CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF CHINESE IMMIGRANT STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN TRANSITION SERVICES

Xin Qing

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Xin Qing
Disability and Equity in Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education

National College of Education
National Louis University
September 2018
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Doctor of Education in the National College of Education

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Date Approved
9-10-2013
Abstract

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to understand the experiences of newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities who are in transition programs. In depth interviews were conducted with four students and their families. Quality of life, sense of self, nature of relationships, beliefs about disability, and challenges and opportunities are examined. The study surfaces complex social, cultural, and economic factors that impact students’ experiences. Data indicates that participants’ sense of self are informed largely by negative experiences with others based on perceptions of disability combined with negative experiences of being a new immigrant. They expressed feeling lonely and isolated. Participants identified lack of material and non-material resources as barriers for themselves and their families. Positive connections were found between participants being employed and establishing bonds and interactions with the community. Underlying assumptions about disability surfaced showing participants are often informed by a Social Darwinist view of disability more prevalent in China and encounter social disability rights model in their transition programs. A number of barriers to change, both in social systems and belief systems, were identified along with recommendations.
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Terry Smith for her support, guidance, patience and caring that encouraged me throughout my doctoral program. Without her help the work presented in this dissertation would not have been possible. Dr. Smith is a wonderful advisor and I have been privileged to work with her. I would also like to thank Dr. Valerie Owen, Dr. Xiuwen Wu, and Dr. Sadia Warsi for being on my dissertation committee. Your efforts in reading and critiquing my research are appreciated more than you know. I would like to thank my family for their constant support and optimism. I couldn’t have done it without you!
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Chapter 1:

Introduction

Background for the Problem

Nobody talks to me except the homeless people living under the Cermak and Canal Bridge. We have the same goal: to survive daily. We laugh together and talk together, although I don’t know what they are talking about. They even look at me while talking to me. I’m a human being in their eyes! I was a bagger at Mariano’s in my community. I was fired because customers yelled at me when I packed raw meat and fruits together. That’s their only food supplies for the week. I was rejected by many social service employment programs because they thought I’m not someone they can place. Then they cannot get government incentive funding for helping me. My relatives hide themselves far away from us. I cannot say hi to them because if other people know they are my relatives, they cannot get married or have friends in the community. Neighbors keep silent. They pretend that they did not see me. Even if they sometimes give me food, they don’t want other people to know about it (Interview July 15, 2014).

Exploring the life stories of new immigrant students from China with intellectual disabilities is the passion of my life. In my eight years of working in my community to help these young people find and get connected to competitive employment opportunities, I faced unique challenges in overcoming cultural attitudes toward people with disabilities and in accommodating peoples’ lower awareness of disability rights. I felt sorry for my clients because I understood where they come from. When a country lacks resources, human life suffers; when a community lacks resources, people fight against each other in order to survive instead of helping people in need. In some communities, having a relative with intellectual disabilities makes
people drop to the bottom of the social pyramid. The combined consequences of society’s responses to intellectual disabilities form a cloud that hangs over families, even the extended families, of new Chinese immigrants. This cloud affects the families from birth to death in areas of finance, health, education, employment, school, friendships, community, marriage, and social status. The more cases I touched, the more I felt deeply that each part of the social structure was inter-connected, almost like a web. These are not simple, individual problems to address like “if I get a stomachache, I treat my stomach; when I have a fever, I go to the hospital.” People do not realize what is happening because they often get trapped in concrete, immediate problems and do not have a long-term plan to build economically and educationally sustainable environments or to work through their problems step by step. I believe that they often need to get out of the situation and look back at it from a different perspective or need someone who understands the broader systems who can give them guidance to get out of their difficulties.

I am an employment professional who is deeply committed to my community. In order to find out how the cloud of social stigma attaches to new Chinese immigrants with intellectual disabilities and their families, I decided to pursue my doctoral studies in Disability and Equity in Education. I am not doing this for myself, but for my community. I want to represent the underrepresented population of new Chinese immigrants with intellectual disabilities who suffer from ignorance, discrimination, and prejudice. With my education and experience, I believe that I can shine a light on the characteristics of these individual themes in order to analyze how to get people and families out of the spider web they are trapped in and to break the cycle of poverty and stigma which seems to be a tragedy that never ends.

To compare life stories of “my population” to the stories of middle-class American students, I started working as an instructor at a post-secondary transition program for young
adults with multiple intellectual disabilities in the general population while I continued working part-time in the Chinese community. In working at both a mainstream transition program and a transition service in the Chinatown community, I discovered a big gap in how services are delivered and how people talk about intellectual disabilities, as well as in the degree of accommodations given. Below is a short note from one of my American students. (His confidential information is modified in order to protect his identity.)

I will go to France for summer vacation. My parents give this as a gift for me. Ten weeks of hard work for the fair exchange of two weeks’ vacation! My brother is studying overseas as a construction major in Paris for a year, so we are just right to meet him. My father met my mother at Northwestern University, one of the best private universities in the country. After I finish my transition program, I will stay with my parents in their big house in the suburbs and commute to Chicago to work at a pet store as an unpaid intern. My supervisor likes me and gave me a good schedule. I will keep working there and will try to get a paid position there and then accumulate skills to find a job in the suburbs. I like working in the suburbs because I grew up there, and I have friends and neighbors there. Then I will rent my own apartment. I feel energetic and sunny every day, I’m happy with what I have, and I’m able to handle things in my life (Interview September 3, 2014).

Definition of disability

Until the 1980s, the definition of a disability was answered mainly in medical terms with its treatment and therapeutic focus. This led to the creation of institutions charged with providing that remedy of care, while often separating individuals with disabilities from mainstream society, causing these individuals to not only be seen as diseased but as disadvantaged, unusual, and incompetent of participation (Squier, 2008).
I am questioning the clinical model, which defines intellectual disabilities based on fixed standards in intellectual functioning, IQ scores, and adaptive behavior, such as communication, self-care, home living, social skills, self-direction, leisure, work, and learning. I am taking a social model approach because I believe an intellectual disability should be viewed within the context of external social factors. I agree with many advocates that adjusting the environment and the support to meet the person’s needs can increase the person’s capacity and quality of life. (IDRS, 2017).

I also question the definition of what a transition program is--a coordinated set of activities for students with disabilities that focus on improving the academic and functional achievement of students with disabilities to facilitate their movement from school to post-school activities. This definition focuses on making “working robots” in order to survive instead of enhancing students’ life and happiness as a whole. It only looks at the deficits of students with intellectual disabilities and ignores their talents and shining characteristics. I would add that there is a need to “support them to realize their career success and interests through realizing their strength and potential.”

**Statement of the Problem**

The big gaps I discovered in services, how people talk about disabilities, and the degree of accommodations students receive encouraged me to conduct this study. The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges and opportunities of immigrant Chinese students with intellectual disabilities in transition services. This is important because many problems arise in the Chinese community, but few are discussed in the mainstream culture. In working with new Chinese immigrants, I observed their multiple challenges in participating in transition programs, as well as their difficulties in getting desirable results in employment outcomes and quality of
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life. My research aims to explore these challenges in order to equip myself for working with newly immigrated students from China with intellectual disabilities.

Previous research has established the effectiveness of transition programs. For example, Will’s Bridges model developed in the 1980s, was created to bridge the gap between schools and post-secondary environments. This model is still applied today in programs, services, and supports. Halpern’s Revised Transition Model (1985) stated that employment was not a sole factor in determining the quality of life; residential and interpersonal factors must also be considered. These models indicated that opportunities to participate in transition programs can empower students with intellectual disabilities to develop academic strengths, increase their marketability in the job search, enrich their communication capability, and broaden their world view (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). Effective transition programs help students to assume adult roles step by step in the community through improving their professional job skills, professional social skills, and independent living skills. However, few studies have been focused on the Chinese community in a historical and cultural perspective. When I did a search combining the key words of “transition programs”, “intellectual developmental disabilities” and “Chinese history of immigration law” in EBSCOhost, just a few results were found. This might be because new immigrant students from China have not revealed that they have problems participating in transition programs. This might also be attributed to political or immigration factors which make it difficult for their voices to be heard. Not only does this gap in literature affect the transition results in certain immigrant communities, it also has long-term implications for these students’ growth in employment and independent living. It could be because that they were analyzed as immigrants as a group rather than programs specifically geared towards Chinese immigrants, or other culture difference, such as not wanting to be seen as a problem.
Therefore, my research aims to bridge this gap by analyzing the situations of Chinese immigrants with intellectual disabilities who are in transition programs and to explore their life experiences and challenges. This study aims to look at the intersection of cultural differences, perceptions of disabilities, and transition services together in one inquiry.

**Background of the Researcher**

My journey in the field of education has provided me with the opportunity to experience multiple schools and cultural environments. I am a Chinese immigrant who came to the United States in 2007, when I was 26 years old. I worked in employment services between 2009 and 2014 at the Chinese American Service League (CASL), the largest social service agency in Chicago providing comprehensive disability services to serve the needs of the Chinese community. Then I started pursuing my doctorate in Disability and Equity in Education at National Louis University. Since 2014, I have been working at Path to Academics, Community and Employment at National Louis University, a three-year American post-secondary program for students with intellectual disabilities. I have worked as an ILLS Instructor and Job Coach. I also maintain my relationship with my community through working part-time and volunteering at Pui Tak Chinese Community Church and at Midwest Asian Health Association (MAHA), a non-profit organization whose mission is to reduce health disparities for Asian Americans in the Midwest and to operate the Individual Place and Support program in cooperation with Chinese American Service League. This dichotomy of experiences has allowed me to witness firsthand the differences in experiences in transition programs between students from immigrant Chinese families and students who have grown up in American culture. This experience has also provided me with the motivation and firsthand data sources to conduct this research.
My doctoral program in Disability and Equity in Education has given me a solid knowledge base for my research. Classes on epistemology, disability and poverty, disability history, as well as disability advocacy helped me develop critical views and strategies for analyzing external factors influencing the lives of people with intellectual disabilities. My ability to identify beliefs and behaviors that are often associated with people from different socio-economic backgrounds and to summarize the internal causes and effects of these dispositions has helped me establish a solid ground for my research. For example, I previously attributed the lack of confidence and strict obedience I saw in Chinese immigrants to communism, but now I realize that these dispositions were also common to people who felt a sense of poverty.

My understanding of existing literature began with preliminary research I conducted in which I explored the lived experiences of newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities which included interviews and a literature review. That previous study made me question what factors might be causing the students’ isolation and lower quality of life. Because of these factors, the students might be exposed to multiple barriers to participating in transition programs, such as refusing to attend transition programs and feeling shame in talking about their disabilities. In interacting with these students, I was curious about what these factors are and why they are strong enough to cause fear and isolation. Initially, I was attributing these factors to cultural differences, and now I realize that when people move to an absolutely new environment and face language barriers, they may not have an adequate knowledge of disability support, social justice, and equity. I also did research in which I interviewed program staff regarding students’ improvements in professional life skills, professional social skills, and communication skills. I interviewed parents about their immigration experiences. I did quantitative research to
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analyze program students’ job data and their satisfaction with their lives. These studies and research paved the way for my dissertation.

Purpose of My Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges and opportunities of Chinese immigrant students with intellectual disabilities in transition services in greater Chicago area. Identification of the service agencies that are working towards greater inclusion of those area residents in need of services occurred in the course of conducting this study. Given my skills in working with families in a cultural context, my study is itself designed as an investigation of methods for addressing and reducing the stigma of those with disabilities that is unique to the Asian community. My study displays my strong commitment to delivering services in a culturally competent way.

The intent of this study is to identify and understand cultural attitudes toward disability that can hinder students’ ability to find sustaining competitive employment, as well as to have had in changing limiting attitudes in the communities they serve by making the transition services and principles accessible to clients and their families. My research aims to discover examples of how families have leveraged cultural strength to support people to succeed in competitive employment. This requires in-depth knowledge of disability-related issues, of client and family concerns, and of the varied cultural and language contexts from which these concerns and perceptions arise.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

What are the experiences of newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities who are in transition services in the United States?
What is known about their quality of life, communication styles, and their ability to make and maintain friendships?

How do their families make sense of their children’s disabilities and their experiences in the program?

To achieve the objectives of my study, in chapter 2, I will review literature on the current trends, goals, theories, and research on transition programs in the United States that serve students with intellectual disabilities. In chapter 3, I will describe the theory and practices of ethnographic study and focus on the particular challenges and opportunities of interviewing Chinese immigrants with intellectual disabilities and their families. I will describe the methods I used to conduct interviews and observations, and I how I build rapport and trust with the participants. Ethnography is defined as an umbrella term for fieldwork, interviewing, and other means of gathering data in real world environments that puts the researcher in the nature environment rather than in an artificially contrived setting (Willis, 2007). Ethnography is concerned with the impact of culture on meaning making and behavior, which is the key feature of my research--analyzing what people already do, know and believe. This an appropriate methodology for my study since I need to grasp the cultural issues faced by new immigrants from China. Ethnography is a relational methodology that considers the researcher to be formative in the process. I will utilize my connections to the community, my understandings as the researcher, will try to minimize my influence by examining specific phenomena by using descriptive language instead of by summarizing events.

By conducting an ethnographic study, I will be able to observe and converse with new immigrants from China with intellectual disabilities and their families directly and describe and interpret their behaviors and characteristics. The process of my research aims to capture
participants’ lived experiences in a respectful manner that legitimizes new immigrants’ voices as sources of knowledge.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided some background for the problem I wish to address and the reasons why I want to research the life stories of new immigrant students from China with intellectual disabilities. In order to understand the experiences of Chinese immigrants with intellectual disabilities who are in transition programs and the cultural beliefs and values that they draw on to make sense of their experience, I will conduct an ethnographic study that allows for a rich exploration of culture. This is important work because while Chinese immigrants who bravely leave everything and come to the United States in the hope of a brighter future may not reap the full benefits of and contribute to American society due to limited understanding of the culture, disability awareness, as well as knowledge of special education laws.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I review literature that will provide contextual background to understand my research that addresses the experiences of Chinese immigrant students in transition services in the United States, their quality of life, and the ways in which their families make sense of their disabilities. The literature review I conducted presents a landscape that has been enriched by the analyses of various transition services in the United States that serve students with intellectual disabilities. The review indicates a reflection of the general trends, goals, theories, and research in the studies being conducted on transition programs and approaches. Second, I will review research on the experiences of Chinese immigrant students with intellectual disabilities as a means to enlarge and upgrade my existing knowledge, including their communication style, making and maintaining friendships, as well as quality of life. Third, I will review factors related to policy and legislate and the history of immigration and disability. This will review has broadened my own understanding and establishes a solid literature base for my research.

Current Trends, Goals, Theories and Research on Transition Services

My study is unique in that its primary objective is to illustrate the experiences and beliefs of Chinese immigrants who are in transition services in the United States, as well as their families’ interpretations of their experiences. In order to understand their experiences one must understand the goals, theories, practices, and purposes of transition services that serve students with intellectual disabilities.
Participation in College and Community Settings

In order to explore current trends, goals, theories and research on transition programs in the United States that serve students with intellectual disabilities, I reviewed several research studies addressing college settings and community settings and participation. Grigal & Hart, 2008) stated that two trends in transition programs in the United States to help students with intellectual disabilities reach their academic and social potentials are the use of college and community settings. While community based instruction has been implemented for decades as part of transition services, the milestone of college settings as places of transition service has emerged recently since previously students with disabilities were not allowed access to higher education. There is literature comparing transition program results in community based settings and in school based settings, and I believe they are comparable. Grigal & Hart (2010) conducted qualitative and inductive analyses in urban and rural schools and noted that there was a positive correlation between the school settings and transition outcomes. Kohler & Field’s (2003) research indicated a trend of collaboration between schools’ efforts and community participation, which jointly facilitated students’ realization of their goals of employment and independent living.

College settings

Inequities in life opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities have been well documented throughout history (Wolfensberger, 1988). It is only within the last 40 years that there has been any expectation that students with intellectual disabilities would even attend school, let alone attend college (Heward, 2013). However, literature on the topic provides evidence that people with disabilities can contribute to society’s success and enjoy the happiness and sense of achievement with or without accommodation. The college setting creates an
atmosphere of academic growth that encourages lifelong learning for students to pursue, access, and benefit from higher education (Smith, Grigal & Sulewski, 2013). The ability of students with intellectual disabilities to study in college settings brings changes in mindsets about who can go to college and benefit and enhances the belief that people with disabilities can obtain higher starting salaries and a higher rate of employment (Grigal & Hart, 2010). This belief promotes equal opportunity via a college experience by stating that everybody who has a dream to learn and to be successful should have the opportunity. Some students’ wings cannot be cut off because they have a disability. The more research I conducted, the more hopeful I became that students with intellectual disabilities can learn, their interests can be stimulated, their potential can be explored, they can work free from discrimination and marginalization, and they can be successful.

More than thirty years ago, parents’ hopes and dreams for a free, appropriate public education for their children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment were realized through the mandate of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EHCA, PL 94-142). Succeeding reauthorizations (1983 and 2004) and amendments (1990, 1997) of the individuals with disabilities Education Act (IDEA) brought with them greater access to the general education curriculum. For some parents, the reauthorizations led them to higher hopes and expectations of a successful transition to postsecondary outcomes. Therefore, young adults with intellectual disabilities and their parents have an added post-school outcome choice: continued learning at college campus (Griffin, McMillan, & Hodapp, 2000). To assist colleges, students, and families, the U.S. Department of Education is funding the creation of the Technical Assistance Center to help colleges and university develop and expand programs for students with intellectual disabilities.
If one reflects upon The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) (PL 110-315) of 2008, it becomes evident that students with intellectual disabilities do have access to post-secondary education on college campuses and participate in formal and informal learning opportunities (Lee, 2009). Post-secondary education provides added training, skills, and knowledge to help advance individuals’ lives and careers. Individuals with intellectual disabilities and their parents desiring and expecting the same postschool outcomes from continued postsecondary education is a phenomenon beginning within this new millennium and appears to be gaining interest across the nation (Hart & Grigal, 2008). Post-secondary education programs have become increasingly creative in offering students intellectualized supports and access to higher education (Mock & Love, 2012). The study conducted by Li, Wu & Ong (2014) indicated that college settings allow students with intellectual disabilities to interact with a diverse population of same age peers as part of the group. Through access to a multitude of valued roles and activities, they participate in college settings, they acquire work experience and employment, and they participate in recreation and leisure activities that they did not have the opportunities to do before. Similar to the approach taken by Li, Wu & Ong (2014), O’Brien, Alldred, & Jones (1996) conducted a qualitative study in Trinity College Dublin through multiple sources of data collection that aimed to examine the experiences of students with intellectual disabilities gaining access to a university setting and to understand how traditional students looked at it. Results showed that the experience of being included within a university setting led the students to see themselves as being more alike than different from their peers and increased their self-confidence, engagement, and social network. In addition, their presence encouraged traditional students to have more interactions with students with disabilities. The recently signed Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA; PL 110-315), provides three newly
added supports for students with intellectual disabilities. The HEOA authorizes students with intellectual disabilities attending programs designed for them in higher education to be eligible for the first time for Pell Grants, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, and the Federal Work-Study Program (Title IV, Part G, 485). Authorizes the development and expansion of high quality, inclusive model comprehensive transition and post-secondary programs (Title VII, Part D, Subpart 2, 766 and 768). Authorizes the establishment of a national coordinating center for new college programs for students with intellectual disabilities; providing technical assistance, evaluation, and development of recommendations for model accreditation standards as well as outreach and dissemination to postsecondary programs, families and prospective students (Title VII, part D, subpart 4, sec 777-778).

Learning in a college setting allows students with intellectual disabilities to pursue the same goals as any student who attends college--employment, a better job than a high school diploma may offer, and life-long social networks (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Post-secondary education offers the promise of pursuing valuable social goals, enhancing social networks, and increasing employment options (Sheppard-Jones, Kleinert, Druckemiller & Ray, 2015). The National Council on Disability and Social Security Administration (2000) announced that, completing almost any type of post-secondary education significantly improves an individual’s chances of securing meaningful employment. This provides students with the means to be self-sufficient, since the poverty rates of college graduates are much lower than non-college graduates. Analysis of national vocational rehabilitation data found that “youth with intellectual disabilities who participated in post-secondary education were 26% more likely to leave vocational rehabilitation services with a paid job and earn a 73% higher weekly income” (Migliore, Butterworth & Hart, 2009). Zafft, Hart, and Zimbrich (2004) found that, for 20
transition age students with intellectual disabilities, participation in post-secondary programs with individual supports resulted in higher employment rates (100% vs. 43%) and higher wages compared to similar students who were served in a more traditional high-school-based transition programs.

Although researchers agree that studying in a college setting shows promise as a means of providing science and other content area instruction to students with disabilities, many authors strongly encourage more in-depth investigation of the changes in employment outcomes and independent living that might be associated with this setting. Spencer and Spence (2017) indicated that a mere 10% of students with intellectual disabilities could have opportunities to participate fully in college. It is important that students and families share their perspectives related to inclusive higher education and their participation and engagement in future policy initiatives.

Though frequency data indicated that many desired their children to become lifelong learners, most parents expected that desire would not become a reality. Nearly 79% of the parents did not expect their children would enter college for credit, nor did 61% expect their children to continue learning on a college campus. Nonetheless, nearly a quarter of the parents desired their children to enroll in college for credit (23.3%) with about 11.5% expecting that would actually occur. About 82% of the parents were aware students, ages 18 to 22 years, were continuing public school in postsecondary settings, and 71% were aware students continued past their 22nd birthday.

**Community settings**

I reviewed several studies on transitional services in community settings that emphasize the interaction of health conditions with social environment and individual factors. This is a milestone in the history of disability rights movement. Community settings encourage students
with disabilities to be involved and function within a social and environmental context that results from a diagnosed health condition (Bell & Clegg, 2012). For example, goals for community settings and participation published by The World Report on Disability (World Health Organization & World Bank, 2011). This reinterprets the definition of disability from a specific health impairment to a limitation in functioning within a social and environmental context that results from a diagnosed health condition (Bell & Clegg, 2012). In this section, I will review trends in the use of community settings, challenges in implementing services in community settings, as well as how to overcome these challenges.

