated that they expect to improve their Japanese language and to gain professional knowledge in this field through their graduate study at JFOU.

② Self-perception of academic adaptation status

The participants were asked to give the self-perception of their academic adaptation status based on the level of stress and number of difficulties currently faced by them during study. Five scales were used as measurement. They are very poor (adjustment), poor, neutral, good and very good. “Very poor” indicates the highest level of stress and the most difficulties, while “very good” refers to the lowest stress level and the least difficulties. The data are presented in Table 2. It should be noted that the participants’ self-perception may not refer to their actual status.

Table 2. The participants' self-perception of academic adaptation status

Very poor	None
Poor	Henry and Lynn
Neutral	Ella, Justin, Maggie, Nancy
Good	Brenda, Carl, Fiona, Ivy, Ken,
Very good	Amy, Daisy, Grace, Oliver

It could be observed from their self-perception that more than half of the participants are fairly well adjusted academically, while the PhD participants (Amy, Brenda, Carl, Grace); participants working less than 10 hours (Amy and Daisy) and Oliver with solid knowledge background in business administration are better adjusted.

5.7 Academic difficulties

Except for Oliver and Ken, all the participants thought the process of academic adaptation is accompanied by a significant level of stress and difficulties. The participants were asked about the most difficult and stressful experiences in their academic adaptation, more specifically, the major difficulties encountered during their study in JFOU. The academic difficulties identified by most of the participants include attending classes (seminars) and presentations; progress in one's research/ writing theses and timely graduation/ obtaining a degree as well as independent arrangement of study. This part will present these major academic difficulties, followed by the analysis of two exceptional cases - Oliver and Ken, who did not consider the

adaptation process difficult and stressful.

① **attending classes (seminars) and doing presentations**

All the participants, except Ken and Oliver, recalled the difficulties experienced at the initial stage of their academic adaptation, (that is, when they just started studying in JFOU) as attending classes (mainly in the form of seminars) and doing presentations. Most of them spent about half a year to get fairly adjusted. One exceptional case is Grace, who only spent three months before she became “very well adapted”: “Of course, at first I was stressed but I quickly got used to it and I have been doing quite well in study.”

Firstly, they found it difficult to understand the teaching content and to catch up with the teacher. Brenda said that “At first I had to look into the dictionary all the time while listening to the teacher, otherwise I could not understand what she or he was talking about.” And Henry and Justin both mentioned: “It happened a lot that I could not catch up with the teachers.” Carl also noted:

The first few months it was difficult for me to understand the teachers and their meaning, quite usually, I had no idea about the key academic norms and conventions mentioned by the instructor and was not able to answer his or her questions.

Secondly, classes and seminars are usually unfolded in the form of student discussion and presentations and the students usually have to do presentations alone instead of in groups. Therefore, at the beginning they spent a lot of time preparing for presentations and felt anxious and stressful while presenting in class. Amy said that “The process of

preparing the presentation was painful.” And Fiona had the similar experience:

When I first started, due to the limited ability of Japanese language and lack of disciplinary knowledge, it took me a long time to read and to prepare for the presentation, and I felt nervous when presenting in Japanese in front of classmates and the teacher. I was afraid that I could not understand and answer them when they asked me questions.

Even after one semester of study, half of the Master’s participants said that they are still experiencing a certain level of stress and difficulties attending classes and seminars, while the PhD interviewees no longer view this as a stressor.

Representative responses from the Master’s participants are:

“Even now, I still cannot totally understand the teachers’ instruction. I have to be very concentrative only to understand about 80 % of the teaching content” (Ella).

“Although I have already been used to doing presentations, my Japanese competencies are restricted and I still have a difficult time preparing it” (Nancy).

By contrast, a PhD participant, Brenda said:

We PhD students seldom have classes. Based on the curricula I meet my supervisor every week for at least one hour, which is called ‘official hours’ for face to face supervision. Sometimes we have ‘seminars’, where the students report and present their research progress and get feedback from their professors. It is in some sense like tutoring hours but not formal form of classes or seminars. It is just a chance for students supervised by the same professor to gather together with their supervisor and do presentations on their work. After two years Master’s study presentations are not a problem at all. What is more, these seminars are to help you with your study.

② Making progress in research/ writing theses

All the participants, except Ken and Oliver, mentioned that the most challenging event they are experiencing at present is making progress in their research, more specifically, writing theses (dissertations for PhD students). They all expressed in a similar way that “at present, writing the thesis/ dissertation might be the most difficult, challenging and stressful part for me”.

③ Timely graduation/ obtaining a degree

In conjunction with progress in their research, graduation in time/ obtaining a degree is equally another source of stress encountered by the two second year Master’s participants (Daisy and Fiona) and the four PhD participants (Amy, Brenda, Carl and Grace). Especially the four PhD students under investigation considered obtaining a PhD degree very challenging, difficult and stressful. Amy mentioned that “The only thing I am worried about now is that if I can finish my dissertation and graduate on time.” And Grace also commented: “The evaluation of dissertations is very strict here; I am quite stressed by the concerns about producing a qualified dissertation and obtaining the PhD degree.”

Ella and Lynn, still the first year students of the Master’s program, are also strongly stressed by the worries about timely graduation since they could hardly decide their research topics and make further progress.

④ Independent arrangement of learning and research

In addition to issues discussed above, over half of the Master’s participants (including

Ken) raised the difficulty of arranging learning and research depending on themselves, in other words, independent study. They thought it is quite challenging to rationally plan and arrange every step of learning and research on their own and to fish for effective approaches to gaining specialized knowledge and to carrying out research through independent learning.

Following are some responses from the participants:

“Mostly I had to make decisions all by myself – which courses to attend, when to study, what to study and how to study. All in a sudden, I had so much freedom that I had no idea what should be the right thing to do” (Justin).

“Here is different because mostly you learn by yourself but not from the class. The teachers no longer tell you what you should do to learn. At first, I did not know how to use my time effectively and how to search for useful sources” (Lynn).

“I was confused and lost starting with the thesis proposal. We students had the absolute initiatives to decide our thesis topics, but I did not know how to choose a good topic” (Henry).

Daisy also had similar experiences:

Maybe it is commonsense that graduate students should learn by themselves or that they should have more free time so that they can arrange study and research in their own way. Nevertheless, I still felt it difficult in the beginning. I had devoted a lot of time and energy and failed a lot of times before I figured out a good way (at least effective for me) to learn and accumulated some research skills.

It should be noted from the participants’ responses that some of them are lack of

independent learning skills, which could serve as a reason of their academic difficulties. The responses above also imply the independent learning approach adopted in JFOU that is different from the participants' previous learning experiences. This will be further explored in the next part.

⑤ **Two exceptional cases - Oliver and Ken**

Different from other participants, Oliver did not report any difficulties in the progress of disciplinary study but complained that he did not gain any deep and specialized knowledge in this field through teaching-“the content of classes and seminars is too general, which is not specialized and deep enough for me. Moreover, there is not much introduction about recent advances in research on this field”. And according to him, language barriers do not impede his learning progress but his language competencies are constantly improved during study.

The only challenge for Oliver is that he cannot reasonably manage the time for classes because the part time job is occupying a lot of time and he has to select the classes to attend according to the schedule of part-time work instead of to his needs and interest.

He noted:

my time is divided into pieces by the part time work, I expected my life in Japan to be like that I can focus on my study and spend the spare time from study on working part time and learning about the Japanese culture and society. But now, I have to arrange everything based on the needs of part-time work- my time for study, classes and seminars to attend, so I feel that I have not gained much useful and expected knowledge so far.

