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Exploring Chinese International Students' Motivational Factors in Non-Mandatory Event Participation

Aimin Liao

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Exploring Chinese International Students' Motivational Factors in Non-Mandatory Event
Participation

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. My late father, Weihua, always encouraged and believed that I could be the best version of myself academically, personally, and professionally. To my mother and sister, Ruizhen and Aiyin, thank you for supporting my educational journey and loving me unconditionally. I am forever grateful for my family.

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ABSTRACT

This action research investigated Chinese international students' motivational/demotivational factors and their perspectives on Virginia Tech's non-mandatory events. The theoretical framework guided the research questions, literature reviews, and data design collection/analysis process. The self-determination theory provided the primary motivational factors for Chinese international students. The literacy/discourse theory explained their difficulties when practicing secondary Discourses in an American college. This action research utilized open-ended surveys and semi-structured interviews to understand Chinese international students' motivations, struggles, and feedback in non-mandatory event participation. The qualitative research findings indicated that Chinese international students are motivated by autonomy, competency, and relatedness. Some Chinese international students' inadequate language/cultural competency, awareness level, and lack of needs demotivate their motivations to participate in optional events. Future research directions and recommendations for non-mandatory events' designs, promotions, and implementations are provided.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In order to experience new cultures and gain a competitive edge, the researcher moved from China to America at the age of 17. The researcher naively thought that she would adjust to an American high school in no time. Reality was the opposite. Attending an American high school was scary, almost terrifying, to the researcher. Due to language barriers, the researcher was unable to understand her teachers, classmates, and host family. Being one of the only Chinese students in the school, the researcher was unable to fit in and avoided any events and personal interactions with her classmates. Staring was the researcher's only greeting from her classmates for the longest time. As a result, the researcher wondered if she had done anything wrong. Two years later, when the researcher started college, the situation slightly improved. Even now, the researcher still remembers how lonely and helpless she felt during high school. This experience later translated into practical work identifying at-risk Chinese international students and providing counseling to them in the role as an International Programs Academic Specialist at Virginia Tech (VT).

Many Chinese international students are going through struggles and loneliness now. These students are forced to find a way to cope with their new environment, described as *cultural grouping* by the researcher. Cultural grouping occurs when students only associate themselves with those from the same background and avoid non-mandatory interactions and events with those from different backgrounds. Due to her

personal background, the researcher always noticed cultural grouping among other Chinese international students while being a student and a professional staff member at Virginia Tech. This phenomenon of cultural grouping did not disappear or improve throughout the years. In addition to personal struggles, Chinese international students are also challenged academically. A few professors approached the researcher and expressed concerns about Chinese international students' unsatisfactory grades and unwillingness to speak English. Some students are physically here at VT but mentally not present. Although the University offers many non-mandatory personal and professional development opportunities such as career fairs, peer academic coaching, tutoring, and writing services, Chinese international students rarely take advantage of these events and miss many opportunities. Therefore, investigating Chinese international students' motivational factors and exploring ways to encourage these students to participate in non-mandatory events is essential.

Problem of Practice

The Problem of Practice was the lack of motivation among Chinese international students to participate in non-mandatory events. Virginia Tech offers many non-mandatory events, such as mentorship programs, resume workshops, career fairs, writing services, and wellness programs. Participating in optional events is not a requirement but highly recommended. These non-mandatory events are beneficial as they provide important information and opportunities to attendees. The minimal non-mandatory event participation among Chinese international students negatively impacts their college experience. On average, less than 10% of Chinese international students participated in each non-mandatory event held by the International Programs Office at Virginia Tech's

Pamplin College of Business. Further, some Chinese international students even suffer academically, socially, psychologically, or professionally in silent instead of utilizing available resources. Chinese international students also miss personal and professional development opportunities by avoiding non-mandatory events.

It was essential to investigate Chinese international students' motivation for participation, their preferred non-mandatory events, and their perspectives on current events. The information helped the researcher to understand Chinese international students' motivational and demotivational factors in non-mandatory event participation and to understand their perspectives on current events, which were consistent with the goals of this action research.

Currently, some research draws connections between international students' motivation and their learning experiences in the classroom. However, research has yet to explore the correlation between Chinese international students' motivation and non-mandatory personal and professional development opportunities. Additionally, most recent research emphasizes Asian international students as one homogenous group of study participants and overlooks students' cultural differences. This research study focused specifically on Chinese undergraduate and graduate international students. It was important for the researcher to include students from different levels of study because their motivational perspectives and needs may be different based on their age.

Some reasons may also contribute to demotivating Chinese international students to participate in non-mandatory personal and professional development events. External factors, such as discrimination against international students, and internal factors, such as students' background, culture, and English skills, affect Chinese international students'

perspectives, experiences, and performance at U.S. colleges. According to Cho's dissertation (2009), American students mocked international students because of their accents, customs, and clothes. Also, in that study, Cho found that American students would not associate with international students. Instead of helping international students practice their English skills, some students imitated international students' language by saying nonsense words (Cho, 2009). Almost all of the participants from that research mentioned numerous instances of ill-treatment, verbal harassment, physical harassment, and racial profiling. Although Asian students are viewed as high achievers and "model minorities," people from other backgrounds will often discount the meaning of those achievements by associating Asians as "foreigners," "nerds," or "social misfits" (Chou & Feagin, 2016, p.9). Discrimination can quickly destroy someone's self-esteem, silence their voice as a unique individual, and make them question their own identity.

English writing is a unique challenge for international students (Fass-Holmes, 2016). Chinese international students are more likely to experience challenges with grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary (Yin-Croft, 2012) because of the fundamental differences between Asian languages and English (Fass-Holmes, 2016). English is the foundation for most courses and communication at American universities. A language deficiency may negatively impact international students' classroom participation and academic performance (Yuerong et al., 2017). Universities must acknowledge the issue associated with Chinese international students' English skills and provide support programs for them.

Chinese international students suffer not only academically but also mentally. It is not uncommon for Chinese international students to experience symptoms of depression

because of cultural shock, severe loneliness, and stress. Han et al. (2013) found that 45% of Yale University students from China reported symptoms of depression. Similar international students' depression rate data was also reported at the University of Delaware (Redden, 2019). Almost half of the Chinese international students at the above universities experience symptoms of depression, which is an alarming statistic.

Even though Chinese international students are struggling externally and internally, they are still not motivated enough to utilize the available resources to improve their situations. Understanding Chinese international students' demotivating factors is equally important to exploring the motivating factors in this study. Examining factors that demotivate Chinese international students to participate in personal and professional development events provides a deeper understanding of Chinese international students' circumstances. Hence, this is the significance of this study.

Theoretical Framework

Theories were used to guide the research, which should be closely related to the subject being studied (Connelly, 2014). The researcher grounded this action research based on Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (1985) and Gee's literacy/discourse theory (1989b). This study aimed to discover Chinese international students' perspectives, motivational and demotivational factors in non-mandatory event participation. Deci and Ryan (1985) noted that autonomy, competency, and relatedness motivate people to do something, thus providing a motivational framework for this study. Gee (1989b) discussed the challenges of using a language in a professional setting that is not similar to people's home language. Many Chinese international students are unable or unwilling to master English as a second discourse, resulting in cultural grouping among the Chinese

community. Both theories closely relate to the researcher's Problem of Practice, guiding this action research study by explaining motivational factors and the importance of secondary discourses. The theories will be further discussed in chapter two.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory focuses on the reasons of voluntary human behavior related to one's motivation (Deci, 1976). Motivation drives humans to behave or engage in a certain activity voluntarily. This action research intends to find out why Chinese international students do not voluntarily participate in optional events at Virginia Tech, aligning with the core of self-determination theory. Autonomy, competency, and relatedness impact one's motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Autonomy occurs when people use the information to make choices of their own will. People feel intrinsically motivated when they willingly do something without being pressured.

Competency refers to the feeling of being capable. People experience a sense of satisfaction when they are effective in a specific activity. Satisfaction leads and motivates people to learn and develop continuously.

Relatedness refers to being socially connected within a group (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The need for belongingness motivates one to do something.

Literacy/Discourse Theory

Gee (1989b) distinguished the difference between primary and secondary discourses. Humans develop the oral mode of speaking a language as the primary discourse at home. Secondary discourses are developed beyond one's home, such as at schools, workplaces, churches, and offices (Gee, 1989b). In this action research, Chinese

international students practice secondary discourse as English-language learners in American colleges. Gee (1989a) stated that Discourses represent one's "words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes" (pp. 6-7). People have significant advantages in mastering the secondary use of language when their primary discourse aligns linguistically and culturally with the secondary discourse (Gee, 1989b). In other words, it can be challenging for Chinese international students to master English and American cultural identity because of the missing connections between their primary and secondary discourses. More importantly, being able to use secondary discourses properly is essential because it associates with ones' literary levels and their identities (Gee, 1989b). Further, Chinese international students do not feel comfortable participating in English-speaking non-mandatory events without adequate English skills. But language is not the only issue for Chinese international students. According to Gee (1989a), "Someone can speak English, but not fluently. Someone cannot engage in a Discourse in a less than fully fluent manner. You are either in it or you're not" (pp 9-10). Additionally, some Chinese international students' inability to use language and cultural discourses may result in unsatisfactory academic performances and a lack of communication with American students, professors, and/or staff members.

Purpose of the Study

This action research aimed to uncover Chinese international students' motivational and demotivational factors in non-mandatory event participation. By participating in these events, Chinese international students can bond with American students and faculty members better, adjust to life in American college settings faster, and achieve higher

academic grades. There is minimal research addressing Chinese international students' motivational needs in U.S. colleges, even though they face unique and more challenges. Universities offer many resources, such as peer mentoring programs and writing centers to current students; however, Chinese international students' low participation rate in non-mandatory events has not been previously investigated. The lack of motivation to utilize available resources prevents Chinese international students from thriving on U.S. campuses.

Additionally, more than 290,000 Chinese international students study in the United States, representing the largest international student population group in the United States (Duffin, 2023). Chinese international students are also the most significant international student group at Virginia Tech (College Factual, 2022). Therefore, learning about Chinese international students' perspectives and motivations in optional event participation is important and long overdue.

This action research analyzed the motivational factors among Chinese international students, developed a deeper understanding of students' needs, acted as a reference material for future non-mandatory event developments, and improved students' college experience in the long run. Aligning with the theoretical framework, the research questions focus on Chinese international students' motivational and demotivational factors in non-mandatory event participation.

Research Questions

Good research questions should be related to the literature review and suggest the types of research approach and data collection method for the study (Efron & Ravid,

2013). Open-ended questions were utilized in this study to allow an in-depth conversation. Therefore, the following research questions were created based on the above criteria.

1. What factors motivate and demotivate Chinese international students to participate in non-mandatory events?
2. How do Chinese international students perceive the existing events?

The first research question allowed the researcher to discover the investigated population's motivational and demotivational factors in non-mandatory event participation, which were more complicated and could not be explained with numerical data. Similarly, the second research question explored Chinese international students' perspectives on existing events. The complexity of the research questions was best addressed by qualitative research (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Both research questions aligned with this action research's purpose to gain a deeper understanding of Chinese international students through a motivational lens.

Positionality Statement

The researcher is familiar with Chinese and American cultures because of her background and experiences. The researcher was born and raised in China, then moved to the United States in 2010. The researcher was also previously a Chinese international student who experienced culture shock, language barriers, and discrimination. She was left alone to immerse herself into American college culture and this provided her with an insider perspective on the stated research problem as a Chinese international student. Similar to other Chinese international students, the researcher was not motivated to participate in non-mandatory events as an undergraduate student. Consequently, she did not receive adequate career support and spent more than six months trying to secure a

part-time job after graduation. Based on her experiences, it is her belief that motivating Chinese international students to participate in non-mandatory events as early as possible would benefit them tremendously.

Working in the International Programs Office from 2018 to 2020 allowed the researcher to examine Chinese international students' non-mandatory event participation issues as a member of university staff. Through this lens, she noticed that Chinese international students' minimal participation in non-mandatory events was relatively common. The information gap between Chinese international Students and U.S. colleges is getting larger. As a results, university staff members have a hard time promoting events and workshops to Chinese international students. The researcher is interested in ways to motivate Chinese international students to participate in non-mandatory workshops and utilize available resources.

The combined knowledge of being a former international student and a university staff member has prepared the researcher to conduct this study. The researcher collaborated with the Association of Chinese Students and Scholars, became a member of Virginia Tech's Chinese international students' group chats to learn about Chinese international students' motivations, and sent an open-ended survey to multiple group chats through WeChat. Based on the open-ended survey answers, the researcher selected four participants to interview. The researcher spent adequate time with each interviewee to learn about their backgrounds, perspectives, motivation, and demotivation concerning non-mandatory event participation.

Although the researcher's personal background of being a Chinese international student provided her with an understanding of Asian culture and values, it also generated

pre-assumptions and biases for the study. For example, the researcher previously assumed that Chinese international students tend to be quieter compared to American college students. The researcher acknowledged her bias and practiced ongoing self-reflection throughout the research process. She analyzed the research as an outsider to avoid false expectations and assumptions about Chinese international students and refrain from carrying her expectations as a former international student into this action research study. Despite the potential issues of pre-assumptions, the researcher's previous identity is not always a negative aspect of the study. She has a high level of commitment to this topic and yearns to create a better college experience for Chinese international students because she stood in their positions before.

Research Design

Action research is the central theme of this research, instead of traditional research. Improving practice is the purpose of action research (Efron & Efrat, 2020). As an education practitioner, the researcher noticed the existing issue related to Chinese international students' minimal engagement with American university students, staff, and faculty members and recognized that this particular issue would only be improved with an action plan. Being a practitioner allowed the researcher to engage with the participants directly, focused on solutions to her practice, and conducted her investigations reflectively and critically (Efron & Efrat, 2020).

Qualitative research was utilized in this study, allowing the researcher to examine participants' perspectives and motivational factors on non-mandatory event participation. Herr and Anderson (2015) stated that qualitative methods align with action research's practicality. Conversation, text, and discourse analysis are used to provide an

understanding of a given situation in qualitative methods (Herr & Anderson, 2015). This research method was the most appropriate for the research questions because the motivational and demotivational reasons can only be understood and captured through an in-depth conversation. Qualitative research best addressed the research questions and purpose of this action research.

This qualitative research was conducted at Virginia Tech, a four-year public institution in Southwest Virginia. An open-ended survey was sent to group chats with admitted Chinese international students from 2018 through 2022. The survey explored students' thoughts and beliefs about the research topic. From the survey, the researcher selected four students to further discuss their motivational needs and challenges as Chinese international students. Chinese international students were selected in this study because they represent the largest international population group in Virginia Tech and the United States. All participants chosen were either undergraduate or graduate Chinese international students.

Data Collection and Analysis

The open-ended survey and interviews represent the data collection instruments for this research. The researcher sent open-ended surveys with eight short questions about participants' names, contact information, majors, classifications, non-mandatory event preferences, and general perspectives about motivations to several Chinese international students' group chats. The researcher provided English and Chinese versions of each open-ended survey question to minimize language barriers. The interview results were used to interpret Chinese international students' motivational and demotivational factors in non-mandatory event participation. Semi-structured interviews were utilized, primarily

guided by a list of questions but open to further discussion. The researcher conducted each interview in Chinese and recorded it via Zoom.

The open-ended survey and interview data were then transcribed, translated, and organized into files. The researcher used predetermined categories based on the theoretical framework when analyzing the survey and interview data. The predetermined categories call for the following five steps: identifying the predetermined categories, finding segments in the data for each category, looking for themes within each category, arranging the themes logically, and selecting quotes that illustrate the categories (Efron & Ravid, 2020). The researcher used thick description, developed the habits of self-reflexivity, and utilized member checking to ensure the credibility of the research. “Thick description refers to a detailed and rich account of the research context and a presentation of the participants’ perspectives in their own words” (Efron & Ravid, 2020, p. 76). All participants’ primary perspectives were translated accurately without any editing and are presented in Chapter four, allowing others to understand and interpret data fairly. The researcher shared the interview transcripts with participants to further ensure that participants’ responses were recorded accurately. Throughout the research process, the researcher acknowledged and examined her subjectivity about the topic cautiously to ensure the fairness of the research outcomes.