Four trends were discussed about serving students with intellectual disabilities in community settings. First of all, a variety of legislation, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), was enacted to address and prevent discrimination against individuals with disabilities in areas of employment, housing, education, and access to public services such as transportation. Second, current policy and research facilitate accommodations that enable people with disabilities to be fully participant in important daily activities, such as receiving higher education and equal rights of employment. This is a major shift from the medical model to the interaction between the medical and social constructs of inclusion (World Health Organization & World Bank, 2011). Third, advocacy services were promoted as an interface between medical diagnoses and the law in order to assist people with disabilities to have full and effective participation and inclusion in society (United Nations 2006). Advocacy services encourage society to understand people with intellectual disabilities in a cultural context and inscribe with meaning--indeed made--within social relations. This perspective is fundamentally democratic, denaturalizing disability’s assumed inferiority by
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casting it as different, rather than as lacking (Thomas, 2001). Fourth, with the objective to live as valued and participating members of the community and to support the independence and social and economic participation of people with disability, voices and awareness of social inclusion have been gradually accepted in people’s common understanding in developed countries (National Disability Insurance Scheme Act, 2013). These voices promote a common belief that everyone in the community should include all members socially, intellectually, culturally, and personally. Literature indicates there are benefits and an upward trend in the context of community settings and social inclusion.

Although current legislation, policy, advocacy, and awareness promote intellectually disabled people living in a community setting, there is abundant literature showing challenges in implementing this setting. For example, Qualter, Brown, Munn and Rotenberg (2010) revealed that students with intellectual disabilities often remain socially outside and looking in, being silent, and passively participating in community settings. In observing people with profound and severe intellectual disabilities exploring the use of public places such as cafes, Gilmore and Cuskelley (2014) concluded that participants with intellectual disabilities exhibited extremely low levels of interaction and collaborative activities. Emerson & McVilly (2004) revealed that attempts to foster friendships and increase social integration by moving people with a disabilities from institutions to the community have met with limited success because the focus has been on the physical environment rather than on the social environment and relies on the goodwill or interpersonal skills of individual caregivers who may not always be available. Hubert-Williams, Hastings, Owen, Burns, Day, Mulligan & Noone (2014), in supporting Emerson (2005), indicated that simply changing the physical environment of people with intellectual disabilities without considering how these changes affect social interactions can have negative
consequences. Duvdevany and Arar (2004) concluded in their research that ideal community-based intervention would develop in ecological environments in which people with disabilities feel comfortable and accepted and where social affordances are readily available, such as in assisted living arrangements or community-based gathering places that encourage interaction and foster a measure of autonomy.

In researching how to overcome the challenges mentioned above, I found that many publications attribute the gap between theory and practice to the unclear definitions of both social inclusion and community participation for people with intellectual disabilities (Bell and Clegg, 2012), as well as to the absence of consistent frameworks and methods of measurements in empirical research (Verdonschot, Witte, Reichrath, Buntinx & Curfs, 2009). I agree with O’Brien, Alldred & Jones (1996) who vividly described the distinction as being community presence versus community participation. When people weren’t able to communicate, they were not relating to the world. The definition of community participation does not only mean the use of facilities in the community available to everyone, but also being part of a growing network of relationships that include people with and without intellectual disabilities (Cabieses, Pickett and Tunstall, 2012).

In the articles I reviewed on community presence and community participation, the emphasis is on overcoming the challenges and difficulties of community participation rather than an outright refutation of the method. Zheng, Tian, Hao, Gu, Tao, Liang, Chen, Fang, Ruan, Ai and Hao (2016) conducted research on the level of community presence that provided opportunities for assessing the behaviors of people with intellectual disabilities in public places and the factors that exist along with the continuity of social presence and community participation or the potential for making friends and building social relationships. Emerson and
McVilly (2004)’s research discovered that the ways in which members of the public interacted with these students was important, as they could facilitate or limit contact. His ethnographic study drew attention to members of the public in mediating contact and managing tensions when students misunderstood taken-for-granted rules of social interaction. Their research was conducted in three Melbourne suburbs and in a regional town. It was discovered that many community members were aware of the presence of people with intellectual disabilities in places such as restaurants and shopping malls. They were able to express acceptance of the presence of a person with an intellectual disability by engaging in positive interactions such as smiling, starting conversations or offering assistance. However, they were often unsure how to interact with them using appropriate language, felt constrained by the presence of staff, worried they would cause embarrassment or not know how to disengage. Research indicates a need in educating community members in respect to planning for participation and inclusion in community groups.

In exploring effective ways of facilitating interactions between people with and without advanced social skills, Bigby and Knox (2009) suggested promoting social interactions between strangers in public places that would extend communication and provide more convivial moments in which a common purpose is shared. O’Brien, Alldred & Jones (1996) explained that these kinds of social interactions are neither simply anonymous free mingling (usually seen as community presence) nor interactions based on established relationships (usually seen as community participation). A small pilot study using unstructured observations to explore the encounters of five people with intellectual disabilities identified fleeting encounters and service transactions, some of which had moments of conviviality. The study indicated that, firstly, such contact provides people with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to become known to others.
in their community and to form new relationships. Indeed, the first step in every friendship is an encounter between strangers. Secondly, contact with strangers, even if it does not lead to lasting relationships, can be seen as meaningful everyday activities through which people experience moments of conviviality, recognition, affirmation and a sense of belonging, all of which can be understood as important aspects of social inclusion. Promoting encounters with strangers can therefore be seen as an integral part of the mission of disability services and the support workers they employ.

The research of Chen, Guo, Zheng, Wei, Song, Cao, Huang, Yang, and Shang (2014) focused on supporting staff by highlighting that effectively supporting participation and identifying necessary staff skills can be informed by reframing the long standing binary of community presence and participation. However, these staff members were trying to place boundaries, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and take roles like tours guides, acting as danger minimizing mediators, keeping distance with groups. They also prefer to take students to familiar places where they would be recognized, and they were less likely to engage themselves with students’ groups or become the audience for students’ rule transgressions. (Chiu, Wei, Lee, Choovanichvong & Wong, 2001) conclude that the skills, motivations, and priorities of front-line support workers are perceived as important factors influencing the participation of service users. Bigby & Knox (2009), in supporting the ideas of McConkey & Collins (2010), presented that poor staff practices, low wages and high turnover, inadequate training or supervision, and staff misinterpretation of policy aims are identified as reasons for the failure to move beyond community presence.

Studies by Xu, Dempsey & Foreman (2014) focused on independent living conditions and the community involvement of students with intellectual disabilities. The former study
indicated that in trying to avoid taking the initiative and actively engage with the real world, many young adults would rather transition to congregated, segregated sheltered workshops and day programs or stay at home. The latter study states that the majority of students with intellectual disabilities feel more confident if they remain with their parents or pursue congregated, segregated group living situations, such as group homes. They even thought that the best choice of moving out of their parents’ house would be to stay with their peers who are in the same situation. So they might have a community of the disabled. Both studies indicate that relatively few students with intellectual disabilities move out of their parents’ home into typical apartments and homes like students without disabilities. Both studies mention that passive participation and self-isolation from the community hindered the growth of students with intellectual disabilities. The problem of passive participation not only happens in the U.S., but is a common phenomenon in other developed countries. In China, the Protection of Disabled Persons law of 1991, with the person-centered planning processes which was the centerpiece, ended up having limited success in enriching the social networks of people with intellectual disabilities to better connect with those without disabilities (Su, Cuskelley, Gilmore & Sullivan, 2015).

**Conclusion**

This section describes the theoretical framework of current trends, goals, theories, and research on transition programs in the United States that serve students with intellectual disabilities. Reviewing the literature revealed that having students with intellectual disabilities live in college settings and in community settings are two trends in transition services in the United States to help such students reach their potential academically and socially. Having students with intellectual disabilities live in a college setting is supported by many who share the
conviction that all students should have access to a post-secondary education that leads to employment and independent living opportunities. Having students with intellectual disabilities live in a community setting is designed to provide the students with “real life experiences” in community presence and community participation. The goal is to provide a variety of hands-on learning opportunities at all age levels to help students acquire the skills to live independently. In reviewing the literature, I recognize the movement of students with disabilities to college settings and community settings to be the progress of human beings through the mutual efforts of society. Because of this trend, the number of colleges that enroll such students continues to expand, spurred on by the recent changes in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA) and coupled with changes in attitudes that redefine and support people with intellectual disabilities as competent, capable, independent and productive citizens. In addition, living in community settings encourages students with disabilities to be involved and function within a social and environmental context (Bell & Clegg, 2012).

However, some literature that I reviewed stated that most of these efforts only remain on the legislative, policy, advocacy, and awareness level, and it far less developed on a practical level. We do have changes in laws, policies, and advanced understandings that encourage individuals with intellectual disabilities to break with the societal limitations that are based upon old paradigms, perceptions, and stereotypes. However, there is abundant literature showing that students with intellectual disabilities often remain socially outside looking in, being silent, and participating passively (Verdonschot, de Witte, Reichrath, Buntinx & Curfs, 2009). They try to avoid taking the initiative to actively engage with the real world. Many young adults would rather transition to congregated and segregated sheltered workshops and day programs or stay at home. Although each encounter may not seem significant, the sum forms an important
dimension of a person’s social life. I believe that it takes time for communities to accept students with disabilities through the joint efforts of everyone involved.

**Employment Data**

Among the literature I reviewed on current trends and the broader category of transition, there was much written on employment and approaches in vocational assessment. Studies show research in employment skills training occurring at all levels of education from elementary schools to college, from interdisciplinary teams to subject specific teams, from job description to combinations of skills, from personality to people skills, and emotional intelligence (Yun-Tung, 2010).

**The heightened focus on school-to-career possibilities**

Wagner, Newmanm, Cametom, Levine & Garza (2006) stated that there is a heightened focus on transition, and the importance of work has also translated into a variety of school-to-career possibilities, though students with intellectual disabilities are less likely to attain competitive jobs. General employability skills provide valid representations of work functioning that are generalizable to a variety of settings. The research of Mock and Love (2012) helped me understand why abundant research was carried out in job data, although having a job is not the sole indicator for transition success. He explained that work is a central aspect of human existence and a vital component of independent living for the majority of working-age adults. His article is a composite of existing literature, mentioning that students’ happiness and confidence levels increase a lot when they get job offers. Yun-Tung (2010) stated that paid employment helps students with disabilities get financial self-sufficiency, earn respect and social engagement, and learn about labor rights such as minimum wage, child labor laws, OSHA regulations, insurance, and unemployment benefits. Happiness earned from achievement offers
positive stimulation to their growth, as work plays an important role in the rehabilitation of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Participating in employment not only enables students to learn multiple job skills to build up careers they are interested in, but also broadens their views to include the pursuit of happiness as a basic human right. When people with disabilities are able to get competitive and supportive employment within the community, they will not only earn responsible salaries and benefits, but will also participate in social activities and become more independent. In reviewing the various literature exploring necessary job accommodations, I discovered that modification of work schedules and provision of adequate supervision and coaching at the workplace were mentioned again and again in the research. The Americans with Disabilities Act legislated reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities as long as they are able to perform basic job functions and not cause undue hardship for employers.

**Transition outcomes continue to be disappointing**

Many efforts were made at legislative and administrative level. For example, Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004; PL 108-446) and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (PL, 107-110) legislated rights for people with disabilities in areas of education, employment, and public access. In addition, Will’s Bridge Model developed in 1984 provided schools with their development of educational programs to help students transition into their post-school adult lives. However, as pointed out by Rutkowski, Daston, Van Keiken, & Riehel (2006), the journey of transition is full of uncertainty since it takes a large amount of time and resources to obtain and refine the necessary skills to successfully launch into adulthood. Peterson (2004) explored this explanation further by describing that transition is a dynamic process in which life changes and adjustments occur as students with disabilities experience a transfer from behaving primarily as a dependent to undertaking rising independent duty in the community. Kohler & Field (2003),
acting as both researcher and participant, specified that successful transition demands coordinated planning, teamwork, and decision-making among schools and supporting agencies. My literature review show that transition outcomes continue to be disappointing (Mock & Love, 2012). The literature indicates that the majority of working age people with intellectual disabilities are unemployed (Luecking & Wittenberg, 2009). Students with intellectual disabilities continue to fall behind and are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed compared to those without disabilities (Johnson, Mellard, & Lancaster, 2007). Even in many Asian countries and regions with lower levels of social welfare benefits where everyone is encouraged to work, the competitive employment rate is very low. In this category, Hong Kong was around 30% in a sample of 325 people with psychiatric disabilities. In Taiwan, the labor participation rate for people with disabilities was 27.42% and the unemployment rate was 16.70% in 2007, while the total population’s labor participation rate was 58.25% and unemployment rate was 3.91% (Xu, Dempsey & Foreman, 2014).

Since current employment condition for people with disabilities is still much worse than the general population, studying job terminations has been regarded as a way to understand job tenure among supported employment participants. While society has become more inclusive over the past few decades, many people still cannot accept people with intellectual disabilities positively. Several research studies identified reasons for job terminations among students with intellectual disabilities. Here is a summary of the most common job problems related to job termination: Interpersonal difficulty and unable to cope with the job demand; wanting to obtain a better job (19%), work stress (18%), and inability to do tasks (18%); not wanting to work (15%), physical health problems (13%), and obtaining a better job; poor attendance (Xu, Dempsey, & Foreman, 2014); inability to cope with job demand (28.9%), being offered better jobs (14.6%),
and being unsuitable for the job (16.1%); interpersonal functioning (58%), mental illness (52%), dissatisfaction with job (52%), quality of work (36%), medical illness (30%), dependability (22%); and substance abuse (15%) (Su, Cuskelly, Gilmore & Sullivan, 2015). The journey of exploring termination also leads to the conclusion that daydreaming, lack of initiative, and the lack of interpersonal functioning is common for persons with disabilities. Three studies were reviewed, although the results of these studies could not be directly compared. Based on 238 terminated placements, Xu, Dempsey & Foreman (2014) found that the majority of participants initiated their own termination (59.2%). 52 percent of the 63 job terminations were unsatisfactory, which is defined as the client quitting without having other job plans or simply being fired.

**Employment services**

Because of the importance of employment participation and the high unemployment rate of people with intellectual disabilities, employment services were viewed as essential parts of transition. Hampton & Xiao (2007) indicated four major approaches in vocational assessment for people with disabilities: standard testing, job analysis, work samples and situational assessment. Individual factors such as educational level, category of disability, level of the disability, working attitude, working skills, interpersonal relationship, and physical and emotional stability were also analyzed as factors determining employability. In researching how to develop employment skills for people with intellectual disabilities, the review of literature shows promise, which inspires me to continue to explore this topic. The most evidence-based approach is supported employment, which directly assists people with disabilities to obtain competitive employment based on their preferences, skills, and experiences (Grigal & Hart, 2010). It was discovered that, even though the working ability of people with disabilities may be below
average, supported employment service can help them develop their work potential and bridge the employment skills gap in order to enter and stay in the job market.

Supported employment emphasizes the integration of vocational and clinical services, rapid job search, matching jobs to students’ preferences, skills and experiences; and ongoing job supports. There is a growing trend to analyze job development, mock interviews, placement, training, and job coaching, and follow up services as a way to enhance instructional practice. The job coach model helps students with intellectual disabilities to select, obtain, and maintain paid work in an integrated employment setting. Job coaches provide students with intellectual disabilities with intake interviews, consultations before interviews with employers, accompany clients to be interviewed, intensive guidance, follow-up guidance, and referrals. Intensive guidance in the workplace lasts from 2 weeks up to 3 months after a student has been employed (Johnson, Mellard & Lancaster, 2007).

Research on the employment of individuals with disabilities in China is rare in both the Chinese and English literature. A search of all articles published in China on intellectual disabilities since 1994 returned approximately 800 articles, though few touched on employment. Chiu, Wei, Lee, Choovanichvong and Wong (2001) analyzed ways of impacting caregivers through the “Familylink” employment system. Pearson and Tsang (2004) carried out qualitative research on chances of finding employment at occupational therapy stations that were established in local neighborhoods for individuals with disabilities. Their research discovered the effectiveness of basic training in vocational skills and some opportunities to earn wages. In addition, Chen (2014) described employment and the lives of young adults with intellectual disabilities from the perspectives of both the young adults and their parents. However, all three of these articles described examples in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Shanghai, three of the most
advanced cities in China. Thus, the conditions in the rest of China have not been researched up to now. From this, we can also find the uneven development of disability awareness across mainland China.

**Conclusion**

This section summarizes employment related factors in the literature, including a heightened focus on school-to-career possibilities, disappointing transition outcomes, termination analysis, as well as the work of employment services. In reviewing the literature, I recognize that employment is the most important part of transition services. Based on employment, students would be able to build up a stable income and self-confidence. They can cultivate life skills, social skills, and job skills. However, employment was not the only issue, and we also need to take quality of life and residential and interpersonal factors into account (Halpern, 1985).

**Experience of New Immigrant Chinese Students with Intellectual Disabilities in Transition Services in the United States**

**Introduction**

There is little literature available in researching intellectual disabilities in the Chinese community; there are also limited resources available addressing the impact of intellectual disabilities in Chinese oral language, since Chinese people often believe that talking about this topic might cause shame and bad luck. Intellectual disabilities were not diagnosed in China until 1982, when a doctor observed children with intellectual disabilities on an academic trip to the United States. Related services and awareness were not initiated in China until the 1990s. The census of people with disabilities in China has increased to 82.96 million in the 2006 national survey, among whom 5.5 million were in the category of Intellectual Disability (China Publishing the Communique on the Data of the Second National Survey on Disability, 2007). In
this section, I will review literature in areas of students’ communication style, their making and maintaining friendships, as well as their quality of life.

**Communication style**

In analyzing the communication style of students with intellectual disabilities, Bell and Clegg (2012) indicated that one of students’ major problems is reduced contact with the outside world, which, in turn, limits their social skills and their understanding about the system. For example, students’ reduced contact limits new Chinese immigrants’ understanding of the social welfare system. Therefore, they do not even know that people living in the United States have a safety net that does not exist in many other countries. They believe that applying for social welfare might cause them to lose their immigrant status, and getting free money from anywhere else is a trap that might cause them to lose all of their property. They would rather stay with their presumption that it is the family’s sole responsibility to support their kids with intellectual disabilities since the Chinese safety network is family based--blood relationships, extended family, and close friends. The reduced contact negatively affects these families’ economic stability, emotional states, and emotional adjustments. Therefore, new Chinese immigrants believe that people with disabilities are poor, and they do not have the adequate resources to support their lives (Williams, 2001). The experiences of new Chinese immigrants indicated that having a child needing full time and lifetime attention brings a substantial amount of social and financial pressures on their families. Families have to bear economic pressures as children with intellectual disabilities are considered economic liabilities. These burdens might be too big to accept, since most of the Chinese immigrants are lower income families, and they have to work longer hours to offset low wages and do not have time to look after their kids. Survival is the priority since many of them do not even have the financial resources to make a living. Even if
parents and social services can work something out to help by promoting a safety network, they may still feel overwhelmed by the needs of a person with disabilities, particularly as problems tend to persist throughout the person’s life. The shortage of financial resources also puts a cloud over the family’s happiness. Parents prefer to stay in joint families with other supportive members in order to share responsibilities to fight against negative consequences, although this brings conflicts and more arguments than living in nuclear families. In addition, the relationships of other siblings with parents get tense, as parents might give more time to their intellectually disabled children compared to the nondisabled ones (Wolfensberger, 1998).

Shakespeare (2006) pointed out that many individuals with intellectual disabilities are in the community, but are not part of the community. His studies described experiences from reduced opportunity for social engagement to outright rejection. In American history, students with intellectual disabilities were segregated from their peers without disabilities in many aspects of life such as education, living, employment, and participation in activities (Kochhar-Bryant, 2007). In the Chinese community, people try to avoid of building close relationships with these families because they are afraid of being associated with these families. Therefore, the outright rejection may further reduce families’ access to the social network. These problems were expressed in cycles, in which cause and effects rotate repeatedly. The outright rejection might bring social exclusion, as new immigrant students from China are not able to participate in social and community gatherings. There is evidence that they experience more complicated grief than students who were born and raised in the United States Brickell & Munir, 2008. Wagner, Cadwalladar, Newman, & Marder (2003) revealed a significant gap between students with intellectual disabilities and their age peers in terms of high school graduation rates, competitive employment, and independent living results through the National Longitudinal Transition Study.
Their studies indicated that students with intellectual disabilities have limited expectations of an independent lifestyle, and service providers have limited perceptions of the types of programs that might be offered. More chances of being placed into special schools and separate classes indicate increased opportunities of staying segregated in special residential settings, and students end up working in sheltered workshops (Wolfensberger, 1998). New immigrant Chinese students have extensive attitude problems in participating in transition programs, such as refusing to attend transition programs and feeling shame in talking about their disabilities. For people who were so afraid of being labeled as “disabled”, participating in transition programs means putting the label on their faces and letting the whole world know that they have disabilities. Since Chinese mothers do not allow their kids to participate in transition and go through treatment, their kids were mostly likely to be unemployed or under-employed. Since they do not have the time and resources for their kids to go through intervention, they will have to do the work for their kids, instead of training the kids to have the skills to live independently. This stimulates “learned helplessness” which means someone is doing for a student what they can already do for themselves, or what they can be taught to do for themselves, or what can be adapted so the student can do it for themselves. Therefore, these kids may be more likely to work in restaurants, on assembly lines, or in hotels as minimum wage laborers. The overwhelming workload and unreasonable working conditions, in addition to order and demand supervisory styles make them feel useless, depressed, and hopeless (Wong, Wong, Schalock & Chou, 2011).

Making and maintaining friendships

The literature shows that compared to mainstreamed students, new Chinese immigrant students with intellectual disabilities report more difficulties in making friends and maintaining friendships because of negative life events caused by having intellectual disabilities, and they
have an increased vulnerability to loneliness (Chiu, Yang, Wong & Li, 2013). In particular, individuals with intellectual disabilities experience loss as being more personal because they are isolated (Shakespeare, 2006). Reviewing the literature causes me to recall memories of my social work experience in which situations and expressions similar to these frequently appeared: “Once the disability was diagnosed, the extended family cried for three days;” “My brother cannot find someone to marry simply because he has a disabled relative;” “Students don’t like to stay in special classes and attend transition programs; they are making every effort to get out of special classrooms.” Childs (1985) also pointed out that, because of students’ self-perceived devalued status, they were not able to meet peer expectations. Students with intellectual disabilities have more chance of being lonely and depressed. Mak & Cheung (2008) revealed that people with intellectual disabilities are often lonely and tend to be easily stressed by new situations, and the barrier of isolation could hinder their social functioning further since they already have problems in making friends and in expressing and receiving information. Because they try to hide their disabilities by avoiding interactions with people, they get more isolated and perform worse in social interactions, even with close family members (Ghaziuddin, 1988).