And Ken has not felt much stress or many difficulties since the very beginning of his

graduate study because he had taken undergraduate courses following his present supervisor in JFOU for half a year and had also lived in Japan for a few years before he was admitted to the graduate school. In this regard, he had more knowledge basis essential for the graduate study and faced less language barriers than his Chinese counterparts. There are two things that he considers quite challenging: to “totally understand professors’ instructions, ideas, thoughts and guidance” and to “rationally plan and arrange every step in learning and research” (in accordance with 5.7.④).

5.8 Reasons for academic difficulties

The academic difficulties identified in the last part could be attributed to a number of factors. According to most of the participants, major reasons for their academic difficulties are language barriers; insufficient knowledge of the academic major and research methods; unfamiliar teaching and learning approaches; lack of systematic teaching of disciplinary knowledge; inadequate guidance of learning and research; financial pressures and part time work as well as lack of independent learning skills (implications of some participants’ responses). This part will first analyze the two exceptional cases identified in the last part and then move on to the above-mentioned reasons.

① The exceptional cases identified in 5.7. - Oliver and Ken

According to Oliver, there are three major reasons for him to feel not having gained much knowledge during graduate study- professor to student ratio, curriculum and part time work. He said:

Every professor has a lot of students to supervise and thus the professors are too busy to have enough time for in-depth communication with every student, whenever I discussed with my advisor, we could only refer to some basic issues; seldom had a chance (time) to dig deeper and go further into details.

For this reason the major way for him to gain knowledge is classes and seminars, but, as is stated in last part, the curricula, the instruction in classes is not deep and specialized enough for him. What is more, due to the part time work, sometimes he is not able to attend classes and lectures that he wants to attend.

Ken said that in-depth understanding and communication with Japanese professors requires the understanding of their logical approaches to problems and his own ability of logical thinking.

Japanese professors seem to take indirect but deeper and broader logical approaches to problems. They usually dig into relevant issues and theories before referring to the central problem. If I want to totally understand the professor's guidance, his thoughts and ideas, I need to first know well about the issues and theories mentioned by them as well as how these issues and theories are related to the central issue. But it took me a certain time to figure out all the logical relations (Ken).

With respect to the reason for challenge of independent learning and research, he referred to the different roles of teachers and students in China and Japan: In China, teachers taught us by "holding our hands"-prepared and arranged everything for us, all we had to do was just to follow them. But here in Japan, we have to study on our own and make plans and arrangements all by ourselves. Professors will not tell you exactly what to do; they just guide you by providing ideas, suggestions and comments for

reference (this issue will be further discussed in 5.8.④).

② Language barriers

According to all the participants except Ken and Oliver, Japanese language barriers, especially the lack of Japanese knowledge of academic norms and conventions and difficulties in academic writing (composing Japanese theses or dissertations in an academic style) account for one of the major reasons for their academic difficulties. According to most of the participants, their initial difficulties in attending classes and stress of doing presentations mainly derived from their inability to understand the instructor and to express ideas in Japanese, which requires disciplinary knowledge (this factor will be specified in 5.8.③) about academic norms and conventions in Japanese language. Moreover, even though the majority of the participants majored in Japanese in the university in China for at least four years, they still found it difficult to compose academic paper using “precise”, “native”, or “professional” Japanese “in an academic way”. And language barriers also impede them in understanding the guidance from their supervisors.

③ Lack of disciplinary knowledge as well as insufficient knowledge about research methods

Except Ken and Oliver, all the participants mentioned that the lack of systematic knowledge in their field of study as well as insufficient knowledge about research methods constitute a major reason for the difficulties encountered during their study.

Most of the participants majored in Japanese language before they came to Japan and

had not accumulated adequate basic or systematic knowledge for their future graduate study in JFOU. They come up with a lot of unfamiliar academic norms, conventions and theories in the field attending classes and writing theses. They have to look into dictionaries (Brenda, Ivy and Nancy: “I looked into the dictionary all the time while listening to the teachers and reading articles”), to read a lot of books and articles, to understand, to memorize and to gradually build up knowledge basis for attending seminars and writing their theses. Therefore, all the thirteen participants consider the theses writing to be “time consuming”, “really difficult”, “stressful”, and “painful” and “taking a lot of time and energy”.

Similarly, the thirteen participants, also attributed the difficulties in writing theses/dissertations to the insufficient knowledge about research methods, that is, how to conduct social research-“how to search for the literature using various sources”, “how to choose and decide a research topic”, “how to review the literature, collect and analysis data” and “how to compose a paper in an academic way” etc.

The four PhD students, who have already acquired systematic knowledge and accumulated some research skills during previous study, used to have these problems during their Master’s education, but now they are more stressed by their dissertations because of “the painful and time-consuming process of research itself” (Brenda, Carl); “difficulties of field work and data collection” (Amy, Brenda, Grace); “the limited time of PhD study” (three years) (Amy, Brenda, Carl, Grace) and “the high criteria as well as strict evaluation”(Amy, Brenda, Carl, Grace).

For Grace, the most challenging part of research and thesis writing is data collection: “In collecting data for my research I have to conduct interviews with CEOs (Chief Executive Officers) or other superior managers of big companies, who are always busy and seldom have time for this kind of interviews, it is difficult to get an appointment with them.”

The high requirements/criteria as well as strict assessment of PhD dissertations are viewed by the four PhD students as the main reason contributing to their fear of failure to obtain a degree and graduate on time.

Both the requirements in quality and quantity are very challenging for me to achieve. We are required to write 300 pages for a PhD dissertation. But as far as I know, last year, one of the graduates wrote around 460,000 words (in Japanese), and the quantity, as a rule, was increased year by year, which means I have to write no less than 460,000. Moreover, the evaluators are very strict and precise. Once you fail to pass the first round of evaluation, you have to wait at least for half a year for another chance (Brenda).

There are two main reasons for the difficulty and stress in writing the dissertation: firstly we have to write at least 300 pages, which is a large amount; secondly, if you want to compose a qualified dissertation with cohesive statement and convincing arguments (Amy).

Different from us, it is easier for my friends studying social science to obtain a degree. They have more chance to get their works published during graduate study and once they have several published papers, the criteria for their PhD dissertations will be relaxed. But when it comes to us, students at business school, the dissertation is possibly the only and the most acceptable and realistic way for the university and professors to assess and evaluate our academic performance/ achievement. Therefore, the criteria are very high and the process of evaluation is strict and even rigorous. All in all, compared to us, the students majoring in social science are having a relatively easier

time working on the dissertations and have more chances to obtain a degree on time (Carl).

④ **Unfamiliar approaches to teaching and learning**

Unfamiliar teaching and learning approaches were perceived by the majority of the participants as another reason for academic difficulties. According to the participants who feel stressful in attending classes/ seminars and doing presentations at the initial stage, besides Japanese language difficulties, the unfamiliar patterns of classroom interactions serve as another cause for the stress. And all the participants except Oliver referred to the different roles of students and teachers in Chinese and Japanese teaching and learning as a reason for the difficulties and challenges encountered by them in the process of academic adaptation (including the case of Ken, see 5.8.①). In their perception, in JFOU, the teachers regard themselves as facilitators of the students' own independent pursuit of knowledge. And the students have greater freedom to exercise independence and responsibility in arranging their own schedule for study, work and leisure. They are expected to be more independent learners.

In China, the participants had classes in universities where the teacher taught and the students only listened and took notes. In the process of teaching and learning, teachers tell the students everything they need to know and teach them how to acquire the knowledge and first-step classes always start with the most basic knowledge, such as introduction of academic norms and conventions; students gain most of the knowledge by attending classes and completing homework/assignments.

However, in JFOU, according to the participants, classes are usually taking the form of

seminars and most of the time is designed for students to express their own opinions, to discuss, and to do presentations, they were nervous at the beginning because they “had not or seldom experienced this kind of discussions and presentations before”. They were stressed by the unfamiliar patterns of teaching and learning, where students are the main actors of the classroom and “have to frequently express their own ideas in front of classmates and teachers”. Moreover, professors’ instruction only constitutes a small part of the class; professors “merely play the roles of guiding the students” in their learning and research; thus the participants have to gain most of the knowledge in this field through independent study, for instance, reading and learning by themselves after classes.