Significance and Limitations of Study

Exploring the motivational and demotivational factors that impact Chinese international students' non-mandatory event participation and understanding their perspective on current events were the purposes of this study, aligning with the action research’s core value of improvements. Action is the key and center of action research,

heavily focusing on the solutions to the current issue (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Action research was the most appropriate for this study because it addressed an overdue and overlooked issue for Chinese international students. Currently, no studies reveal Chinese international students' motivation for non-mandatory events. This research intended to generate knowledge about Chinese international students' motivational needs. The generated information for this study can be potentially used by institutions as reference material when creating events and developing motivational strategies for Chinese international students. Chinese international students will be more willing to participate in their desired non-mandatory events, resulting in personal and professional development. Improved non-mandatory events create and encourage interactions between Chinese international and American students, improving overall students' experience and raising cultural awareness.

Even though this study benefits different parties, such as colleges, American students, and Chinese international students, a few limitations are present. First, the open-ended survey and interview were conducted at one rural college. Students enrolled in an urban university or community college may have different motivational needs and challenges, which are not represented in this action research. Second, the participants may not represent those Chinese international students with minimal non-mandatory event participation at Virginia Tech. The participants were already members of the student organization or student group chat. Additionally, the participants voluntarily completed the open-ended surveys. Therefore, the findings may represent the more active Chinese international students instead of the average population.

Summary of Findings

The findings closely align with the theoretical framework of the research. Chinese international students are intrinsically motivated to participate in non-mandatory events that are meaningful and purposeful. External incentives such as free merchandise or gift cards can be helpful but insignificant when motivating Chinese international students to participate in non-mandatory events. Chinese international students are motivated to attend events related to their interests. Also, strong English competency motivates Chinese international students to participate in non-mandatory events. Students with inadequate language skills may refrain from optional events to avoid speaking English. Additionally, Chinese international students' English skills are more likely to develop naturally instead of in a formal learning environment. Many Chinese international students have a strong preference for Chinese-related non-mandatory events. Cultural and language differences seem to impact Chinese international students' ability when adapting to American Discourses. The researcher also found that Chinese international students' inadequate awareness of campus events and lack of needs demotivate them from participating in non-mandatory events.

Organization of the Dissertation

Five chapters are included in this dissertation. Chapter one provides an overview of the problem of practice and serves as a chain of logic for this research. The literature review is the second chapter of this study, providing works of literature and research about motivation theories, Chinese international students' motivational challenges, needs, and trends in U.S. colleges. A clear understanding of why Chinese international students were selected for this study should be developed through Chapter two. Chapter three

covers this study's research design and method, explaining why action research and qualitative approach are chosen and rationalizing the selected participants and data collection tool. Next, the fourth chapter presents the open-ended survey and interview data, determines Chinese international students' motivational and demotivational factors in non-mandatory event participation, and analyzes data through the theoretical framework. Lastly, Chapter five summarizes the entire study and provides recommendations for future non-mandatory event development for Chinese international students.

List of Definitions

The following definitions are provided to establish consistent collective understanding of this action research study.

Action research: an inquiry done by or with an organization or community member to develop a plan to improve what is already happening (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Cultural grouping: a phenomenon in which students only associate themselves with those who are from the same background.

Demotivation: the lack of interest and motivation for doing something.

Motivation: the need/reason/drive for doing something or behaving in a particular way.

Non-mandatory events: events/workshops/development opportunities that are not required for students to attend.

Qualitative research: a research method that studies a situation or phenomenon through open-ended questions and is later analyzed and organized into categories, patterns, and trends (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses Chinese international students' experiences in the United States, an overview of the problem of practice, the theoretical framework of the study, the literature review methodology, historic perspectives on Asian students, international students' external and internal demotivational factors, international students' college motivational factors related to needs, and associated contemporary issues and trends.

Most related research categorizes Asian international students under one homogeneous group. Although previous studies focus on Asian international students as a whole, Chinese students remain the largest international student population in America. Therefore, studies related to Asian international students mostly apply to Chinese international students.

Overview

More than one million international students study in U.S. colleges (Institute of International Education, 2021b). The increasing number of international students supplies diverse learning experiences to American students. Chinese students are the largest share of international students in the United States, representing 34.6% of the total international student population (Moody, 2020). Students from India constitute 18% of the international student population, and 4.6% are Korean (Moody, 2020). With such a vast population of Chinese international students, learning more about their basic, social, mental, educational, and policy needs is essential (Meyer, 2001). Maslow (1943)

explained that needs and motivations are inseparable, and human needs drive one to do something. Because of the above correlation, Chinese international students' needs and motivations were examined together.

Chinese international students encounter unique external and internal difficulties, including discrimination and mistreatment (Li et al., 2018; Yao, 2018), stereotypes (Chou & Feagin, 2016), and language barriers, which demotivate them from participating in non-mandatory events, utilizing on-campus resources and making satisfactory academic progress (Mei, 2019). Investigating Chinese international students' motivational and demotivational factors to participate in non-mandatory events is imperative. The action research's goal is to understand Chinese international and American students' needs and motivations, help them develop personally and professionally, and provide non-mandatory event development recommendations for U.S. colleges.

At the time of this study, no current research revealed Chinese international students' motivational factors in non-mandatory event participation. Chinese international students' motivational and demotivational factors remain insignificant, an overlooked problem of practice in many American colleges. Chinese international students are underserved by American institutions, even though they pay higher tuition than American students (Loudenback, 2016). Therefore, research questions must address Chinese international students' motivational needs. The following research questions guided this action research:

1. What factors motivate and demotivate Chinese international students to participate in non-mandatory events?
2. How do Chinese international students perceive the existing events?

Organization of Literature Review

This chapter demonstrates the importance of understanding Chinese international students' current circumstances through a motivational lens. The literature review methodology and theoretical framework are at the beginning of this chapter. The historic perspectives on Chinese international students show that similar issues related to language barriers and their inability to integrate into American college life have remained unsolved since 1980. Chinese international students' needs and challenges will be mentioned because they closely relate to their motivation and demotivation. The last few studies describe underserved Chinese international students and their value to American colleges. A summary of essential findings serves as the closing of this chapter.

Purpose of the Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review is to examine and review the existing literature to confirm the importance and urgency of understanding Chinese international students' motivational factors through needs and demotivational factors through challenges. This chapter intends to analyze and compare the historical and current situation for Chinese international students through studies from different decades. The studies in this chapter prove the existing knowledge gap concerning issues related to Chinese international students, which supports and justifies the need for this study. Through the process of investigating related literature, the researcher also gained a deeper understanding of the topic and learned more about the current trends of Chinese international students. The lack of previous research about Chinese international students' motivational needs and contemporary trends of decreased Chinese international students'

enrollment also further illustrate the significance of this research since American colleges heavily rely on Chinese international students financially.

Literature Review Strategies

The researcher mainly used dissertations, peer-reviewed articles, and books for the literature review through the University of South Carolina (UofSC) database. For dissertations, keywords including Chinese international students, Asian international students, motivation, and international students services were searched through ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. Published journals and peer-reviewed articles were the other primary resources from the database through UofSC. The researcher used Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (1985) and Gee's literacy/discourse theory (1989b) to build on the theoretical framework. Statistics, such as Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores, were extracted from the official TOEFL site. Most of the literature resources were published recently, from 2000 to 2020, to ensure the information is still relevant today.

Theoretical Framework

This action research is guided by Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (1985) and Gee's literacy/discourse theory (1989b). The self-determination theory provides factors that drive people to do something. The researcher aims to explore factors that motivate Chinese international students to participate in non-mandatory events. Gee's literacy/discourse theory explains the difficulty of mastering a discourse different from people's home language. The history, definition, and importance of both theories are described in detail for this action research study.

Self-Determination Theory

The root of Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory can be traced back to the 1980s. Motivating people is the purpose of self-determination theory. Therefore, it is essential to understand the differences among intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Intrinsic motivation is the primary focus of the self-determination theory. Intrinsically motivated people willingly do things for gratification, interest, or enjoyment rather than for external rewards (Deci & Ryan, 1980). Extrinsically motivated people do things because of pressure (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Extrinsic motivations are related to goals and rewards. Amotivation refers to the lack of motivation to act. People either do not act or go through the motions without a purpose when amotivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Deci and Ryan formally introduced the self-determination theory in 1985. Their book, *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*, heavily focused on self-determination and competency instead of relatedness. Although relatedness was as important, more research and explorations about relatedness were needed at that time (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Self-determination and competency intrinsically motivate people. "self-determination refers to the experience of freedom in initiating one's behavior" (p. 31). In other words, self-determination is about personal choices. Additionally, self-determination has a much longer history than the self-determination theory proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985). James, the first psychologist, discussed the importance of volition and willpower in 1890. Competency is another critical element of the self-determination theory. White (1959) introduced a feeling of efficacy and described it as the source of motivation, which later became part of the self-determination theory. According to Deci

and Ryan, “Competency is the accumulated result of one’s interactions with the environment, of one’s exploration, learning, and adaptation” (1985, p. 27). Being capable of doing something motivates people to further learn and grow. Relatedness is the last need of the self-determination theory. Ryan and Deci (2000) stated that people are extrinsically motivated to do things that are “valued by significant others to whom they feel attached or related” (p. 73). People want to feel belongingness and connect with others. In conclusion, people with intrinsic motivation and integrated extrinsic motivation mostly experience supports for competency, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Although needs are universal, people from different cultures will likely express their competency, autonomy, and relatedness differently (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Studies related to self-determination in different cultures are significant to this action research. The researcher hopes to apply the self-determination theory when analyzing Chinese international students’ motivations. In another study, Church et al. (2012) sent questionnaires to students from the United States, Australia, Mexico, Venezuela, Philippines, Malaysia, and China. Although the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are universally important, Asian participants averaged lower than non-Asian participants in perceived satisfaction with the above three elements (Church et al., 2012). Deci and Ryan (1985) stressed the benefits of intrinsic motivation; however, extrinsic motivation can be as helpful in another culture. Nishimura and Sakurai (2017) found that Japanese junior high school students experienced high social pressure as extrinsic controlled motivation to excel academically. However, they did not have a lower motivational level. Furthermore, the importance of autonomy appears to be

conversational in Asian cultures. Sheldon (2012) found that autonomy need is less supported by Asian cultures. Wichmann (2011) indicated that autonomy relates to well-being across cultures, but the importance of autonomy may vary depending on the culture. Further research is needed regarding the importance of autonomy in different countries.

Literacy/Discourse Theory

Many people associate one's literacy level with their ability to write and read and equate illiterate with a lack of intelligence (Carter, 1947). Gee (1989b) argued that the commonly accepted definition of literacy is problematic. Reading is more about decoding and interpreting instead of calling out the names of letters (Gee, 1989b). Besides reading, humans learn to speak and develop oral skills as the primary discourse through family interactions (Gee, 1989b). Humans learn to act and speak accordingly, depending on the settings. Secondary discourse is developed in a more formal environment, such as schools, workplaces, stores, and offices, usually built on the primary discourse (Gee, 1989b). More importantly, "literacy is control of secondary uses of language" (Gee, 1989b, p. 23).

It is essential to understand that discourse is a complicated term with multiple layers. Discourse is similar to an "identity kit" that represents humans' ways of using language, thinking, and acting within a social group (Gee, 1989a, p. 7). Discourse is closely related to this action research because it is about integration and immersion in secondary institutions, such as American colleges, as a Chinese international student. Gee (1989a) did not directly discuss the meaning of capital D in his previous work and later added that Discourses, with a capital D, represent every aspect of life. Chinese international students' cultures, values, beliefs, and English proficiency are parts of their

discourses. Gee noted that students have a significant advantage when their primary discourse aligns with their secondary discourse (1989b). Therefore, it is hard for Chinese international students to master secondary discourse as English-language learners and adjust to American Discourses, with the capital D, because their primary discourses are drastically different from the secondary discourses. Social groups tend not to accept those who cannot fluently practice Discourses and view them as outsiders (Gee, 1989a). Helping non-mainstream students, such as Chinese international students, to master literacies is a process that requires acquisition, not learning. Second language learners benefit from a natural conversation more than formal grammar learning (Gee, 1989b). In other words, a natural environment is needed and should be created for Chinese international students to improve their English language skills.

Historic Perspectives on Chinese International Students

Yang (1988) conducted a study at two community colleges in Los Angeles and found that Chinese international students' English proficiency determined their academic success. However, Chinese international students' inadequate English skills prevented them from excelling academically and narrowed their major selections to the STEM field (Yang, 1988). Similarly, Abu-Saad et al. (1982) found that language barriers and faculty members' lack of awareness of foreign cultures were the biggest concerns for Asian international students. Chinese international students were challenged not only academically but also socially. Academic success was East Asian international students' most significant concern, a primary factor taking up their time and preventing them from socializing with others (Wilson, 1996). Although Chinese international students were highly committed to academic success, their academic journey in U.S. colleges was

challenging. Endo (1980) pointed out that Asian American students avoided classroom participation and oral presentations, reinforcing a stereotype of Asian Americans as quiet and unexpressive. Consequently, teachers gave out poor grades to students who performed poorly in classroom discussions because teachers saw this as evidence of inadequate preparation or a lack of intelligence (Endo, 1980).

To address the challenges international and minority students encountered, Evans (1990) surveyed undergraduate and graduate nontraditional students enrolled at Iowa State University in fall 1989. The most pressing issues that should be addressed through student services were race relations among the existing ethnic/cultural groups represented, deflating the close-minded attitudes toward students from different backgrounds, providing international and minority student populations an equal opportunity to perform academically, and limiting the increasing cost of tuition (Evans, 1990). Some international students demanded a standard grading policy because they felt that their grades depended upon their cultural/ethnic differences rather than academic achievement and thought they received a different grading scale than other students (Evans, 1990).

At this time of this study, only a few other studies and articles have addressed Chinese or Asian international students' needs and challenges. Prior to the 1980s, not many Chinese international students studied at American colleges, and this explains the lack of previous data and information.

External Challenges that Demotivate Chinese International Students from Participating in Non-Mandatory Events

This section discusses the following external challenges for Chinese international students:

- Discrimination and mistreatment
- Western international students versus other international students
- The myth of model minority as Asian students
- Immigration regulations and career-related issues

Discrimination and Mistreatment

Chinese international students face mistreatment because of their backgrounds and cultures. Li et al. (2018) conducted qualitative research at a Midwestern public university to explore East Asian international students' academic adaptation experiences. Eason, a Chinese participant, stated that his American classmates discriminated against him, ignored his opinions, and assigned him unwanted tasks throughout the group project (Li et al., 2018). Chinese international students not only have negative experiences with their classmates but also with staff in American colleges. According to Cho (2009), English as a Second Language (ESL) faculty, non-ESL teachers, and non-academic staff exhibited a lack of sensitivity toward international students studying at Louisiana colleges. Such negative experiences may discourage Chinese international students from further communicating and interacting with American students and staff.

Yao (2018) also shared similar findings in her research conducted at a large land-grant Midwestern university. A few Chinese students experienced blatant acts of discrimination committed by American students (Yao, 2018). It is not uncommon for

Chinese international students to encounter discrimination in American colleges as Yao's study (2018) found that many participants and their friends had been discriminated against subtly. This represented multiple similar occurrences on one campus.

The above studies indicate that Chinese international students were mistreated by faculty members, staff, and American students. It is extremely hard for Chinese international students to fit in at American colleges and be comfortable with who they are if they are continually discriminated against. Chinese international students are discouraged from participating in non-mandatory events because of discrimination. Colleges must do a better job of conveying the importance and expectation of cultural competency within the community.

Western International Students Versus Other International Students

Asian international students also have a more challenging time communicating with American students. Interactions between Asian international students and American students can be limited. However, this phenomenon does not apply to international students from Western countries. Perry (2017) recruited participants from a U.S. land grant university, and utilized a quantitative approach, and placed participants into one of the two categories: 1) population was predominantly of Western or European descent, and 2) nations that were not. Results showed that international students from non-Western countries felt that domestic students avoided talking to them more than students from Western nations. Students from non-Western nations had more significant concerns with discrimination from faculty, American students, and other international students than students from Western nations (Perry, 2017).