There is literature that highlights the difficulties new Chinese immigrants with intellectual disabilities have in initiating, establishing, and maintaining friendships. I reviewed three research studies describing the facts of such immigrants’ loneliness and five studies regarding the reasons for their loneliness. Luftig (1988) assessed emotional health in students who were attending mainstream schools and concluded that students with intellectual disabilities were significantly lonelier and more isolated than their non-disabled peers. Heiman and Margalit (1998) found that no matter if they attend mainstream or special schools, students with intellectual disabilities were lonelier than their typically developed peers. Jobling and Cuskelly
(2002) described the phenomenon that many individuals with intellectual disabilities rely on paid “friends” with whom to undertake leisure activities, instead of meaningfully engaging with others in the community. Bigby and Knox (2009) found that the social relationships of people with intellectual disabilities were largely restricted to agency staff, family, and others with intellectual disabilities. Emerson & McVilly (2004) discovered that such individuals are less socially engaged, and their friends tend to be others with intellectual disabilities. Chappell (1994) conducted an experiment and found that for people with intellectual disabilities close friendships occurred only with other people with intellectual disabilities. The philosophical approach of inclusion was based on the need for friends to be “equal.” When the social network of students with intellectual disabilities was restricted to others with intellectual disabilities, they may have lost important modeling opportunities provided by interacting with nondisabled kids. In their qualitative research assessing attitudes towards individuals with intellectual disability in China, Su, Cuskelley, Gilmore and Sullivan (2015) stated that many students with intellectual disabilities have imagined friends because of the negative attitudes of community members.

The reasons given for the loneliness of students with intellectual disabilities extracted from my literature review included the following:

No time: students rely on social services which often requires people to spend a lot of time waiting; they get trapped in concrete, immediate problems instead of taking time to making friends (Gilmote & Cuskelley, 2014).

No money: they have limited financial resources for recreational activities and making friends. Xu, Dempsey & Foreman (2014) tested the correlation between having a disability and poverty by using three measurements. After providing an overview of the official poverty measure and the supplemental poverty measure, they discuss two dimensional poverty measures.
Working-age persons with disabilities are more likely to be poor, whatever the measurements they use. Having a disability is often associated with both unemployment and poverty. People with intellectual disabilities have limited opportunities to explore their vocational interests and are often placed in segregated settings doing repetitive and nonfunctional jobs.

- No autonomy: they depend on others for transportation and social activities.
- No initiative: the more they have imagined friends, the harder it is for them to be able to get out and interact with the real world. Among those with profound levels of intellectual disabilities, very few have regular contact with friends (Emerson, 2007). As children, they participate in fewer social activities with friends and are reported by parents to have fewer reciprocal friendships than their typically developing peers. When they grow up, they tend to spend more time alone (Gilmore & Cuskelly, 2014).

In order to analyze factors impacting people’s capacity for making and maintaining friends and participating in real world activities, many studies analyzed the environment in which individuals with intellectual disabilities live, learn, and work. These authors believed that permitting certain actions within the environment that the person inhabits is equally important, since abilities change more slowly than events in the environment. Among these researchers, Gaver (1996) discovered an ecological approach designed to improved environments by assessing aspects of the physical environment and social interaction. This is important because it focused on the ecological context within which the person with a disability develops as properties of the person-environment system. The approach offers an appealing way of thinking about service design as it encourages policymakers and therapists to explore what the environment provides, or fails to provide, creatively and to consider how services could be designed differently to better serve the needs of those with disabilities. In addition, educational
Institutions have responded to these ideas by making available more educational and community experiences that can provide authentic experiences of living, working, and learning in their communities (Grigal & Hart, 2008). Chan (2005) provides reports on interventions and on parent advocacy efforts, as well as professional support, mutual help, and right-direction information for parents. Hampton, Nan, Zhang, Li, Qiong, Denninger, Yanan & Zhu (2015) highlight the importance of family members’ education workshops, through which parents start to encourage their children with intellectual disabilities to make friends and actively participate in community activities. Most of these parents learned the importance of providing good home environments through shared responsibilities, instead of feeling shame and guilt about their circumstances. Parents also learn how to have an open communication about students’ disabilities and to involve students in making their own decisions and in taking responsibility. Cabieses, Pickett & Tunstall (2012) point out that participating in community living solves a common problem for these students’ family. When the responsibility of taking care of students with disabilities shifts to society, family members are able to find employment and sources of income, and they connect with the outside world. With increased family income and knowledge of disabilities, both students and their family members can increase their quality of life. This could fundamentally break prior assumptions that families of people with disabilities have fewer resources, inadequate education, and poorer health conditions.

Much of the literature I reviewed placed an emphasis on improving the social skills of students with intellectual disabilities, such as working on students’ body gestures and eye contact while talking to people. Many transition programs have curricula that are heavy on building professional social skills, with the hope that their students can communicate well in the community. However, little emphasis is placed on interdependence and the importance of
nurturing relationships. A key part of developing interpersonal skills is the ability to form attachments so that students can interact more effectively with other people. Various problems preventing these students from getting desirable results in employment outcomes and quality of life can be related to the same reason—the students are unable to form attachments. Therefore, friends, relationships, and a sense of belonging are at the center of a rich quality of life. The ability to form attachments starts from childhood. Clegg & Lansdall-Welfare (1995) indicate that, children’s attachment with the primary caregiver establishes the groundwork and method for exploring their environment and their relationships. The strength of their attachments may influence the later development of their interpersonal skills, as well as their openness in expressing themselves. However, Gibson’s (1986) education of attention indicates that students with intellectual disabilities find it difficult to extract information from the environment, to process the information, and to express themselves to an audience. In addition, Chinese culture is highly collectivist and hierarchical in order, and younger people are required to obey what their parents say and follow directions, instead of expressing themselves freely and forming attachments naturally. Observation shows that interactions with students who have intellectual disabilities require greater effort, with the need to repeat and clarify questions, and the inferred meaning that comes from facial expressions and other social elements may be misperceived or not be understood at all by information receivers. Since children with intellectual disabilities are not able to perform in a “standard” way their parents expect, they try to keep distance to avoid blame. Gibson (1986) also points out that when children grow up, their attachments extend to a broader circle of people. When forming attachments with key figures, such as parents or professional caregivers, who do not provide the comfort or security that is needed to explore the social and physical environment, disabled children may appear strange and disturbing to others,
they will not be attuned to their surroundings, and they may be socially isolated from their peers. In addition, an insecure attachment may arise when there is a gap in communication caused by the social and nonsocial aspects if the environment that can be perceived and acted upon by that person. These insecure attachments cause several problems such as communication difficulties in the long term, demanding for support that no caregiver can meet, hospital stays that disturb the relationship, or an unwillingness to accept their disabilities.

Schuengel & Janssen (2006) promote the experience of being loved and emotionally supported by another person as an important way of establishing attachments. Their research indicate that these secure attachments can offset negative affordances or environmental constraints by providing emotional comfort and reducing the impact of stigmatizing experiences that often accompany a disability. These experiences cannot only reduce stigma when students who have intellectual disabilities get frustrated in miscommunicating with others or not being accepted by the community, but also increase confidence and reduce social isolation and can encourage them to overcome problems that may threaten the creation of bonds with peers. As long as people feel they are loved, their stress level and frustration will not be that high. Sterkenburg, Janseen & Schuengel (2008) indicate that, in practice, therapeutic interventions that focus on establishing secure attachments with the caregiver have been successfully used to help clients with intellectual disabilities, since the experience of being loved promotes the sense of success for these students.

Conducting research on insecure attachments paved the way for analyzing problems of new Chinese immigrant students. For these students, language proficiency may reinforce insecure attachments because they may not be able to express themselves clearly (Hodges, 2009). One example is that many ELL students were placed in special classes. There is not a
large awareness of Chinese culture in the U.S. Many times, Chinese immigrant students do not express their ideas clearly. They rely on body language, eye contact, and gestures to communicate. American culture speakers put the most important point at the beginning of conversations, but Chinese communication styles put them at the end by using implied meanings. Forming attachments is difficult for students with intellectual disabilities (Atkinson, Chisholm, Scott, Goldberg, Vaughn, Blackwell, & Tam, F., 1999), possibly because of their difficulties in expressing themselves and in finding appropriate ways to communicate with other people. This is even more difficult for Chinese immigrant students with disabilities given the lack of cultural awareness in the general society and their limited language proficiency. These misunderstandings between the students and others are likely to damage developing relationships further. These awkward exchanges reduce the positive affordance that the child provides to the caregiver and discourages further interaction through the depletion of available parental resources. These difficulties usually persist into adulthood, putting pressure on caregivers throughout the disabled person’s life and affecting relationships with peers as well as with other members of the community. Therefore, these students try to avoid conversations. Although interactions in a stressful environment that feels inaccessible to the students may explain these difficulties, the relatively impoverished social relationships that people with disabilities experience also contribute to the problem. Many people don’t understand why new immigrants from China refine relevant information gained from interacting with the environment in different ways. The parent may not have the knowledge and skills to engage in a dialogue to solve the problems that the students have (Loveland, 1991).

Quality of life
Multiple studies revealed that newly immigrated Chinese students and their families who participate in transition services are subject to a lower quality of life because of their emotional stress. Instead of focusing on the solutions or treatments for the illness, people from a Chinese cultural background focus on the cause of the illness, that is, why it happened. This causes a tremendous amount of fear, hostility, alienation, and blame (Bowlby, 1988). Chinese people do not want others to know about family members’ disabilities because of the belief that such circumstances are caused by a genetic disease for which parents are held responsible. In Chinese culture, which is strongly influenced by brutalism, there is a belief in the cause and effect of “do good things and you will be blessed eventually; do bad things and you will be punished finally.” People culturally associate intellectual disability with a sin that the parents might have committed in the past. Because of the lack of medical knowledge, many family members view a disability as a punishment since the traditional Chinese term for disability is “disabled people-canji ren”, meaning “handicapped” and “sick people”. Students with disabilities do not actively participate in transition programs because their disabilities are viewed as being shameful and guilt inducing.

Mothers of children with intellectual disabilities face a number of social and economic problems on societal and family levels. In order for their disabled children not to “become a public charge,” mothers would have to stay at home and look after their children with disabilities. This conflicts with the Chinese beliefs of “everybody should work” as well as “women support half of the sky.” Since 1949, Communist China placed work as a basic right for women. Working age women who do not actively participate in the workforce were treated as lower-level citizens who rely on other people’s income to survive. A stay at home mother represents a lower social status of “being useless” or “lower status.” Stay at home mothers have
to undertake social isolation to avoid being blamed. If they choose to work, they may frequently go through family-work role conflict because their kids have extra demands for care. In this situation, mothers would have to sacrifice her job income and promotion opportunities while paying huge medical and facilitation expenses for their kids. Mothers cannot stay productive at work and at the same time provide extra care for their children. Therefore, the mental stress caused by devalued social status, economic pressure, and the overwhelming responsibility to manage both home responsibilities and paid work, as well as caring for their disabled child, sometimes results in divorce and separation. When the main care providers are under pressure, the life of their disabled children might be affected. Since the mothers’ financial and emotional stability are challenged, their kids suffer too. Several research studies analyzed factors determining that the total quality of life for people with intellectual disabilities has a strong correlation with society’s inclusion level. The more inclusion the society has, the happier they will be. Students who were integrated in regular classrooms can learn social skills through modeling their typically developing peers, and they may have accumulated skills of making non-disabled friends (Su, Cuskelly, Gilmore & Sullivan, 2015). Students with disabilities need to learn how to handle the embarrassment brought on by their inappropriate behavior, instead of feeling shame and anger. They need to have the opportunity to come into contact with society, with friends, with classmates, instead of getting their lives closed off. They have to learn how to deal with problems and get reasonable results instead of avoiding problems. Otherwise, they might rely on their families in the long run, instead of accumulating independent living skills (Smart, 2004). However, the general population holds substantial reservations about proactively interacting with students who have intellectual disabilities. People sometimes even believe that segregated settings, such as special schools, are the most appropriate so that students with
disabilities will not interrupt “normal society” (Xu, Dempsey & Foreman, 2014). For example, 14 service providers who participated in a focus group study suggested that segregated disability-specific programs might be more suitable for students with intellectual disabilities. Many small programs also established over the last decade with funding have used group rather than individual approaches to supporting inclusion in the mainstream community. Segregated and group-based transition programs are contrary to the ideas of inclusion in mainstream community life as articulated in the disability policy and in the person-centeredness that is a central principle of service delivery. Consequently, it is important to demonstrate the possibilities that are reflected in an inclusive and person-centered approach to community participation.

Attitudes from the community affect people’s attitudes. When the general population pretends to be inclusive but has little opportunity to know and understand people with intellectual disabilities, such people are more likely to be seen as strange, abnormal, and unpredictable, thus reinforcing negative social attitudes. Inclusion is not just clarity, it means to know, to understand, and to engage students with intellectual disabilities as insiders rather than outsiders. Compared with mainstream students, newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities have much lower chance of been included, and many transition program students show self-pity and a sense of helplessness. Therefore, it is important to build the “linkage” and act as a bridge between people with intellectual disabilities and community groups. How to facilitate inclusion continues to be a topic in the literature I reviewed. To date, the challenges of translating this broad concept into practice or identifying the processes and skills required have not been clearly articulated. Students with disabilities require all kinds of support for planned participation in community groups. If we don’t have sufficient support, we cannot provide reasonable accommodations to facilitate their equal participation. Even if
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community groups may be willing to include students with intellectual disabilities, they may lack the confidence and resources to do this successfully (National Center for Science Education, 2016).

Conclusion

In this section, I discussed essential features of the experience of newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities in transition programs in the United States, including their communication style, their ability to make and maintain friendships, as well as their quality of life. The more research I conducted analyzing this topic, the clearer the picture showing cause and effect relationships became. In addition to my prior assumptions that that problems would appear in cycles, I found that positive things present in cycles too. For example, positive attitudes from the community affect people’s attitudes. The more inclusion the society has, the happier students will be. Students who were integrated into regular classrooms can learn social skills through modeling their typically developing peers, and they may have accumulated skills of making friends without a disability (Xu, Dempsey & Foreman, 2014). Also, findings indicated that these secure attachments can offset negative affordances or environmental constraints by providing emotional comfort and reducing the impact of stigmatizing experiences that often accompany a disability (Yun-Tung, 2010).

Legislation and Immigration Law affecting Chinese immigrant students with intellectual disabilities

Introduction

Previous sections described essential features of the experience of newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities in transition programs in the United States, including their contact style, making and maintaining friends, as well as their quality of life. I
was curious about where these features come from. In this section, I will seek out factors that affect the experiences of new Chinese immigrants with intellectual abilities in the context of legislation, immigration laws, and history, since culture has a very strong impact upon our understanding of disability and of the goals and processes of transition. I reviewed literature in each aspect in different ways and for different reasons, revealing important elements of laws, values, beliefs, and family dynamics in the stories of newly immigrated Chinese students’ transitions. For example, the immigration histories of many families, especially undocumented families, made new immigrants believe that they needed to suffer themselves in exchange for a better life in the long run. This conflicts with American culture, which promotes freedom of speech, the pursuit of happiness, and the enjoyment of spending money. Because of family stories passed generation through generation about the Chinese Exclusion Act, Chinese immigrants believe that they need to be silent and obey rules. China’s highly collectivist society made them get used to sacrificing themselves to benefit the group, instead of advocating for individual rights.

**Legislation in China for people with disabilities**

The thinking of Chinese immigrants is strongly influenced by their home country’s legislation. There are two main acts of legislation in China governing the right to education and employment for people with disabilities. One is the Compulsory Education Law of 1986 of China and the other is The 1990 Education and Employment Law of the People’s Republic of China.

The Compulsory Education Law of 1986 of China made everybody go to school by mandating nine years of education for all students. When they say everybody, they mean everybody. Chinese culture has a tradition of focusing on education, and Chinese people believe
that education is an essential way to improve social economic status. This is similar to many other Asian countries like Japan and Korea, which put education first in every aspect of their policy making. Regardless of age, gender, and income level, anyone who had not yet received nine years of school education must attend. This is much stricter than “No Child Left Behind” in the U.S. because it requires 100% participation, forced education, and obedience with no exceptions. Many cities and towns even use the jail system and police force to enforce the law. Although it looks as if the government is violating human rights, this does increase the awareness of education for every family, including students with disabilities. Even though students with disabilities are not mandated to attend school by The Compulsory Education Law of 1986, they receive increased schooling opportunities that provide them with some awareness of education such as in special education schools and separate settings. In order to facilitate diagnoses and treatment for students with disabilities and in order to encourage everybody to go to school, the government provides early intervention funds for students with disabilities. Basic welfare services such as the Minimum Living Standard Assistance for low income families, including those whose members have disabilities, are also being provided to more and more families (Xu, Dempsey & Foreman, 2014).

China’s Disabled Persons Federation (1990) aims to protect people with all sorts of disabilities in areas of education and employment. Compared with American Disability Act, the law does not mandate equal employment opportunities and reasonable accommodation, because the job market is very competitive and people from the countryside compete for minimum wage jobs. However, the law is already a milestone because it legislates the employment of people with disabilities and promotes concentrated employment, dispersed employment, and self-employment. Concentrated employment refers to jobs created at welfare institutes, places that
largely hire individuals with disabilities. Dispersed employment refers to persons with disabilities employed in community factories and businesses at a certain percentage. Because a majority of businesses were state owned at that period of time, state run factories, governmental owned organizations, enterprises receiving government funding, institutions and urban and rural collective economic units were required to hire a certain percentage of workers with disabilities for appropriate types of jobs and posts. However, this quota based employment did not last long, since more and more state owned businesses went bankrupt in the 2000s. As the newly arisen market economy drives for profit, companies are unwilling to hire individuals with disabilities even with tax incentives and when the hiring would not cause any undue hardships. In addition, a large number of skilled workers were laid off during the transition from a planned economy to a market economy. This made it more difficult for individuals with disabilities to compete for existing jobs. Moreover, many welfare factories that were supposed to employ individuals with disabilities closed down because they could not compete financially (Yun-Tung, 2010).

According to Marxism, social welfare is divided equally, and everybody get the same share of living materials. Although people with disabilities cannot productively create value for the society, benefits mandated by the government were taken for granted. The transition from a planned economy to a market economy brought a sudden change in the social welfare system run by state owned factories providing all living materials including food vouchers, housing, education and healthcare. After the economic system transition, people with disabilities needed to look after themselves or apply for basic welfare through local government entities (Sowell & Louis, 2000).

**Immigration history and legislation in the United States**
Transcripts of immigration laws reflected society’s beliefs, perceptions and attitudes and were important to define what looked desirable about prospective immigrants and ultimately prospective Americans. Reviewing the literature surrounding immigration laws in the U.S. provided me with the opportunity to discover the hidden biases that existed in immigration laws that were simply reinforced without analysis by both the social historians of immigration and legal scholars. For many decades, historians and legal scholars simply accepted the explanation of these biases given by the political actors at the time, since they believed that these actions were intended to protect the United States against immigrants who were unlikely to be able to support themselves and thus would require maintenance by private charities or by the government. Based on their reasoning, it was impossible for people with various disabilities to find employment to make a living. Therefore, they would rely on government welfare to survive and become a burden on society (Wilson, 2009). These biases were never subject to an extensive, critical review that sought to ask why they were there, or what their presence meant (Nielsen, 2012).

1882-1924 was the darkest period for immigration by people with disabilities. Various regulations were in place that caused people with disabilities to be rejected from entering the U.S. This period begins with the Immigration Act of 1882 and ends with the highly restrictive Immigration Act of 1924 (Wilson, 2009). For people with disabilities, this was a time full of tears with words such as “restrictive entry,” “denial,” and “rejection” written on every page of their journeys. This was true not only for immigrants who were documented as disabled, but people who seemed unsound mentally or physically were also subject to discrimination and restrictive procedures (Nielsen, 2012).
By 1907, immigration approval required a medical certificate to certify that the applicant was healthy enough to make a living. As certain physically different people were perceived as unlikely to be able to make a living, they had the greatest chance to be rejected at the entry port. From port officers’ perspective, new immigrants were most likely to perform wage labor such as being a railroad worker or a maid. Since the overseers of competitive wage labor could not hire disabled people, disabled people could not support themselves financially. Since they could not support themselves financially, they would either have to rely on social welfare or involve themselves in criminal activities (Beard, 2013).

In 1917, immigration officials received instructions to reject all immigrants with any mental defects, since legislation passed by Congress labeled immigrants with disabilities as a threat to the country. Those immigration officers, who might not have any medical background, used their own judgments in determining which immigrants were physically or mentally disabled. Although these practices lacked scientific evidence, they were applied to exclude potential immigrants for decades (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disability, 2016). During that period, ship captains were even required by law to certify that their passengers were healthy, since they had chance to interact with passengers on the boat. If they allowed sick people or disabled people to land, they would have to pay a penalty. From the literature recording this unreasonable requirement, we could see how individuals with disabilities were also segregated and excluded (Wilson, 2009).

The Chinese Exclusion Act was the only race based discriminatory legislation in American history. The first generation of Chinese immigrants came around 1860s for the gold rush in California. During that period, the U.S. had a lack of laborers to maintain the gold and silver mines, build railroads, and work for southern plantations. Taking this opportunity, many
Chinese workers were recruited to work in the U.S. They were described as quiet workers, hardworking, and workers who did not require much in terms of wages because their wives and children lived in China with lower living expenses. Chinese immigrants participated in the construction of the First Transcontinental Railroad, and helped in establishing fruit farms in California. After the 1860s, several laws were passed in order to segregate and restrict Chinese immigration. This was partly due to several economic crises that happened in California. Many workers lost their jobs, and they thought that Chinese immigrants took their jobs. Afterward, Chinese immigrants faced racism from the white people who settled in California earlier than they did. Laws were published with the purpose of segregation and discrimination. Chinese people were forced to live in restricted areas from the 1870s, and these areas were later developed as “Chinatowns.” They were in bad legal situations and were treated as lower class aliens. They were even subject to extra taxes because they were minorities. They could not apply for citizenship, and they were not allowed to marry white people (Teitelbaum, 2004).

Laws enacted between 1862 and 1892 severely restricted Chinese immigrants from entering and settling in the U.S. In 1862, the Coolie Trade Act made coolie labor illegal (Lee, 2007). The 1875 Page Act restricted Asian laborers from entering the U.S. (Lee, 2007). The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 banned Chinese from becoming naturalized citizens and prohibited Chinese laborers from entering the U.S. for a period of 10 years (Lee, 2007). In 1888, the Scott Act rejected Chinese from re-entry into the U.S. (Lee, 2007). In 1892, the Geary Act extended the exclusion laws for another 10 years, and it required all Chinese immigrants to show a green card to stay in the U.S. (Lee, 2007).

The history of immigration law strongly impacts people’s views and attitudes toward disabilities. Many new Chinese immigrants’ families view disabilities as a punishment since the
history of immigration law defines people with disabilities as being “handicapped” and “sick people.” In addition, since the laws specified that people who can’t perform wage labor would be deported, new immigrants had an extremely heightened focus on getting jobs instead of learning job skills step by step (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, Garza, 2006). The Chinese tradition perceives a disability as an extreme health concern in which dementia is the most severe and brings shame and burden to the family (Dong, Chang, Wong & Wong, 2010). Instead of focusing on the solution to treatment for the illness, they simply do not want others to know that they have disabilities because they are afraid of becoming “public charges.” They do not actively participate in transition programs because having a disability is viewed as something shameful and guilt inducing.