Compared to their previous educational experiences in Chinese universities, where they had intensive course schedules and mainly learnt by attending classes, the participants said that they are having much more freedom (including a lot more free time from classes) in learning and arranging their own study and research as graduate students in JFOU. This means that most of the time they have to depend on themselves in learning and research rather than counting on the professors. The unfamiliar independent learning approach, together with the **lack of independent learning skills** (for some participants, analyzed in 5.7.④) confronted them with stress and difficulties of independent study.

⑤ **Insufficient learning support**

Insufficient learning support in this part refers to two aspects: lack of systematic teaching and inadequate guidance in learning and research. The first aspect is mainly

about classroom instruction and the second is more related to supervision.

I Lack of systematic teaching of disciplinary knowledge

As is analyzed in section ③, most of the participants encountered difficulties in academic adaptation due to the lack of basic or systematic disciplinary knowledge. A majority of them came to JFOU with little academic background in business administration. However, according to half of the participants, the instruction of most classes are organized based on the expectations that the students have already acquired systematic knowledge in this field and most of the professors have the same expectations of their students. Therefore, the teaching activities failed to help them build up solid knowledge basis of the discipline at the first beginning, in other words, failed to systematically (step by step) guide the students into the major of study.

Following are some comments from the participants:

“The classes began with a high-level teaching, while I was still at the bottom. At first, I could only understand 20 or 30% (at most) of the content” (Henry).

“The professor talked to me/us expecting that I knew most of the norms, theories and conventions he mentioned about, but actually I did not” (Maggie).

“We had to do presentations at the first beginning, but at that time I almost knew nothing about the major” (Lynn).

“There were few instructors, who could give us heuristic guidance in how to think, how to analyze a problem, how to conduct research and compose academic papers in this new field for us” (Justin).

As a result, the participants, at the beginning of their study, found it difficult to catch up with their teachers' "high-level" instruction in classes, to prepare for presentations and to compose theses in the unfamiliar field of study. Since the teaching content was complicated and unfamiliar for them, they had to put a lot of effort in academic reading after classes for acquiring basic and relevant knowledge to keep pace with the teaching progress.

Additionally, three Master's participants thought that the curricula were "too theoretical" and they "expected to learn some more practical knowledge".

II Inadequate guidance of learning and research

More than half of the participants (including Oliver, as in VIII①) perceived that they had not received expected guidance/assistance in learning and research from the professors. Lynn said: "Professors are busy with research and seldom have enough time to show each individual student how to learn and how to conduct research." And Ella noted: "We all had a hard time gaining specialized knowledge in this field, because we had little directions from the professors about what to do and mostly had to figure it out ourselves." Similarly for Nancy:

It seems to me that professors do not have much time that can be spent on an individual student so I have not received much support or help so far. I have to depend on myself to explore a right way to learn (to accumulate disciplinary knowledge) and to research (to compose theses).

Since the participants were assigned different supervisors, the situation varies depending on the guidance received from their supervisors. For instance, there is one

Japanese professor who knows very well about China and Chinese language and forwardly offers help and advice to his students whenever they need it; the participants under his supervision are fairly satisfied with the academic support, at least in terms of research supervision. Two other examples are Brenda and Carl. Brenda said: “Actually, it depends. I seldom get any help from my advisor, but some other students do get some.” And Carl:

My ex-advisor during Master’s study is quite famous and authoritative in this field, but he was too busy with his own research to guide his students. He could not even fulfill the supervision requirement prescribed in the curriculum. How could I expect ‘extra’ support? But now, I benefit a lot from my newly assigned supervisor for the PhD study. He always offers helpful and heuristic advice.

With respect to compatibility of communicating with professors, it also depends from one professor to another; however, the participants feel comfortable when interacting with most of the professors. They described the professors as “professional”, “responsible”, “approachable”, “scrupulous” and “patient”, but their interactions are mainly restricted to classes and stipulated “office hours”- hours for supervisors to guide their students in research. They could seldom “see” their professors or receive **forwardly** help after class (they usually could get help when they ask for it. This will be analyzed in the next part of coping strategies).

Finally, three participants complained about the university’s policy regarding assigning supervisors. According to them, admitted by JFOU they were told that they would have the chance to choose their own supervisors. However, after their study began, the supervisors were actually assigned by the university but not based on their

willingness. Additionally, two of them receive little support from their supervisors because the supervisors' research field is not quite relevant to their research topics.

One of the participants described her experience as follows:

My advisor has a different field of research which has little relationship of my topic, so I did not get much guidance from him. He could not even give me suggestions on which books or articles are useful for my study. At that time I had to all depend on myself (Brenda).

⑥ **Financial pressures and part time work**

As is discussed in part 5.5., most of the participants are stressed by financial pressures and twelve out of fourteen participants who work part time (except for Amy and Daisy) considered part time work to be one of the major reasons for their academic stress and difficulties during adaptation. They mentioned that part-time work takes a lot of time and energy away from study, and consequently impede their learning and research process. Fiona said: "I really need a lot of time to improve Japanese and to gain disciplinary knowledge, but it is hard for me to get sufficient time to study because of financial pressures and part time work." And Justin noted: "The financial pressures made me unable to concentrate on my study." Ivy also said: "Usually, when I came back home late from work, I was too tired to go on to study." Brenda also talked about her experience:

The last 3 months of my Master's study are like nightmares. I was working on my Master's thesis and preparing for the entrance exams for the PhD program at the same time. The worst thing is that I had to manage all of these not reducing the hours of my part time job. I am self-financed, could not give up working, so those days I was totally exhausted.

Amy and Daisy work less than 10 hours a week and both of them are holding

on-campus jobs, so they considered that their part-time jobs positively influenced their study. Amy noted: “I work as a teaching assistant, so I am also learning in the process of working. Moreover, I do not work much; it does not take time from my study. I am actually benefiting from the job.” And Daisy said: “I work on campus only using some of my spare time from study (you cannot study all the time). It helps me to expand my social networks and has positive influence on my study.”

5.9 Coping strategies

The process of academic adaptation is a process of coping with academic difficulties. Almost all the participants encountering stress and difficulties in their academic adaptation adopt a common pattern of coping and solving problems. That is, when coming up with a problem they at first tend to solve the problem depending on themselves, some of them may turn to their friends (mostly their Chinese peers and elder students) for help in this process and they usually get some useful advice; when they feel that they are not able to solve the problem even with the help from their friends, they choose to approach their supervisors.

Three steps could be roughly identified in their coping, which are independent hard working; seeking help from friends (usually, peer students) and approaching professors for help. The three step strategy will be detailedly analyzed in this part.

① Independent hard working

Independent hard working by spending a lot of time on reading and practice is the

major approach for the participants to overcome the academic difficulties and to adjust to the new academic environment.

Notable comments given for the first step are:

“I improve Japanese language competencies and get prepared before classes and seminars. Listen carefully to the teachers and take full notes during classes” (Nancy).

“I sat all day long in the library and read a lot of materials” (Carl).

“I read a large amount of relevant literature, looking into dictionaries; tried to understand them, memorize them (new words, theories and unfamiliar norms and conventions...), and turned them into my own knowledge” (Daisy).

“I actively involved in seminars: I took active part in discussions, made effort to carefully prepare every presentations” (Fiona).

Study rooms and university library are the most frequently utilized facilities by the participants. Two participants also mentioned that they try to rearrange their schedules of part time work-to reduce the working hours or to change the time of working.