Lee and Rice (2007) also shared similar findings as Perry. Lee and Rice conducted their research on a large public university in the Southwest region of the United States through an online survey in 2007. The researchers found that students from Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East reported considerable discrimination. Students from Europe and specifically Canada and New Zealand, did not report any direct negative experiences related to their race or culture (Lee & Rice, 2007). Both studies indicate that students from non-Western countries come across more issues than students from Western ones. Based on the above findings, it appears that American students have a more positive attitude toward those with a similar background, culture, and physical features.

The Myth of Model Minority as Asian Students

It is not uncommon for one to think that Asian students are free from racism because Asian students tend to have high levels of educational attainment and household income (Chou & Feagin, 2016). Asian students' social status makes it seem as if they are doing better than other racial minorities. In fact, the Asian students' experience with racial hostility and discrimination is very negative and largely untold with very harmful invisibility. According to Chou and Feagin (2016), most stereotypes of Asian students "are negative, such as non-Asians' notions that Asians 'do not speak English well,' 'have accents,' and are 'submissive,' 'sneaky,' 'stingy,' and 'greedy,' etc." (p.10). Even though Asian students are higher achievers compared to other racial minorities, they still are not respected and treated equally as their peers. Martel (2016) noted, "Asian Americans have been socially constructed as a visibly homogenous, foreign, model minority yet remains

invisible, subordinated, or marginalized in many environments, particularly in education" (p.42).

The myth of model minority may also put Asian students in a disadvantaged position regarding the college admission process. The National Study of College Experience (Espenshade & Radford, 2009) showed that Asians need to score 140 points higher than White applicants, 320 points higher than Hispanic applicants, and 450 points higher than Black applicants on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) to get admitted at the same school. Affirmative action protects minorities such as Black and Hispanic students while excluding Asian students (Lee & Tran, 2019). In spite of Asians' Non-White minority status, Asians do not benefit from affirmative action since they do not have historic disadvantages like other minorities (Lee & Tran, 2019). Asian students are punished because they are high-achieving minorities (Wu, 2015).

Immigration Regulations and Career-Related Issues

Chinese international students are not only experiencing educational discrimination but also systemic discrimination through the U.S. federal government's immigration policies. The majority of international students are F-1 visa holders in the United States, which allows these students to work on-campus as well as off-campus under restrictions (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2020). Students with F-1 visas are allowed to work on campus for no more than 20 hours per week when school is in session, and they are not eligible for any U.S. federal financial aid, including work-study positions (McFadden & Seedorff, 2017). For off-campus employment, international students must find employment related to their majors, seek approval from designated school officials, and submit an application with fee payments (McFadden &

Seedorff, 2017). International students are allowed to work at an internship offered by sponsoring employers in agreement with the host institution (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2020).

Besides challenges related to employment regulations, the lack of resources (Sangganjanavanich et al., 2011) also explains international students' low employment rates in America. Sangganjanavanich et al. (2011) invited eight international students to participate in a 10-week support group that was followed by a single-session focus group. All participants said they did not know how to locate resources such as employment rules and public policies pertaining to international students (Sangganjanavanich et al., 2011). Insufficient support from career counselors was also mentioned in the study.

It is challenging for international students to seek employment with many regulations in place. As a result, fee-based internship programs are becoming more popular among international students. In these programs, students pay a fee to an organization that will review their application materials and guarantee internship placement (usually unpaid) with the inclusion of training concerning networking, professionalism, and career-related soft skills (McFadden & Seedorff, 2017). A fee-based internship program is generally expensive, in some cases costing thousands of dollars (McFadden & Seedorff, 2017) and international students have to purchase internship experience in order to build their resumes. Additionally, companies must meet different legal requirements in order to hire international students (McFadden & Seedorff, 2017), which could be a burden for some organizations. For example, only three out of over 50 companies at Virginia Tech's business-major career fair are willing to hire international

students. Also, some Chinese international students may find it pointless to participate in career fairs or workshops because of the strict immigration policies.

Internal Challenges that Demotivate Chinese International Students from Participating in Non-Mandatory Events

This section will discuss the following internal challenges for Chinese international students:

- Internal perception of being an Asian international student
- Fundamental differences between Chinese and English
- Unwillingness to seek help among Chinese international students
- Academic issues among Chinese international students

Internal Perception of Being an Asian International Student

Besides external challenges, Chinese international students also struggle with internal barriers such as self-perception (Park, 2019), language, cultural differences, homesickness (Perry, 2017) and academic-related issues (Mei, 2019). Park (2019) recruited 306 Asian international students from four-year universities in the United States and conducted quantitative research through an online survey. Park (2019) discovered that Asian international students' internal perspective of how others viewed Asians was more negative than how they viewed Asians themselves. Asian international students perceived that American society devalued Asians because of their non-native English accent and country of origin (Park, 2019). Even though Asian international students' public regard is not as negative, Asian international students still carried inaccurate assumptions about themselves. They felt self-conscious about their culture and language. Being different from Americans is almost a wrong thing for Asian international students

(Chou & Feagin, 2016). In order to fit in, Asian students want to seem more westernized (Chou & Feagin, 2016). Asian international students' negative private regard prevents them from engaging in college activities, socializing with American students, participating in classroom discussions, and landing internship or employment opportunities.

Fundamental Differences Between Chinese and English

Almost every international student is required to demonstrate English proficiency for college admission purposes by completing the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). These scores are accepted by more than 10,000 colleges and universities in more than 150 countries (TOEFL, 2019). The TOEFL measures the ability to communicate in English using the four language skills - reading, listening, speaking, and writing (TOEFL, 2019). The maximum score for each four-language skill is 30, totaling a score of 120 for the entire test. Based on the percentile ranks provided by TOEFL in 2019, a total score of 80 represents a 38-percentile rank, and a total score of 84 represents a 51-percentile rank for the entire group. According to the annual TOEFL report in 2019, 18 out of 29 Asian countries, including China and Korea, were placed at 51 or under the percentile rank. Statistically, Southeast Asian students generally scored considerably lower than other students.

A few reasons may explain Chinese international students' challenges when learning English. First, China has several localized dialects that uniquely differ from English concerning their written form (Fass-Holmes, 2016). For example, China's Mandarin language has a different writing system using characters representing words instead of alphabets (Fass-Holmes, 2016). Second, English has many different rules than

Chinese. Yin-Croft (2012) explained that pronunciation, word order, omission, or misuse of words, and literal translation are the most common issues for Chinese students.

English skills affect Chinese international students' lives significantly. For instance, students with better English skills reported a lower perceived discrimination rate (Park, 2019). Students with poor English skills avoid cross-cultural interactions with American students, struggle academically, and possibly experience homesickness more than other students (Perry, 2017).

Unwillingness to Seek Help among Chinese International Students

Chinese international students may have many questions and need help when they first arrive in America. Navigating a new campus in another country is challenging for many Chinese international students. It is important for these students to seek help. However, Li (2016) found that some Chinese international students were reluctant to seek help and preferred to solve the problem by themselves through qualitative research. Chinese international students' unwillingness to seek help prevents them from utilizing campus resources. Further, Chinese culture emphasizes self-reliance or relying on one's inner circle (Li, 2016). It can be uncomfortable for Chinese international students to open up and seek help from American professors and university staff members.

Academic Issues Among Chinese International Students

Besides language barriers, as mentioned above, Chinese international students encounter other obstacles regarding their academic status. The Chinese classroom structure is different from American classroom structure. Chinese students are expected to sit and listen quietly instead of raising questions during class (Huang, 2009). In America, classroom discussions and presentations are encouraged and utilized frequently

in K-12 and higher education. Some Chinese international students may struggle adapting to the interactive learning style and feel uncomfortable during class (Mei, 2019). As a result, Chinese international students may miss or have lower participation grades if they do not voice their opinions.

According to Mei (2019), some Chinese international students are unaware of the available on-campus resources and services, including writing centers, tutoring centers, group exercises, and student success centers. These services are common in American colleges but not in Chinese colleges (Mei, 2019). Chinese international students often do not take advantage of the programs and resources and may miss out on many developmental opportunities because of their unawareness. Adequate resource and event promotion to Chinese international students is needed to improve awareness.

Additionally, Chinese international students tend to be unfamiliar with academic policies in American colleges. Mei (2019) noted that Chinese international students could not fully understand email and procedures and were unaware of the severe consequences of being on academic probation. In other words, Chinese international students cannot take action proactively to address potential academic issues due to language barriers. Chinese international students also receive inaccurate information related to academic policies from their peers and non-official online resources (Mei, 2019), which hinders academic success. Without understanding academic policies, Chinese international students may fail the following academic requirements, including overall GPA, class hours, class format, and pace of progress.

Motivating Chinese International Students

To better serve Chinese international students, understanding their motivations and needs is essential. Chinese international students will be more motivated to participate in non-mandatory events addressing their needs and motivation. Therefore, it is important for American colleges to learn more about Chinese international students and develop non-mandatory events accordingly. This section will discuss the following related topics below:

- Chinese international students' college needs
- Motivational factors for Chinese international students

Understanding Chinese International Students' College Needs

International students at American colleges and universities contribute 38.7 billion dollars to the U.S. economy and support 415,996 jobs (NAFSA, 2020a). The significance of international students extends beyond financial benefits, as they make useful political, cultural, social, and educational contributions (Altbach & Knight, 2007). In order to maintain a high level of contribution from international students, colleges must attempt to understand international students' needs better.

Alfattal (2016) conducted a qualitative study at a public university in Southern California and interviewed 12 international students about their American experiences and college needs based on Kotler and Fox's marketing mix model created in 1995. Kotler and Fox (1995) suggested the 7Ps, including program, place, promotion, price, process, physical facilities, and people for strategic marketing. The 7Ps mean something different when it comes to education, which can be interpreted in the following ways:

(1) 'Program' refers to the programs a higher education campus makes available to students. (2) 'Place' concerns the delivery of 'Program,' as it relates to making education accessible in terms of time and physio geographical distribution of 'Program.' (3) 'Promotion' is all the methods that institutions use to speak to the public. (4) 'Price' are tuition and other expenses incurred during the study. (5) 'Process' is the management of enrollment, teaching, and learning. (6) 'Physical Facilities' concerns how the institution is physically shaped and includes the nature and quality of campus facilities provided. Finally, (7) 'People' are the administration, the faculty, and the staff of a higher education campus. (Alfattal, 2016, p. 923)

Additionally, Alfattal (2016) suggested adding peace as the eighth P to the marketing model because the participants sought safe, peaceful, tolerant, welcoming, friendly, and secure American college experiences.

Chinese international students' college needs can be different after arriving in America. Toward this, Meyer published a theoretical article in 2001 about international student orientation and described that orientation should be an ongoing process of personal, intellectual, and academic development. Meyer (2001) also explained that the content and structure of international student orientation, and address basic needs, cultural/social adjustment, educational adjustment, immigration regulations, and physical and psychological well-being in the following:

(1) Basic needs refer to preparing for departure, housing, food, shopping, personal and health services, campus facilities, financial matter, communication methods, academic resources, and transportation. (2) To address cultural and social

adjustment, U.S. culture, general knowledge of cultural shock, and appropriate social conduct should be mentioned during the orientation. (3) The educational adjustment refers to the structure of American higher education, learning skills and strategies, the role of faculty members, academic advisors, and international student advisors. (4) Immigration regulations refer to visa and employment policies. (5) Topics related to campus safety, health insurance, healthy lifestyle, medical and counseling services should be addressed (pp. 68-69).

Although Meyer's suggestions are for international student orientation, the information can be considered and applied to non-mandatory event development for Chinese international students.

In addition to Alfattal's 8Ps marketing model and Meyer's suggestions of international students' overall needs, academic needs of international students are also unique. Rai (2002) questioned whether the curriculum meets international students' needs. To research this idea, Rai mailed a questionnaire to 111 deans and directors of accredited graduate social work programs. Out of 111 questionnaires, only a small number of schools reported adding international content to a very great extent to their curriculums, and none of the schools offered a particular course for international students (Rai, 2002). Based on the finding, Rai concluded that many graduate social work programs did not provide sufficient training for international students who will return to their home countries. The degree may serve as a credential rather than a set of methods and skills (Rai, 2002). The current curriculum does not meet international students' career needs. To improve the curriculum, colleges must encourage the maximum infusion of international content in the required elective courses (Ramanathan & Link, 1999). If

curricula address global issues, international practices, and diverse perspectives, students will be able to apply their knowledge in different countries.

An internationally infused curriculum and culturally conscious learning environment are needed because of the large international student enrollment. Eleven U.S. colleges had an enrollment of 10,000 international students or more during the 2019-2020 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2021a). Four colleges, including New York University, Northeastern University- Boston, University of Southern California, and Columbia University, had an enrollment of 15,000 international students or more (Institute of International Education, 2021a), which make up approximately 40-55 percent of total student populations in those schools. Colleges should at least modify their curriculums to meet international students' career needs. American students will also benefit from a more diverse curriculum as they learn more about global perspectives, policies, and trends.

Heng (2017) found that a culturally conscious learning environment is crucial through interviews with 18 Chinese international students from three urban, private, four-year liberal arts-focused U.S. colleges. One-third of the participants requested teachers to consider their backgrounds when teaching and discussing U.S. culture more (Heng, 2017). For example, participants suggested that teachers provide additional definitions to terms, ideas, and anecdotes in class. Some standard English terms were found to be confusing for Chinese international students while non-verbal communication is also valued. Participants hoped that teachers would encourage, nod, and reassure them during conversations (Heng, 2017).

In addition to Chinese international students' academic needs, they may also need mental health programs. Atri and Sharma (2006) explained why Asian international students need a designated mental health program. First, many viewed Asian students as one homogenous group and ignored the differences between country of origin, language, and culture (Atri & Sharma, 2006). Asian cultures can be drastically different, depending on the countries of origin. Second, the stereotype of the model minority as Asian students compounded the stressors and gave way to distress in the long run. Atri and Sharma (2006) suggested counseling practitioners become familiar with cross-cultural communication and be culturally sensitive when creating a mental health program for Asian students. It is vital for college counselors and university administrators to be culturally competent and aware of Asian international students' high learning motivation (Li et al., 2018). It will also be good practice to use Asian international students' motivation to make positive changes, improve their self-esteem during a counseling session, and understand Asian international students' psychological well-being related to academic adaptation (Li et al., 2018).

To learn about Asian international students' thought processes and bring about cultural awareness, Li (2014) facilitated a three-day training program for advisors and other faculty members. Participants learned about the feeling of being a foreigner, international students' challenges, and support systems for international students (Li, 2014). Li also explained that very few cross-cultural training programs are designed for international students and their advisors in America. Cross-cultural training should be utilized more because of international students' growing population (Li, 2014). A

culturally competent campus provides a positive and encouraging environment to international students, motivating students to engage in the college community actively.

Motivational Factors for Chinese International Students

American colleges offer many social and professor development opportunities for students. For example, students have the option to participate in activities or events held by student organizations or official departments. Non-mandatory events are positively associated with students' academic success and employment outcomes (Ribeiro et al., 2023). Tsai and Wong (2012) conducted research in a large Midwestern university to explore reasons contributing to Taiwanese and Chinese international students' participation in social organizations. Gaining social support, free food, and practical benefits motivate these students to participate in social organizations (Tsai & Wong, 2012). Additionally, not all Chinese international students also share the same motivation in non-mandatory event participation. Heng (2019) found that first-year students participate in extracurricular activities based on their interests. Second-year students participate in non-mandatory activities to improve their resumes.

Bamber (2013) conducted a mixed-methods study to investigate what motivates Chinese females to enroll in a master's program in the United Kingdom. Career gains, a shorter length of the program, the U.K. job market, comparatively cheaper tuition because of the exchange rate, and the opportunity to travel are the primary motivations for Chinese females to study in the United Kingdom (Bamber, 2013). Additionally, Zhai et al. (2019) concluded that career opportunities, university reputation, host country environment, and social connections motivate Chinese students to study in Australia. The above studies suggest potential pre-departure factors that motivate Chinese students to

study abroad. Understanding the students' motivational reasons for studying abroad will also help colleges better meet students' expectations.