The American immigration history clearly corresponds to America’s materialistic culture, as whether or not someone could earn money served as the first signifier of potential defectiveness during the immigration history. Those who could prove that they already had the money to support themselves could experience earlier examination. Neilson (2012) mentioned that the first-class passengers experienced far less scrutiny. For example, they were given a visual examination to detect the eye disease trachoma, rather than the painful eversion of the eyelids by inspectors that others had to endure (Thornton, 2004). However, immigrants who could not prove that they already had the money to support themselves were under many restrictions and guidelines. One of the well-known standards used by LPC was “becoming public charge,” which assumes that immigrants with disabilities were not able to find a job and make a living (Nielsen, 2012). For example, the 1882 law prohibited entry to any "lunatic, idiot, or any person unable to take care of himself or herself without becoming a public charge." They believed that people with disabilities were unable to support themselves (Centers for disease
control and prevention, 2016). Therefore, new immigrants just didn’t see doctors. In order not to become a “public charge,” new immigrants from China with ID/DD were usually cared for by friends and relatives (Baum, Ma & Payea, 2010). These worries and fears were passed down generation through generation, along with the assumptions that bodies considered defective rendered people unable to perform wage-earning labor. Many Chinese immigrants do not know that, according to ADA, no discrimination is permitted as long with they can perform essential job functions with or without accommodation.

Considering the cultural background of Chinese immigrants raises the importance of reviewing their immigration history. It is important to analyze the value of the perspectives of immigration laws for understanding disability history. Although most of the people did not have experience with immigration laws from history directly, they were strongly influenced by the extended values these laws represented because of the widely spread worry and fear. For example, the actual number of individuals who were deported based on their disabilities was relatively small, but the opinions about which individuals looked attractive enough to be favored and to be productive was widely expressed. From 1891 to 1930, the Public Health Service examined more than 25 million potential immigrants, and 3 percent of them were issued medical certificates indicating that they had either a disability or a disease. Of those receiving medical certificates, only 10 percent were refused entry or got deported. Between 1909 and 1930, only 4.4 percent of all immigrants were certified as disabled or diseased per year (Wilson, 2009). This makes me wonder how the 0.3% refusal rate for immigrants between 1891 and 1930 created widespread worry and fear, especially when Chinese immigrants during that period, for the most part, did not speak or write fluent English. They worked as railway workers and farm laborers; they did not have the means to contact congress or get an attorney, and they didn’t even watch
televisions or read English newspapers; their major way of communication was chatting in the tea
houses or restaurants in the community (Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, 2004).

Conclusion

Understanding laws and history helps people understand societies by offering clues and facts about legislation and what happened earlier. When we analyze the present and predict the future, we look back into our history to find the patterns, trends and causes. The study of laws and immigration history not only enables me to remember major events and developments, but also triggers me to research further the factors causing change as well as their effects and influences. A critical view of history studies power relations between the oppressor and the ones being oppressed, as well as the elements that support and or stand against change (Baum, Ma & Payea, 2010). The process of gathering and reviewing the data for studying the challenges of newly immigrated students from China with intellectual disabilities in transition programs was a profound one for me. I felt empowered to conduct the literature review since my work experience revealed that newly immigrated students from China face multiple challenges in participating in transition programs, such as isolation and lower quality of life.

Summary of this Chapter

In this chapter, I reviewed current trends, goals, theories and research on transition programs in the United States that serve students with intellectual disabilities. I also explored the experiences of newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities in transition services in the United States, including their communication style, difficulties in making and maintaining friendships, as well as their lower quality of life. In addition, I discussed how laws and immigration history influence Chinese immigrants’ beliefs toward disabilities.
Many educators, researchers receiving government funding, and social service providers published research and established theoretical frameworks in this field. The use of community settings, college settings, and a highlighted focus on employment training are trends in transition programs in the United States. However, my knowledge of disability and poverty encouraged me to view the cause and effect relationships in different aspects. I would site Deng, Poon-McBrayer and Farnsworth (2001)’s finding that disability continues to occupy very little space on the poverty research, advocacy, and policy stage.

I believe that the concept that the well being of people with disabilities has been interpreted narrowly by monitoring employment participation and economic self-sufficiency. However, I support Beijing Disabled Persons’ Federation (2002) who state that participating in employment allows people with disabilities to earn income and provides a myriad of other non-monetary benefits, including increases in self-esteem and self-worth, making lasting friends, and increased physical and mental health.

In my review of literature, I found that students with intellectual disabilities are still viewed in a negative light and rely on the society’s good will for positive interactions (Kaehne & Beyer, 2009), instead of engaging with others equally in regular schools, workplaces, and community settings. Sometimes people just passively interact with students with intellectual disabilities to show that it is a characteristic of the “educated class.” Even in disability programs in higher education settings, “obedience and following directions training” formed the main part of students’ education.

Although the history of immigration law spread extensive worry and fear, studies started to focus on the fact that persons with disabilities do have many choices and possibilities in life through transition programs. Researchers also have provided evidence that students with
intellectual disabilities can lead independent lives and have opportunities to make choices and life decisions, and that all persons with disabilities are employable and have the right to that opportunity. Transition programs provide students training in dressing appropriately, taking transportation, managing money, taking care of one’s appearance, and sleep patterns. Through family members’ education workshops, a majority of participants reported that their parents started to encourage them to actively engage with the society, to make contributions, and to make their own decisions (Hampton, Li, Denninger, & Zhu, 2015).

I support Gilmore and Cuskelley (2014) that measurements that incorporate information on social inclusion and political participation have also opened up opportunities for improving the wellbeing of persons with disabilities in society. This also fits my framework that the ability of multinational measures to capture the wellbeing of persons with disabilities should continue to be explored within the disability policy, advocacy, and research communities.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

In this chapter I will provide an accounting of the methods and procedures used to research the challenges of Chinese immigrants with intellectual disabilities in transition services. This is important research because many problems arise in the Chinese community, but few were discussed in the literature I reviewed. Previous chapters described current trends in transition programs, beliefs, and behaviors of and about individuals with intellectual disabilities and the role that history, culture and immigration have had in influencing the successes of immigrant Chinese students with intellectual disabilities. Chapter 3 opens with a review of a pilot study I conducted in 2016 and followed by a discussion of the current research questions and rationale. The chapter continues with the purpose of the study, the research epistemology, methodology, context, participants, procedures and forms of analysis.

Pilot study

I conducted a pilot study in the spring of 2016 to analyze the challenges of newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities in transition services. I interviewed three transition program staff members who worked closely with these students. I conducted this research because there was minimal research specific to transition outcomes in a cultural context, in terms of quality of life, improvement in professional life skills, professional social skills, and professional job skills (Baynton, 2005). I engaged in semi-structured interviews with the transition program staff members by using open-ended questions that allowed for discussions in which they could communicate their personal experiences and insights, and students’ stories from the teacher’s side.
The pilot study paved the way and sparked the light for me to conduct my current study. The experience of interviewing transition program staff members provided initial insights into the challenges of newly migrated students from China with intellectual disabilities in transition programs, as well as how the services assist these students and accommodate their needs. By using qualitative approaches and involving agency staff, I analyzed the progress and challenges of newly immigrated students in areas of clothing, transportation, money management, appearance, and sleep patterns. I was delighted to find that transition services are able to increase students’ family support and self-advocacy skills and increase their total quality of life. Interview data revealed that these programs look at individual student interests, strengths, assets, challenges, and needs and these factors are reported to a facilitator by a variety of people, including peers, who are familiar with the students. In addition, the pilot study also showed that the majority of the participants reported that their parents started to expose them to society by encouraging them to communicate and socialize, as well as involving them in making personal and familial decisions. On the other hand, the pilot study motivated me to conduct further research on the student side since it revealed that immigrant Chinese students have multiple challenges in participating in transition programs, such as isolation and a lower quality of life. Therefore, I believed that a deep analysis of students and families perceptions could help me understand ways in which we could improve transition services for immigrants with disabilities.

The Current Study

My research did not come about suddenly. I have been on this continuum for eight years and have been accumulating literature and field experience through formal and informal ways year after year. As a Chinese immigrant myself who has pursued a doctorate in the field of Disability Studies and Education and who has work experience at transition services in both the
mainstream (middle-class students born and/or raised in the United States) and the Chinese community, I feel that I have the mission and ability to investigate the lived experiences of Chinese immigrant students who are in transition programs with an eye to the cultural meanings that impact their success. I believe I can gain insights into the way students are viewed by their community through analyzing lived stories of immigrant Chinese students and their families that will help me advocate for more culturally responsive programs. Compared with the mainstream students with intellectual disabilities, Chinese immigrants show multiple difficulties in participating in transition programs and difficulties in getting desirable results in employment outcomes and in quality of life. This dichotomy of experience has allowed me to witness first-hand the disparities in the transition outcomes and programs for students who are from newly immigrated Chinese families as compared to students who have grown up in American culture. My experiences have provided me with the motivation and information with which to conduct this research because the more I can hear and feel, the better recommendations I can make to my community. I pursued my research as my passion. I am proud of it. I stand for it, and insist on my research. I am visible in all stages. I have been conducting preliminary research through formal and informal means because I am eager to find answers.

**Research problem**

In the literature review, gaps found in employment outcomes, communication style, and quality of life between the Chinese community and mainstream society encouraged me to research the lived experiences of Chinese immigrants with intellectual disabilities in transition services. I found research that showed limitations to the extent to which Chinese immigrants are willing to talk about their disabilities, how they are involved in transition services, and their
expectations of transition outcomes. I also witnessed these disparities in my community during my pilot study back in 2016.

**Research purpose and questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges of Chinese immigrant students with intellectual disabilities who were in transition programs in the greater Chicago area. I sought to add to the empirical data on the features and themes of the experience of Chinese immigrants with intellectual disabilities in transition services in the United States. I endeavored to add to what was known about their quality of life, their communication styles, and transition outcomes, and to discover the factors behind the scenes causing these experiences.

The intent of my study was to discover the cultural attitudes toward disabilities that can hinder and sustain competitive employment, as well as to learn about the success service programs have had in changing many of these attitudes in the communities they serve. My research also aimed to discover how the Chinese immigrant community leverages cultural strengths to support students to succeed in transition programs and competitive employment. This required in-depth knowledge of disability-related issues, of client and family concerns, and of the varied cultural and language contexts from which these concerns and perceptions arise.

The following research questions guided this study:

- What are the experiences of newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities who are in transition services in the United States?
- What is known about their quality of life, communication styles, and their ability to make and maintain friendships?
- How do their families make sense of their children’s disabilities and their experiences in the program?
With my unique skills of working with families in a cultural context, my study was designed to gain insights into addressing and reducing the stigma of having a disability that is unique to the Chinese immigrant community. My research was an enactment of my strong commitment to delivering services in a culturally competent way.

**Epistemological framework**

I drew constructivist epistemology in my research since “Analyzing the epistemological framework is important because it is a system of knowing…that has both an internal and external validity” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000 p.257). Burr (2003) explains that epistemology, “is the study of the nature of knowledge and how we come to know the world of things” (p.92). In the constructivist view, meaning is not discovered, but constructed. Meaning is not inherent in the object, merely waiting for someone to come upon it. It is like when we are taking the train, we are not eager to get to a pre-set destination as fast as we can, but enjoy the scenery out the window, making meaning of it and then deciding where to go next. The world and objects in the world are indeterminate as they may grow with new meaning but actual meaning emerges only when consciousness provides them with water and sunshine (Crotty, 1998).

I believe that meaning is best understood in participants’ lived experience based on their social, cultural, and historical contexts in the process of how they construct what they experienced (Burr, 2003). I agree with Crotty (1998) that because of the essential relationship that human experience bears to its object, no object can be adequately described in isolation from the conscious being experiencing it. This is even more true with social relationships. People’s life experiences can be understood, summarized, and analyzed. Although certain groups of individuals with certain backgrounds may construct their stories in different ways, there is a way to interpret it. It is important to my research to try to understand how people make meaning of
what is important to them, their families and the community. With this assumption, I could explore the sense that participants make of their personal and social worlds and utilize my education and background to analyze these experiences.

I also believe that people are able to construct their life stories through the process of interacting with people and to narrate their own experiences in their own words, highlighting issues that experts would not conceive of as standout issues (Burr, 2003). Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998). Participants can make sense of their lived stories and can represent them through many ways, such as telling stories, singing songs, and drawing pictures. Through observing tears in their eyes, pride and happiness on their faces, and their clenched fists, I interpreted the essence of participants’ experiences in a quest to understand what they have experienced and how they experienced it.

My decision to draw on constructivism as my epistemology came from my previous literature review related to the lived experience of newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities. The reviewed research made me wonder what factors might be causing students’ isolation and lower quality of life. Because of these factors, students may be exposed to multiple barriers to participation in transition programs, such as refusing to attend transition programs and feeling shame in talking about their disabilities. In interacting with these students, I was curious about what these factors are, and why they are so strong as to cause fear and isolation. Initially, I was attributing these factors to cultural differences. When people move to an absolutely new environment and face language barriers, they may not have adequate knowledge of disability support, social justice, and equity. However, I wanted to understand these issues from the perspective of the people who live them.
Methodology and rationale

Based on the epistemological framework discussed above, I engaged in an ethnographic study, which is defined as:

A sociological method that explores how people live and make sense of their lives with one another in particular places. The focus might be on meaning they produce through every day interactions, or places, and the organizational logics that guide our activities (Little, 2012).

I believed that through pursuing my research questions using ethnographic inquiry, I could better understand students’ lived stories, as well as their experiences in professional life skills, professional social skills, and professional jobs skills in a multicultural context (Bell, 2001). Ethnography seeks to understand an insider point of view through seeing the events in a detailed, in-depth description of everyday life and practice. It seeks to promote embedded research that promotes close-up observation, rigorous theory, and social critique. It also recognizes the vivid nature of fieldwork where people are in the stories, and the stories are about people (Hoey, 2017). In my ethnographic study, I have spent much time within the culture I am studying, and I will observe and interact with participants in areas of their everyday lives (Austin, Z.& Sutton, J. (2015). Since people are able to make descriptions of their own lives as discussed in the epistemological framework, ethnography can be utilized through close exploration of different data sources including semi-structured interviews.

Ethnography is about the understanding of culture, domination, and social structure based on observation, interview and interpretation. It pays attention to the minutiae of experience, to the cultural texture of social relations, and to the remote structural forces and power vectors that bear on them (Burr, 2003). Ethnographic study has a long history of studies in cultural interpretation, such as immigration and community relations (Spradley, 1979), upon which we depend to direct our behavior, function, and to organize our experience (Crotty, 1998). Although
this study utilizes ethnographic methodology because of the emphasis on culture, my interview technique drew on practices from what Seidman (1998) refers to as in-depth phenomenological interviewing. This blending of ethnographic methodology and phenomenological interview method allowed for participants to surface their experiences, while I was able to connect their experiences to the broader cultural frames as is central to ethnography. It goes beyond reporting events and details of experience to explain how these represent what we might call webs of meaning, the cultural constructs in which we live (Hoey, 2017). This fit my research goals that were concerned with the culture of Chinese immigrants. I spent time with those families who have a family member with a disability involved in transition programs, and analyzed what people experience and believe.

Culture exerts a profound influence on the ways in which people think and what they think. In my literature review, it was revealed that in Chinese culture, people often focus on the cause of illness instead of focusing on the solution or treatment for the illness— that is, why it happened. This causes a tremendous amount of fear, hostility, alienation and blame (Brockhaus & Gregorio, 2014). The traditional Chinese term for disability is negatively translated as “canji ren”, meaning “handicapped” and “sick people”. Since having a disability is often viewed as a punishment, people with disabilities do not frequently participate in transition programs. Chinese culture relates the goals of transition to charity and government sponsored workshops, instead of providing necessary accommodation to support them to achieve essential job function (The Law Library, 2018). Hart, Mele-McCarthy, Pasternack, Zimbrich, and Parker (2004) found that Asian Americans significantly underuse formal intellectual disability services, a fact they attribute to a mismatch of cultural perspectives and language barriers. Chinese culture is strongly collectivist. Mainland Chinese immigrants rarely participate in existing transitional services because in China
people with intellectual disabilities are commonly cared for by their families or depend on community support rather than institutional care (Agozzine, Browder, Karvonen, Test & Wood, 2001). Many newly immigrated students from China feel too much shame to take the initiative to ask for help, nor do they attend social intervention programs and transition services. These students reported feelings of ignorance, neglect, superstition, and fear that have exacerbated their isolation because they are afraid of social discrimination. They are so nervous when people look at them when what they need is more patience and communication. Since ethnography is concerned with culture, it becomes a key feature of my research by helping me to analyze what people experience and believe.

My data collection methods were situated activities that were designed to discover the hidden pictures of the undiscovered world. Ethnographic research facilitates my inquiry because it consists of a set of analytical and interpretive elements that make the world visible. It aims to reveal a vivid picture of the lived experience through multiple layers, critical lenses, and multiple perspectives. This was helpful since transition experiences among Chinese immigrants is an underexposed topic. Most studies analyze transition programs in mainstream society. Less is known about how transition programs are preparing recently immigrated Chinese students with disabilities to live independently in their community and what issue needs to be addressed. They can be seen as a minority within a minority (Stoffelen, Kok, Hospers, Curfs, 2013) since little is known from the specific standpoint of new Chinese immigrants. This is because little attention has paid to minority populations, and Chinese people are not used to getting their voices heard.

**Representing Culture**

Cultures are always diverse. Even within the Chinese culture, different people may hold different views toward the same topic, based on their varieties in language, religion, race, sexual
orientation, gender, age and ethnicity. I believe that my study should be responsive to these diversity, as well as to have a level of exposure and reflect to it. When I speak of Chinese culture it comes from own experience as Chinese person who has lived in two cultures, my experience in working with new Chinese immigrant and from my participants’ data. Same thing applies to American Culture. It is like people who work or study in the United States, introduce what they think and feel. While I often will generalize to Chinese culture and American Culture, I am not implying that all Chinese or American people believe the same things about disability. My research only represent the families who participant in my study, instead of what all Chinese people think.

**Context of the study**

I conducted my study in Chicago’s Chinatown neighborhood; where many new immigrants live. I purposefully chose a homogenous sample because the study focused on a particular group of people who possess similar experiences and culture. As it is a hub of Chinese Culture in the Midwest, Chinatown is a unique neighborhood with many new immigrants living there. Everybody knows everybody. From a cultural point of view, there are many specific circumstances that have influenced the living conditions of new immigrants with disabilities. Although families of students with intellectual disabilities hide themselves in the community, they know each other well and have established their own community.

**Researcher Positionality**

I am an insider and an outsider in my study. I am an insider because I am a Chinese immigrant and an outsider because I am not disabled nor am I the family member of a person with an intellectual disability. As an immigrant myself, I am deeply rooted in my community, so I was confident that I would be able to find qualified participants for my study. I also take great
pride in the fact that my participants trusted me based on my years of social service experience in the community. Here are some examples of what I did for my community. I was in charge of “Put Illinois to Work” in 2010 and helped over three hundred community high school graduates find employment opportunities. I was the chairperson for 2011 Census and my group went into every single family in our community asking for census information. I organized volunteers in the Secretary of State’s Driver’s License in the Community program every quarter from 2010-2014. I hosted internship programs for many high schools. Then I participated in the parents’ weekly meeting at the Pui Tak Center Disability program and did home visits for new immigrants with intellectual disabilities. These experiences provided me with direct opportunities to establish relationships and trust with my participants.

I am also influenced by my education at the doctoral level in Disability Studies and Education. My doctoral study not only established a solid knowledge base for my research, but also provided me with particular insights. It has exposed me to a social model of disability in which society’s responses to disability are seen as setting up barriers and/or possibilities for the success of people with disabilities. It takes the constructivist epistemology described earlier in this chapter to heart, and insists that we not look at disability as a thing waiting to be discovered, but as social construct, created in culture, history, and context. Change in a social model is not geared towards “fixing” the disability, but towards helping to build more a more inclusive society in which disability is seen as a rich aspect of human diversity rather than a deficit.

My professional knowledge provides me with particular insights. My goal was to allow my participants to tell their stories in their own ways, from their own meanings. I did, however, interpret them from my standpoint, being as careful as possible to facilitate their meanings. I also interpreted participants’ stories and co-constructed meanings through my own lenses. This was a
challenging task because there are many different ways to make sense of participants’ lives and see things through different angles based on my past experience. Therefore, making meanings from how my participants interpret their life stories was a complicated experience. I needed to analyze their body language, acknowledge the meanings of language behind the scenes, hear their voices, and understand their emotions.

I made decisions about which areas to inquire more thoroughly during the interviews and what themes to analyze more deeply (Merriam, 2009). Since people construct their worldviews by interacting with other members of society, their knowledge of the world cannot be separated from social, cultural, and historical influences. I explored relationships between new immigrants with intellectual disabilities and their communities, gathered additional information by observing and recording their body language, and clarified questions for the participants if necessary. I interpreted participants’ voices and accommodated their dynamic and personal natures through modifying specific designs, methods, and procedures in my study (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

Confidentiality and Ethics of the Research

The ethical/power issues that I considered were related to the fact that most of the participants were my clients who receive services in Chinatown, which might cause them to try to please me with their responses. In addition, there is the understanding that “Chinatown has no secrets.” People are very afraid of their confidential information being exposed. Because of their limited English skills and communication methods, the ways in which people in the Chinese community receive social media and news are limited. Therefore, they established their own media spreading tool--gossip. The tea house by the senior building is the place where gossip is often spread. Senior people like to be together because they are often lonely. When they are together, they talk about other people’s secrets. In order to address the issues mentioned, I
informed participants again and again that all information given was confidential and would not be disclosed to social services. I let them know that whether they participated or not, it would not affect the services they receive and that information collected in my study is not the same as the information submitted to social services. I told them they could stop participating at any time. Beyond assuring participants that their identities would be kept anonymous and their information would not be shared, I took great care to communicate respectfully with the participants and honor their truths.