As to the results of their independent learning, most of them expressed that after longtime and painful efforts they gradually improved language competencies; gained deeper understanding of disciplinary knowledge and acquired some writings skills and research methods.

Representative responses are:

At first I came through a lot of confusing norms, recondite theories and

unfamiliar conceptions, but as time went by, I read more and more, presented more and more and wrote more and more, I gradually gain deeper understanding of the discipline. But the process was really suffering and time consuming (Daisy).

During the two years of Master's study, I developed and accumulated research skills in my own way devoting a lot of time and energy. I did a lot of readings and gradually developed effective ways to searching for data as well as acquired skills of composing a qualified dissertation (Grace).

② Seeking help from friends

As is mentioned above, the Chinese participants have a tendency to solve problems by themselves if no help is offered forwardly. However, once they try to ask for help and support, the most frequently used source is their friends - usually Chinese peers and elder students on the same major, because they perceive that familiar friends are much easier for them to approach compared to busy professors. Generally speaking, they are quite satisfied with help and advices from their friends, which they consider useful, pragmatic and easy to get the point. For example, Nancy said: "At first, we learnt together to prepare for the presentations." And Brenda mentioned: "The elder students provide a lot of information and feasible advices." Maggie also talked about her experience:

I usually turn to my friends if I cannot solve it all by myself. It is easy to communicate with Chinese students in the same major, we know well about each other's situation and I usually get useful (although not professional) advice.

③ Approaching professors for help

Professors (in most cases, supervisors) are usually the last person, to whom the

participants approach for help, because they respect their teachers, understand that they are busy, and try their best not to cause them any trouble. Most of them perceive that such characteristics of Japanese culture as “being polite and keeping a distance”; “being modest and showing respect to superiors”; “being considerable and try not to disturb others” or “not to cause trouble to other people” are important rules to follow when communicating with Japanese people, especially with their teachers. Moreover, they could see that their supervisors are very busy. Therefore, they try not to bother them and even though they come to the professors with questions they “should already have some ideas in mind”.

Among all the participants, the PhD students have more opportunities to meet their supervisors face to face and receive guidance in coping with academic difficulties thanks to the stipulated “office hours”-at least one hour a week. However, they still try their best to solve the problems on their own and rarely ask their supervisors to help them “after office hours” due to the considerations mentioned above.

Relative responses from the Master’s participants are:

“I seldom ask teachers for help” (Ella, Henry, Nancy and Oliver).

“My advisor is busy and he is suffering a lot for private reasons. I really cannot bear to bring him any more burdens or trouble” (Nancy).

“Professors are busy. I can rarely reach them after class. Besides, I am not familiar with them, so it is better not to disturb them” (Henry).

And from the PhD participants:

My supervisor is willing to help every student, but I know that he is busy- he has a lot of students to supervise; has to attend various meetings, conferences, consult the companies and carry out his own research. So if I have difficulties, I first try to fix it by myself. If I failed, I turn to him (utilizing the office hours) well prepared-at least I should have already known 80% of the way to solve the problems (Carl).

I make a draft of my problems and questions every time before meeting him at the office hour, so that we can efficiently use the limited time. If you come to the supervisor with nothing, he could hardly help you within such little time. He is here only to direct you and guide you when you have a lot in mind, but not to plan basic things/everything for you (Grace).

It is worth mentioning that for the exceptional case Oliver, who seldom encounters difficulties in study, instead of approaching professors for help, he desires more communication with the professors “in order to learn from them” and “to be more professional”.

Most participants are satisfied with their supervisors stating that they are intent and patient, and are always willing to offer help only if they come to them with questions. With respect to the actual effects of professors’ help, most participants thought that their guidance are useful and effective and to some extent solve their problems, while six Master’s participants also reflected that due to the language barriers and communicative obstacles, sometimes they could not totally or precisely understand the professors’ guidance and they are hesitate to ask them to specify it again and again.

The four PhD participants seem to have fewer problems in receiving supervisors’ help and understanding their guidance. According to them, their supervisors offer

“heuristic”, “clear” and “neutral” guidance for them and “try not to impose personal opinions to influence the students’ own decision”. Their guidance to some extent helped them by guiding their research “to the right direction”. However, in the end and also as a matter of fact, their own efforts are the most important factor influencing outcomes of the coping, that is, they ought not to rely on the supervisors too much. For instance, Grace said: “It is your own study and research; you cannot just leave the major tasks to the supervisor. I am already happy with his effective guidance.” And Brenda noted: “I cannot account on my supervisor, in the end it is your own effort to overcome the difficulties and challenges.” Carl also commented:

They just guide you by providing ideas, suggestions and comments for reference and try not to impose their thoughts and opinions on the students. You are led by him, but in the final analysis your own effort is the key to solving the problems.

5.10 Suggestions for university support

Except for Ken, fourteen participants provided suggestions and advices for improving the university support for Chinese graduate students in JFOU. Three major issues were raised by them, which include financial support, Japanese language training and integration of domestic and international students. There were some other recommendations that were mentioned by individual participants only twice in the interviews. These included: improving library service by developing clear English instructions, expanding the open time of study rooms and providing wireless connection so that students could use the internet anywhere in the university with their own laptops instead of going to the computer center.

① Financial support

Ten participants mentioned about insufficient financial support and unreasonable selection criteria. More diversified sources for financial aid, equitable selection and portfolio assessment are desired. Brenda said: “It is really difficult to study and to work at the mean time. Diversified sources of available financial aid should be provided.” And Daisy advised: “The self financed students are suffering a lot from the heavy workload; they do not even have enough time to have a good rest. The university should provide more funding.” Two more suggestions are given as follows:

I cannot concentrate on study due to intensive part time work. But I have a strong financial pressure-I mainly depend on the work to fund my study and living. So I could not give up either of them. Even partial financial aid could release me from the heavy load, so that I could have more time for study (Lynn).

The self-financed students pay a lot to study in the private university than in other public ones, so I think the university should provide more stable and assuring environment for those, maybe, by actively helping them seek various kinds of financial aid (Grace).

Some participants said the selection criteria of scholarship recipients should be evaluated and reformed. Fiona commented: “The selection of scholarship recipients may not only be based on the merit but also based on the needs of the student. We are overloaded with study but still have to work.” Henry said:

They selected the recipients from us new Master’s students mainly based on the grade of a written exam (one essay question) and their performance in the interview conducted with those who passed the written exam. I do not consider the onetime assessment a reasonable way to wholly evaluate a student’s capabilities so as to decide the scholarship recipients.

And some were confused with the selection criteria and thought that the university policies on selecting scholarship recipients are not clearly prescribed and lack of equity: “I have no idea how they select the recipients-sometimes a B student got the scholarship instead of an A student” (Justin).

Finally, the first year PhD students referred to the university policy that PhD students could only apply for and receive scholarship from the second year of their study: “It is unreasonable. I hope that they could find a better way to address this issue” (Carl).

② Japanese language training

Three participants suggested that Japanese language training on academic writing and argumentation should be provided for international students. Lynn mentioned: “It is difficult to use Japanese to write the thesis; the university should provide courses on academic writing in Japanese language.” Henry also suggested: “They should offer some language training to show us how to correctly use Japanese in an academic style in composing theses and doing presentations.”

③ Integration of domestic and international students

Six participants advised that the university should create more opportunities for the Chinese students to communicate with Japanese students as well as professors. Oliver suggested: “I think the university could offer us more chances to communicate and discuss with professors after class.” Henry also said: “I hope that they organize more extracurricular activities to integrate Chinese graduate students and Japanese students in the university.” And Ivy expressed her opinion: “We might need a better

environment for communicating with Japanese students as well as learning Japanese culture and society.”

Chapter 6 will discuss the findings from the investigation presented in the current chapter.