Chinese international students' English proficiency also plays an important role in impacting their motivation. Xing and Bolden (2019) stated that oral English proficiency is closely related to Chinese international students' academic acculturation success. However, the oral component of English learning in China is not as important as reading, writing, and listening (Xing & Bolden). In other words, Chinese international students rarely have the opportunity to practice their oral English proficiency before enrolling in an English-speaking university. Improving oral English proficiency can be a scary but necessary process for Chinese international students because it impacts their daily communication with professors and classmates. Xing and Bolden (2019) found that all participants in their studies were motivated to improve their oral English. However, motivation declined when they realized they were unable to cultivate meaningful conversations with native English speakers.

In addition to academic needs, Chinese international students are motivated to make friends with other Chinese peers instead of American students (Tang et al., 2018). Chinese international students do not necessarily have to step out of their comfort zone and expand their social circle beyond the Chinese community if their needs are met by other Chinese students. Tang et al. (2018) also pointed out that some Chinese international students do not expect full integration into American campus culture because academic success is their primary focus. Similarly, He and Huston (2018) shared similar findings about the importance of academic success among Chinese international students. Participants were determined and motivated to complete their programs

successfully and excel in classes (He & Huston, 2018). Chinese international students are highly motivated when it comes to academic success. Other aspects of college life, such as personal or social development, may seem insignificant compared to academic success.

Underserved Asian International Students

Traditionally, underserved students are defined as students who do not receive resources as equitably as other students in the academic pipeline, including low-income, underrepresented, racial/ethnic minorities, and first-generation students (Highe & Fisher, n.d.). Asian international students appear not to be one of the underserved student groups (Martell, 2016); however, they experience inequality differently at American colleges.

Tannock (2018) argued that tuition fees are among the most important factors when measuring equality and social justice in higher education. It was found that international students pay up to three times more than in-state students at public universities (Loudenback, 2016). Even though international students only represented 12% of the total student population, they contributed nearly 30% of total tuition revenue at public universities in 2015 (Bustamante, 2020). For example, The Ohio State University-Columbus campus charged in-state students \$24,544, out-of-state students \$46,528, and international students \$49,456 for 2020-2021 tuition and room and board (The Ohio State University, 2021). International students at the Ohio State University paid almost double the tuition of in-state students. The cost differences were only \$3,000 between out-of-state and international students; however, many international students pay full tuition out-of-pocket with no financial aid (NAFSA, 2023; Le, 2018). For public colleges, minimal scholarships are available for international students (NAFSA, 2023).

Even though international students are paying the premium price for college education in the United States, their motivational needs and challenges are not addressed. They have not received the quality of college experiences they paid for. For Chinese international students, the situation is even more challenging because of prejudice from domestic students, mistreatment from staff, and higher SAT score admission standards (Chou & Feagin, 2016; Li et al., 2018; Yao, 2018; Espenshade & Radford, 2009).

Besides financial inequality for Asian international students, college practitioners also fail to respond to Asian American students' needs promptly to meet the growth of this student population (Kawaguchi, 2003). Martell (2016) conducted a qualitative study to investigate nine Asian American students' experiences at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). It was found that the services and support available for Asian American students at UIC were insufficient, even though UIC was one of the top 25 most diverse U.S. universities (Martell, 2016). Martell further explained that Asian American students' needs remained invisible and treated as a college's secondary priority because Asian Americans were not considered a traditionally underrepresented group. With 22.7% of the Asian American population in 2014, UIC still did not offer an academic support unit for Asian American students (Martell, 2016). As a result, all participants felt unwelcomed and frustrated during their time at UIC.

Similarly, Qu (2018) shared findings regarding ongoing assistance to international students. It was found that only one out of eight students received assignment support after orientation (Qu, 2018). Two-thirds of Qu's participants also stated that the support for professional advice, diligent student-staff-instructor interactions, and guidance in the curriculum were insufficient.

In summary, Asian international students are underserved by American colleges because their identities and needs were not acknowledged (Martell, 2016) in spite of the international students' higher tuition. Asian international students' challenges, needs, and motivational factors should be addressed by colleges promptly.

Emerging Trends that Impact Asian International Students

International students contribute financially significantly to universities and the U.S. economy. NAFSA (2020b) stated, "for every eight international students, three U.S. jobs are created and supported by spending occurring in the higher education, accommodation, dining, retail, transportation, telecommunications, and health insurance sectors" (p. 1). In recent years, however, the enrollment of international students in the United States has declined due to visa regulations, the increasingly competitive global market of higher education options, the social environment, and high tuition costs (Institute of International Education, 2021a).

Van Alebeek and Wilson (2019) conducted a semi-structured interview of 16 participants in a public, regional university in the Southeast United States. The goal of the interview was to find information about international students' decision-making process when selecting a college or a country (Van Alebeek & Wilson, 2019). International students consider multiple factors when choosing a country and an institution as their destinations. Cost, the availability of an English as a Second Language (ESL) program, application requirements such as the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), the program's reputation, and professional opportunities influenced all stages of international students' choice of institution and country (Van Alebeek & Wilson, 2019). According to Van Alebeek and Wilson (2019), "the families' opinions played a major role in the

predisposition, search, and choice stage of finding educational opportunities abroad" (p. 298).

Besides the above trends that influence international students' decisions to study in the United States, the political environment is equally important. Laws and Ammigan (2020) mentioned a 3% decrease in first-time enrollment of international students after the 2016 presidential election, and it was the first international student enrollment loss since 2005. It is critical for university administrators and staff to recognize the impact of the political environment on international students and remain proactive in providing immigration support services (Law & Ammigan, 2020).

In fall 2020, international student enrollment at U.S. colleges and universities and virtual enrollment decreased by 43 percent because of the COVID-19 global pandemic (Institute of International Education, 2021). Many colleges and universities across the country experienced financial crises (Dickler, 2020) because of the decreased enrollment and state funding budget cuts. The University of Alaska's Board of Regents approved reducing, discontinuing, renaming, or merging 45 academic programs to save close to \$4 million (University of Alaska, 2020). The academic program cuts impacted almost 700 students and 30 faculty and staff members (University of Alaska, 2020). Besides financial crisis, anti-Asian racism, spread quickly on the web and across social media platforms, is also the byproduct of the COVID-19 pandemic (Tausen et al., 2020). Leaders on campus should address anti-Asian racism and xenophobia, condemn such acts, and support Asian American and Pacific Islander students (Tausen et al., 2020).

Approximately half of U.S. colleges and universities prioritize overseas recruitment in China, Vietnam, India, Korea, and Asian countries remain the focus of

global recruitment (Institute of International Education, 2020). In order to stay competitive globally, U.S. institutions must offer appealing programs that address Asian international students' needs and acknowledge the current challenges.

Related Research

Wilson (1996) utilized a mixed research method including questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to examine Asian international students' stressors and coping behaviors. Five sites were selected for data collection, representing different types and locations of colleges. Participants identified that their social and emotional needs were met by interacting with other international students as their primary support network instead of American students (Wilson, 1996). Similarly, Lam (1997) analyzed factors that affect Taiwanese students' relationship building with American students. Some participants mentioned that there is not enough motivation to spend the time and effort to develop friendships with Americans (Lam, 1997). They preferred making friends with other international students and found communication with Americans is a struggle due to language differences (Lam, 1997). Lam (1997) mentioned that it is safer for international students to keep quiet to avoid the embarrassment of making a mistake while speaking English. The fear of speaking English impacts not only Asian students' social life but also their academic performances.

The Office of International Students Service plays a significant role because it supports international students in various ways. The Office of International Students Service is a primary resource for many international students. According to Qu (2018), the Office of International Services has made dramatic contributions to facilitating international student engagement by providing immigration services, creating networking

events, and offering development workshops for international students. International Student Services' goal is to foster effective engagement practices based on international students' unique needs throughout their journey in America. Psychological issues, academic issues, English language difficulties, sociocultural issues, financial concerns, and career development concerns are the main issues for international students (Qu, 2018). Motivating Asian international students to engage in non-mandatory events and helping the students develop personally and professionally are the goals of this action research.

Summary

Information about Chinese international students' engagement outside of a learning environment is minimal, even though participation in non-mandatory events is as important and highly beneficial. Students develop soft skills, improve study skills, build career networks, and foster relationships through engagement in non-mandatory events. Although the non-mandatory events are beneficial, the minimal participation among Chinese international students has always been an issue. Additionally, no existing research discusses Chinese international students' motivations and demotivation to attend non-mandatory events. Students' backgrounds are overlooked in similar research, emphasizing Asian identity as a whole. This research will bridge the knowledge gap to explore Chinese international students' motivational and demotivational factors in non-mandatory event participation and investigate their perspectives on college events.

Many studies show that Chinese international students require additional assistance than other international students because they are challenged more frequently due to discrimination, self-acceptance issues, and language barriers. Because of these

challenges, Chinese international students minimize their participation in non-mandatory events. Current literature suggests that Chinese international students require adequate physiological, safety, love, and esteem needs to be met in order to succeed in American colleges. A few recent studies demonstrate Chinese international students' pre- and post-departure motivations to study abroad. Finally, statistics collected by NAFSA and IIE indicate that Asian international students as a whole are underserved by colleges and charged more tuition because of their background. Therefore, it is imperative to serve Chinese international students better by investigating their post-departure motivations, needs, and challenges.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

This research investigated the motivational and demotivational factors that impact Chinese international students' motivational levels in non-mandatory event participation. Chinese international students are the most significant international student group in America. The increasing enrollment of Chinese international students has brought benefits and challenges for American colleges. Chinese international students' low engagement rate in workshops and events may put them in disadvantaged academic, developing, and networking positions because of missing opportunities. American colleges benefit financially through Chinese international students' fully-paid tuition. However, Chinese international students' needs are not met. Therefore, studying Chinese international students' needs, motivations, and challenges is important.

Problem of Practice

The researcher found it challenging to immerse herself in an American campus as a Chinese international student. Further, the researcher did not take advantage of many personal and professional development opportunities because she was unaware of campus resources and was uncomfortable with her identity as a Chinese international student. Later, as a university staff member, the researcher noticed that many Chinese international students were repeating the same mistake. These students have a difficult time fitting in and refuse to take advantage of campus resources. From 2018 to 2020, the

researcher created countless networking, community bonding, and mentoring opportunities for Chinese international students. However, less than 10% of Chinese international students participated in those events. The researcher realized that Chinese international students are not motivated or interested in participating in non-mandatory events. Low campus participation rates among Chinese international students has been overlooked for decades as the situation has never improved. The researcher hopes to learn more about Chinese international students' motivational and demotivational factors and explore their perspectives on non-mandatory events through this study. At the present time, no studies explore Chinese international students' motivational levels in non-mandatory event participation. Therefore, this study bridges the knowledge gap and benefits both American campuses and Chinese international students.

Overview of Chapter

Chapter three focused on research design and methodologies. Followed by the problem of practice and research questions, the rationale for the selected research methodology, a description of the research design, the researcher's role, and the research's setting are provided. This chapter presented information about the participants of the study, such as the number of participants and their characteristics. Data collection methods related to measures, instruments, and tools are discussed in this chapter. Research procedures and protocols for surveys and interviews are the next sections of the chapter. Finally, this chapter reviewed the process and overview of data analysis gathered from the interviews and surveys. A summarized paragraph served as the closing of the chapter.

Research Questions

This research addressed the following research questions:

1. What factors motivate and demotivate Chinese international students to participate in non-mandatory events?
2. How do Chinese international students perceive the existing events?

Research Design

This qualitative action research investigated Chinese students' motivational needs and challenges in non-mandatory event participation. A concern for improvement in educational practice draws practitioners to action research (McAteer, 2013). Precisely, the lack of engagement in non-mandatory events among Chinese international students is the researcher's concern in this action research. The researcher intended to explore motivational levels and needs among Chinese international students in-depth, which can only be measured qualitatively. This study incorporated thick description, self-reflexivity, and member checking to ensure the validity of the findings.

The Rationale of Research Design

Action research aims to improve practice and usually is conducted by insiders and practitioners who are closely involved in the problem of practice (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Specifically, the researcher wanted to gain a deeper understanding of her research topic and explore ways to motivate Chinese international students in non-mandatory event participation. This study aimed to discover Chinese international students' motivational and demotivational factors and understand their perspectives on current events, which align with action research's fundamental concept of practice improvement. Unlike traditional research, action researchers study themselves and their practices in a

subjective, involved, and engaging way (Efron & Ravid, 2020). In addition, action research is practical (Efron & Ravid, 2020). Being practical means a few different things to action researchers. First, the action researcher must consider whether researching a specific topic is manageable and practical. Second, the research has to evaluate the potential benefits and changes this study can contribute. This particular study about Chinese international students benefits American colleges, Chinese international students, Asian international students, and American students.

Furthermore, action research requires a specific development process. Getting to know the problem is essential to action research (McAteer, 2013). Before developing solutions to the issue, a deep understanding of the research topic must be formed. Action researchers tend to be more familiar with their research topics (Efron & Ravid, 2020) because of their insider positionality as practitioners. In this case, the researcher's experience as a former Chinese international student and university staff allowed her to witness motivational levels and participation rates among Chinese international students, have a deeper understanding of the issue, and fully commit to the research topic.

Qualitative research has been evolving, developing, and used in sociology, education, and psychology for a long time (Flick, 2007). Qualitative research is the appropriate research method for this study because the purpose of qualitative research aligns with action research's problem-solving characteristics. Flick (2007) stated that qualitative research often focuses on changing the issue or promoting solutions to practical problems rather than knowledge production or scientific purposes. Specifically, Chinese international students' lack of motivation to participate in non-mandatory events is the practical problem for this action research. Through this research, the researcher

wants to discover motivational and demotivational factors that impact Chinese international students' decisions on non-mandatory event participation. Both research questions identify the audience and the subject of this qualitative action research. The open-ended questions call for qualitative research, such as open-ended surveys and interviews, allowing the researcher to understand the participants' perspectives through an in-depth conversation.

Videoconferencing platforms such as Zoom and Skype have been used extensively for research purposes, meetings, and interpersonal communication during the pandemic (Boland et al., 2022). The researcher conducted all interviews using Zoom, allowing the participants the flexibility to answer all questions in the comfort of their own homes without traveling. More participants were willing to participate in this research because they could complete the open-ended survey and interviews virtually. Boland et al. (2022) noted that rapport and technical issues could be areas of concern using videoconferencing. The researcher repeatedly tested the camera, microphone, internet speed, and recording capability to avoid technical issues before the Zoom interviews. The researcher also successfully built a rapport with participants by creating an open and relaxing dialogue. Although videoconferencing offers many benefits, a drawback is present. The researcher was able to capture both verbal and nonverbal cues during the interview. However, some of the non-verbal data was not clear enough through the camera.

Language choices in either Chinese or English were offered to the participants in the open-ended survey and interviews. Cortazzi et al. (2011) stated that the quality of the interview data varies depending on the choice of language when interviewing Chinese

participants. A few students approached the researcher before completing the open-ended survey and asked if the interview would be conducted in Chinese. These students expressed that they would feel more comfortable answering the questions in Chinese. The researcher offered language choices in English and Chinese to meet the participants' comfort levels. Language choice is a critical factor that impacts the participants' decision to take part in this research and the quality of the collected data. Much more information and expressions were collected when participants were interviewed in their first language compared to interviewing in their second language (Cortazzi et al., 2011).

Research Design Validity

The researcher utilized three different methods to ensure the validity of this research. First, the researcher practiced thick description. The participants were able to tell their stories using their own words in this action research, allowing the readers to immerse themselves in the participants' experiences. The researcher also included a detailed description of the research context and setting. Second, the researcher used member checking. The researcher recorded each interview, created Chinese subtitles using a subtitle generator, confirmed the accuracy of subtitles, translated content from Chinese to English, and shared the interview transcripts with the participants to ensure the translation's validity. The participants then confirmed the accuracy of their ideas and perspectives through the member-checking process. Third, the researcher developed the habit of self-reflexivity. Additionally, the researcher maintained her objectivity by recognizing her bias about the research topic.