**Gaining Entry and Selecting Participants**

A convenience sampling was used as a means to choose the participants for my study. This technique allowed me to find participants through my contacts and from among people I was familiar with. Engagement before the interviews was an important factor in recruiting participants and that potentially affected the richness of data gathered (Wagstaff, 2014). My research followed a structured procedure. The first step was to send out the study participation request sheet (Appendix 1). This step was important because it not only showed that I was taking this seriously, but also let potential participants know information about my study. Chinese society has a strong hierarchical order; people with higher education and field experiences are respected. I distributed the study participation request sheets at several transition services providers in Chicago’s Chinatown. The Disability Program Director of the Pui Tak Center, who is an active member in the Chinese community, agreed to help me recruit participants, proofread the study participant request sheet for my research, and distributed the request sheet to the church group. I acquired permission from both participants and their parents as people who showed an interest or willingness to have home visits.
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF CHINESE IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

Home visits were the second step. I did my first home visit together with the Disability Program Director of the Pui Tak Center to show the integrity of my research. I gave participants the informed consent form (Appendix 2), explaining the purpose and nature of my research. Because many families are restaurant workers and laborers and they have to work longer hours and weekends to offset their low wages, they take Mondays off. I chose Mondays to schedule home visits. Home visits were good ways to observe or infer many family dynamics, social status, income level, family member job occupation, living style, family stories, and religious beliefs.

The home visits served several functions: to select families for my study; to establish the engagement and mutual obligation by informing participants about my research; and to explain the benefits and expectations of all parties. Based on observations and conversations in their home, I got a rough idea of the home environments in which they were living, asked related questions based on my observations, and found good participants for my research. I also obtained informed consent from participants and let them know what efforts were needed in participating in the research. Their consent allowed me to disclose their words while keeping their names confidential.

I took written notes throughout observations during the home visits. After the first home visit, I selected four families as my participants and arranged follow-up meetings with each. I used my own discretion to decide who might be good participants. I also identified participants according to the following criteria; they needed to be new immigrants from Mainland China, and they needed to have a family member diagnosed as having an intellectual disability who participated in transition services.

I recruited four families to participate in my study, each family has one member who has an intellectual disability, who attended high school transition programs, and who followed up
with necessary transition services in Chicago Chinatown community. The age of participants’ ranged from 18 to 26, their parents’ ages ranged from 40 to 55, and they are high school to college graduates. Participants live in a variety of different family structures and configurations. One household included only parents and siblings living in the home, the other three participants lived with extended families including grandparents, uncles, and aunts.

**Establishing Trust and Building Rapport**

I spent time establishing rapport with the families. Chinese immigrants often only trust people they know, and families with intellectual disabilities are even harder to reach. Few people in the community find it easy to admit that they have an intellectual disability because people with disabilities are subject to stigmatization. As Shakspeare (2006) points out, “Many people with disabilities are in the community, but are not part of the community.”

My participants have not had many opportunities to express what they have wanted to express. They were excited to be interviewed for a doctoral level research because they thought it might help them to understand things better or to get their voices heard. On one hand, they desperately needed knowledge of American services and beliefs on disability, but they were also afraid of losing their cultural identity. On the other hand, they were not used to sharing their feelings or having freedom of speech. Back in China, people were not allowed/encouraged to speak freely and talk about government policies or anything negative about the social system. Chinese people often follow the practice of “If I don’t trust you, I tell you nothing; if I trust you, I tell you everything.” They can only trust people they know, and I believe they trusted me because of my deep connections with the community.

Engagement before the interviews helped me to modify my research and to accommodate participants’ needs, as well as to yield the best results of my study. Originally, I planned to
conduct interviews in the Chinatown library, and I reserved rooms for my twelve interviews. However, my participants communicated with me that they might find it stressful to leave their homes and turn their cell phones to silent. Taking them to the library can sometimes seem like removing them completely from the earth. I came to understand that the participants felt stressed that they would not be available to take care of emergency calls and requests when away from home, which is the most convenient place for contact. Homes are considered as “low risk and comfortable environments.” Participants expressed that they would feel more comfortable and relaxed at home, and they would not have to worry about emergencies that might happen when they are away.

Through interactions before conducting my study, I realized that every disturbance that happened during the interviews might be considered an emergency for them for three reasons. First, my participants’ work schedules are not always set, as they do work such as an on-call janitor and temporary work. In addition, living within a lower economic status with no preventive care, emergency funds, food reserves, or adequate social connections, any missed opportunity may affect their basic living. So, their stress level is high. Third, it seems that they have lower confidence levels because they are new immigrants and not familiar with American society. They sometimes might not be able to deal with their landlords, supervisors, co-workers, and others’ impatience with calm and confidence. They may even look at their cell phones if they are not ringing.

Engagement before the interviews helped me to modify interview schedules based on the availability of each family. People with certain disabilities cannot accommodate tight schedules and easily switch roles, so they have to leave the whole afternoon open to help them relax. Previously, I learned that people living in poverty have lots of time. However, my participants’
behavior did not correspond with this. They had little spare time because they got so easily stressed by all kinds of common situations. They often can’t solve problems strategically, due to no cash reserves and fear. For example, they don’t go a garage for car maintenance, but rely on unskilled neighbors to do it for them at minimal cost. They have to go to six different stores to buy things on sale instead of going to one grocery store. The social services they use are very slow and bureaucratic. Given these circumstances, I appreciate that how much commitment and effort my participants gave to my study. They squeezed half-days for interviewing from lives in which they have a shortage of time. Because of their time constraints, I provided them with the most flexibility and accommodations in scheduling our interviews that I could.

The Complexities of Communication

I interviewed each family three times over a three month period. At each interview, I sat together with each family like long-term friends having dinner together. Having dinner while talking might not be appropriate for a mainstream interview, but for Chinese people, this shows respect, makes interviewees more relaxed, and it encourages people to talk freely. In this way, parent and family members can explain points and translate for other participants in case they were not able to describe things clearly. Interviewing the whole family as a group yielded the most effective results for my study for three reasons. First, sometimes my participants needed “interpreters” to “lubricate” connections. This may also have helped reduce the stress felt by participants with intellectual disabilities because their parents and family members are the people who understand them the best and know what they wanted to say. They could also “translate” my interview questions in ways in which their children could understand. Second, many parents communicated on many levels such as gestures and clothing. They have vivid pictures in their mind and they have multiple ways of describing things. I sometimes acted an ice-breaker,
sharing a story and then someone else would say “I have the same story, or I have a different experience.” This motivated participants to talk more but, sometimes it may have impacted their thinking. Third, participants always gave me permission to ask them questions together with parents or relatives because privacy was not a big issue when they were back in China. Chinese culture is collective. Krueger & Casey (2009) point out that interactions in groups will likely yield the best information when interviewees are family members and cooperative with each other, when time to collect information is limited, and when individuals interviewed one on one may not know how to provide information.

Interview questions were modified in order to accommodate participants’ disabilities, levels in English literacy, as well as understanding of American history and culture since they are new immigrants. First of all, I used simple words that even people who speak minimal English can understand. I always remembered that my participants are English language learners and may need to answer questions in their native language. I also broke down long interview questions into short ones and then connected them back together. Second, since my participants are culturally and linguistically diverse students, I made them feel comfortable through valuing their cultural perspectives and traditions and affirming their strengths such as, “We Chinese people are hard workers.” Third, based on my participants’ socio-economic class, I used their ways of speaking, which is low in abstraction and high in description. Interview questions were designed to include participants’ vocabularies. For example, I used phrases I heard them use such as “free of charge,” “work in airport to prepare food,” “working on Christmas day get double pay.” Fourth, I adopted multiple access points such as pictures and audio and video recordings to optimize participants’ understanding of my interview questions and increase their active
engagement during the interview. I provided cooperative and interactive communications to facilitate my participants to engage in the conversation through YouTube and Google Images. I also customized my study to accommodate participants’ disability. Some participants couldn’t sit for long periods of time, and they needed breaks in between questions. In addition, participants with Asperger’s might be only interested in certain topics, such as airplanes, so I had to customize my questions to attract their interest and keep them focused.

The Chinese community is a silent community, and people do not always express what they think. I used open-ended questions that would allow participants more freedom to communicate personal experiences, social events, and students’ stories instead of simply answering, “Yes, yes and yes.” This required me, as a researcher, to have more interaction and experience to approach the interviewee’s experiential, yet structured world, in a comprehensive way. I believe that my participants and their families do have the abilities, education, and experience to tell stories instructed by when, where, how, and why questions (Flick, 2014).

Everyone has a lot of things to say.

**Conducting Interviews**

After establishing rapport and trust through the first home visits, I conducted semi-structured interviews which interviews support ethnographic inquiry because this approach places an emphasis on allowing participants to answer without being limited by pre-defined choices (Jamshed, 2014). This method uncovered rich descriptive data on the personal experiences of participants, allowing me to capture each participant’s perceptions, voice, and opinions in detail. Information gathered during semi-structured interviews can move the interpretation process from general topics to more specific insights.
Interview questions were open-ended to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants’ views, experiences, and perceptions in their own voices (Creswell, 2007). Open-ended questions provided participants the opportunity to expand their views and discuss the issues they most cared about. Participants shared their stories, provided their perspectives on their transition experience, their desires, and their expectations. This provides participants room to respond to questions without limitations and gives them a chance to share concrete experience related to the topic being investigated. Participants were encouraged to express their overall experiences as a newly immigrated people with intellectual disabilities, including the examination of their quality of life, communication styles, and confidence level.

Participants were able to describe facts through implied meanings, half-explained agendas, eye contact, and gestures, or by using the color of their clothing to communicate their emotions. My participants rarely drew on abstract reasoning, analyzed cause and effect, or connected their experience to the social, legal, economic, and global context. Nobody talked about the hidden rules between different social classes, nor did they mention the unequal distribution of assets, the shrinking of the middle class, economic trends, nor the big immigration wave after the Civil War. They talked about their history of working in the labor factory and how they became unemployed or under employed, but did not mention that corporations moved factories overseas. Participants did not analyze their experiences within these broader cause and effect relationships, rather they attributed their successes or failures to “good luck” or “bad luck”, and “god bless.” While “professionals” might analyze characteristics of people who succeed in their fields, conduct gap analyses, and consider ways to bridge these gaps, my participants thought “everyone should be equal” and simply “hated” people who got the opportunities and resources.
As a researcher, I interpreted their experiences and connected them to broader contexts of culture, economy, and disabilities rights. Therefore, the goals of phenomenology and ethnography were easily combined since phenomenology focuses on firsthand experience and meaning, and ethnography makes connections between experience and meaning, and culture. Because my research focused on Chinese immigrants’ experiences, culture was always central to analysis and interpretation.

The method of interviewing I used involved conducting a three-part interview series, which consisted of three separate interviews with each family. The rationale behind this form of interviewing is that “People’s behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them” (Seidman, 1998, p. 11). Since this technique “allows the interviewer and the participant to plumb the experience and to place it in context” (Seidman, 1998, p. 11), I could balance the data collected from each interview and make sure that I understood answers from participants, especially students with intellectual disabilities (Seidman, 2006).

My interviews began with a brief introduction that referred to the topic of the study and was intended to stimulate the interviewee’s own narrative. I distributed an interview protocol (Appendix 3) prior to each interview that informed participants that I am researching the lived experiences of recent immigrated Chinese students with disabilities who are transition programs. The first interview, involved a “Focused Life History” and was used to establish the context of the participant’s experiences. The second involved “The Details of Experience” and was used to allow the participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it appears (Flick, 2014). The last interview focused on the “Reflection on the Meaning” and was used to assist the participant in reflecting on the meaning of their experiences.
During the Focused Life History interview I gathered stories to identify individuals’ experiences by asking them to tell me as much as possible about themselves “in light of the topic” (Seidman, 1998, p. 11). I asked them to tell me about their life experiences before and after they immigrated to the U.S., and invited them to share their stories according to the interview protocol. By doing this, participants were more prepared to tell stories that are relevant to my research questions. The goal was to get a picture of them and their family relations, neighborhood, and friends. This interview also shed light on their past living conditions, the daily routines of the students, the activities they were involved in, past schooling, family background and family supports. This was the focus of the first round of interviews. Some questions for this interview include:

- How long have you been living in the U.S., how old were you when you came in the US?
- How and why did you come to the United States of America?
- Do you more like living in China or U.S.? Why? What is best about each place?
- What did you/your family do in China?
- What do you/does your family do now?
- What do you want to do in the future?

During the second interview I delved more deeply into the details of their current experience. I asked the participants for the concrete details of immigration backgrounds, IEPs and related experiences in China and United States, experiences with transition services in the community, as well as their quality of life. The questions revolved around topics, such as, what do they do for a living, their daily routines, and their relationships with the community.

I acted as an active listener who guided and encouraged participants with when, where, how, and why questions. I adopted active listening and collaboration skills, which helped me to discuss the
participants’ stories as well as their personal and cultural backgrounds. Transition program related questions included a brief overview of the program they worked with, services provided, clients served, and the duration of the program. Questions also were also asked about their employment, independent life skills, independent social skills, and their total quality of life. In addition, participants described their success stories and their worst days.

During the final interview, I asked questions that focused on reflection on the meanings of their experiences. Subjects that were explored during this interview include perceptions on community relations, such as:

How does your supervisor treat you? How do your coworkers treat you?

Where do you work? Where did you work before? Where do you want to work in the future?

Do people in the community treat you well? Do you treat them well? Do they say hi to you?

During this interview, I inquired into what actions were taken to meet students’ needs, as well as what the challenges were, if any, on this path for both the participants and families. For example, I asked their opinions about whether or not newly immigrated students from China have barriers to participating in transition programs, how Chinese participants differ from mainstream students, and how the program staff assists these students and accommodates their needs. Reflection on meaning required me to try to uncover that which has been “swept under the rug” that explains the multi-layered context of life for my participants. My relationships with my participants works out during my research, and this provided the background information I needed to understand their stories.
Interviewing using sensitive questions at this stage required a high level of language and communication skills. It is not just the need to express questions clearly, but also to touch their feelings and make them confident in talking about their stories. Questions always started from “when did you come to the United States, and how do you like it” and gradually moved to disability related questions and what they felt. I felt there was always a need to respect participants’ dignity in order to keep the interview moving forward. I used encouraging language, such as: “your situation is already better off than many kids in China,” “your stories are impressive,” and “your story touches my heart, can you explain more.” I paid attention not only to what they said, but also to how they expressed themselves through eye contact and through the speed with which they spoke (Creswell, 2007).

**Data analysis**

A coding process was used to organize and sort my data according to Creswell (2007)’s guidelines. Because of the operational nature of my research, I customized my research procedure to a close examination of the lived experiences of newly immigrated Chinese students. I collected data, labeled, compiled and organized them, and reflected on the evidence gathered to watch for emerging similarities and themes. Then I summarized and synthesized stories of the participants to see what emerged from my data. The process of data collection and interpretation included reading transcripts in a detailed way, making meanings and analyzing my notes, coding, looking for themes, and drawing on the theory. I not only identified parts of the text that stood out as significant statements or passages, but also arrived at essential themes that represent my participants’ lived experiences as newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities. These steps are described below.

**Step one: Reading transcripts in a detailed way**
Reading transcripts in a detailed way helped me to develop a story line in order to lay out what participants said and how they said it. The purpose of reading my transcripts word by word was to make sure that my analysis would focus on what came from participants’ mouths, instead of my own ideas, reasoning, or experience. I read each of my transcripts right after the interview and then once every week, in order to focus on exactly what participants said, to find key points in an analytical process, and to minimize my own add-ons and pre-assumptions during the research. The nature of qualitative research requires me to make sense of the data. I could not avoid my own pre-assumptions, but tried to minimize it through close reading of the transcripts (Seidman, 2006).

Reading transcripts once a week helped me to remember details during the three months of my interview process. The hardest part was to maintain the dignity of my data when grasping participants’ underlying assumptions, experiences, and beliefs. Because my participants are new immigrants from China, they are used to not always being understood. They often rely on implied meanings, half-explained agendas, hiding their emotions through body language, eye contact, and gestures. Even the color of their clothing communicates their emotions such as happiness or sadness, as well as how they portray themselves, and make sense of their world. I wanted to make sure that I did my best to understand all of their levels and types of communication. Even the best language and culture expert cannot interpret 100 percent of the original author’s meanings.

Due to time limits and different levels of interaction for the three interviews for each participant, each transcript was a different length, captured different aspects and depth, and portrayed participants’ perspectives in different ways. The second transcript was usually longer than the first one, and the third transcript was longer than the second one. This was because most
participants had challenges expressing their understanding to make meanings from their life stories, so it took time for them to rephrase their answers as well as to recall them. My strategy was to apply the same transcription guidelines to all transcripts to make sure that they were analyzed in equal weight and went through the same process. Most of the transcripts were in Chinese, and some were in English. I translated Chinese transcripts into English, in order to facilitate data analysis.

The first reading was 100 percent based on the original transcript. This detailed and time-consuming procedure not only refreshed my memory about participants’ story but also made sure of the accuracy of my research data. I did not find the process burdensome, but actually enjoyed it. It was like watching a 3D movie, and I was a character in it. I felt that I had entered into that movie sometimes, with sweet smiles on my mouth, or with tears in my eyes. I was excited when I discovered some hidden facts under the skin, I was sad when I re-called some sad pictures. Through making sense of my transcripts and coding in my previous steps, I immersed myself into “3D pictures” of participants’ life stories. I felt like I became part of the story and would be able to “swim with the fish to find themes.”

I marked my notes on the spaces between lines and described and identified when, where, how, why of the events of their lived experiences that caught my eye related to my research questions. In blue, I marked the how they expressed themselves, such as “with tears,” “with pride,” “raised voice,” “shy,” and using “body language.” This coding was a process of interpretation and getting to know my participants. These steps help me to get familiar with participants and their life experience not only though what they said, but also how they said it, through their tones, gestures, and emotions.

**Step two: Making meanings and analyzing using my perspectives**
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Based on the word by word checking and writing comments of how participants answered interview questions, the second step was to interpret these transcripts and make notes about my reflections and feelings. I explored these transcripts, made comments, and made sense of each key word based on how I understood and appreciated the data based on my own education, work experience and immigration experience. I drew on these sources of knowledge, to analyze key words based on culture, history, research, theory and disability studies. These comments were made on the notes using a red color. Making sense of how participants make sense of the world I relied on my experience and connection with the community, my education in disability studies, as well as discretional judgment developed from my experience as a social worker. As an Chinese immigrant myself who experienced the same things they experienced and a social worker deeply connected with the community, I was well positioned to do this work. The discrepancy between interview notes from participants and their parents or family members, highlighted the need to understand how my participants make sense of their lived experience, especially since my participants are people with some kind of intellectual disability.

Step three: Developing a storyline

I developed my story line by writing down a sentence about each participant that described my interpretation in general terms. 15 initial codes were established from my conceptual framework and research questions to help me figure out how I would write up the research findings. These were codes such as, “work,” “communication,” and “quality of life.” In the previous steps, I made comments on my notes about what participants said and how they said it. I also wrote down the meanings I made of their answers. These steps helped me construct emergent codes of ideas, concepts, actions, relationships and meanings that came up in the data and were different than the pre-set codes.
I set up a coding system as a means of organizing my data. I used a number of symbols to stand for concepts such as “immigration story,” “self-perception,” and “self-determination.” These codes became the key to organizing the data. Coding helped me to summarize data because the parents were detailed in their descriptions. I wanted to respect their telling of their life stories that they cared so much about. They often described every single detail, such as the color of their clothes, or moving the calendar from the Lion King on March 1st to Beauty and the Beast on May 30th. However, coding those long stories sometimes only needed one sentence such as, “his preferences do not match his age.” In addition, coding helped me to sort information into analyzing transcripts. Often participants mixed immigration experiences, family demographics, and what they cared about most within vague stories. They don’t always answer questions clearly starting with “I think,” they sometimes expressed their meanings in indirect ways, such as through pictures, music, and through what “other people said.”

**Step four: Looking for themes**

Based on coding keywords and comments of each participant’s stories, the next step was to find clues, relationships, as well as assumptions from my transcripts. Looking for themes helped me to sort notes into a clear lines and provided clues as to where they were coming from. Each participant shared a range of experiences, from immigration to the U.S., their daily stories, their education, their life stories, happiness, tears, love, get-togethers, and separations. I could see their hearts, sunny, rainy, or expecting. I read key words and codes several times and utilized my notations and comments, creating thematic labels that captured the participant’s descriptions of experience.

It was important to review the notes of my reactions and ideas that emerged, my thoughts on how to interpret actions, as well as the connections in between. I needed to pay attention to
what was emerging out of the data, including questions and issues for me to relate to other data. This step involved developing new structures of the themes and discovering the most salient components of the participants’ lived experience. My goal was to produce a summary for important themes in the various comments attached to a part of the transcript.

Participants expressed their stories in narrative ways that often lacked time sequence and logical order. Because the education levels of the new immigrants were relatively low, most of the language was storytelling. They didn’t often show abstract thinking and reasoning or analyze cause and effect connections between themes. For example, they were able to say concrete experiences such as, “Kids in the neighborhoods are not allowed to eat at my house or receive gifts from my family,” “Nobody wants to marry my brother. My mother almost committed suicide when my brother’s engagement rings were returned.” There was a need to upgrade the language in summative and analytical ways to create a sequence order of the themes and map how the themes fit together. I concluded their themes with summative statements such “they think this causes intellectual disabilities.”

Themes collected from participants were often simple facts that provided details of what their daily life looked like, rather than defining the broader problems. Participants expressed the details of what they suffered and experienced. Often when people are in a situation, they cannot summarize the problem clearly until they get out of the situation and look back. In this situation, I needed to utilize thematic development to delineate aspects of the phenomena that are essential to the lived experience of it. I also searched for connections, built on structure, related themes, looked for causes, as well discovered salient components and meanings beneath the surface (Manen, 2009).
During the coding process, I also set aside themes that were specific to a participant or which, while perhaps interesting, were not related to the research purpose and questions. I did not isolate single features because I wanted to combine the collective experiences of participants to get systemic and methodical results.

**Step five: Draw on the theory**

In the previous steps, analyzing transcripts of the first participant provided patterns to abstract and articulate themes for the other three participants. A pattern can be characterized by similarity, difference, frequency, sequence correspondence, and cause and effective relationships. Based on this pattern identified in the previous steps, I moved on to the next participant and repeated the same steps. I applied the same guideline to each participant’s transcripts to make sure that they were given the same weight. As I did this throughout the analytical process, I continued to note my thoughts about the process to keep the aim of qualitative study of “making sense of how participants make sense of the world.”

Culture was always a part of the analysis. I used culture to organize my thinking across the themes since much of my analysis is drawing on culture. Some of this is through my research, but some it is through my own understandings of Chinese and American Culture. Culture was always a part of the analysis. I reviewed the similar and different patterns of each participant’s lived experiences and evaluated these themes for their relevance to the purpose of my study. The major focus was on the impact of culture in how participants and their families made sense of their experiences, but I also derived meaning from my profession of social work and the discipline of disability studies in education. During my social work experience, I often observed the common patterns of people from generational poverty and how they often think and construct the world. For example, they often wanted to negotiate for an extra case of food at the
food pantry by respecting leaders and flattering them. My professional experience helped me to build up my instincts for finding patterns among participants from abstract and theoretical perspectives. Based on that, I developed themes such as sense of self, sense of family, and sense of environment.