Chapter 6 Discussion

In consistent with the stress and coping model, in adjusting to the new academic environment in JFOU, most participants encountered a certain level of stress and coped with various stressors and difficulties. Moreover, either the experienced stress and difficulties or adopted coping strategies by the participants are greatly influenced by the cognitive appraisals of the situation (e.g. the participants' appraisal of strict assessment criteria and perceptions of professors' accessibility after class) as well as the availability of personal (such as independent learning skills, disciplinary knowledge basis and language competencies) and environmental (such as learning support, financial support and friendship networks) resources.

To recap, the research questions set out for this study are: What aspects of academic life do the Chinese graduate students in JFOU find the most difficult and stressful; What might be the possible reasons; and How do they cope with the academic stressors. This chapter will discuss the findings of the study. It will first answer the research questions relating the findings to the reviewed literature and reflecting the International Academic Adjustment Model. Further, it will discuss the relationships between categories identified in the last chapter, demographic information and the academic adaptation based on the findings. Finally, it will consider the dilemmas faced by the Chinese graduate students investigated.

6.1 Relating findings to research questions

This part will answer the three research questions set out for the present study using the findings presented in the last chapter and relate the answers to the reviewed literature and theoretical framework- the International Academic Adjustment Model.

① What aspects of academic life do they find the most difficult and stressful?

The major academic stressors or difficulties identified by the participants are: attending classes (seminars) and doing presentations; making progress in research and writing theses; timely graduation and obtaining a degree; and independent arrangement of learning and research. These factors are consistent with most of the academic stressors identified by Fukada and Jou (1996).

PhD participants encounter fewer difficulties than the Master's students. The major stressors experienced by them are, at first, timely graduation/obtaining a degree, and, in conjunction with it, making progress in research and writing dissertations. This corresponds to the Japanese literature, which indicated the extraordinary difficulty of obtaining PhD degrees faced by international students in Japan (Kitamura & Umakoshi, 1981; Shao, 2008; Umakoshi, 1991 & 1997).

The majority of the participants went through an initial stage of feeling lost, but then felt more confident and more settled down either in the second semester or the second year. The most stressful experience in the initial stage of academic adaptation is attending classes and doing presentations. Stress in this aspect was gradually released as time went by, and commonly after one semester, writing theses replaced its place

becoming the most stressful part.

Making progress in research is a constant stressor running through the whole process of the participants' graduate study despite stages of adaptation, level of education or improvement in the individual's knowledge. This might possibly be explained by the stress from obtaining a degree and the emphasis of Japanese graduate education on research and research training, by which even students destined for non-research careers would learn something about the nature of research (Mozumi, 1997; Umakoshi, 1997). Most of these academic challenges have something to do with the participants' language competencies and previous educational experiences as well as academic expectations, which will further be discussed in the next part.

② What might be the possible reasons for the academic difficulties from the students' perspective?

Most students interviewed attributed six factors as the causes for the encountered academic stress and difficulties, which include:

1. Language barriers: corresponding to the "Japanese language proficiency" in the theoretical framework. This factor could be both viewed as an academic difficulty and as one of the reasons for other academic stressors.

The importance of language competencies in the international students' academic adaptation has been well documented either in the western (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Janet, 1987; Lewthwaite, 1996; Robertson, Line, Jones & Thomas, 2000;

Wan & Xu, 1987; Zhang, 2002) or in Japanese literature (Chen & Takataya, 2008; Inoue & Merino, 2007; Mozumi, 1997; Oka, Fukada & Jou, 1996). The students interviewed mentioned about the lack of language proficiency in understanding lectures and reading comprehension, oral communication, vocabulary and academic writing... These language skills have also been justified in previous studies to be very important for successful academic adjustment. It could be found in the interviewees' responses that academic writing has the most considerable influence on the students' academic adaptation, because it is directly related to the difficulty of writing theses/dissertations and consequently of great importance to the research progress.

2. Financial pressures and part time work: corresponding to the factor of “financial and employment status” in the theoretical framework. Financial pressures seem to be a major concern of the students. In consistent with findings in the Japanese literature (Mozumi, 1997; Oka, Fukada & Jou, 1996; Sun, 2004; Tanaka, Takai, Kohyama & Fujihara, 1994; Xu & Kageyama, 1994), all the self-financed participants stated that the financial difficulties and consequent burdens of part time work negatively affected their study and served as a major cause of their stress. However, the partial scholarship recipients interviewed also raised the negative effects of part time work on their study. Although the scholarship, to some extent, relieved financial pressures of these students, they still chose to work for about the same length of time (between 20 and 30 hours) as the self-financed students, because the received partial scholarship was not sufficient for their living expenses and the high tuitions and fees, in their words.

By contrast, the full scholarship participants, who only work less than 10 hours a week and hold on-campus jobs, felt that the part-time work benefits their adaptation. It is in agreement with Ernest and Patrick's (1991) theory that holding a part-time job off campus tend to be associated with negative effects on academic outcomes, while part-time employment on campus has more positive impacts on these outcomes by enhancing the students' involvement and integration in the institution

3. Insufficient learning support from the university: lack of systematic teaching of disciplinary knowledge and inadequate guidance of learning and research. These two factors have been referred to by Umakoshi (1991) and Mozumi (1997) as problems rose by international students studying in Japanese universities: the lack of systematic guidance and frequent interactions between students and professors and too much attention devoted by the professors to research rather than teaching are all reflected in the interviewees' responses.

It should be noticed that failure of the students themselves in effectively utilizing available academic support and assistance (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Zimmerman & Pons, 1986) might also lead to the feeling of the inadequate guidance of learning and research. That is, there may be possibilities that the participants have not made full use of the formal services of the university, but they perceived the services they have utilized to be the actual services provided by the university. For instance, the participants are reluctant to approach their teachers for help, but

actually when they turned to the professors, most of them do receive effective guidance. Their feelings of insufficient guidance from their teachers may be partly because they seldom ask for it but wait for the guidance to be provided “automatically” (relevant to the students’ coping strategies), which the professors might not be aware of.

And lack of systematic teaching of disciplinary knowledge could be explained by gaps between professors’ and students’ expectations (Robertson et al., 2000; Zhang, 2002): On the one hand, students mostly studied language before they came to Japan. Lacking basic and systematic knowledge of future major, they expect the teaching could help them gain systematic knowledge step by step; on the other hand, the teaching practice at the first beginning are carried out based on the expectation that the students should have basic and systematic knowledge of the discipline and skills of doing research. As a result, the students had a difficult time keeping pace with their teachers.

4. Unfamiliar teaching and learning approaches: where teachers are facilitators promoting learner autonomy, while students are the focus of the educational process (Dunn, 2006). For instance, students are more independent in learning activities, such as sourcing materials, selecting research topics and expressing their own opinions and organizing their own study schedules; and classrooms interact in the form of student-led seminars and presentations.

The relation of unfamiliar teaching and learning styles to academic adaptation

difficulties is supported by Robertson et al. (2000) and Zhang's (2002) research, which yield similar findings. Furthermore, underlying the unfamiliar patterns of teaching and learning are the students' previous educational experiences (Zhang, 2002) (specified in the next factor) and gaps between the expectations of students and that of the faculty (Dunn, 2006; Zhang, 2002): the students expected that they could greatly rely on their teachers in learning and research (as is in their previous education), while the teaching staff expects them to pursue knowledge more independently.

The insufficient learning support, the unfamiliar teaching and learning approaches, gaps between students' and professors' expectations, as well as some participants' failure to approach the faculty for help are all associated or consistent with Dunn's (2006) argumentation of "interactions with faculty", which is a factor proposed in the theoretical framework.