Context and Setting of the Study

This research study was conducted at Virginia Tech. Virginia Tech is a four-year land grant university located in Southwest Virginia. With an enrollment of more than 38,000 students, Virginia Tech is considered a large public university. In 2022, 3,733 out of 30,434 undergraduate students were Asian (Virginia Tech, 2022). Roughly 60% of the student population was White. Asians represented more than 12% of the student population, the second-largest racial group at Virginia Tech. International students represent roughly 10% of the Virginia Tech undergraduate population. While there are 1,380 undergraduate international students at Virginia Tech, 1,004 are males, 368 are females, and eight students did not report their genders (Virginia Tech, 2022). There are also 2,497 international graduate students at Virginia Tech with 1,649 males, 845 females, and three students not reporting their genders (Virginia Tech, 2022). Chinese international graduate and undergraduate students represent the largest international student group at Virginia Tech, with an enrollment of over 1,600 students (Virginia Tech, 2022).

Participants were chosen from the Association of Chinese Students and Scholars. WeChat is one of the most popular social media applications among Chinese international students, allowing users to chat and post on the platform. The open-ended surveys were sent to the Chinese international students' group chats through WeChat. The WeChat groups include Chinese international undergraduate and graduate students who were admitted by Virginia Tech between 2018 and 2022. Every member has to prove their identity by providing their Virginia Tech student/staff ID upon being accepted in the group for security purposes. Each WeChat group is managed by the Association of

Chinese Students and Scholars, the largest and only official Chinese international student organization at Virginia Tech. Four participants were invited to interview further after the open-ended surveys.

The selection process included consideration of participants' country of origin and classifications, the researcher's needs, and the diversity of participants. Each participant was required to identify as Chinese international undergraduate or graduate students. The chosen four participants were compensated with a \$30 gift card to participate in the interview. Additionally, the researcher used thick description, self-reflexivity, and member checking to ensure the credibility of the research method.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher has both perspectives of being both an outsider and an insider in this study. Because of the researcher's previous experience as a Chinese international student, she had the opportunity to study and observe Chinese international students' behavior patterns in non-mandatory event participation. The researcher also worked at the Pamplin International Programs Office at Virginia Tech for more than two years. As an international program academic specialist, the researcher's responsibility was to create programs for international students and help them develop professionally and personally. The researcher's experience as an insider gave her a deeper understanding of the research topic. The researcher's previous role as a university staff helped her remain objective, allowing her to analyze the issue differently.

The researcher aimed to explore Chinese international students' motivational and demotivational factors in Virginia Tech's non-mandatory event participation. Since the researcher conducted interviews with students, she is an active participant-observer.

According to Brancati (2018), active participant researchers converse with their participants. It is not the researcher's intention to engage and observe the participants beyond the open-ended surveys and interviews. The extent of the researchers' engagement level varies (Brancati, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

The researcher developed ethical guidelines when conducting research. It is important to obtain permission to conduct the study (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Precisely, the researcher obtained IRB approval from the University of South Carolina. Approval was not needed at Virginia Tech. After obtaining the University of South Carolina's IRB approval, the researcher collected participants' consent upon the completion of the open-ended survey. The invitation letter and a list of Virginia Tech's non-mandatory events were sent to each participant before the interview. The invitation letter explained the research's purpose and the participant's expectations.

Due to the invaluable and unique nature of each data set, besides the saved data on the researcher's computer, a hard or an electronic copy of the researcher's entire data set should be stored elsewhere and accessible at any time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All data from the open-ended surveys and video and audio recordings from interviews were collected and stored electronically. The researcher used Google Forms to develop, conduct, and record open-ended surveys. The researcher downloaded the Google Forms Portable Document Format (PDF) file whenever an update of information occurred. The downloadable copies of the data from the open-ended surveys, interview recordings, and interview transcripts were stored on the researcher's personal hard drive, laptop, and a cloud-based platform. Data were organized under three folders: pre-research, during the

research, and post-research. All participants in this study were volunteers. Although this research did not include highly sensitive information, the survey and interview participants' identities remain anonymous. Each interviewee's name was replaced by a pseudonym to ensure utmost honesty, openness, and privacy during the interview.

Participants

Voluntary response sampling and non-probability purposeful sampling were used in this action research. Open-ended surveys were sent to multiple Virginia Tech Chinese international students' group chats. Open-ended survey participants answered the questions voluntarily, generating negative, neutral, and positive perspectives on the research topic. The researcher collected 25 responses from the open-ended surveys. Four participants were selected by the researcher using non-probability purposeful sampling. Patton (2002) recommended researchers capture major variations rather than identify a common core when selecting samples. Including the maximal variation in purposeful sampling is the selection strategy. Specifically, priorities were given to participants from different majors and classifications. The researcher also selected interview participants based on their open-ended survey answers about motivation and non-mandatory event participant frequency. The discussed samplings were the most appropriate for the study since they allowed the researcher to focus on Chinese international undergraduate and graduate students specifically. All interviews were conducted one to four weeks after the open-ended survey completion. Participants were compensated with a \$30 gift card to partake in the open-ended survey and interview.

The sample sizes of 25 open-ended survey participants and four interview participants are sufficient to represent students from one country. The open-ended survey

explored the participants' general beliefs and perspectives about non-mandatory events and motivation. In contrast, the interviews further investigated Chinese international students' motivational needs and their perspectives on non-mandatory events. Twenty-five open-ended survey answers and four in-depth conversations provided the researcher with an overview of Chinese international students' motivational needs and challenges and answered the research questions adequately.

All interview participants shared the characteristics below:

1. Ethnicity: Chinese international students only
2. Gender: all genders are welcome
3. Major: all majors are welcome
4. Classification: all undergraduate or graduate classifications are welcome

Although all genders, majors, and classifications are welcome, the researcher selected participants using a maximal variation selection strategy to ensure a diverse portfolio of Chinese international students in the research. The researcher purposely selected participants from different classifications. Two participants were graduate students, and the remaining two were undergraduate students. One was a first-year student, and one was a fourth-year student. Selected interview participants also study in various majors, such as business, engineering, computer science, and computer engineering. Their participation frequency and awareness level of non-mandatory events were different from each other. For example, one participant only attended two non-mandatory events. The other participants attended more than 15 non-mandatory events.

The first participant, James, was a Chinese international graduate student who considered himself highly motivated and extremely familiar with Virginia Tech's non-

mandatory events. James also participated in more than 15 non-mandatory events per semester, the highest number out of everyone who answered the open-ended survey.

Alex was the next selected participant, one of the only two first-year students who completed the open-ended survey. Alex indicated that he was not familiar with Virginia Tech's non-mandatory events.

Luna was selected as the third participant, a fourth-year student at Virginia Tech. She was the only participant in this research who held a leadership position in a student organization. Luna's perspectives were invaluable to the research because she participated in non-mandatory events as an attendee and a leader.

Jayden was the last selected participant, a first-year graduate student. Jayden indicated that he was familiar with Virginia Tech's non-mandatory events with an average motivational level.

Data Collection Measures, Instruments, and Tools

This qualitative action research included open-ended surveys and interviews, which were collected and analyzed separately, then compared and contrasted with each other. Open-ended surveys with eight questions were sent to participants to allow them to express general opinions regarding the research topic in their own words. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four selected participants.

Open-ended surveys are unstructured and usually require one or more sentences of responses to help explain and clarify answers to the questions, which obtain participants' views and feelings about a subject (Efron & Ravid, 2013). The Google Forms open-ended survey was sent to participants prior to the interview. All questions were provided in both English and Chinese and participants had the freedom to answer

the open-ended questions in either language. Participants expressed their beliefs and thoughts about motivations and non-mandatory programs with their own words and in a relaxed setting, helping them ease into the topic. The open-ended survey also helped the participants understand this research more.

Interviews are used as a guided conversation to discover participants' interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and perspectives on the research topic. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the qualitative interview should be somewhat structured and guided by open-ended questions. All interviews were conducted and recorded through Zoom. It took approximately one hour to complete each interview. Only one interview from each participant was needed for this study. Although all interviews were conducted in Chinese, the participants were given the choice to interview in either English or Chinese. The interviews were intended to explore Chinese international students' motivational and demotivational factors for attending non-mandatory events and their perspectives on available events. Each participant was guided through a list of open-ended questions that welcomed participants' ideas and related open discussion. The semi-structured interview was the most applicable for this study because it ensured the quality and fairness of every interview. It was also easier to compare the results of each interview if the same questions were asked. Further discussion about the participants' perspectives was encouraged but not required.

The researcher developed the questions for the open-ended survey and interview with the consideration of the alignment with the research questions, theoretical framework, and the explored topic. All questions are related to participants' motivation, demotivation, background, and perspectives on non-mandatory events. Additionally,

questions should be designed with a specific sequence. Billups (2021) suggested that questions should be organized by moving from broad and less sensitive to specific/complex. The questions in the open-ended survey were designed to be less detailed than interview questions, asking participants' background information and general opinions of non-mandatory events and motivation. On the contrary, the interview questions involved more substantial and complex questions. The researcher also avoided creating leading questions to capture rich responses.

Research Procedure

An eight-week qualitative research period was used in this study. Specifically, the open-ended surveys and interviews were conducted during the eight-week research period. The open-ended survey was collected from Weeks two to three; invitation letters and a list of Virginia Tech's non-mandatory events were sent to participants on Week four, and interviews took place from Weeks five to eight. The agenda of the research procedure is discussed below.

Week One: Pre-Research Preparation

Adequate pre-research preparation is necessary because it ensures the efficiency of the research. During the pre-research period, the researcher communicated with the student leaders in the Association of Chinese Students and Scholars, sought permission to join multiple group chats, and posted announcements about the upcoming open-ended surveys.

Week Two through Eight: Open-Ended Surveys and Interviews

Starting from Week two, the researcher sent out the open-ended survey, announced the completion deadline, and answered participants' questions. The open-

ended survey remained available for two weeks. The researcher then reviewed the open-ended survey answers, selected four interview participants, contacted the participants, and sent out the invitation letter and a list of Virginia Tech's non-mandatory events on Week four. One semi-structured interview was conducted per week. A total of four interviews were scheduled through Weeks five to eight. Each discussion was guided by a list of questions and conducted through Zoom. Both visual and audio data were recorded.

Treatment, Processing, and Analysis of Data

The qualitative data was collected through open-ended surveys and interviews. The pre-data analysis preparation was needed to ensure an organized and accurate data analysis process. Efron and Ravid (2013) suggested the following pre-data analysis steps for researchers: transform data into readable text, sort the data into files, create a data file organizer, and immerse themselves in the data. In this case, the researcher transcribed and translated the open-ended surveys and interviews into typed text in Microsoft Word, organized data based on the four participants, and became familiar with the participants' responses. Making the text manageable, hearing what was said, and developing theory are the three coding phases that will help group and interpret the crucial information as a whole or individually (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

After the data analysis preparation, the researcher used the following four steps from the predetermined categories coding method to analyze the open-ended survey and interview data: identify categories using the theoretical framework, divide the data accordingly, organize the predetermined categories, record the categories (Efron & Ravid, 2020). The purpose of coding is to turn the raw qualitative data into a theory relevant to the research (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). All interviews and open-ended

survey questions were closely related to the research questions. The research questions were answered when the researcher reflected on and synthesized the collected data. The researcher intended to discover Chinese international students' motivational and demotivational factors and their perspectives on non-mandatory events through the interception of the open-ended data and interview data.

Summary

Chapter three provides information related to the research design and methods. The overview of the study clarified the importance of investigating Chinese international students' motivational and demotivational factors on non-mandatory event participation. The researcher used qualitative action research because this research design focused on the solution to the issue and inspected the problem of practice from an in-depth perspective. During the eight-week research period, the researcher sent open-ended surveys and conducted four interviews. The predetermined categories coding method was used when interpreting the collected data.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Overview of the Study

This research explores Chinese international students' motivational factors in Virginia Tech's non-mandatory events. Many non-mandatory events, such as writing services, English Corner, career workshops, and networking events, provide free and invaluable resources to help students develop academic, social, and professional skills. Although non-mandatory events are available to all Virginia Tech students, Chinese international students rarely take advantage of these developmental events and miss potential opportunities.

The researcher's problem of practice is the lack of motivation among Chinese international students in non-mandatory event participation. Less than 10% of Chinese international students attended the researcher's non-mandatory events at Virginia Tech. The researcher contacted all Chinese international students through emails and phone calls to further assist during the pandemic. However, most of the Chinese international students were unresponsive. Investigating the disconnect between Chinese international students and the Virginia Tech community is imperative. Therefore, the researcher aimed to gain a deeper understanding of Chinese international students through the following questions in this action research:

1. What factors motivate and demotivate Chinese international students to participate in non-mandatory events?

2. How do Chinese international students perceive the existing events?

Furthermore, Chinese international students are the largest international student group at Virginia Tech and in America (Duffin, 2022; College Factual, 2022). More than \$38 billion were contributed to the U.S. economy by international students (NAFSA, 2020b). A sustainable relationship among the U.S. economy, American colleges, and Chinese international students can be formed by providing adequate support to Chinese international students. This action research aimed to explore Chinese international students' motivational factors in non-mandatory event participation and gain a deeper understanding of these students' needs and preferences. American colleges can use this action research's generated information to create better non-mandatory events for Chinese international students. Future Chinese international students will have a better American college experience if they connect with the college community more.

Research Strategy

Qualitative action research was conducted for this study. This research method is the most appropriate for this study because the researcher wants to address an existing issue, improve current practice, and understand the targeted population through an in-depth conversation. Open-ended surveys and interviews were used in this research. The open-ended survey answers were used to gather participants' basic information, such as their classification and contact information. They were also used to initiate perspectives on the topic. The researcher used the interview data to further understand Chinese international students' thoughts on motivation and non-mandatory events.

Before conducting any research, the researcher received IRB approval from the University of South Carolina. Virginia Tech's IRB approval was not needed. Participants'

consent was collected upon completion of the survey. An invitation letter and a list of Virginia Tech's non-mandatory events were sent to each participant prior to the interview.

Data Collection

The open-ended Google Form survey included English questions with Chinese translations, which was sent to Virginia Tech's Chinese international students' WeChat groups. Learning about the participants' perspectives on motivation and non-mandatory events is the purpose of the open-ended survey.

The researcher received 25 responses for the open-ended survey and selected four participants to interview through Zoom. Participants were given the option to complete the interview in English or Chinese. The semi-structured interview contained 8 questions and lasted about 60 minutes for each participant. The interview questions sought to understand Chinese international students' motivational and demotivational factors as well as their perception of Virginia Tech's non-mandatory events. All participants understood that this interview was pertaining to Virginia Tech and agreed with naming the university. The participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed and organized the collected data using the theoretical framework. Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory states that humans are motivated by the support of autonomy, competency, and relatedness. Although the participants in this research share different cultural backgrounds than Deci and Ryan's primary audiences, they are all motivated by autonomy, competency, and relatedness. However, other factors such as inadequate English competency, the lack of needs, the

unawareness of non-mandatory events, and their unwillingness to fully engage in secondary Discourses demotivate some Chinese international students from participating in non-mandatory events. Gee (1989b) discussed the importance and difficulty of mastering and using secondary discourse. This theory is closely related to the research because many Chinese international students struggle to practice secondary discourses.

General Findings

Online Open-Ended Surveys

The open-ended survey included eight questions in total. The researcher collected participants' consent upon the completion of the open-ended survey. Participants had the option to answer each question in either English or Chinese. All participants were aware that this open-ended survey was specific to Virginia Tech and fine with naming the university as long as their identities remained anonymous.

Question 1 sought information about participants' classification. Twelve out of the 25 students who answered the survey were graduate students, six were fourth-year students, five were second-year students, and two were first-year students. Although the survey was sent to all Chinese international students, none of the third-year students completed the survey. Graduate students represented 48% of the population, and undergraduate students represented 52% of the population in this open-ended survey. The results are presented in Figure 4.1.

The researcher used Questions 2, 3, 4, and 7 to learn about Chinese international students' perspectives on Virginia Tech's non-mandatory events. Question 2 asked about the participants' top three favorite non-mandatory events at Virginia Tech (not in a specific order). Some participants only provided one favorite event instead of three.