Through reading transcripts in a detailed way, making meanings and analyzing through my perspectives, developing a storyline, looking for themes, as well as drawing on the theory, I established themes and patterns of participants’ lived experiences. Then I connected them back to theory in my review of literature, professional studies, and experience and connected themes to this literature.

I analyzed participants’ lived experiences in the social, cultural, and global context by using knowledge and skills learned through my study of Disability and Equity in Education, such as Disability and Poverty, Advocacy, and Qualitative Analysis. I utilized topics such as the hidden rules between different social classes, the unequal distribution of assets, as well as the history of immigration law. This helped me to make connections between the experiences of my participants and the literature in the field.

**My Relationship to the Data**

Coding and analysis were a continuous process. The reading and rereading of the transcripts and the continuous identification of significant statements, passages, and moments, allowed me to develop a general sense of the data. Being a Chinese woman who understands Chinese and American culture, I see these participants through an insider and outsider relationship. I’m an insider by virtue of being a Chinese immigrant, but an outsider by virtue of my education and social class. These aspects heavily impacted my interpretation and analysis. Since so much of my data was so emotional, I found I needed to stand in the center of the
analysis and make my beliefs and suppositions clear in order to try understand the influence these had on my study. For example a participant shared, “I was forced to separate from my loved ones and leave my hometown. Even renting a $300 bedroom, I had to share with someone else to reduce the cost of living. I got up early in the morning in the snow and transferred buses to get to work and didn’t get back home until midnight. When I passed by a restaurant, I had no money to buy food. When I smelled food, the saliva and tears mixed together.” These kinds of statements had a deep impact on me. To process them, I consistently reflexively bracketed my values, beliefs, and assumptions through journaling and field notes. Secondly, I sat with my data, listened to them, pondered them, and noticed what I was drawn to. I continued to question “why” at all stages of my research process to improve the quality and moral uprightness of my study, including the pre-research/preparation stage, the data collection stage, as well as the data analysis stage. My research process always “involved a focused engagement with the data” (Manen, 2009) as I wrote “as a way of knowing--a method of discovery and analysis” (Richardson, 2000), and worked “closely with specific steps of analysis” (Manen, 2009).

**Summary of chapter**

This chapter lays out the methodology, epistemology, methods and procedures I used to research the lived experiences of immigrant Chinese students with intellectual disabilities in transition services. My choice of methodology served three purposes: first, it enabled me to explore the ethnographic cross-cultural description of the nature, types, and manifestations of Chinese views and traditions and its effects on people’s attitudes toward disabilities; second, it enhanced the general understanding of causes and consequences contributing to Chinese people’s views towards people with disabilities; third, my research was an enactment of my strong commitment to doing research in a culturally competent way.
In order to discover, analyze, and describe the lived experiences of Chinese immigrant students with intellectual disabilities in transition programs in Chicago and to evaluate what their strengths and challenges look like, I conducted qualitative research and collected data in an ethnographic study. The research process discussed in detail in this chapter guided my selection of participants, interviews and analysis. The coding and analysis processes allowed me to abstract data from my interviews. In the next chapter, I organize my findings by themes with multiple excerpts from the interviews to support each theme. Each theme includes an analysis that supports, questions, expands, or explains how my findings connect to culture, the foundational layers built in my review of literature chapter, to previous research and theory, and trends and practices in the field.
Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

Chapter Overview

In order to research, analyze, and describe the lived experiences of immigrant Chinese students with intellectual disabilities who are in transition programs in Chicago, and to explore what their advantages and challenges look like, I conducted qualitative research and collected data in an ethnographic study as discussed in chapter 3. The coding process helped me to extract data from interview notes that support, question, expand, or explain the foundational layers built upon in the literature review chapter, outlining previous research and findings, trends, and practices in the area. This chapter presents findings and discussions through extensive review and examination of the data collected, and organized into themes. This chapter includes an overview of the results of interview data, as well as discussions of these study results. I organized this chapter by themes with detailed findings to support each theme. All findings are drawn from the interviews with my participants.

Findings

The results of my study are discussed in detail below. Findings expand the literature on lived experiences of newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities who are in transition programs in the U.S. Keywords from my interviews are used in order to describe the essence of the findings within each theme. Phrases from the interviews are included in order to support data analysis and answer the following research questions:

What are the experiences of newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities who are in transition services in the United States?
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF CHINESE IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

What is known about their quality of life, communication styles, and their ability to make and maintain friendships?

How do their families make sense of their children’s disabilities and their experiences in the program?

Findings of data analysis often involve many different responses, perspectives and paradoxes on participants’ views of themselves, families, resources, as well as their communities. Through an examination of codes, and passages from interview transcripts, I identified four major themes in response to my research questions. These are discussed as follows: sense of self; change; family relationships; resources.

Theme 1: Sense of self

This section focuses on how participants look at themselves through their own perspectives. Interview questions inquire into participants’ sense of themselves not only through questions such as “Can you introduce yourself?,” but also through “What do you most care about?,” “What is your biggest concern?,” “What was your best day at work?,” as well as, “What was your worst day at school?.” I broke down my questions into smaller pieces and explained them to participants, using examples and illustrations to make sure they understood my questions. I understand that people with certain disabilities may use different vocabularies or reasonings to describe themselves. Based on this, I maintain the validity of this study in two ways. First, through deep connections with my community, I know these families well, so I have a basic sense of their family’s beliefs and histories, as well as knowing how to interact with participants to make sure that we understand each other. Second, participants’ parents and family members’ involvement also helped assure the validity of my study because parents and family members could help explain and translate participants’ responses or offer additional comments.
The majority of participants started with the format of “introducing yourself” learned in transition programs, such as “My name is...,” “I studied at...,” “I work at...,” and “My hobby is...”. All of the formats sounded similar. I believe that participants treat this as standard format for introducing themselves. In order to get more information, I broke down questions into smaller pieces, used body language and gestures, and encouraged participants to talk freely and treat me as a family member or friend, not as a job interviewer. I used questions such as “How old were you when you came here?,” “What do you do in your spare time?,” and “What are your hobbies?” in order to reduce the chance that participants have memorized answers. Their narratives provided much thicker, more colorful, and strong personal stories through describing their daily activities, work, and life naturally from their hearts and facts, instead of intentionally making up “good images” just to answer my questions. This corresponds with Foucault’s (1988) point that a sense of self is constructed through communication, the environment, and the history surrounding a person.

**Self-perception**

The following excerpts from interviews show life experiences that participants viewed as positive:

As soon as I graduated from transition and got to my college freshman year, I wrote a long article in my school magazine titled “Half Apple’s Appreciation” in order to appreciate a social worker I met years ago. Even the social worker who helped us can’t remember the story. When I was an illegal immigrant, my social worker asked me to take a seat and pealed an apple. She listened carefully how desperate we were and made suggestions to accommodate my disabilities and immigration needs, instead of yelling at me and threatening deportation. The apple was so
sweet, so big. I eat half, she eat half. I found that I was a loved and cared in her eyes. That was such a sweet moment to light our future progressions.

When I was playing pianos at my school, I played well and attracted other students gathering around singing and dancing surrounding me. For them, I’m no longer a threat but a contributor to the happiness of our group. I’m a member of my group. They said I’m a talent and I can hear sounds accurately. I feel so relaxed and cheerful.

I work in a hospital and I have good sense of self. I’m happy about my excellent memory skills. I can do medical filings well since I’m good at remembering file numbers. I do it quick with no mistakes. I’m proud of myself, and people in the hospital like me. People working in hospitals received education about my disability, and they know how to work with me. I’m happy about it.

In answering interview questions, participants showed appreciation for positive experiences they received such as being involved, being loved and cared for, as well as being valued as a member of a group. When they talked about receiving favors from people who treated them nicely, they remember those instances their whole lives, and they enjoy undiminished happiness from these memories. This was exhibited through the way they described these events, the smiles on their faces and the bright shining in their eyes, like a child’s when receiving sweet candy. These experiences provided them comfort and a stress free environment in which they felt confident.

These positive experiences described by participants can be attributed to some extent to progress in the disability movement. In American history, students with intellectual disabilities were segregated from their non-disabled peers in many aspects of life such as education, living, employment, and participating in activities (Kochhar-Bryant, 2007). Providing segregated places
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF CHINESE IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

and spaces for students with disabilities sends the message that individuals with disabilities are visitors rather than members of society (Schwarz, 2013). The efforts of disability rights advocates and the growing national movement has helped change that perception. Based on their non-stop efforts, people with disabilities are more and more integrated into society and included in schools, jobs and communities. Taking the issue of accessible environments as an example, in the 1950s, the barrier-free movement resulted in the development of national standards for "barrier-free" buildings. In 1968, the Architectural Barriers Act required that all buildings designed, constructed, altered, or leased with federal funds be made accessible. By 1973, forty-nine states had adopted accessibility legislation (Schalock, Luckasson & Shogren, 2007). However, while much progress has been made, there is still more work to do. The following quotes from interviews show some ways in which my participants internalized negative senses of self from hurtful interactions, such as:

| Others don’t like me, others don’t play with me, teachers and classmates sometimes don’t even care about me. That good food is not something I can eat. |
| I feel that I was not accepted so I tried to hide and avoid being made fun of. I cannot do it. |
| I have been told that I’m not good, I have experienced multiple failures, I have learned that it is better to avoid undesired discussions or tasks. |
| I told my classmate that I will call his daddy. I took the chair and threw it at classmates. I will mess up my classmate’s yard. I threw my noise to the ceiling fan and see who was scared of me. I barked like a dog towards the teacher. |

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Data also indicated that having intellectual disabilities and being new immigrants contributed to a great degree in participants having negative senses of self. Negative identity-forming perceptions frequently appear in answering interview questions explicitly or indirectly with participants expressing negative attitudes and questioning their abilities. Negative experiences of being disliked were not only expressed in voluntary ways, they were sometimes also aggressive or threatening. This can be sometimes translated as “I want attention” or as “I want to communicate but I don’t know how.” Everyone has passion, interests, and areas of fascination that make life interesting, engaging and worthwhile (Schwarz, 2013). However, people raised in Chinese culture usually look at individuals’ negative sides instead of their positive sides, such as their advantages and achievements, in order to keep people humble. Instead of treating these negative experiences as “it is the way it is,” they always blame themselves for not being good enough, saying “I need to work harder” or “I need to push myself more”. This creates a “double harm for students with disabilities”. Because of this, their negative senses of self-made them reduce contact with the outside world. “I hide myself to avoid being made fun of”. This corresponds with Bell and Clegg (2012) finding that that reduced contact with the outside world, in turn, limits participants’ social skills and their sense of self further.

Quality of life

Quality of life refers to “How satisfied are you with your life in general and in areas of employment, health, environment, and family?”. It addresses participants’ overall well-being, as well as negative and positive features of their lived experiences. In the following excerpts, I will draw on themes related to the perception of a negative quality of participants’ lives. In particular, I focus on the emotional states they described, as well as experiences they saw as undesirable.
American people are more individualistic, they focus on their own wellbeing instead of using a whole day to criticize other people and let the whole world know about my disability.

If we go back to China, we need to work three times harder in order to maintain the living standard we have now. Living in the United States in much easier. Housing cost and food cost is not that high compared with my home country. As long as you have a job, you can live well.

I can still benefit from the collective Chinese culture when I’m in the United States. I’m happy that my family and relatives live together, and we share resources and help each other. I know that there are some inconvenience and privacy issues but we did receive generous help and support from our relatives.

I know that participating in labor force is a right, not an obligation. When I can contribute, I’m happy. The competition is not that high in the United States, and everybody can find a job. My company provides accommodation for my disability so I can contribute. I’m happy about it.

To my experience, American culture does not have an absolute way or standard of what normal people should be like. I’m OK with not expressing my feelings and happiness since nobody listens anyhow. I’m comfortable with a glass wall between me and people around me. I only talk to my people who are similar to me.

I don’t get along with people around me because we have different ways of thinking. We pretend not see each other to make ourselves feel better. I think this is another way of being respectful. No contact, no communication, no common interest. I try to avoid contact with people. When people contact me, I’m stressed out.
I have no friends and no interests, I want to live on the moon. I have no initiative to find training and support in building connections with other people, not only in my community but also in mainstream.

One day my mum received a call from my school to praise my good job, she was so shocked and got confused. My mum yelled, “What, how come?” She always wanted to hang herself when seeing caller ID from my school because she was too stressed out. ” She confirmed my name three times to make sure that this time I had not made trouble.

My parents don’t want to go to parents’ meeting. They don’t, they just don’t. They lost lots of face, like putting them in jail! Too stressful!

I have depression. I hide myself in the closet and cry a lot. My emotional instability, anxiety and depression have even negatively affected my physical health. My doctor referred me to counseling but I don’t speak that much English. Communication at this level is not something that a translator can do.

People are afraid of building connections with my family. This limits our opportunities to access mainstream information and disability rights established through internet links and electronic mailing lists. We have to get information from local social service agencies or through word of mouth. This causes information delay, exhaustive time in waiting, as well as translation errors, which limit our knowledge further. For example, I only know Medicare, we knew nothings about other benefits until you told me.

My study revealed that participants experienced some negative aspects to their lives, but their whole life is much better than when we were in China. Positive aspects of quality of life that participants brought about were relatively lower cost of living, higher acceptance level from
the society, able to participant in labor force and make contributions, as well as benefiting from the insurance system, social welfare, and disability entrance is far advanced than many other countries. In addition, participants do appreciate the strong family bonds they have, since Chinese culture is more collective than the American culture.

Negative aspects of quality of life that participants brought about were feeling lonely, helpless, stressed out, being different, wanting to hide, feeling anxiety and painful, unhappy, as well as being scared. There is a need for them to learn how to make appropriate social judgements and evaluations of their behaviors, as well as skills of praising and complimenting others, offering help, inviting others to take part in social activities, controlling their tempers, as well as receiving criticism (Caldarella & Merrell, 1997). These may also need to take initiatives to make connects with supports from society, since multiple studies revealed that newly immigrated Chinese students and their families reported factors affect quality of life were being silenced and avoidance (Chiu, Yang, Wong & Li, 2013).

According to Smart (2004), people with disabilities need to learn how to live in contact with society, with friends, with classmates, instead of feeling shame and anger, students need to learn how to handle the embarrassment brought on by their inappropriate behavior. They also have to learn how to deal with problems and get reasonable results instead of avoiding problems. Otherwise, they might rely on their families in the long run, instead of accumulating independent living skills. Also society needs to continue to evolve, to be more inclusive and accepting, and to come to terms with its fears.

My study also found connections between participants’ quality of life and their social skills in areas of social engagement, level of loneliness, and quality of friendships. Because participants often protect themselves from the negative reactions of society, they may face added
difficulties in social interactions, communication, stereotyped behaviors, and they may also have
depression when they understand these problems (Howlin, Goode, Hutton & Rutter, 2004).
Emerson & McVilly (2004) discovered that, people with intellectual disabilities are less socially
engaged, and their friends tend to be others with intellectual disabilities. Bigby and Knox’s
(2009) study showed that the social relationships of people with intellectual disabilities were
largely restricted to agency staff, family, and others with intellectual disabilities. Instead of
creating opportunities to develop their personal skills, they translated this into “I don’t talk to
them,” “I don’t say a word because nobody cares,” “I don’t participate in the labor force to avoid
making trouble,” “I lock myself in the closet to avoid contact”. These views correspond with
Bell and Clegg’s (2012) analysis that one of the major problems faced by people with intellectual
disabilities is reduced contact with the outside world, which, in turn, limits their social skills and
their understanding about the system. If we could advocate for more acceptance and engagement
in society, many individuals with intellectual disabilities would be less lonely and become a
“true part” of the community (Shakespeare, 2006). Their greater acceptance would in turn
influence their quality of life, employment, and independent living.

Normalcy

This section starts with the definition of normalcy which seems to be a term that is
difficult to define, complex and often has contradictory meanings. On the surface, it could equate
to statistical terms such as “median or average,” “range,” or “not extreme”. It could also mean an
idea about what is acceptable and natural. From a deficit model, normalcy could be translated to
the question “Do you feel different than other people?”. It implies that the majority of the
population should somehow be part of the norm, and having a disability might equal being out of
that range. The social model, encourages rethinking the definition of normalcy by considering
who is oppressed and marginalized by these definitions. Rather, having a disability is seen as being a normal part of life, and enhanced human rights and legal protections are advocated. In this section, I will describe participants’ relationships to the term and concepts of normalcy.

When I was in the playground, other people look me as suspicious and don’t allow their kids to play with me. They asked their kids, “Are you OK with playing with those people?” My mum was so angry. “What do you mean by those people?” I was so stressed out when I heard this that I never went there again.

I was sometimes considered to be less important than my non-disabled peers since disabilities can be translated into abnormal. I can only complete fewer assignments than my classmates.

When I was identified as having a disability, the way people look at my family changed a lot.

From this perspective, it is our narrow notions of “normal” that actually creates disabilities. During my study, the majority of participants described believing or feeling different, or having been changed in some way as a result of having intellectual disabilities. Through analysis of my interview records of how my participants introduce themselves and see the world, findings and discoveries emerged, with such words as “normal” and “different” frequently appearing, although I intentionally tried to avoid using these terms in my questionnaire. “Different” and “abnormal” were the most frequently occurring words in my interview notes. Besides frequently using words describing differences or abnormalities, the way participants described these words often came with negative connotations. They used such phrases as “That was not good,” “I’m so stupid,” and “I was crazy”. This might be attributed to the fact that society interprets normal and abnormal in negative ways.
In reviewing the literature, the term “normal” does not come with the emotions the participants thought it did. It has the following different meanings. First, on the surface, it means right or wrong such as normal behavior, normal dress, normal topic of conversations, and normal family styles. These interpretations explain reasons why the words participants used to describe normalcy often came with negative emotions. Second, “normal” is about socially accepted behavior expectations. A social model would see these students being impacted by society’s norms. In this case, the complexity is that the participants are drawing on the norms of two societies, Chinese and American. For example, it is expected to stand very close and touch their hands or arms to show friendships while talking to someone in China, but leaving some personal space is encouraged in the U.S. Based on this analysis, participants usually see the term “normal” as right or wrong, rather than “common” (Neubert, Moon & Grigal, 2004).

On top of participants’ interpretation of the word “normal,” they also found that people hold substantial reservations about interacting with them. People tend to respond with fear, discomfort, and aversion when they come into contact with people with intellectual disabilities (Wright, Gronfein, & Owens, 2000). Although the experience of being loved and emotionally supported by another person is an important way of establishing attachments (Schuengel & Janssen, 2006), participants described barriers to giving and receiving the love and emotional support that would help them develop secure attachments. Such secure attachments would offset negative environmental constraints, provide emotional comfort, and reduce the impact of stigmatizing experiences. In addition, people were afraid of building close relationships with participants’ families because they were worried about being associated with these families. Therefore, participants’ families might become more socially isolated and might further lose
social connections and knowledge of social networks. These problems were expressed in cycles, in which cause and effects rotate repeatedly.

Several research studies from the literature review analyzed factors that determined that the feeling of being normal for people with intellectual disabilities has a strong correlation with their level of inclusion in society. The more included they feel socially, the more normal they feel. For example, students who were integrated into regular classrooms learned social skills through modeling their typically developing peers, and they may have accumulated skills in making non-disabled friends (Su, Cuskelly, Gilmore & Sullivan, 2015). Inclusion is not just clarity, it means to know, to understand, and to engage students with intellectual disabilities as insiders rather than outsiders. Because people were afraid of building connections with them, immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities have a lower chance of been included, and many transition program students show sadness and express a sense of helplessness.

| I always wear university or workplace uniforms so people see me as normal. |
| I’m a paid employee. I’m a full time worker with benefits in the post office. |
| I paid back credit card by myself. |
| I told everybody that I can read signs on the street and I read loud. |
| I received education at a standard college. |

I also found that participants had developed a vocabulary to distinguish themselves as “regular people without disabilities” in order to define that they are “normal.” I was happy that they have a transition guideline in mind because feeling normal helps them to deal with problems and get reasonable results instead of avoiding problems. Otherwise, they might rely on their families in the long run, instead of accumulating independent living skills (Smart, 2004). The
more they feel normal, the more they are confident in learning how to handle the embarrassment brought on by their unexpected behaviors, instead of feeling marginalized and considered to be useless and lower. This provides them opportunities to come into contact with society, with friends, with classmates, instead of having their lives closed off.

I was disappointed that “not being different” often seemed to be their requirement for feeling confident. The assumption is that, the label associated with intellectual disabilities was central to being valued, and they believe that being non-disabled is right and normal but to be disabled or different is wrong. Did they ever think that, without the uniform, they are still a valued member in my heart? What they were clearly saying was that “regular people with disabilities” are not normal until they can participate in transition programs and meet the requirements. This is self-discriminatory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I use my income to purchase food for myself. Normal or not, what does that matter? With my disability, I’m still a skillful worker. People like me. As long as my income can afford my rent and daily cost, I’m happy.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within normal range,’ what does that mean? Professionals in the fields of medicine make decisions for us. The standard is made by outsiders instead of people like me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The goals of expected behavior in instruction are to encourage common rules and make society peaceful and harmonious, not to judge people into different classes. This way of understanding normalcy creates oppression and is not good for peace and harmony.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is not right to consider me as a risk factor, unhealthy, or pathological, and diseased. People in my society should have knowledge of intellectual disabilities, so they will not see us as scary.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
From the interview notes, I found that participants started to question the definition of normalcy and to some extent felt that being different was not just described as something negative. They are questioning society’s norms, which is at the heart of the social model. These are very sophisticated thoughts. Through the transition programs they participated, they learnt to view having a disability as different instead of abnormal in areas of physical appearances, how they behave, attention, interests, as well as cognitive functioning. In addition, words of empowerment from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which they also learned about in their transition programs, such as equality, privacy, remedy, option, property, assembly, appeared in my interview notes in answering interview questions.

In summary, there seems to be some evolution being shown here. Participants are beginning to question narrow notions of “normal” that actually contributes to difference being viewed as disability. I believe that, in general, society’s norms make my participants feel ashamed and make them want to hide, but they are beginning to count themselves as normal based on doing normal things like working and contributing.

**Self-determination**

The term “self-determination” is defined as a right, being allowed a free, independent choice, being allowed to identify and clarify goals, as well as the extent to which participants make decision for themselves. In this section, I will lay out how participants define self-determination, as well as their perceptions on this topic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I learned the word ‘self-determination’ in class, but I don’t even know the actual meaning. I don’t think I have the ability to do it, so I don’t ask for it.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I lack self-confidence. I rely on other people to decide for me. Therefore, other people get used to making decisions for me. I feel stressed out when I make decisions for myself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My parents make decision for me. If I don’t obey them, I feel worried and depressed, I always please others. When they say something, then I was expected to comply immediately.