5. Insufficient knowledge of the academic major and research methods as well as lack of independent learning skills (in association with learning approach): The most important reason for the participants' lack of disciplinary knowledge, research and independent learning skills (also a reason for the unfamiliar teaching and learning approaches) is that most of them were undergraduate students majoring in Japanese language before they came to Japan, which indicate that their experiences at JFOU would involve the transition from undergraduate to graduate education and from language learning undergraduates to graduates at business school. This is consistent with Zhang's (2002) opinion that previous educational experiences and learning

styles greatly influence Chinese students' academic adaptation.

6. As is stated by Dunn (2006) analyzing the International Academic Adjustment Model, other factors such as “pre-departure preparedness”, “orientation & advising experiences” were also found to be more or less related to the participants' academic adaptation. As is analyzed in 5.1., although some students predicted the difficulties they will face in their future study in JFOU and prepared for it, they were far from well prepared to be smoothly adjusted from the very beginning. And orientation and advising experiences could be viewed as a segment of university learning support. The students expressed their need for more practical advice based on their diversified background as well as detailed information about their supervisors or instructors. This, to some extent, implies their feelings of inadequate learning support.

With reference to the “housing situation”, there is not adequate evidence to justify its relationship to the students' academic adaptation. The students suffering from noise do not prove to have difficulties in study for this reason. Neither did the two participants, who complaint the waste of time on the way to the university, attribute it to their stress in academic adaptation.

To sum up, the academic challenges faced by the students could mainly be attributed to the students' language competencies and their previous educational experiences, financial difficulties, insufficient learning support from the university, as well as gaps between the students' academic expectations and that of professors. Next part will

discuss how the students cope with the academic difficulties.

③ How do they cope with the academic difficulties?

Last chapter identified a three-step coping strategy, which is commonly adopted by most of the participants in coping with the academic difficulties encountered. That is, 1. Independent hard working; 2. Seeking help from friends; and 3. Approaching professors for help

Let go of problems, asking for help, establishing relationships with advisors and instructors are identified as coping strategies adopted by international students for positive adjustment (Tseng & Newton, 2002). These strategies are more or less adopted by the participants in coping with encountered academic difficulties.

Most students let go the problems by making more effort, which usually means spending more time and energy on study. And in asking for help, the students effectively used their friendship networks, the majority of whom are their Chinese peers (including elder Chinese students). This is in accordance with findings of Japanese literature that Chinese students tend to solve their problems from within their small social or familial group (Chen & Takataya, 2008; Jou & Fukada, 1995b; Sun, 2004) and with the theoretical framework that “peer relationships” positively contribute to Chinese students’ academic adjustment (Dunn, 2006). However, the 3-step coping prevented the students from effectively and fully utilizing one of the most important coping resources – advisors and instructors.

Research evidence in the Japanese literature shows that professors are the major source of support in international students' learning and research (Chen & Takataya, 2008; Jou & Fukada, 1995b). And Dunn (2006) also pointed out that the international students benefit academically when they do seek support from the faculty ("interactions with faculty"). Nevertheless, most of the participants are reluctant to take initiative to approach professors for help except in classes or during the stipulated hours for the meeting with their supervisors.

To understand this phenomenon, one could not ignore the underlying cultural factors. Firstly, it could be inferred from the participants' responses that the conception of showing politeness and respect to teachers (Nakashima & Tanaka, 2008) might, to a sense, be perceived by a few students as keeping a distance from their professors. Secondly, Kitayama and Markus (2000) proposed the interdependent model to explain the self and social relations manifested in the East Asian culture. One of the central features for this model is: people in a relationship are expected to take the perspective of others in the relationship, feel empathically with them, and act accordingly, often altruistically, on others' behalf (P.120). Compared to Chinese culture, this characteristic seems to have a more obvious manifestation in the Japanese society. Therefore, as is analyzed in 5.9., the participants considered "being considerable and try not to disturb others" or "not to cause trouble to other people" as important rules to follow when communicating with their teachers. This is why most of them usually do not come to their professors, who appear to them occupied with classes, lectures, research, meetings or getting into various troubles, until the last minute.

According to the participants' responses, by adopting the 3-step coping strategy they could usually solve the problems, but it cost, sometimes wasted a lot of time and energy. Meanwhile, most of the students did receive effective guidance from their professors for solving the problem. Thus it could be assumed that this strategy might not be quite efficient and effective: if the students had sought help from their instructors and supervisors earlier or more frequently, they might have solved the problem within a shorter time and more easily.

Considering that most students adopt a relatively passive approach in seeking for help, more voluntarily and forwardly offered guidance from the professors might be helpful for their academic adaptation. On the other side, the students should take a more active stance- dare to go for consultations.

6.2 Relationships between factors

This part will discuss the relationships between categories identified in the last chapter, demographic information and the students' self-perceived adjustment status.

The factor of "academic achievement" (in the International Academic Adjustment Model) was found to be a strong predictor of Chinese graduate students' academic adaptation and the grade is an effective measure of the student's adaptation to the academic environment (Dunn, 2006). In collecting data for the current study, the investigator did not manage to acquire grades of the participants due to confidential reasons. However, the participants were asked about their expectations of academic

achievements. Most of them mentioned about producing a qualified thesis/dissertation, obtaining a degree. The answer is consistent with our findings of academic difficulties faced by the students that writing thesis/dissertation and obtaining a degree are major stressors for most of the participants. It also means that the academic achievement is a major concern of the participants in academic adaptation.

The participants were also asked about their self-perception of academic adaptation status (see Table 2) based on the level of stress and academic difficulties currently faced by them. Instead of grades, the participants' self-perception is utilized here as a measure of their academic adjustment status. By doing this, it is possible for us to observe the relationships between categories, demographic characteristics and the participants' academic adaptation.

As is shown in Table 2, the overall academic adjustment status of the participants is satisfying. One of the possible reasons for this might be that they have all been studying in JFOU for more than half a year and consequently, the most stressful and difficult period might possibly have gone away.

6.2.1 Demographic characteristics and academic adaptation

Relationships between international students' demographic characteristics and their adaptation status have been testified in Dunn (2006)'s study that older students having stayed longer in the host culture, having been longer at the current university and spent more years in the current program tend to be more academically adjusted. Gender and

marital statuses in her study were not found to be related to the students' academic adaptation.

All the participants in the current study are single, so the relation of marital status to the students' academic adjustment could not be examined in the current study. However, findings in the current study to a great extent correspond with above-mentioned patterns.

At first, difference between male and female students could not be observed from the participants' responses. Therefore, no relationship between gender and academic adaptation could be concluded in the current study.

Furthermore, in general, PhD students are better adjusted than the Master's students: three out of four PhD participants fall into the category of "very good" and the other one falls into "good". The PhD participants stay longer in JFOU; they completed their Master's education in the same university, in the same program and thus are more familiar with the academic environment of JFOU. Moreover, compared to their Master's counterparts, they have acquired systematic knowledge in this major, gained research skills and improved independent learning skills and they might be more close to their teachers as well (because they interacted with them for more years).

For the similar reasons, both of the second year Master's students perceived themselves well or very well adapted; and Ken, who is also well adjusted, lived in Japan for over 3 years and informally studied in JFOU for half a year before he was

admitted as a Master's student.

Therefore, it could be extrapolated that the longer the participants stay in JFOU and in the graduate program; the better they are academically adjusted.

Besides, all the participants, except Ken, stay the same time in Japan as they stay in JFOU and in the same program, which means, the longer the participants stay in JFOU and the program, the longer they stay in Japan. Ken stays even longer in Japan than in JFOU. So it could be further concluded that the longer the participants reside in Japan, the better they are academically adjusted.

Finally, the best adjusted students are older students (above 25) and the students, who are poorly adjusted, have younger ages (23 and 24). This is also consistent with Dunn's (2006) finding that older students are better adjusted academically.

6.2.2 Relations across categories

Besides the demographic characteristics discussed above, some other patterns of relations have also been found between categories

Firstly, scholarship recipients prove to be better adjusted than self-financed students, while full scholarship students are best adjusted. This has already been discussed earlier in answering the second research question.