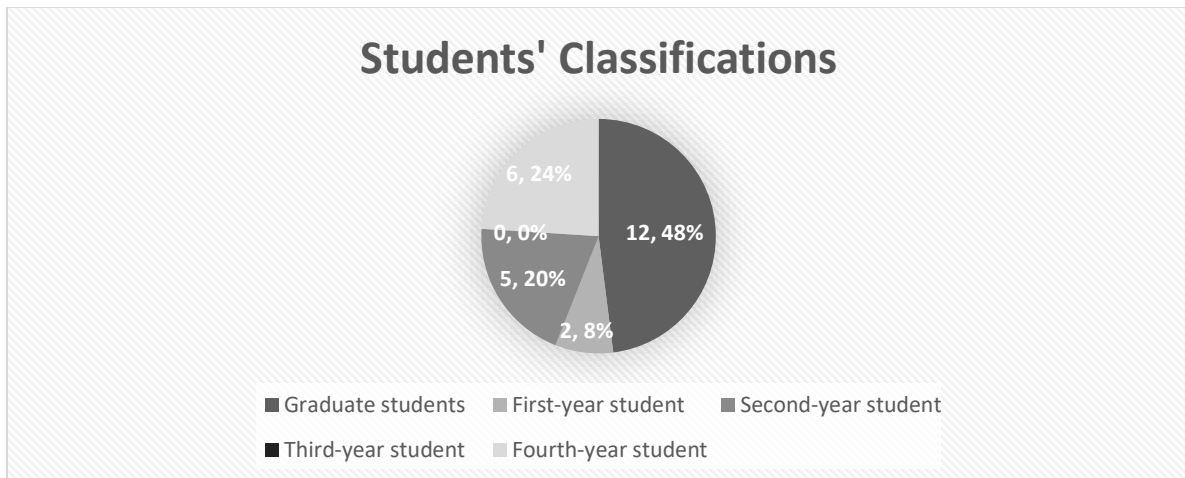


Figure 4.1
Students' Classifications

Therefore, a total number of 64 events were mentioned. Fourteen participants stated the career fair was one of their favorite non-mandatory events. Globberfest was the second most popular non-mandatory event, selected by 12 participants. Globberfest is an annual Virginia Tech student involvement fair where students build connections with student organizations, departments, and the local community. Seven participants selected writing services. Sports events, networking events, and guest lectures were selected by five participants, Chinese-related events and major fairs were selected by three participants, and both concerts and memorial events were selected by two participants. At least one participant selected the following events: food-related events, school fairs, club fairs, research-related events, giveaway events, and health events.

Question 3 asked the participants' participation frequency in non-mandatory events per semester. Three participants did not provide a specific number and were unsure of their frequency. Thirteen participants attended zero to two non-mandatory events per semester, four participants attended three to five non-mandatory events, and five participants attended more than five events per semester.

Question 4 explored the participants' awareness level of Virginia Tech's non-mandatory events. Three participants were unfamiliar with the events, and 10 participants selected the option *less familiar* when describing their awareness level. Eight participants stated they had an average awareness level, and three participants were familiar with the non-mandatory events. One person was very familiar with the non-mandatory events. The results are presented in Figure 4.2.

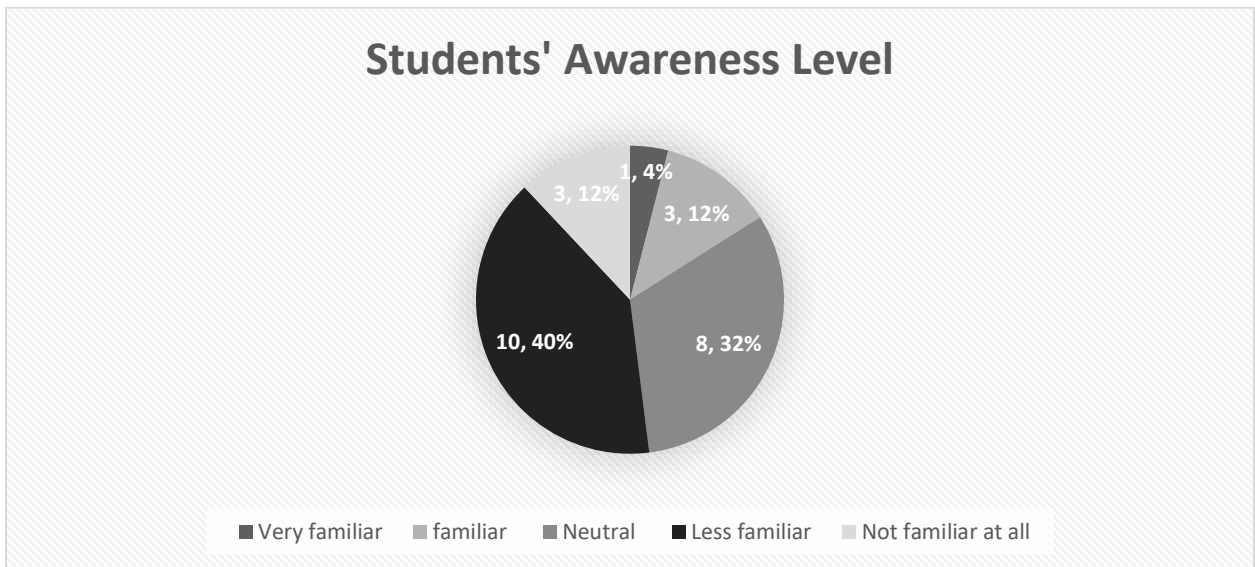


Figure 4.2
Students' Awareness Level

Question 7 asked if the participants desired other non-mandatory events that were not offered by Virginia Tech. Twenty-one participants answered this question. Seven participants stated "N/A," "none," "not yet," "I don't know," and "Virginia Tech provided enough non-mandatory events already." Five participants wanted more music-related events, and five participants preferred Virginia Tech to offer more Chinese/international students-related events. The following desired events were mentioned by one participant: ballroom dancing, gaming festival, communication events, and academic seminar.

Overall, the results of Questions 3 and 4 indicate that most Chinese international students participate in minimum numbers of non-mandatory events, and their awareness level of these events is low. The results of Questions 2 and 7 suggested that Chinese international students prefer functional and social events such as career fairs, involvement fairs with student organizations, music-related events, and Chinese/international students-related events.

The researcher aimed to investigate participants' perspectives about motivation through Questions 5 and 6. Question 5 asked the participants to describe the meaning of motivation. The following 25 responses were captured for this question: "I don't know," "something fun," "motivation drives people to do something," "depends on an individual's needs and curiosity," "join the events and actively participate on them," "very important, motivation leads to success," "you would attend the events without any notifications in advance for something that you are interested in and you will search the information on your own," "motivation drives me to grow and socialize," "it is the source of energy to drive me to do something," "depending on the individual's personal interest. I attended transfer student society at the beginning. During the pandemic, students need more assistance in career fair or OPT/CPT process," "it is important for us," "it is a key to be successful," "helping me to achieve the ideal life," "these activities lead to a nice experience outside of class and help me to relax and bond with my friends," "maximize motivation leads to success," "experience new things and overcome your fear of talking to someone else," "depending on the individual's personalities and English skills. It is hard to be motivated if you are an introvert who doesn't feel comfortable with your English skills. You will not want to attend any events in that situation. Time is also

another factor. I didn't have any time to participate in non-mandatory events because of my study before," "I am motivated to participate in events that align with my personal interests," "motivation is important for college students. You need the motivation to develop academically and socially," "not important," "responsibilities and habits motivate me," "it is the beginning of anything," "personal interests motivate me," "personal goals motivate me," and "have the passion for doing something."

Question 6 was related to participants' motivational level compared to their peers. Three participants selected "much higher motivation" than their peers, three participants selected "higher," twelve participants selected "neutral," five participants selected "lower," and two participants selected "much lower." The results are presented in Figure 4.3.

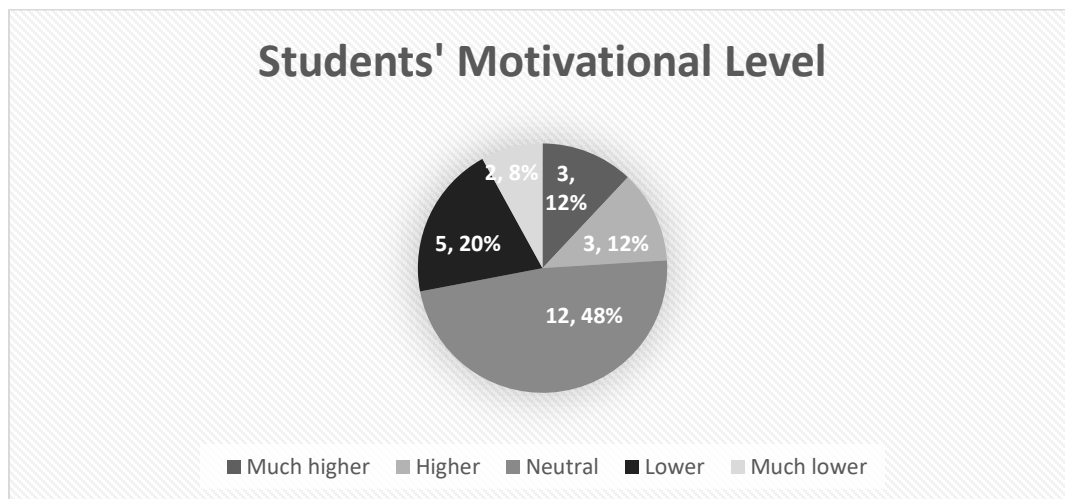


Figure 4.3
Students' Motivational Level

Overall, the results of Question 6 revealed that most Chinese international students have average to high motivation. Based on Question 5's answers, the most common themes of Chinese international students' motivation are "personal interests," "drive," and "success."

The researcher ended the open-ended survey by asking participants to list any questions or comments that they had. Fifteen participants skipped the last question. Four participants stated "no," "N/A," or "I don't know, and my information is limited." The following responses were provided for this question: "more Chinese-related events," "more outdoor intercultural activities and learn from other colleges," "make Chinese Lunar New Year a better event and offer more intercultural events," "post pictures about giveaways in advance," "meeting new friends improves my motivation, and I learn a valuable lesson from my friends," and "more basic events that introduce VT's resources and areas." The results of Question 8 indicated that Chinese international students desire more Chinese and intercultural events, similar to the results of Question 7.

The researcher sorted the overall open-ended survey results into themes using Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Open-Ended Survey Emergent Themes

| | |
|--|---|
| Top three favorite non-mandatory events (not in a specific order) | N=64 (all 25 participants completed this question, but some only provided one favorite event) Career fair-22%, Globberfest-19%, writing services-11%, sport events-8%, networking events-8%, guest lectures-8%, Chinese events-5%, major fairs-5%, concerts-3%, memorial events-3%, food events-2%, school fair-2%, club fair-2%, research events-2%, give-away events-2%, and health events-2%. |
| Participation frequency per semester | N=25 Zero to two events-52%, more than five-20%, three to five-16%, unsure-12%, |
| Desired non-mandatory events that were not offered by Virginia Tech | N=21 I don't know/none/enough events already-33%, music events-24%, Chinese/international students' events-24%, ballroom dancing-5%, gaming festival-5%, communication events -5%, and academic seminar-5%. |
| Meaning of motivation | N=25 Personal interests-20%, success-16%, drive-16%, individual's needs-12%, important-12%, meeting new friends-8%, join and participate-4%, something fun-4%, not important-4%, and I don't know-4% |
| Additional feedback or comments | N=10 I don't know-40%, more Chinese and intercultural events-30%, post pictures of free merchandise-10%, meeting new friends improves my motivation-10%, more events about VT's resources-10% |

Data Analysis Based on Themes

The researcher sorted and organized the survey and interview data into the following themes using the self-determination theory and literacy/discourse theory. The self-determination theory mentions that autonomy, competency, and relatedness impact human motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Similar to the self-determination theory, the three primary factors manifested during the researcher's data collection process. Moreover, discourse is similar to one's identity, representing their way of speaking, acting, and thinking (Gee, 1989a). Some Chinese international students are trapped in their primary discourse and unable to practice secondary discourse with a different culture. The following themes were discovered upon the completion of this research in Table 4.2.

Autonomy

People tend to be more motivated when they have autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Autonomy is about personal choice, which is not controlled or enforced by other factors. Extrinsic motivation usually pressures people to do something instead of what people genuinely want to do (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The researcher asked the participants to share the factors that motivate them in non-mandatory event participation.

Theme 1a: Participants Are More Motivated to Participate in Non-Mandatory Events by Meeting New Friends and Self-Development than Tangible Rewards

Three out of the four interview participants stated that tangible rewards would not motivate them enough to attend non-mandatory events. Participants are more likely to attend non-mandatory events if they are intrinsically motivated. James was the only participant who was motivated to participate in non-mandatory events because of

Table 4.2*Data Analysis Based on Themes*

| Self-determination theory | Literacy/discourse theory | Themes that are related to the theoretical framework | Additional themes beyond the theoretical framework |
|---|--|---|---|
| Autonomy | | 1a. participants are more motivated to participate in non-mandatory events by meeting new friends and self-development than tangible rewards. 1b. mandatory events demotivate Chinese international students | 4a. awareness impacts Chinese international students' non-mandatory event participation 5a. Chinese international students' characteristics: the lack of needs |
| Competency | Students should acquire secondary discourses instead of learning. | 2a. the need to master personal interests 2b. Development and importance of English competency | |
| Relatedness and unrelatedness found in different Discourses | Challenging when primary discourses are drastically different from secondary discourses Someone can speak English, but not fluently. Someone cannot engage in a Discourse in a less than fully fluent manner. You are either in it or you're not" (Gee, 1989a, pp. 9-10). | 3a. preference for Chinese-related non-mandatory events 3b. difficulties in connecting with American Discourses | |

giveaways. Jayden described his experience during the interview:

Meeting new friends is the most important motivation for me to participate in non-mandatory events. It will even be better if this event is related to my personal interest. I would also love to improve my English by attending these events...I don't really care about getting free stuff from the non-mandatory events. The tangible reward is not a factor here.

Meeting new friends is also Luna's and Alex's motivation to participate in non-mandatory events. Luna said, "Meeting new friends was my motivation for participating in non-mandatory events. I hung out with both Chinese and American friends during the process and was able to practice my English." Alex stated, "Meeting new people and having fun are the biggest motivations for me. I don't really care about getting freebies from the events."

James shared different perspectives:

Depending on the events, such as writing services, I will use them if I have the need. However, I will mostly attend non-mandatory events that offer free drinks, light refreshments, or free food. I won't attend group discussions that do not offer anything because I live off-campus. I will not drive to campus for those events.

Additionally, the open-ended survey Question 5 asked participants to define the meaning of motivation. The survey revealed similar results about the importance of meeting new friends. 8% of the survey participants stated that meeting new friends is the definition of motivation. Two participants wrote, "These activities lead to a nice experience outside of class and help me to relax and bond with my friends" and "Motivate me to experience new things and meet new people."

Alex was not interested in the non-mandatory development workshops because "it is too early for a first-year student." Luna, Jayden, and James all expressed the need for "learning something new" or "self-development" at the non-mandatory events. Non-mandatory events that enhance self-development are repetitively mentioned in the open-ended survey participants. Open-ended survey Question 2 asked about participants' top three favorite non-mandatory events. The survey results revealed that 60% of the participants' favorite non-mandatory events are related to career, writing, or academic development.

Theme 1b: Mandatory Events Demotivate Chinese International Students

Different from non-mandatory events, Virginia Tech also offers some required events. Participation in mandatory events is not a choice but a requirement for Chinese international students. It is important to learn about their perspectives when autonomy is lacking. The interview data demonstrated that 75% of the participants had a negative attitude toward mandatory events. Only Luna had a neutral and open-minded attitude about mandatory events. Luna stated, "I am already here, and it may as well make the best out of it." Both Alex and Jayden revealed that they would skip the mandatory events if the consequences were not severe. Similarly, James described his feeling about mandatory events:

I really dislike mandatory events, even if the events align with my personal interests. I feel pressured to attend because it is mandatory. I don't have a choice of not attending if something urgent comes up that day... Mandatory events definitely decrease my interest and willingness to participate.

Alex also shared his experiences with mandatory events:

I dislike any mandatory events because of the pressure. I have to show up at a specific time, which I don't like. My friends also do not like mandatory events.

They will not talk to anyone at the event, even if they are physically present at the event. They are reluctant to participate in anything.

Similarly, Jayden stated, "I don't like mandatory events and would skip them if possible. I would ask my friends to sign up for my attendance in mandatory events. I can see the purposes in some mandatory events but still." Although Luna and Jayden acknowledged some mandatory events were somewhat meaningful, all four interview participants used the word "pressured" to describe their feeling about mandatory events and mentioned that their willingness to participate decreased.