I was not motivated to do planning for myself. In China, the society changes so quick. I don’t even know what tomorrow looks like.

Professionals are making decisions for me based on what has been done for other people without asking me and my parents questions. Even if they ask, I don’t know how to answer. They have no time to wait for me since training already takes a lot of time. It is like many people lining up from the North Pole to the South Pole waiting for the judge to knock on the table.

Is everything good?
Yeah, yes.

Any suggestions?
No, no.

Placement and decisions are based on what has always been done for other students, I don’t have a three-year plan or five-year plan. They made it for me.

During the study, the stories expressed by participants reflected their situations and perceptions of making decisions for themselves, which means to make decisions about their own futures, as well as to plan for themselves. Some words that showed up frequently in the interview notes such as “comply”, “complete”, “follow”, “attend”, “obey”, clearly show participants’ lack of self-determination. On looking at participants’ attitudes toward this topic, I found that they sometimes told me that they did not want to discuss a certain topic, and other times they changed the subject. They also reacted by being silent with non-verbal cues, such as head nodding and shoulder shrugging, or non-responses, to show that they didn’t like this question. According to
critical disclosure analysis, silence must be considered as discourse (Fairclough, 2010). Although they wanted to say something, they also want to know that other people care about them, and that they are able to participate. I believe they produced an interruption by not using their voice to contribute to the discussion this topic because they thought the question about self-determination was disrespectful. This corresponds with the literature, which shows that people with intellectual disabilities were traditionally marginalized, their voices were not heard on their perspectives and experiences of being a part of the mental health system. In addition, some participants didn’t seem to know the meaning of self-determination.

From the stories some participants shared, there seemed to be confusion about the meaning of self-determination and how to translate this into rights and obligations. Although transition programs expect participants to demonstrate self-control and appropriate behavior, participants reflected that they were actually had little autonomy. This is because they were not trusted to make decisions for themselves, or they even questioned their own ability on this. Even though some participants were required to act with autonomy and control, they referred to self-control as a problem that frequently occurred.

Participants often seemed to prefer to keep their presumption that it is the family’s sole responsibility to make decisions for them since the Chinese safety network is family based—blood relationships, extended family, and close friends. Therefore, they don’t trust themselves to make decisions (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, Garza, 2006). Chinese people believe it is the family’s responsibility to make decisions for members of the family, especially for family members with intellectual disabilities. Relying on others to make decisions negatively affect participants’ economic stability, emotional state, and emotional adjustment (Williams, 2001).
In summary, stories expressed by participants reflect their situations and perceptions of how they make decisions and plan for themselves. Participants sometimes expressed that they thought discussing this topic was kind of disrespectful and they would rather stay with their assumption that it is the family’s sole responsibility to make decisions for them. In the next theme, I will look at “change.”

**Theme 2: Change**

Change means to make or become different. The motivation for change might be to pursue a better life and make progress. In this section, I will discuss participants’ perceptions about changes, including to what extent they want to make changes, goals for change, as well as how they go about making changes.

**The extent to which participants wanted to make changes**

During my study, the phrase “get out of my current situation” frequently appeared with tears and anger. Participants indicated that they were not happy their current life, they always wanted to get out. The following statement show the extent to which participants wanted to make changes in their lives.

| I don’t want to live in this situation anymore. It is too bad. It is just too bad. I want to change! |
| I have anger in my heart. I hate my life! I cannot describe it clearly but I want to get out of my current situation! |
| I can sacrifice anything in order to escape my current life, I want to make changes! |
My life was like a monster following me which made my fortune fall and fall. I want to stop falling.

The reason why participants expressed a desperate desire to change is that their current situations are very stressful. Initially I thought that with Medicaid, around $800 per month, pension and social services, they should have sufficient resources because they are already better off than people in many other countries in the same situation. However, no matter if it was explicitly expressed or implied in the interview stories, participants reflected that their current lives included suffering. They felt they could not sustain it and wanted any chance to get out. For example, every time when I interviewed one participant’s mother, even I felt depressed the whole day. The combined consequences of having a child with an intellectual disability made her feel like she had spent “eight years fighting Japanese during World War II”. The pain was not expressed explicitly, but more from the look in her eyes, the way she struggled when she talked about things, and her view of the world. She tried to beg everybody to squeeze resources and depended on the charity or tears of others. What she most cared about was daily survival. She made every effort to save a penny, but did not know how to get sustainable economic resources. In order to save an eight dollar parking fee, she called her relatives for half an hour to get directions, during one interview. It was very, very stressful because she always looked for the cheapest way instead of the best way. She was yelling, swearing, blaming social service agencies for not giving more things and pinching pennies. She tried to make herself bigger in order to fight, she seemed to take the government help for granted without showing any appreciation. People raised in Chinese often culture believe that change is possible. In China, social class is not as stable as in the United States and receiving higher education is positively correlated with
upward mobility. This is not only because of the fast changing economic directions, but also because people grow up with the same education.

**Goals for change**

Goals are guideposts to the future that provide a “motivation factor which encourages people to pursue success through goal-directed energy and pathways” (Goldratt, E. (2014). The goals we set up three years ago determine where we are now, and the goals we set up today will determine where we are at in the next three to five years. In this section, I will review participants’ realistic goals, goals that are achievable through efforts and are realistic, as well as unrealistic goals, goals that might actually fall within the realm of magic hope.

| I hope for enough strength to take care of my independent living so my mom can find a job. |
| I hope to find a real job after graduation so I can support myself financially. |
| I hope to be able to communicate with others, so I can have friends. I need to learn communication skills. |
| I hope to volunteer without pay first in order to get experience for a full time job with benefits. |
| I hope to have a normal life, feel respected and valued, like everyone else on North Michigan Avenue. |
| I hope I can speak out to advocate for my needs and make positive contributions to society. |

Participants’ hopes described above during interviews reflect their basic needs and living standards. I believe these hopes are achievable through efforts and are realistic. These can goals
challenge to independent living, communication, employment, quality of life, as well as advocacy. However, when we think about change, we’re often tempted to shoot for huge goals. These goals seem to be too vague, with no specific plans or timelines to achieve them. During the interview, I found that many participants had unrealistic goals that actually fall within the realm of magic hope.

| I enjoy the pleasure of been treated as first-class people during vacation and keep it as long as possible. |
| My families spend all our savings when we went back to visit their relatives back in China because these events gave us instant pleasure, the feeling of being rich and temporarily forgot our pain. |
| I was so jealous because my neighbor as the beneficiary of someone’s life insurance. That was in the 1980s when fifty thousand dollars was a lot of money in China, and very few people could get a visa to go to the United States. |
| I like to hang out with friends and drink a lot of beers. Drugs and alcohol give people temporary relief. |
| I hope that I can communicate like other people in my community one day with the help from God. |

Interview data show that participants spent a lot of time to pursuing a sense of achievement associated with goals that don’t improved their lives. For example, in playing computer games they receive continuous promotions in the progress of fighting monsters. This controllable experience of being successful helps them to forget their current bad situation. This
corresponds with what one participant said, “my life was like a monster following me which made my fortune fall and fall”. Reading novels allows them to imagine becoming the character of the stories, and creates day dreams in their actual life. This corresponds to the statement in one interview, “these events gave us instant pleasure, the feeling of being rich and temporarily forgot our pain”. YouTube tragedy videos can make them feeling better off than others who suffer more, even though they know that they themselves suffer.

I think I understand where my participants perspectives, because their lives were too hard. This corresponds with the literature that I reviewed that most governmental efforts only remain on the legislative, policy, advocacy, and awareness level, and it far less developed on a practical level (Goldratt, 2014). We do have changes in laws, policies, and advanced understandings that encourage individuals with intellectual disabilities to break with the societal limitations that are based upon old paradigms, perceptions, and stereotypes. However, people with intellectual disabilities often remain socially outside looking in, being silent, and participating passively (Verdonschot, de Witte, Reichrath, Buntinx & Curfs, 2009). “When movies flashed many times, every day, it becomes true”. Therefore, even changes experienced through media or TV make them excited. Participants enjoy these movies which are like sweet candy, and brings them social status that is higher than in their day dreams with no pressure and no stress.

**Process of change**

No matter what their goal is, participants sometimes seem to understand that the process of change is a time consuming, step by step procedure, instead of something that can be
completed in one day. The following quotes show that learning employment skills, communication skills, as well as independent life skills are effective processes for change.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>I learned job skills that enabled me to find a job. I have a full-time job. I have money and health insurance.</th>
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<tr>
<td>During transition, I learned that we have residential options away from our parents’ homes and options to take on adult roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned how to establish personal, professional, and social relationships.</td>
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Participants do recognize what they experienced in transition programs was a routine way to achieve employment and independent living goals, with expectations for continued, lifelong learning that are results-oriented and measurable. Participating in transition programs allowed them to pursue the same goals as their non-disabled peers in employment and in developing lifelong social networks (Grigal & Hart, 2010). When they invested time and effort, their efforts were rewarded.

Learning job skills was viewed as an essential part of making changes, although people’s value cannot be interpreted narrowly by monitoring employment participation and economic self-sufficiency. This correspond with Hampton and Xiao’s (2007) findings which highlighted the importance of employment participation for people with intellectual disabilities. In addition, Wagner, Newmann, Cametom, Levine and Garza (2006) stated that the heightened focus on transition and the importance of work has also translated into a variety of school-to-career possibilities, though students with intellectual disabilities are less likely to attain competitive jobs. Mock and Love (2012) explained that work is a central aspect of human existence and a
vital component of independent living for the majority of working-age adults. His article is a composite of existing literature, mentioning that students’ happiness and confidence levels increase a lot when they get job offers.

Interview notes from my participants recorded steps of their efforts to realize residential options away from their parents’ homes and to take on adult roles. However, the process of independent living is time consuming and takes lots of effort. One participant revealed that he feels more confident to remain with his parents so that they can “look after each other”. Another participant said that he would rather stay in a segregated group living with people “under the same condition,” such as a group home in order to be “equal and valued”. The process of achieving independent living is not just finding a place and paying rent. It is more about “feeling touched,” “feeling equal,” and “feeling clicked” with the people with whom one is living. The process of change is not just in the participant side such as being “able to brush one’s teeth and take a shower,” it also relies on the society to “click with them” as a valued part and for them to feel engaged.

**Barriers for change**

I found that several themes came up in my data around barriers to change. I found that participants often had no transition plan, had no one to ask for disability related information, did not want to ask for help, and did not have role models.

I have my transition plan but my parents don’t read it. They do not speak English.

Nobody in my family knows American history and law. Even the one hundred citizenship interview questions, my parents cannot pass.
I don’t even survive daily, how can I plan for the next three years?

We do not have relationships with special aide teachers, attorneys, and social workers. We cannot get as much advice as mainstream people.

Paying for professional advice is too expensive. I can buy a lot of food on that money. Waiting line for free professional advice is too long.

If I open up and ask questions, it means that I don’t know, and people look down on me.

I will have to wait in social service the whole day in order to get help.

If I open up to ask for help, people will try to avoid contact with me. I will suffer more.

If I wash dishes in a restaurant, I make money. If I participate in the program, I lose money, plus there is no guarantee that money will be earned back.

I did go through a process of change during the transition program. However, I can only find a part time job. I cannot find an office job.

I want to work for the government and have a stable job, but there are not that many opportunities in transition.

Not many students with intellectual disabilities participate in transition.

Even if I found a job through transition, it cannot enhance my endeavor as a whole. People still look me down.

We only see office jobs as real jobs.
I can only find a labor job in a food pantry because of my disability, so I don’t have to receive training in vocabulary and social skills.

The transition process is not worth that much money, because I will be employed in a sheltered workshop anyhow. Then why should I spend that money?

No transition plan

Although the law declares that the process may start at age twelve, many new immigrants deferred the process to the last minute at the age of sixteen. One participant said “nobody in my family can ready English”. They don’t have the vocabulary and knowledge to read through the transition plan. How can they participate in decision making? Many parents don’t know American culture and history. They have never stepped out of Chinatown. They don’t know what laws and requirements are because, in China, this was not required at all. Financially, parents survive on a daily basis, and they need to wire money back to China. They need to acquire money from everywhere they can to provide for food, rent, and other basic resources while paying back their debt for immigration. Therefore, they have no time to pursue career goals or academic goals, saying, “Study is useless”.

Nobody to ask for disability related information

In the mainstream of American culture, parents can ask professionals such as special education teachers, attorneys, and social workers for advice. In the Chinese community, people often don’t have relationships with people in the mainstream. Therefore, they have to “obey whatever the authority said instead of actively participating in decision making and leveraging the power.” Apart from language difficulties, new immigrants have different communication style, different reasoning, as well as different points they value. In Chinese culture, people don’t
spend money for professional advice such as for an attorney or a CPA. If they choose to get help from social services, the line is usually very long because of the staff to client ratio. They sometimes prefer to ask the street person for free advice. It is like when the car breaks down, they ask handy neighbors instead of going to a local business. There is also a lack of bilingual disability professionals who received higher education, know both mainstream culture and Chinese communication style, and have connections with mainstream employers.

**Don’t want to open up and ask for help**

In mainstream American culture, parents are more open to talk about students’ disabilities and are open to advice. The extra time and extra money they can manage combine to form a large quantity of marginal power. However, in the Chinese community, parents often feel ashamed to ask for help, and they don’t actively look for resources.

**No role models**

Chinese people think an office job is higher than a labor job, but transition programs create more labor jobs. Often what they achieve does not correspond with what they wanted to be after graduation from transition programs. Transition results do not always match their expectations.

**Cannot afford efforts to pursue dreams**

The process of pursuing dreams requires thoughtful, persistent, and collaborative work on the part of the participants, their family, social services, and their schools. “I know the more time we spend in the program the more benefits we are likely to see from the program. However, we cannot afford it”. America’s history of immigration clearly corresponds to America’s
materialistic culture. Immigrants who brought in assets and investments were welcomed, which is similar as our current EB-5 category. However, without strong combined resources, it is very hard to go through transition process.

In this section, I analyzed barriers for change labelled “no transition plan,” “nobody to ask for disability related information,” “don’t want to ask for help,” and “no role models.” Theme 2 discusses participants’ perceptions about changes, including to what extent they want to make changes, their goals for change, as well as how they make changes. In the next theme, I will look at the role of family relationships.

**Theme 3: Family relationships**

In this section, I will discuss participants’ family relationships, including ideas of burden and sin, minimum involvement, as well as hiding. My research data show that having intellectual disabilities influenced participants and their families’ life choices and resulted in the perception of sacrifices being made. How disabilities are perceived across different cultures influence the reasoning of families of students with disabilities. Interview data clearly indicate participants’ perception that Chinese culture sees disability as a result of parents’ sin in the past or that they did something wrong in their previous lives.

**Burden and sin**

Data collected during interviews reflect participants’ family member’s panic, fear, worry, sense of loss, and suffering because they have to undertake the burdens of having children with intellectual disabilities. Expressions such as “guilty” and “fearful” appear frequently during my study.
I have fear in my heart. My co-worker always yelled at me, “Even non-disabled new immigrants can’t find a job! Why we keep you working here?” I pleaded, I begged, I lost my boundary because I did make trouble, and I cannot find a job anywhere else. My mom has to job coach me all the time while I work in the store.

When we were in China, my husband was a doctor and I was a nurse. We had good income so I took my kids on vacation when we had the opportunity. We would go out to parks every weekend because vacation and weekend activities reduced my son’s stress. We went to many big cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, looking for treatment and for vacation. The sand spa treatment for autism was $500 every time, and I bought ten treatments at once, paid out of pocket, even though my son was not diagnosed with autism. After immigrating to the U.S., my husband works in a restaurant. I choose not to work in order to stay with my son. Because of this situation, our family doesn’t even have money to pay rent.

I donated a threshold for a temple, representing myself and let thousands of people step on it. I believe that this pays back my sin since my son’s disability was perceived as some sort of ancestral curse.

Buddha said suffering myself can make my son better, so I eat bad food, work twelve hours a day in the restaurant washing dishes, I don’t spend a penny. I bow myself to reduce my sin with the hope that my son will be cured as a result of my daily prayer to God.

The U.S. Constitution empowers dignity, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness as the basic right of being a human being. However, I smelled self-hurting, restriction and withdrawing from data collected from my interview such as “donated a threshold for a temple,” “this is the only place where I can work”, and “I eat bad food to reduce my sin”. This does not match
American culture which promotes brilliance of human character and personality, choice and abundance in material resources, as well as the pursuit of excellence in career paths. Hampton & Xiao (2007) indicates that parents of children with certain intellectual disabilities report lower adaptability and cohesion within the family as well as lower rates of family happiness. In the US, a child's disability is considered more of a responsibility on the community, whereas in China, the responsibility rests upon the parents or the caregivers, both financially and emotionally. New immigrants may not even know that people living in the United States have a safety net that does not exist in their country. They believe that applying for social warfare might cause them to lose their immigrant status, and getting free money from anywhere else is a trap which might cause them to lose all of their property. They would rather stay with their assumption that it is the family’s sole responsibility to support their kids who have intellectual disabilities since the Chinese safety network is family based--blood relationships, extended family, and close friends. The resulting reduced contact with community negatively affects the economic stability, emotional state, and emotional adjustment of these families (Bell and Clegg, 2012).

Chinese culture attributes a child’s disability to something the parents did, and even the people closest to them are ashamed of them. Instead of focusing on the solution or treatment for the illness, people raised in Chinese culture focus on the cause of the illness, that is, why it happened. This causes a tremendous amount of fear, hostility, alienation, and blame. Chinese people do not want others to know about disabilities because of the belief that such circumstances are caused by a genetic disease for which the parents are held responsible. In Chinese culture, there is a belief in the cause and effect of “do good things and you will be blessed eventually; do bad things and you will be punished finally”. People culturally associate...
an intellectual disability with a sin that the parents might have committed in the past (Bowlby, 1988).

**Minimum involvement**

My interview data show a minimum of direct involvement of parents in participants’ transition, as they often only believe in outcomes that are tangible, immediate and concrete. Instead of actively participating in students’ placement, curriculum design, instruction and step by step evaluation, they try to avoid the conversation.

My family was stressed, scared to death, so we don’t even have the ability to participate in planning for my future. I believe that transition was a culminating event that occurred in my last year of public school. I don’t think transition is an ongoing process that includes the participation and collaboration of adult community service agencies, and others.

I was already overwhelmed with the day-to-day care of my child, including rent, food and basic needs. I felt too tired to dig for hidden information, to plan for his long-term care, even to survive daily, I feel unable to be responsible for sustaining his wellbeing.

I have no time to get involved in my child’s transition. I need to work hard to save money, because I need to leave a portion of money for my autistic kid after I die. So I have to work extra hours to save money, how can I participate in parents’ meetings?

I have no awareness of transition plans. I have no money and no energy. I work at Airport preparing food four days a week 4:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. every day. I get paid every week but I
have no savings at all. Bridgeport rent was $400 per unit five years ago, now it is $1200!
Anywhere else is the same, rents went sky high!

I don’t trust going to get help. They just want to squeeze my money for ‘professional advice’.

My parents said that my transition plan is just for compliance requirements. It does nothing to help me. Transition was just another bureaucratic exercise of paper signing without parent or student input, because we don’t know English, anyway.

Parents are not involved in the process, and their interviews reflected their feelings of being stressed out, panicked, and overwhelmed. Not only do they have little awareness of transition plans, but they are also not always able to follow the instructions. This corresponds with Rao & Beidel (2009) that parents of students with intellectual disabilities are less independent and participate much less in social and recreational activities. Instead of facing the problems, they often seems exhausted and don’t trust going to get help. Most Chinese immigrant families are lower income, and they have to work longer hours to offset low wages and do not have time to look after their kids. Survival is the priority, since many of them do not even have the financial resources to cover their basic needs. Even if parents and social services can work something out to help by promoting a safety network, they may still feel overwhelmed by the needs of a person with a disability, particularly as problems tend to persist throughout the person’s life. Serrats (2012) states that many of these parents indicated higher rates of depression as well as stress related to marriage quality, familial quality, parental wellbeing, and economic stability. Rao & Beidel (2009) indicated that stress levels of family members in which there is a child with an intellectual disability were significantly higher than parents of typical children.
Participants saw supported employment narrowly from tangible and monetary perspective such as “wasting money”, and “I will be a dish washer anyhow”. This kind of reasoning may cause them to continue to fall behind, and they are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed compared to those without disabilities (Johnson, Mellard, & Lancaster, 2007). From IDEA (2004), students with special needs have the right to access aides and supports which enable them to equal access to education with their same age peers, and they are granted transitional services specific to their individual needs. For example, supported employment, which emphasizes the integration of vocational and clinical services, rapid job search, matching jobs to students’ preferences, skills and experiences, and ongoing job supports directly assists people with disabilities to obtain competitive employment based on their preferences, skills, and experiences (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Participating in employment not only enables students to learn multiple job skills to build up careers they are interested in, but also broadens their views to include the pursuit of happiness as a basic human right. When people with disabilities are able to get competitive and supportive employment within the community, they will not only earn responsible salaries and benefits, but will also participate in social activities and become more independent (Yun-Tung, 2010).

Hiding

My study revealed that, instead of helping their disabled children attain the skills needed to become meaningful members of the community, many families just don’t want other people know about the disabilities. Participants show extensive adverse attitudes to participating in transition programs, such as refusing to attend transition programs and feeling shame in talking about their disabilities. Data collected during my interview revealed the following factors associated with this topic.
My parents don’t show up in the parent meetings, because it means that they admit that they are the parent of someone with disabilities; therefore, their status will be lower. If we were back in China, they would have to hide me because a disability is usually perceived as somehow their fault. I used to hold that belief too, after receiving education in the United States, I was still uncomfortable to disclose my disability to the public and seek for accommodations.

My neighbor sent his child who has intellectual disabilities to a school in far north instead of the school in the community. They don’t want people to know about the disability. They get up 5:00 A.M. in the morning every day in order to hide this.

Due to the nature of my friend’s disability and the behavior he displays during social gatherings, his family tries to hide him at home instead of expose him to the community. They used to fight with family members who tell other people about my friend. They wanted my friend’s situation to remain among family members only. I feel so sorry for those who were locked in their homes due to lack of support from the government and other personal issues regarding disability back in China. In the U.S., individuals with disabilities can live normal lives. Some go to work and are able to support themselves. Some of them get support from the government. They are not isolated from society.

Back in China, people who wanted to socialize their children or obtain help for them did not know where to take them. Neither the bus nor the stores have wheelchair access. In the United States, people tell my mom that it is okay to have a child with a disability because some children are born like that. I remember that one day when I was stressed out and yelling in public, my mom felt so ashamed and exasperated. One lady came in and talked to my mom “That’s okay. It is normal, and it is part of life”. Back in China, children with
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Disabilities were segregated; they cannot mix with the typical population to maintain peace and harmony. As long as they don’t make trouble for the community, it was okay. Some parents prefer hiding their children than exposing them to the outside world, like to their neighbors, to the public, and to schools. If you expose your child with a disability, they look at you as some kind of wrongdoer.