Secondly, the scholarship recipients, who have less financial pressures and the PhD participants (except Brenda), who stay longer in Japan and in JFOU are fairly satisfied with their extracurricular involvement. The reasons might be: the scholarship recipients have more free time from work to enrich their social life and to take part in the university events and other extracurricular activities; the PhD students stay longer in Japan so they might have wider social networks and more rich and colorful social life.

Furthermore, since the scholarship recipients and the PhD participants are also better adapted students, it might be inferred that except Brenda, the participants, who are better adapted academically, prove to be more involved in the extracurricular activities. Brenda seldom takes part in the extracurricular activities, because (as is explained by her,) she has to work full time-50 hours a week and do not have much spare time. It is in accordance with the theoretical framework that the factor of “extracurricular involvement” is related to the Chinese students’ academic adaptation. However, from the findings the investigator could not simply draw conclusion that extracurricular activities contribute positively to one’s academic adaptation.

Thirdly, in order to understand the participants’ previous educational experiences, which was justified to greatly influence international students’ academic adaptation (Zhang, 2002), “Highest degree obtained before coming to JFOU” comprising the educational level and academic major were referred to in the beginning of the interviews as demographic information.

It has been found that the more related are the students' previous fields of study to the current major, the better they are academically adjusted. For instance, Oliver is very well adapted mainly because he has a solid knowledge background in the same academic major. And the participants who used to major in Business Japanese, which they perceived having some (but not much) relations to the business administration, seem to be better adjusted than those, who studied Japanese Language and Literature in Chinese universities.

6.3 Dilemmas facing Chinese graduate students at JFOU

Based on the findings from data analysis and discussions above, this part attempts to speculate on three dilemmas faced by the Chinese graduate students at JFOU in their academic adaptation.

1. Studying or working: The majority of the Chinese students (except for the full scholarship students) comes to the foreign country and pays a lot of tuitions fees in order to receive graduate education in JFOU. They place a great value on their academic achievements. Most of them are aimed at obtaining advanced degrees and acquiring professional knowledge. However, in order to pay for the high cost of study and living, they have to work part time or, in some cases, full time. Most of them are so occupied with work that they cannot learn adequately- not only the time for study is taken by working but some of the students could not choose or attend classes or lectures by their needs, because the timetable does not fit their working schedules. Although most of them are aware of the fact that the part or full

time work is negatively influencing their study, they could not give it up because of the high tuition fees and living cost.

2. To be considerable or to seek for help: As is discussed earlier, the Chinese graduate students seldom take initiative to approach their professors for help, because they perceive that the professors are very busy; they attempt to be considerable and feel empathically for them; they know about the professors' difficulties, understand their situations and thus decide not to trouble them with their own problems. But on the other hand, the students express an urgent need in learning and research guidance and they desire support and help from the instructors and their supervisors; they feel disappointed when they do not gain sufficient attention and assistance from the faculty. They complain about the scarce support in learning and research but at the same time do not make full use of the resources. In this regard, it is better for the faculty to provide forwardly help instead of expecting the students to come with questions on their own.

3. Advanced degrees or professional training: In the statement of characteristics of graduate education at JFOU, the graduate school aimed at maintaining a proper balance between teaching and research, but in reality it seems to attach much more importance on research. As a result, some professors are too busy with their research to have plenty of time for teaching and guidance. What is more, many Chinese students come to JFOU with the aim to obtain advanced degrees as well as to seek professional training (but not to become researchers). However, instead of being prepared with professional training for their future careers, they have to

devote extraordinary effort to gaining research skills and carrying out research in order to obtain the advanced degrees. This contradiction could be inferred from the participants' complaint about the overemphasis of the graduate education on research and the lack of practical training for their future careers.

Chapter 7 will summarize the findings from the current study and discuss their implications, also concluding the thesis.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

In order to investigate the academic adaptation experiences of Chinese graduate students enrolled at JFOU, the present study identified academic difficulties encountered by the students, explored possible reasons for them and discovered how the students cope with the difficulties. The study also to some extent speculated on the relationships between the students' demographic characteristics and their academic adaptation.

This chapter will conclude the thesis by summarizing the findings and discussing theoretical and practical implications of the findings from the present study.

7.1 Summary of findings

Before moving on to the implications of the study, it is useful to summarize the findings so far:

Firstly, the major academic difficulties faced by the Chinese graduate students at JFOU include: attending classes (seminars) and doing presentations; making progress in research and writing theses; timely graduation and obtaining a degree; and independent arrangement of learning and research. Among all these difficulties, obtaining a degree is most stressful for PhD students, and independent arrangement of learning and research is a challenge only reported by some Master's students.

Secondly, reasons for these academic difficulties identified by the students are: language barriers; financial pressures and part time work; insufficient learning support from the university; unfamiliar teaching and learning approaches; insufficient knowledge of the academic major and research methods; as well as lack of independent learning skills. Language competencies, financial difficulties (burdens of part time work), the students' previous educational experiences and gaps between academic expectations of students and professors (underlying most of the abovementioned factors) are found to be major reasons for the students' academic difficulties.

Thirdly, in coping with the academic difficulties, most participants adopt a three-step strategy: independent hard working; seeking help from friends and at last, approaching professors for help. Independent hard working is the major approach adopted by the students and most of them are reluctant to ask professors for assistance.

Fourthly, except for the factor of "Housing", which refers to difficulties in searching accommodations, the housing services and convenience of the location for study, the theoretical framework utilized for the current study - the International Academic Adjustment Model proves to be applicable for investigating academic adaptation experiences of Chinese graduate students at JFOU. Among all the factors, "Financial and employment status", "Japanese language proficiency", "Interactions with faculty", "Peer relationships", "Academic major" (if understood from the perspective of previous educational experiences) are factors, which significantly influence the students' academic adjustment experiences. "Academic achievement" directly reflects

their academic concerns. And “Extracurricular involvement”, “Pre-departure preparedness” as well as “Orientation & advising experiences” were also found to be related to their academic adaptation. The description of each factor could be referred to in 2.2.

Fifthly, the educational level, age and length of residence in Japan, length of stay in the host university and in the graduate program are demographic characteristics significantly related to the students’ academic adaptation. This is consistent with Dunn’s (2006) findings.

Finally, coping strategies adopted by the students in academic adaptation are greatly influenced by the similarities between Chinese and Japanese culture as well as their cognitive appraisals of the cultural factors.

7.2 Theoretical implications

The present study yields several theoretical implications.

Firstly, since the International Academic Adjustment Model (except the factor of “Housing”) was found to be applicable for investigating academic adaptation experiences of Chinese graduate students at JFOU, it might also be applied for investigating the academic adjustment experiences of Chinese graduate students enrolled at other Japanese private universities, which have similar settings to JFOU.

However, it should be noted that although “Extracurricular involvement” was found to

be related to the students' academic adaptation, no evidence shows that it has positive impact on the students' academic adaptation. Moreover, "academic major" has a different orientation from Dunn's (2006) study, in which academic major refers to the impact of disciplinary differences on academic adaptation. Since the participants are all business students (so no disciplinary differences could be referred to), academic major in this study was utilized as a factor to examine the impact of the participants' previous educational experiences on their academic adaptation. It was defined as the relevance of the current major studied by the students to their previous fields of study.

Secondly, academic adaptation is an endless process, in which one could never reach the perfect status of adaptation and the status changes over time. Only based on the findings from the current study we are not able to justify the stage theories referred to in the literature. However, the students are constantly learning and improving themselves in coping with various stressors and difficulties.