Competency

Deci (1976) suggested that the need for competency leads people to seek challenges and motivates people to learn. The sense of being capable or successful motivates people to do something. In other words, Chinese international students are more likely to participate in non-mandatory events that align with their personal strengths/interests and language competency.

Theme 2a: The Need to Master Personal Interests

The words "personal interests" repetitively appeared in the interview and survey data, which can be the most important motivational factor for Chinese international students. The interview data showed that all of the participants would like to participate in non-mandatory events that align with their personal interests.

James shared his perspectives, “Personal interests motivate me to attend non-mandatory events. I love to practice and improve my Japanese, so I visit the Japanese language corner every week.” Luna shared similar perspectives about personal interests:

I love taking pictures! For example, GlobberFest has a great background, such as a Ferris wheel for my pictures. I am socializing with my friends and also practicing my habit simultaneously when participating in non-mandatory events. Both Alex and Jayden expressed that they would like to be good at their personal interests and participate in related non-mandatory events as a "fun" experience. Alex stated, “I enjoy playing basketball and listening to music, so I may attend events that are related to my interests with or without other Chinese students.”

Jayden further explained:

I am motivated to participate in non-mandatory events related to my personal interests. I like playing tennis and cooking, so I joined tennis and cooking clubs to improve my skills. I participate in tennis and cooking events weekly. We also socialize and have dinner after tennis practice.

Open-ended survey Question 5 asked the participants to describe the meaning of motivation. Participants wrote, "You would attend the events without any notifications in advance for something that you are interested in, and you will search the information on your own," "depending on the individual's personal interest. I attended transfer student society at the beginning. During the pandemic, students need more assistance in career fairs or OPT/CPT process", "I am motivated to participate in events that align with my personal interests," personal interests motivate me," and "have the passion for doing

something." Personal interests were mentioned as the meaning of motivation by 20% of the respondents, representing the most popular answer to Question 5.

Theme 2b: Development and Importance of English Competency

In addition to personal interests, multiple participants mentioned the importance of English competency and their experiences in language development. The interview data showed that 50% of the participants felt very confident in their English skills. James and Luna said that they were not afraid of participating in any events because of their strong English competency. Luna further explained her perspectives:

I am very confident with my English, encouraging me to participate in any events.

I have been in America since 2015, so I shouldn't have issues communicating in English. I understand my American classmates, and they also understand me perfectly.

James and Luna mentioned that their English competency was developed and improved through a natural setting, resonating with Gee's theory about the importance of language acquisition (1989a). James shared his experiences in language development:

I am an extrovert who feels confident in my English, so barely any reasons prevent me from attending non-mandatory events. I volunteered in international football matches and translated for Team Japan. I practiced my English and Japanese when I was an undergrad student. I also lived in an international dorm, which allowed me to improve my language skills.

Similarly, Luna first developed her English skills in an American high school and shared:

My high school only had a few international students, which forced me to jump out of my comfort zone and communicate with American students. I had many

opportunities to work with American students academically and socially in high school. I even held the culture shock club weekly to discuss different cultures.

The other 50% of the interview participants do not feel as confident in their English. Jayden also attended an American high school; however, he did not have the opportunity to immerse himself in American culture or practice his English competency like Luna. Jayden stated, "I attended a high school in Philadelphia with many other Chinese international students. We even had a dorm dedicated only to Chinese international students. It was like a Chinese high school with few American students". Although Jayden felt self-conscious and nervous about his English accent, he was still willing to participate in English-speaking non-mandatory events. Jayden further explained his perspectives about English-speaking non-mandatory events:

I feel more comfortable speaking English in an event with other international students because everyone else also has an accent. I am not as scared if at least a few other international students are present at the event. I feel more nervous if I am the only international student there. I worry about the possibility of saying or pronouncing something wrong.

On the contrary, Alex preferred Chinese-speaking events and would "avoid as many English events as possible." Alex further explained that language differences demotivated him from attending non-mandatory events and stated, "The adjustment was rough for me. I miss communicating with my friends in China." Similarly, James said, "My roommate only attends Chinese-related events. For many Chinese students, language is an issue. They will not attend American events because they are not confident with their English skills." Additionally, one open-ended survey participant wrote in Question 5, "depending

on the individual's personalities and English skills. It is hard to be motivated if you are an introvert who doesn't feel comfortable with your English skills. You will not want to attend any events in that situation.”

The interview data suggested that the level of English competency impacts Chinese international students' motivation in non-mandatory event participation and also their adaptation level to American Discourses. Chinese international students with inadequate language skills avoid speaking English, a primary and initial step of communication. The more they refrain from speaking English, the less likely they immerse in American Discourse. Additionally, the interview results revealed that a natural and functional setting, such as daily conversation or volunteering experience, is beneficial for Chinese international students to develop their English competency.

Relatedness

Relatedness concerns a sense of belonging in a social group (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Many Chinese international students found a sense of belonging by participating in Chinese-related events. Gee (1989b) discussed that primary discourses are home language, beliefs, and values. In this action research, Chinese-related events are Chinese international students' primary discourses. Chinese international students found connections with other Chinese individuals in Chinese-related events by speaking Chinese, practicing Chinese culture, and reinforcing their identity as Chinese international students. The interview data indicated that some Chinese international students strongly prefer events related to their primary discourse, in this case, events with a Chinese theme. During the interview, the researcher learned that some Chinese

international students experience disconnections between their primary discourses and American Discourses.

Theme 3a: Preference for Chinese-Related Non-Mandatory Events

The interview data revealed that 75% of the participants are either a member of Chinese American Associates (CAS) for American Chinese or the Association of Chinese Students and Scholars (ACSS), and 100% of the participants regularly participate in Chinese-related events. Alex and Luna had a strong preference for Chinese-related events. Alex would participate in "almost every Chinese-related event" because he missed the culture he grew up with. Alex further explained:

I feel motivated to attend an event if a lot of Chinese students are attending. I actually attend almost every single Chinese-related event. I attended the Mid-Autumn Festival as a new student in VT and later became a member of the Association of Chinese Students and Scholars. Being a part of the association makes me more willing to attend as well. Virginia Tech has many events, but I barely attend English-speaking events.

Alex shared that his friends hold similar perspectives on English-speaking events.

Although Luna did not mind speaking English, she primarily only participated in Chinese-related events. Luna also stated, "I mostly attend events from the Association of Chinese Students and Scholars and Chinese American Society. I don't really attend other VT events."

On the other hand, James enjoyed all intercultural events. James further explained his perspectives:

I like diverse events that include multicultural communication. I also like to learn about different cultures or greetings in different languages. I especially enjoy the international café held by Cranwell International Center. I am also a member of the Chinese American Society, so I also attend many Chinese-related events. Jayden was somewhat of an exception and chose not to participate in Chinese-related events when he was an undergraduate student. Jayden further explained his choice:

I didn't participate in Chinese-related events before because I had enough Chinese friends already. Participating in Chinese-related events is not helpful to me because it doesn't improve my English. However, the purpose of participating in non-mandatory events changed after being a graduate student. All of my previous friends returned to China. Now I am actually participating in more Chinese events as a graduate student because I need new friends and a sense of belonging.

Additionally, the open-ended survey Question 7 asked if the participants desired other non-mandatory events that were not yet offered by Virginia Tech. Five participants preferred Virginia Tech to offer more Chinese/international students-related events. Open-ended survey Question 8 asked participants to provide additional comments and feedback. Participants wrote, "more Chinese-related events," "more outdoor intercultural activities and learn from other colleges," and "make Chinese Lunar New Year a better event and offer more intercultural events."

Theme 3b. Difficulties in Connecting with American Discourses

Chinese international students find relatedness in Chinese-related events and Chinese-student organizations. However, it seems to be a more challenging process for Chinese international students to bond with their American peers or practice American

Discourses. All four interview participants discussed the differences between American and Chinese international students. Luna discussed that different student organizations are set up for American Chinese and Chinese international students separately. Luna further explained:

American-born Chinese prefer gathering together and having fun as a big group. Chinese international students tend to be quieter because of our background. Chinese Americans sometimes are too Chinese for Americans but too American for Chinese, so they have their own circles.

James shared similar feedback:

We have the Chinese American Society (CAS) for American-born Chinese and the Association of Chinese Students and Scholars (ACSS) for Chinese international students. Compared to Chinese international students, Korean, Thai, or Vietnamese are more willing to speak English. I don't think students from other countries have separate organizations like us. For example, they don't have organizations for Thai international students or American Thai.

Additionally, Alex and Jayden stated that they do not share common interests with American students. Alex further explained:

Cultural and language differences demotivate me from attending English non-mandatory events. Also, American students like to dance at events. I don't think dancing is fun. Non-mandatory events without a real purpose and also don't align with my personal interests are boring to me.

Similarly, Jayden shared his experience by saying:

I found participating in social non-mandatory events challenging as an international graduate student. I tried hanging out with Americans, but we don't share the same interest. They like to party and drink, which I don't enjoy. I don't like to attend non-mandatory events just to have fun.

Some Chinese international students refrain from practicing American Discourses because they are unable to find relatedness with their American or Asian American peers. Gee (1989a) mentioned that people are either outsiders or insiders in Discourses. There is no medium between those roles. In other words, Chinese international students cannot somewhat participate in American Discourse and have to decide to be either an insider or an outsider of the dialogue. Some Chinese international students and American Chinese choose to have a clear line between each other and voluntarily become outsiders to each other's Discourses. Those students are not motivated to participate in Discourses that contradict their primary discourse.

Awareness

Awareness is an additional theme that surfaced beyond the theoretical framework. Some Chinese international students do not participate in non-mandatory events because they are unaware of the events.

Theme 4a: Awareness Impacts Chinese International Students' Non-Mandatory Event Participation

The results of survey Question 4 revealed that 52% of the participants selected either "unfamiliar" or "less familiar" about their awareness level of Virginia Tech's non-mandatory events. The results of the last interview question also demonstrated similar

findings. Participants were asked about their suggestions for motivating Chinese international students' non-mandatory event participation. James shared his suggestions:

Virginia Tech is not doing a good job of promoting non-mandatory events.

Nobody told me about the GlobberConnect website, which includes almost all Virginia Tech events. I missed a whole year of non-mandatory events because I didn't know about the website. I randomly found the website on a poster.

Alex shared similar feedback about non-mandatory event promotion:

Many Chinese international students do not read marketing emails, especially if the emails are in English. Sometimes VT promotes the events through Instagram; however, Chinese international students don't use Instagram. WeChat is the best platform to promote non-mandatory events to us. We wouldn't know about the events through Instagram or emails.

The survey and interview data indicated that Chinese international students' unawareness caused a low non-mandatory event participation rate. More than half of the survey participants had a below-average awareness level. Half of the interview participants thought better promoting strategies are needed to improve Chinese international students' awareness level.

Chinese International Students' Characteristics

The researcher did not specifically ask questions about Chinese international students' characteristics. However, three out of four participants mentioned Chinese international students' lack of needs during the interview and noticed the pattern from their past experiences or observations.

Theme 5a. The Lack of Needs among Chinese International Students

James, Alex, and Jayden mentioned that the lack of development, social, and financial needs demotivate Chinese international students to participate in non-mandatory events or do anything optional, representing 75% of the participants. James further explained:

Some Chinese international students only want an American degree and will return to China after graduation. The American connection or networking doesn't mean anything to them. These Chinese students probably have a job waiting for them back home already. They also don't need development events because the information will not apply to them.

Alex shared a similar perspective:

It is unnecessary to make friends with Americans because many Chinese international students like and prefer to stay in their own circle anyway. Their social needs are met by other Chinese students. A lot of Chinese international students also don't care about free stuff because they have enough already.

Similarly, Jayden said:

Many of my friends don't care about self-development. They would rather play video games than do something meaningful. Don't get me wrong; they are really smart. However, they are financially supported by their family. Their family buy them anything. They don't have the immediate stress to better themselves.

Some Chinese international students' social needs are met by other Chinese students, and their financial needs are met by their parents. Development needs are unnecessary because these students are returning to China after graduation. Because of

the lack of needs, some Chinese international students choose to stay within their circle and avoid participating in any non-mandatory events.

Data Analysis Based on Research Questions

Two research questions guided this action research. The research method and theoretical framework were designed to align with the research questions. The researcher sorted the collected data into different themes. These themes can also apply and answer the two research questions.

Research Question 1

The researcher aimed to explore factors that motivate and demotivate Chinese international students to participate in non-mandatory events. Most Chinese international students are primarily motivated by intrinsic motivation, such as the need for connection and self-development. Extrinsic motivation is somewhat appealing to Chinese international students but is insignificant. The need to master personal interests also motivated Chinese international students. It is a meaningful experience for these students if they are improving and practicing their personal interests when participating in related non-mandatory events. Chinese international students are also motivated to participate in Chinese-related events because they are able to find a sense of belonging. English competency can motivate or demotivate Chinese international students from participating in non-mandatory events, depending on the user's level. Participants were able to develop strong English skills in a natural setting.

In addition to English competency, other factors, such as their unwillingness to practice American Discourses and their lack of needs, also demotivated Chinese international students from participating in non-mandatory events. Most Chinese

international students dislike mandatory events because they feel pressured to participate. Chinese students' lack of social, financial, and development needs diminished the perceived benefits of non-mandatory events.

Research Question 2

The researcher aimed to investigate Chinese international students' perceptions of Virginia Tech's non-mandatory events through this research question. Development events were the most popular among Chinese international students. Chinese international students would also like to see more Chinese-related events. Some Chinese international students strongly preferred Chinese-related events, allowing them to practice their primary discourses in America. In addition, awareness is another important factor that impacts students' perceptions of non-mandatory events. More than half of the survey participants were not familiar with non-mandatory events, which was caused by the lack of efficient non-mandatory event promotion.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented and analyzed the open-ended and interview data. The researcher organized data into themes using the theoretical framework and answered the research questions. The analyzed data corresponded with the self-determination and literacy/discourse theory, revealing the importance of autonomy, competency, and relatedness in primary discourses. Some Chinese international students avoid English non-mandatory events because they are either unable or unwilling to practice American Discourses. Two additional themes about Chinese international students' awareness of non-mandatory events and their lack of needs surfaced beyond the theoretical framework. Based on the analyzed data, Chapter 5 provides recommendations for non-mandatory

events development for Chinese international students and the future implications of this action research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of the Study

Chinese international students are America's most significant international student population (Duffin, 2023), supplying a vibrant and diverse learning environment to American colleges. Although the influx of Chinese international students generates primarily positive results, issues related to Chinese international students' disconnections from American colleges arise. The researcher was previously an undergraduate Chinese international student at Virginia Tech who bonded with only other international students and avoided non-mandatory events. The researcher missed many development opportunities and had a nearly empty resume upon graduation.

Because of her experience, the researcher later worked as an International Programs Academic Specialist at Virginia Tech to help other international students who shared similar experiences. As the International Programs Academic Specialist, the researcher created, designed, and promoted non-mandatory events for international students. Participants often gained academic, social, and professional development opportunities through non-mandatory events. Although non-mandatory events provided invaluable benefits and resources, Chinese international students are not motivated to participate in non-mandatory events, which is the Problem of Practice of this action research. Less than 10% of Chinese international students attended the researcher's

monthly non-mandatory events. Chinese international students' lack of motivation in non-mandatory event participation was and continues to be a common problem many offices encounter at Virginia Tech.

The researcher conducted this qualitative action research to understand better Chinese international students' motivation, demotivation, and perspectives about Virginia Tech's non-mandatory events. Open-ended surveys and interviews were used in this research to explore information for the following research questions:

1. What factors motivate and demotivate Chinese international students to participate in non-mandatory events?
2. How do Chinese international students perceive the existing events?

The generated information answered the research questions. The findings revealed that Chinese international students are motivated by autonomy, competency, and relatedness. Language barriers and unwillingness to connect with American Discourses discouraged Chinese international students from participating in non-mandatory events. Two additional themes about Chinese international students' awareness level and lack of needs surfaced during the data analysis process.

Chapter five discusses the relationships between the researcher's findings and current literature, suggestions for future non-mandatory event developments targeting Chinese international students, the researcher's next steps and reflections, research limitations, implications for future research, and provides a summary of this action research.

Results Related to Existing Literature

Chapter two provided information about Chinese international students' past experiences, external and internal challenges, and motivation and demotivation. More importantly, the origin of the theoretical framework was discussed. The researcher grounded this action research in Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory and Gee's (1989b) literacy/discourse theory. Most emerged themes from this research align with the theoretical framework because of the applicability of the self-determination theory in different cultures (Wichmann, 2011).

Deci and Ryan (1985) discussed that human motivation is impacted by autonomy, competency, and relatedness. As this research indicated, Chinese international students are motivated by the same three factors mentioned in Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory. The study participants are intrinsically motivated to participate in non-mandatory events for personal development, consistent with Xing and Bolden's (2019) findings about Chinese international students' desire to improve their English. In other words, Chinese international students are motivated to do things because of gratification instead of external rewards, resonating with the autonomy aspect in Deci and Ryan's (1980) self-determination theory.

Study data revealed that English competency impacts Chinese international students' motivation in non-mandatory event participation. Chinese international students are more likely to participate in non-mandatory events if they are confident in their English. Additionally, participants developed their strong English skills through acquisition instead of learning (Gee, 1989b). Chinese international students' English

competency impacts their academic, social, and professional life in American colleges (Yang, 1988; Perry, 2017; Park, 2019; Xing & Bolden, 2019).

In addition to English competency, participants are motivated to master their personal interests (Tsai & Wong, 2012; Heng, 2019) through participating in non-mandatory events. Participants in the open-ended survey and interview repeatedly mentioned the importance of personal interests. Although Chinese international students' needs to master their skills align with Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory, the existing literature suggests that academic success is Chinese international students' primary motivation (Wilson, 1996; He & Huston, 2018). On the contrary, most participants did not emphasize academic success in this research. The researcher suspected that participants did not highlight academic success because non-mandatory events were not directly related to their grades in a class. However, participants mentioned they would not participate in non-mandatory events if they were occupied by homework.

The participants also found it easier to relate with other Chinese peers (Tang et al., 2018) or international students than American students (Lam, 1997), which motivated them to participate in Chinese-related non-mandatory events. The research data also revealed that some Chinese international students are not interested in American Discourses (Tang et al., 2018) if the actions contradict their beliefs.

Additional themes related to Chinese international students' awareness and lack of needs also emerged in this research. Data revealed that Chinese international students are unaware of the non-mandatory events (Mei, 2019). More Chinese international students will participate in non-mandatory events if they are familiar with the available

resources and opportunities. The existing literature does not have information about the relationship between Chinese international students' lack of needs and their motivation. Participants explained that some Chinese international students are not motivated to do anything optional or improve themselves through non-mandatory events because they do not need the resources.

Practice Recommendations

Practitioners can use this research as reference material when designing non-mandatory events for Chinese international students. It is important to consider Chinese international students' perspectives when creating non-mandatory events. Chinese international students are motivated to participate in non-mandatory events that are purposeful, beneficial, relatable, and well-advertised.

Most Chinese international students want to gain something, such as a new friend, skill, information, or opportunity, from participating in non-mandatory events. The events will be even more successful if Chinese international students gain multiple things simultaneously. In other words, most Chinese international students are not interested in non-mandatory events that do not provide immediate results. For example, based on the research findings, the career fair is the most popular non-mandatory event among Chinese international students. Chinese international students can potentially gain employment and a networking circle during the career fair. On the other hand, non-mandatory events such as Thanksgiving dinner, movie night, or events without immediate benefits are less appealing to Chinese international students. Chinese international students are also motivated to participate in non-mandatory events aligning with their personal interests. However, it is nearly impossible for practitioners to offer

optional events that cater to everyone's unique interests. Therefore, practitioners must emphasize the benefits and purposes when developing non-mandatory events for Chinese international students.

The word *relatedness* has various meanings. First, relatable non-mandatory events are Chinese-related events. Chinese student organizations experience more success hosting non-mandatory events than other offices and departments. Most Chinese international students are interested and willing to participate in non-mandatory events held by Chinese student organizations. Chinese international students are eager to meet other Chinese through Chinese-related non-mandatory events.

Second, practitioners should relate to Chinese international students in different ways. Practitioners should work with Chinese student organizations in different capacities if they want more success when hosting non-mandatory events for Chinese international students. Practitioners should introduce themselves and their offices at Chinese student organizations' meetings, serve as advisors for Chinese student organizations, and partner with Chinese student organizations to co-host non-mandatory events. Additionally, practitioners should invite Chinese international students to participate in the non-mandatory events' planning/design phase. The more autonomy Chinese international students have, the more they are willing to participate. Through these four steps, practitioners have the opportunity to get to know Chinese students personally. Chinese international students are more likely to participate in future Chinese-related or non-Chinese-related non-mandatory events if they feel comfortable communicating with the practitioner. Practitioners must recognize that improvements in Chinese international students' non-mandatory event participation do not happen

overnight. Practitioners should expect an ongoing process to work with Chinese student organizations regularly.

Although Chinese international students prefer Chinese-related events, most participants desire to bond with American students through non-mandatory events. However, some Chinese international students struggle to connect with American Discourses or cultures. Chinese international students distinguish themselves from American-born Chinese and American students. Practitioners should create non-mandatory events encouraging Chinese international students to relate and see the commonalities among Chinese international students, American-born Chinese, and American students. Through the process of participation, Chinese international students are able to acquire English skills in a natural setting.

Practitioners should also ensure effective promotions for non-mandatory events. Some Chinese international students do not participate in non-mandatory events because they are unaware of them. This research indicated that emailing, Facebook, and Twitter are ineffective promotional platforms for Chinese international students. Chinese international students receive countless academic emails daily and will not carefully read through them. Chinese international students also prefer posts with Chinese translations. Additionally, some Chinese international students do not even have a Facebook or Twitter account. Almost all Chinese students have a WeChat account, a social media platform with chatting and posting functions. Chinese student organizations have an official WeChat account that is followed by many Chinese international students. Chinese student organizations' posts generate the most attention among Chinese international students. Therefore, practitioners should advertise non-mandatory events in both Chinese

and English through the Chinese student organizations' WeChat accounts. In addition to virtual promotions, practitioners can also put up English and Chinese non-mandatory event posters in student gathering spots, such as the library or the primary bus stop.

Reflection on Methodology

The research process turned out to be more positive than the researcher expected. The researcher advertised non-mandatory events multiple times through different platforms and collected fewer responses. The researcher was able to collect 25 open-ended survey answers for this study, representing the most significant number of responses the researcher ever received from Chinese international students. The researcher incorporated autonomy, competency, and relatedness in her research design. The researcher suspected that Chinese international students would be more likely to participate in this research if they were allowed to interview/answer the questions in Chinese or English. All interview participants chose to interview in Chinese, eliminating potential language barriers. The researcher was slightly skeptical about virtual interviews at the beginning. However, all virtual interviews were very successful. Participants preferred virtual interviews, allowing them to express themselves in a safe space.

This study is extremely meaningful to the researcher because she was once a Chinese international student. She was only motivated by academic success and spent all her time on homework. Looking back, she would have had a much more fruitful American college experience if she participated in more non-mandatory events. Academic success should not be the only priority for the researcher. The study findings are meaningful not only to the researcher's personal life but also to her professional life. After graduating from college, the researcher worked as an International Programs

Academic Specialist for international students. The researcher created countless non-mandatory events for international students. However, many Chinese international students avoided non-mandatory events like the researcher once did. The researcher can use the findings to create non-mandatory events that align with Chinese international students' motivational factors.

Limitation and Suggestions

Although this research generated sufficient responses, areas of improvement were identified. First, the researcher only advertised the study through WeChat. No other platforms were utilized. Only Chinese international students who were already in the student organizations received the survey notification. Students who participated in the student organization and completed the open-ended survey may represent the more active groups of Chinese international students than the average ones. The researcher could have reached a larger pool of Chinese international students if multiple communication methods, such as emails or official website announcements, were used. Also, the researcher did not receive responses from any third-year students. Some Chinese international students may have missed the researcher's group messages. The researcher could have asked the Chinese student organizations to post the study as an official announcement.

Second, the applicability of this research would be better if students from rural, urban, and suburban colleges were included. The researcher only conducted the research at a rural land-grant university. Chinese international students' motivation can be different depending on their school choice. Chinese international students enrolling in an

urban college may share different perspectives compared to those in rural areas, which was mentioned by multiple participants in this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research demonstrated that autonomy, competency, and relatedness are related to Chinese international students' motivation. This research provided an understanding of Chinese international students' motivation. It is unknown whether one factor is more important than another one. It would be beneficial to explore if the combination of all three factors will drastically improve Chinese international students' motivation. The research did not test the functionality of the study findings. Further comparative studies are needed between regular and modified non-mandatory events to verify the improved event's effectiveness.

Most participants in this research were fourth-year undergraduate students or graduate students. The selected first-year student was the least motivated to participate in non-mandatory events compared to others. All other interview participants were motivated and interested in non-mandatory events. Chinese international students' age seems to be a factor that impacts their motivation to participate in non-mandatory events. Longitudinal research that includes a few Chinese international students from the first to the fourth year would be beneficial. It would allow the researcher to see the shifting point and triggers of Chinese international students' motivations.

This study confirmed that some Chinese international students are not interested in non-mandatory events that differ from their primary Chinese Discourses. However, future research that explores the differences between Chinese and American Discourses is needed to understand why cultural differences are significant in Chinese international

students' campus engagement or participation. Additionally, this research solely focused on Chinese international students' perspectives and struggles when practicing American Discourses. Future research includes American students' views about international students' Discourses would be beneficial. After all, effective communication requires efforts and understanding from Chinese and American international students.

Summary

The action research confirmed that Chinese international students are motivated to participate in non-mandatory events with the right incentives. Most Chinese international students are selective in non-mandatory events. Participants were highly motivated if their participation resulted in a meaningful outcome. Participants also preferred Chinese-related non-mandatory events or events that aligned with their interests. Inadequate English competency, cultural differences, and the lack of needs demotivate Chinese international students to participate in non-mandatory events.

The research revealed Chinese international students' motivational and demotivational factors. The study findings are meaningful to the researcher and American colleges. Chinese international students are America's largest international student group (Duffin, 2023). It is up to American colleges to provide a better college experience with meaningful non-mandatory events. The researcher will incorporate the study findings when creating non-mandatory events for Chinese international students.

On a personal level, this study supplied the researcher with a reflective learning process. The research reflected on her experiences as an undergraduate Chinese international student and a university staff member, providing her with an overview of the issue. There is a disconnection between American colleges and Chinese international

students. This action research is only a start. The researcher hopes to continue bridging the disconnection by providing meaningful non-mandatory events for Chinese international students.

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL



OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN RESEARCH
DECLARATION of NOT RESEARCH

Aimin Liao
1528 Oriole Dr
Blacksburg, VA 24060

Re: **Pro00122619**

Dear Aimin Liao:

This is to certify that research study entitled *Exploring Asian international students' motivational and demotivational factors in nonmandatory event participation* was reviewed on 7/27/2022 by the Office of Research Compliance, which is an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB). The Office of Research Compliance, on behalf of the Institutional Review Board, has determined that the referenced research study is not subject to the Protection of Human Subject Regulations in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 et. seq.

No further oversight by the USC IRB is required. However, the investigator should inform the Office of Research Compliance prior to making any substantive changes in the research methods, as this may alter the status of the project and require another review.

If you have questions, contact Lisa M. Johnson at lsaj@mailbox.sc.edu or (803) 777-6670.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lisa M. Johnson".

Lisa M. Johnson
ORC Assistant Director and IRB Manager

APPENDIX B

OPEN-ENDED SURVEY QUESTIONS

Study Title: Exploring Chinese International Students' Motivational Factors in Virginia Tech (VT)'s Non-mandatory Event Participation 研究主题：探索中国留学生参与 VT 非强制活动的积极性因素

Principal Investigator Name: Aimin Liao 首席研究员姓名：廖霭旻

Voluntary Participation 自愿参与此问卷

You are under no obligation to participate, and there will be no negative consequences if you withdraw. 您没有义务回答这个问卷，推出也不会有负面的影响。

Participation: You can answer the following questions with either English or Chinese. 您可以用中文或者英文，或者中英文夹杂来回答这份问卷。

All of the data will be analyzed anonymously. Your information will NOT be revealed. 所有数据都将会被匿名分析。您的信息不会被泄露。

By submitting this survey, you consent to participate in this research study and your answers will be provided to the researcher. 提交此问卷即代表您同意参与此研究，您的答案将提供给研究人员。

***Only complete this survey if you are a Chinese international student. 请只是中国留学生才完成这个问卷调差。

Name 您的名字

Email 邮箱

Open-ended survey questions 问卷问题

1. What is your classification? (您所在的年级?)
2. What are your top three favorite non-mandatory events in VT? (您最喜欢的三个 VT 活动是什么呢?)
3. How many times do you participate in non-mandatory events per semester? (您一个学期参加多少个活动呢?)
4. Describe your awareness level of Virginia Tech's non-mandatory event. (描述您对 VT 活动的熟悉程度)
5. What motivation means to you? (您怎么看积极性这样东西?)
6. What is your motivational level compared to your peers? (与同龄人相比, 您的积极性水平如何呢?)
7. What non-mandatory events do you hope to see but Virginia Tech has not yet provided? (您希望看到哪些其他活动但是 VT 还没提供的?)
8. Please list any questions or comments you may have. (请列出您的意见或者问题。)

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW INVITATION LETTER

Good afternoon,

My name is Aimin Liao. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of South Carolina's College of Education. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements for my degree in Doctor of Education, and I would like to invite you to participate. This study is sponsored (*or*) funded by me.

I am studying Chinese international students' motivational and demotivational factors in nonmandatory event participation. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete an open-ended survey about your feelings and thoughts about motivation and existing nonmandatory programs at Virginia Tech and meet with me for an interview to discuss this further.

In particular, we will discuss your motivational needs and challenges when participating in nonmandatory events. You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The interview will take place on the virtual platform and should last about 60 minutes. The session (*or*) interview will be recorded so that I can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by members of the research team and destroyed upon completion of the study.

Although we have described the general nature of the tasks that you will be asked to perform during this study, the full intent and purpose of the study cannot be explained because doing so would bias the study results.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at my personal space. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed.

You will receive a \$30 gift card for participating in the study.

You may withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. You will not receive the \$30 gift card if you terminate before completion. Additionally, if appropriate to the study, if data has already been collected, you will be informed that anything collected prior to withdrawal will be included in the study.

We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at 540-449-9614 and aliao@email.sc.edu or my faculty advisor, Dr. Todd Lilly, at (585) 732-1838 and LillyT98@mailbox.sc.edu.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please contact me and schedule a time for the interview.

With kind regards,

Aimin Liao
540-449-9614
aliao@email.sc.edu

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE LIST OF VIRGINIA TECH'S NON-MANDATORY EVENTS

The Student Success Center provides peer academic coaching, tutoring, student success center courses, and seminar series on academic success.

The Cook Counseling Center provides study skills workshops and mental/physical health workshops, and group sessions.

The housing services provide living-learning programs and leadership opportunities.

The Cranwell International Center provides a global connect support group, welcome events, OPT workshops, and a cross-cultural discussion group.

The Newman Library provides writing services, asynchronous tutoring, and English conversation support.

The Career and Professional Development provides career fairs, internship workshops, Handshake orientation, leadership workshops, and LinkedIn workshops.

*Please note that the above lists are some samples of the current events but do not represent all of Virginia Tech's events.

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe your perspectives about VT's non-mandatory events.
 - Development events
 - Social events
 - Chinese events
2. What motivates you to attend non-mandatory events?
 - Reasons
 - Past Incentives
 - Incidents
 - Emotions
 - Topics
3. What demotivates you from attending non-mandatory events?
 - Reasons
 - Past Incidents
 - Emotions
 - Topics
4. What do you think about participating in non-mandatory events alone or with friends?

5. How do you feel about mandatory events?
6. What kind of intercultural training/experience did you receive before coming to America?
7. What suggestions/feedback/ideas do you have to encourage participation in non-mandatory events?

***All questions were verbally translated to Chinese during interviews.