Finally, the generalizability of the findings is limited by the sample size and research site. Since the sample chosen for this study consisted of only 15 graduate students from Mainland China enrolled at Business School and the research site is a private university located at Tokyo, the findings may not be applicable to other populations, such as undergraduate Chinese students in JFOU and Chinese students in other Japanese universities, especially public universities. Furthermore, only a qualitative method was used in this study. Although it provided some in-depth insights into understanding the academic adjustment process of Chinese students in Japan, to further study this issue, a quantitative approach might be utilized with a larger

population to statistically test the findings and the magnitudes of the relationships between each factor and academic adaptation.

Academic adaptation experiences of Chinese graduate students “in JFOU” are related to a host of factors at several levels. They are related to financial and employment status, language difficulties, interactions with the faculty, friendship networks, background knowledge, orientations and the students’ preparedness for future study. Thus, any university support system should take a holistic approach particularly at the beginning of their studies. The practical implications for university support will be discussed in the next part.

7.3 Practical implications

Findings of the current study could be applied to, and guide the university support for Chinese graduate students.

Firstly, with respect to orientation & advising, the materials handed out to the students pre-departure should include literature that could be referred to in order to build up knowledge basis for their future study. The university should integrate help sessions by elder Chinese students in their comprehensive orientation programs for newly arrived Chinese students. Advice given by the elder Chinese students and their personal experiences prove to be useful and effective for the participants’ adaptation, because these students understand academic stressors and difficulties that their fellow students would face and thereafter know how to cope with them.

Moreover, orientation courses should include Japanese language training in academic writing and presentation (extended training should follow up after formal classes begin).

Secondly, financial difficulties are a major concern of most Chinese students in Japan. And as has been testified in the current study, in most cases, the consequent part time jobs (off campus) negatively affect the students' academic adjustment. The rather that most of them are seeking education in private universities as JFOU, which means that they have to pay higher tuition fees but have less available financial aid. The university should provide more information regarding different kinds of financial support available for Chinese students. Not only limited to the scholarship, financial aid should be provided in various forms and through various channels, such as loans and deduction of tuition fees. If possible, more on-campus jobs might be provided for the students, because on campus work seems to have more positive impact on the students' academic adaptation.

Thirdly, the university should create more opportunities and organize more extracurricular activities to integrate Chinese graduate students, other international students and Japanese students. The students should be encouraged to involve in various cultural and social activities.

Fourthly, the teaching staff and supervisors should recognize the difference in the students' educational background as well as language competencies and be more

aware of each student's needs so as to provide effective instruction and guidance. It is better to design the curricula (means teaching content) by starting with introduction of the discipline, which acquaints the students with academic norms, conventions and important theories of significant relevance to the major of study.

Finally, the professors should show their accessibilities and encourage the students to ask for help. On the other hand, the students should try to adopt a more positive approach in seeking their professors for assistance.

Overall, Chinese students might easily adapt to Japanese academic experiences and might succeed in their studies provided that university leadership, professors, and students themselves rigorously understand potential stressors as well as create and sustain conducive learning environments.

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Appendices

Appendix I Interview Guide

Demographic information: gender, age, academic major, marital status, current year of graduate study, length of stay in Japan, length of stay in JFOU, highest degree obtained before coming to JFOU.

背景资料： 性别；年龄；专业；婚姻状况；研究/博士生学习第几年；在日本所待时间；在樱美林大学所待时间；来日本之前在中国获得的最高学历。

1. Could you tell me about your preparations for the future study and the stress you feel before departure?

在出发去日本之前，你为在日本的学习做了哪些准备？有哪些担心和压力？

2. How do you get the housing environment by the level of convenience? Do you have any troubles/dissatisfaction with housing services?

以方便程度来说你认为你的住房条件怎么样？你在居住过程中遇到过哪些麻烦或者对住房服务有哪些不满意的地方呢？

3. How do you find the orientation (materials provided before departure and orientation for freshmen) to be useful?

你觉得学校提供的新生入学指导（包括来日本之前学校提供的资料以及到日本以后提供的学习生活指导和建议）有用么？哪些方面实用？

4. How do you feel about your participation in extracurricular activities (including school clubs or associations and other social events-parties, trips, visiting...)?

请讲一下你参与课外活动的情况：你参加了哪些学校社团，一般还参加哪些社会活动如聚会，郊游或旅行，参观等？

5. How do you finance your study and stay in Japan?

你是怎么负担在日本的学习和生活费用的？

6. What are your expectations or goals about your grades and other academic achievements?

你对你的学习成绩以及其他学术成就的期望是什么？

7. Would you mention the most difficult and stressful experiences/events you have faced so far in study (in JFOU)?

请指出你（在樱美林大学）学习以来感到最困难最有压力的方面/经历。

8. Why are these experiences/events most stressful/challenging?

问题 10 中提到的这些问题使你感到困难的原因分别是什么？

9. How do you cope with the difficulties? What are the results?

你怎么克服困难，解决学习过程中产生的这些问题？结果如何？

10. Do you have any recommendations for the university to improve its practice for international students?

对于学校进一步改进对留学生的支持和帮助，你有什么建议吗？

Appendix II Covering Letter

Dear student,

Greetings!

I am writing to invite you to participate in an interview for an empirical research exploring the academic experiences of Chinese graduate students at J.F. Oberlin University (JFOU). I am a Chinese Master's student in the Master's program of Higher Education at the University of Oslo. It is the last semester of my study and I am doing my Master's thesis on the academic adaptation experiences of Chinese graduate students at JFOU. The aim of the study is to identify academic difficulties facing these students, find out reasons for the difficulties and how the students cope with the academic difficulties.

The information you provide will be very helpful. It will first, help the university to better understand problems facing Chinese graduate students in their study. Second, with this understanding, the university community will be better able to assist students to adjust to the study at JFOU.

The information you provide will be confidential. No individual student's name will be identified. Your answers will be described and analyzed to form general conclusions about the Chinese graduate students' academic adaptation.

The letter is sent to you with the help of Professor Tachi and Professor Kaneyama, so that your contact details remain confidential to me unless you volunteer to participate and inform me of your contact information. Every effort is made to safeguard your privacy.

I intend to conduct interview in Chinese with 15 Chinese graduate students enrolled at JFOU. Your help and cooperation will be very much appreciated.

Together with this letter, you will receive interview questions (in both Chinese and English) that may be asked about during the interview. The interview will cost you 30-40 minutes through telephone. If you would like to participate in it, please contact me by the end of this month through e-mail: weizhan@student.uv.uio.no or msn: pkurainy@hotmail.com so that we can have a chat and arrange a time for the interview.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

All the best for your study and life in Japan

Yours sincerely,

Wei Zhang

亲爱的同学：

您好！

我是挪威奥斯陆大学高等教育系的硕士研究生，电子邮件是 weizhan@student.uv.uio.no /MSN 是 pkurainy@hotmail.com。去年夏天我曾去你们学校学习交流一个月。受那次经历影响，我把硕士论文的题目定为研究樱美林大学研究生的学术适应经历。论文旨在发现你们在学习中的困难，产生困难的原因，你们应对困难的策略。您提供的信息对于改进学校对中国留学生的支持体系将会有很大帮助。

论文计划采访 15 个中国研究生，采访会用中文进行。出于对个人隐私的保护，我通过馆教授以及金山教授的帮助把这封信和采访问题发给您，这样除非您主动联系我，我不会知道您的任何信息和联系方式。您可以通过写电子邮件联系我，或者加我 MSN。这次采访是匿名的，您提供的信息都不会泄露给第三个人。

采访问题的设计，为避免翻译产生的歧义，一个问题由英文和中文各阐述一次，但是采访会使用中文进行。

如果您愿意参与这次调研，请在 4 月底之前通过邮件或者 MSN 跟我联系。我们可以先约定好时间，然后通过电话形式进行采访，

谢谢！期待您的回复。

此致

敬礼

张薇