Data collected from participant interviews show that sense of shame and hiding prevents participants from being engaged and from being as they are, and recognizing the importance of their active participation. For people who were so afraid of being labeled as “disabled,” participating in transition programs means putting the label on their faces and letting the whole world know that they have disabilities. In American history, people with intellectual disabilities were segregated from their peers without a disability in many aspects of life such as education, living, employment, and participating in activities (Kochhar-Bryant, 2007). Similarly, in the Chinese community, people tried to avoid building close relationships with these families because they were afraid of being associated with these families. One participant revealed that he chose to hide because of his self-perceived devalued status for not being able to meet peer expectations. During the interview, participants reflected that they know that friends need to be equal, the foundation of communication is respect and esteem, and that the strength of connection is similarity. If someone is under the pressure of being lower and being “different” or even “stranger” than their peers, they would choose to be alone and hide away.

There are many consequences for hiding such as losing social skills, becoming lonely and having no social network. Ghaziuddin (1988) pointed out that, by hiding their disabilities by avoiding interactions with people, people get more isolated and perform worse in social interactions, even with close family members. Another consequence of hiding is loneliness.
Participants who reported being hidden or hiding themselves also revealed being lonely. For example, losing opportunities to cultivate their social skills can also profoundly impact various aspects of life including family life, the development and maintenance of relationships, academic life, employment, and day to day interpersonal communications (Howlin & Moss, 2012). Poor social skills are linked to challenges with academic achievement, interpersonal relationships, employment and independent living (Travis & Sigman, 1998). These problems were expressed in cycles. There is evidence that new Chinese immigrant students with intellectual disabilities experience more complicated grief than students who were born and raised in the United States (Brickell & Munir, 2008). In order to solve the problem, Park, Loman, & Miller (2008) pointed out a need to establish context for social skills instruction, the need to facilitate generalization, and use appropriate assessments to measure outcomes contributes to the challenge of addressing social skills. In turn, their improving social skills could positively influence their academic achievements, independent living, as well as emotional health (Howlin & Moss, 2012).

In summary, Theme 3 discussed participants’ perceptions about family relationship including burden and sin, minimal involvement, as well as hiding. These perceptions correspond with Chappell’s (1994) findings that--people who have intellectual disabilities only form close friendships with other people who have intellectual disabilities. When the social network of students with intellectual disabilities was restricted to others with intellectual disabilities, they may have lost important modeling opportunities provided by interacting with nondisabled peers. In the next section, we will discuss resources.

**Theme 4: Resources**

In this section, I’m going to discuss the resources participants have. A resource can be defined as a source or supply from which a benefit is produced. There is some overlap with some
of the findings above. Both material resources and non-material resources surfaced as themes in my data and that I will review below are.

**Material resources**

Alkire & Foster (2011) point out that poverty can take many forms. Economic measures are the most frequently used comparisons to access individual’s well-being, relative or absolute deprivation, and ability to meet basic needs. Participants perceive material resources as being related to money, job security, a place to live, and risk they can bear. The question “do you think money is a problem” got the most responses. Money was a big topic of my research. Participants identified the lack of financial resources as a barrier for themselves and their families. Even though sometimes it was not clearly stated, it could be perceived in discussions of cause and consequences or driving forces throughout my interviews from beginning to the end. Most of my participants displayed a pool of poverty related words and reasoning, and these words were related to basic resources needed to live, such as rice, gas, and milk. The following excerpts from my interviews show their concerns.

| I worry about where to eat the next meal, and where is the next month’s rent coming from”. |
| "Gas price goes up again. |
| One spoon of rice, ten people need to eat. Who eats? |
| Life is like a short mat. When it covers head, it cannot cover feet. |
| When I asked my friend about if I should spend my money now or save up to buy a decent shirt next summer, he joked with me, ‘Don’t think too long, I don’t even know if you can survive until next summer. |
Unemployment, underemployment, part time on-call, night shift, I have to work three jobs to make ends meet.

Supervisor has the extreme power and control over my working hours and wage increase, she yelled at me like a lion, making me fearful.

I need a lot of time to buy groceries, because I only buy promotional stuff from each store, I will have to go to six or seven stores. Survival is difficult, and I know where to get the cheapest oil, rice and milk. Then I have no time.

I was so excited when I picked up a twenty dollar bill someone lost on the street. Then I wait there with the hope that the same thing happens every day. This made me too excited to do other things.

Because my child has no money to spend, street friends took this advantage to get close to him. I feel that he may have more opportunity to be suspended or expelled from school, be arrested and spend time in jail, drink alcohol, and use illegal drugs.

Sub-standard housing, many people share one room, no outlet protectors, peeling plaster, lead paint, roach and rodent infestations, mice.

The following is a discussion taken from my interviews:

“I have depression because I hate my job. I’m a dish washer working until midnight, and my supervisor treat me bad.”

“Why don’t you go to school to upgrade yourself? At least take some ESL classes.”

“I need money to buy a car so I have to keep washing dishes.”

“Why do you need money to buy a car?”

“Because I wash dishes at midnight”
My participants saw poverty as affecting many factors in their lives. They also discussed feelings of frustration, embarrassment, resentment, disappointment, and sadness because of the lack of resources. This corresponds with Gooding & Marriot (2009) stating that people with disabilities often accrue a large amount of debt related to their disabilities, and thus may require a higher minimum threshold to meet basic needs. These costs may trigger questions such as the overall magnitude and sources of these costs, whether individuals are actually able to afford and access all needed goods and services, as well as the impact of these expenses on functioning as well as on social and economic well-being (Mitra, Palmer, Kim, Mont, & Groce, 2017). Most of my participants answered “Where do you live? Do you rent your house or own?” with tears, long responses and deep emotions. I was shocked because I did not expect to have answers like that. I still remember that when I had previously interviewed students in a wealthy district two years ago with the same question, I got the impression that real estate is 80% of the way people accumulate assets. When they talk about owning properties, proud smiles appeared on their faces. I still remember an excerpt from the book Rich Dad, Poor Dad: “No matter where you are in this world, if you don’t accumulate assets, or productive assets, your situation will be the same. You will always be a ‘worker.’ If you have rental properties or a ‘free place to live,’ your life will be much easier” (Kiyosaki, 2015).

In analyzing how having intellectual disabilities influences their lives, participants revealed that the dealing with the effects of poverty is a significant socioeconomic factor, through expressed or implied messages. This corresponds with the literature that poverty and having an intellectual disability have a relationship and that having a disability may lead to poverty, but conversely poverty may lead to having a disability. Poverty and having a disability are believed to operate in a cycle, with the one interplaying with the other. The underlying social,
political, and economic conditions surrounding poverty and disabilities are increasingly identified as major limitations to growth and development (Banks, Kuper, & Polack, 2017).

Having a disability can lead to exclusion from work or education, to a lack of access to healthcare, to inadequate water and sanitation, to malnutrition and poor living conditions (Yeo, 2001), as well as to high healthcare and other expenses, which can cause or exacerbate poverty (World Health Organization, 2011). Absolute and relative poverty can lead to stress and social exclusion, which can worsen intellectual disabilities (Banks, Kuper, & Polack, 2017). Williams’ (2001) research also indicated that having a child with intellectual disabilities could negatively affect these families’ economic stability, emotional state, and emotional adjustment. Therefore, new Chinese immigrants believe that people with disabilities are poor, and they do not have the adequate resources to support their lives.

The findings above revealed how a lack of financial resources directly affects participants’ life in areas of their basic living. Participants exhibited poverty related beliefs during interviews. Not only are these beliefs different from my reasoning, but I also cannot accept these beliefs emotionally. Below I will discuss how a lack of financial resources influences participants’ choices and reasoning by dividing the information into the following categories: “I’m losing friends if I do too well,” “I’m proud that I’m poor,” and “relationships are more important than money.”

**Non-material resources**

In the previous section, I analyzed participants’ perceptions of material resources related to money, job security, places to live, and risks they can bear. These information revealed how a lack of financial resources directly affects participants’ lives in areas of their basic living. In this section, I will analyze participants’ perceptions about non-material resources, such as believes of
“I will lose friends if I do too well”. I will also include more multidimensional measures such as access to public information, education, or mainstream culture. Data collected from my interviews clearly show participants’ lack of important non-material resources. For instance, participants lacked knowledge of U.S. culture and English, did not have necessary skills for employment, and had views that might be different from the mainstream. This makes them scared, even panicked, and causes them to avoid problems, instead of solving problems step by step.

**Friendships**

My study shows that participants do value friendships since these relationships mean a lot to them, and they rely on these relationships to survive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It was my friends, who could not even make their ends meet, who put together $2,000 in cash when I was in difficult situation. It was not easy for them to save up every single dollar. If I find a good job, they all borrow money from me.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have good relationships with my personal ties and I rely on those relationships to survive. With them, in my current situation, I could at least survive. Without them, I may not be able to survive. If I participant in transition, find a job, and live a self-sufficient life, I will lose all my existing friends because we no longer have common features.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When heat was broke in my house, my friends let us stay in their place. They let me to have their room and they stay in sofa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I buy a house, my relatives will hate me because they would think I’m too rich. My husband’s whole family has nowhere to live. If I buy a house, they all move to stay with me. I will have to pay for their food then.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During my study, participants revealed that they cannot afford to lose the relationships they have since they don’t have that many friends. Participants revealed that they tend to be friends only with people with intellectual disabilities because of their difficulties in initiating, establishing, and maintaining friendships. One participant said, “I’m easy to be stressed out so I only talk to people I’m familiar with”. The other participant was only confident talking with family members and “paid staff” instead of meaningfully engaging with others in the community.

Participants value the friendships they have. One participant said “with that friendship bond at least I can survive. If I change I may not be able to survive”. Another participant said “Emotionally, I cannot lose it anyhow, even you give me ten gold bars”. As discussed in the previous analysis about participants’ self-perceived devalued status, the basics of friendships are equality, similarity, and respect. “Equality” can be translated into “holding similar or an equivalent amount of resources,” while “similarity” means similar interests, values, beliefs and hobbies. Most of my participants revealed that succeeding in transition would cause them to put pressure on their peers and the “give and take” relationship would not be balanced. First, they earn “too much money comparably” after mastering employment skills and finding a job. Second, their visions and interests will no longer be “equal” to those of their existing friends. They were afraid that these changes may negatively affect their relationship bonds with other students who are in similar circumstances.

The above ideas also relate to the points I discussed previously about how in Chinese culture the family base consisting of blood relationships, extended family, and close friends holds a strong resistance to poverty. Below are quotes collected from participants that illustrate these ideas.
With relationships, I don’t need to spend that much money. I can put together a decent dinner for less than five dollars by borrowing rice from my brother and meat from my sisters. When I have extra I will pay them back.

Poverty makes our relationship closer. In order to get out of poverty, my dad, who was a retired engineer, went to the city to work as a non-documented restaurant dish washer. The only contact we had for the first three years was wiring money as he wired a big portion of dollars on 20th of every month. This is not just money, this is love. We know that he shared one bedroom with other five workers to save up that money for the family.

Participants revealed that because of their close relationships, they don’t need that much money. They also revealed that when their families were poor and lacked resources, the connections between family members tended to be stronger. They expressed that they enjoyed these relationships, and they and their loved ones benefitted from the mutual support given in these relationships. However, these relationships were only narrowly restricted to family ties, and participants expressed that they cannot get out of their existing personal relationships. There was very little information regarding successful community integration and social fulfillment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. This corresponds with Gilmore & Cuskelley’s (2014) finding that as children, individuals with intellectual disabilities participate in fewer social activities with friends outside personal relationships and are reported by parents to have fewer reciprocal friendships than their typically developing peers. When they grow up, they tend to spend more time alone.

Knowledge of American culture, Education and social warfare system
Participants feel proud of being poor, and believe that relying on social services will prevent them from growing in the long run. Here are quotes from my study which support this understanding.

| Everybody is poor, and we are better off next door. |
| Most people in this world are poor and suffering. Life makes me impossible to stay alive, also impossible to find a way to die. |
| We take pride in our rich spirit. We are not greedy. |
| Rich cannot last for three generations. |
| If I have enough money, I will stop making efforts. |
| Poor people from China is different from poor people in the United States. No matter how poor they are, we believe there is a hope, through education, through relationship. The more they suffer, the harder they work. |
| In China, people who are poor are suffering. However, poor people in the United States are not suffering that much because of the social warfare system and minimum wage. |
| There was no social warfare for people to rely on back in China, so we don’t believe in social services in the United States. |
| Our dignity is the same, do not beg for anything. As soon as you receive free food and charity, you looks lower than other people. |

Participants revealed that being poor is “okay” and “common” because of the insufficient employment opportunities, poor rates of pay, job insecurity and cyclical unemployment back in their home country. They view “suffering” as a motivation factor forcing them to progress in
areas of housing, employment, education, and healthcare. Socioeconomic class in China changes more frequently than it does in the U.S. In addition, participants seem not to trust social services. One participant said, “If I don’t feel pain, I stop making effort”. Relying on social services makes them feel no pain.

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| No matter legal immigrants or illegal immigrants, the process of immigration is a sort of pain. As a ‘foreigner’ or even ‘stranger,’ I was scared about the ‘outside person.’ I hide myself in my own community until I’m comfortable with that. |
| I should have participated in transition, parents know the importance of involvement, but I don’t know how. Misunderstanding, unaware of, confused until we find it too late that I have reduced opportunities to make meaningful life choices. |
| My parents need IEP translator from social service. Her schedule usually does not match with our schedule so we will have to book appoints two month in advance which cannot meet our immediate needs. They keep changing translators. Sometimes translators don’t even know information of special aides, so the communication became strange. |
| When diagnosed as needing an IEP, my whole family cried for three days. We begged the school to move me back into the regular classroom instead of accepting special education. |
| Chinese culture focuses on obedience so we always obeyed what the teachers said without questioning anything or making suggestions. We don’t get used to get our voice heard. |

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Participants also revealed that their non-material resources were connected to their family income, parents’ education levels, as well as to what family members do for a living. They sometimes revealed having no understanding about matching interventions with needs, establishing related knowledge and skills, and using appropriate assessments for IEP. They reported language barriers, feeling unappreciated and lacking in knowledge of the American
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF CHINESE IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

educational system when they are in contact with professionals, since different cultural backgrounds continue to be an issue. One participant expressed concerns or uncertainty about what he was expected to do and accepted orders from professionals without complete understanding. Another participant shared his experience of being shuffled from one service provider to another because he is a culturally and linguistically diverse learner.

These experiences show that not all professionals who deliver services to students from immigrant families are knowledgeable about the families’ unique perceptions, beliefs, and values. For example, immigrant Chinese families perceive having a disability as God’s punishment for past sins, and these perceptions play an important role in how families work with social services. These differing beliefs, values, and cultural backgrounds held by parents and social service providers can create a wider communication gap and may affect student outcomes. Interventions are less effective if no consideration is given to the different needs of these culturally and linguistically diverse learners (Joshi, Eberly & Konzal, 2005).

Community relations & social interaction

Community relations and social interaction are important parts in the analysis of non-material resource. My study indicates that participants have positive correlations between feeling loved and belonging, and the extent of their community engagement and social interactions.

My neighbor who is a special education aide, received trainings in special education, she understand me and is the best friend of me.

I like staff in Chinatown library, they treat me nice so that’s the only place I go beside my home.

They told my mom not to feel shame, since people knows about my disability anyhow.
I like to go church and participate in the disability support group. It not only provides me snack and activities, but also shows love, care and involvement during interaction with their people. I like the way people talk to me.

When I first came to the U.S., I was so surprised that bus, stores, and restaurants have disabilities access. Better facilities provide us opportunities to go out to the public place!

Through my community engagement skills established in transition program, I got information about more job opportunities and unadvertised jobs. This even allows me to get referrals for better jobs which is not traditionally held by individuals with intellectual disabilities.

My dad is a janitor in my community church. I went to the church to stay with him every day after school and helped him to do some cleaning work. I learnt how to mop the floor little by little, as well as where to deposit trash. Three years later when a part time janitor position opened up, I got the job.

Participants do appreciate love, care and involvement during interactions with other people. The fact that participants reported that they most frequently go to places like the library and church supports the connection between having a sense of belonging and social interaction. In addition, participants live close to each other in order to feel that they are loved and that they belong. This corresponds with literature I reviewed regarding trends in community settings that encourage students with disabilities to be involved and function within a social and environmental context. These trends came about through a variety of legislation, policy and research, advocacy services and help people realize the objective “to live as valued and participating members of the community”. Encouraging them to participate in special activities provide people with intellectual disabilities with the conditions necessary for them to feel loved and to feel a sense of belonging. Feeling supported in social and economic participation
encourages them to participate further. This is a positive cycle. Participants feel thankful that better facilities and access provide them with the basic conditions necessary for community engagement and social interactions. The social skills training they received during transition enables them to initiate, monitor, and reinforce social skills development, such as sustaining interactions or giving attention to the quality of the interaction (McConnell, 2002).

My study also found that community relationships and social networks play a key role in the employment of students with intellectual disabilities, especially when they are qualified for comparatively fewer job opportunities. Having community relationships and social networks increases the likelihood of employment. For example, three out of my four participants found jobs through community connections because they were able to get more information about job opportunities, even unadvertised jobs. In addition, my participants indicated they can get better jobs not traditionally held by individuals with intellectual disabilities. However, my interview notes reveal that new immigrants have fewer connections with the mainstream employers because of how long they have been in the U.S., language barriers, and cultural differences. Their vocabulary pool about where they can work includes “restaurant, church, Chinese stores,” and their vocabulary pool about what positions they can get includes “cooking, cleaning, baggers”. Influenced by Chinese culture, which promotes freedom of speech, my participants are not as social as mainstream students under the same conditions which restricts their ability to make social connections even further.

The analysis above shows that community relations and social interactions form an important part in the analysis of non-material resource in the areas of social interaction, access to public facilities, as well as employment. However, my study also showed participants’ negative experiences in community relations and social interaction as follows.
I feel isolated from my peers. During school gatherings, my classmates teased me and made fun of me because I cannot follow instructions.

I know that I have equal rights to participate, but I don’t participate. My routine places are home, work, grocery stores, restaurants, TV or game. I don’t interact with real people. I don’t participate in human group activities to avoid being judged. No interactions, no hurts.

My family felt embarrassed by my behavior, so they decided to reduce my exposure into the community. However, this limits my social functioning and job skills further.

In order to avoid negative attitudes, my mother stays at home and looks after me. Therefore, she knows nothing about the outside world. She just knows how to hide.

My disability itself makes me not very sharing, with no flexibility, unable to think from other people’s point of view, so everybody believes that I am a troublemaker and try to avoid me. They tend to react with fear and abhorrence when they come into contact with me.

If people like me, I can talk with them more. However, I don’t like their eye contact and body gestures while talking to me.

Participants reflected that the attitudes they receive may prevent or limit their social interactions. How community members contacted them was important, as they could facilitate or limit contact between students and members of the public. Data collected from interviews show participants’ low levels of interaction. In collaborative activities, this translates into “no interactions, no hurts”. This corresponds with Gilmore and Cuskelly’s (2014) findings showing that people with disabilities remain socially outside, looking in, being silent, and passively participating in community settings. These negative attitudes that were collected in interview notes were mostly not directly or verbally expressed. It could be body languages, eye contact, the way people interact with participants, as well as the half-expressed language reflecting negative
images from their hearts. Interview data show that participants actually want to participate, but they are afraid of receiving these attitudes which hurt them further, since their self-confidence is already low. This corresponds with Emerson & McVilly’s (2004) findings that the social participation of people who have intellectual disabilities relies on the acceptance or interpersonal skills of individual members, who may not always be available. Therefore, there is a need to eliminate negative attitudes and promote a more positive image of people with intellectual disabilities in the community in order to promote community participation.

The definition of community participation does not only mean the use of facilities in the community available to everyone, but also being part of a growing network of relationships that include people with and without intellectual disabilities. Even with facilities and supports in place to encourage people with intellectual disabilities to participate in the community, many factors still prevent or limit participants’ social interactions. According to Hubert-Williams, Hastings, Owen, Burns, Day, Mulligan & Noone’s (2014) finding that simply change the physical environment of people with intellectual disabilities without considering how these changes affect social interaction can have negative consequences. For example, immigration history makes people with intellectual disabilities fear to participate in community relations because they are so afraid of been deported. The history of immigration makes people think only the strongest and most talented people can stay in the United States. Since they try to hide their disabilities, they might have reduced opportunities in social interactions and job opportunities, and therefore remain totally dependent on their families without taking on normal adult roles. Interview data show that even while sometimes community members were able to express acceptance of the presence of a person with an intellectual disability by engaging in positive interactions such as smiling, opening up a conversation, or offering assistance, participants were
often unsure how to interact. This corresponds to Bigby and Knox’s (2009) findings suggesting that promoting social interactions between strangers in public places would extend communication and provide more convivial moments in which a common purpose is shared. In addition, since the skills, motivations, and priorities of front-line support workers are perceived as important factors influencing the participation of service users, effectively supporting participation and identifying necessary staff skills becomes very important.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings of my research and described the lived experiences of Chinese immigrant students with intellectual disabilities who are in transition programs. Through an examination of codes and passages from interview transcripts, four major themes were identified: sense of self, change, family relationships, and resources. The discussion of sense of self examined participants’ self-perceptions, negative quality of life, normalcy, as well as self-determination. Participants showed appreciation for positive experiences they received such as being involved, loved and cared for, as well as being valued as a member of a group. However, while much progress has been made, there is still more work to do. My study revealed that participants experienced a lower quality of life, such as feeling lonely, helpless, stressed out, different, anxious, in pain, unhappy, and scared. In addition, they expressed feelings of wanting to hide. During my study, the majority of participants described believing or feeling different, or having been changed in some way as a result of having intellectual disabilities. Often, participants would rather stay with their assumption that it is the family’s sole responsibility to make decisions for them since the Chinese safety network is family based--blood relationships, extended family, and close friends.
Change was the second theme and covered to what extent participants want to make changes and to set goals for change, as well as how participants might make changes. Participants expressed desperately wanting to change areas such as basic needs and living standards. Research shows a need to encourage their realistic goals and adjust unrealistic goals. Barriers for change discovered were “no transition plan,” “nobody to ask for disability related information,” and “no role model.”

In the section devoted to family relationships, I analyzed beliefs around disability as a result of burden and sin, parents’ minimum involvement, as well as hiding. Study results showed that having intellectual disabilities influenced the life choices of participants and their families and resulted in the perception of families making sacrifices, although parents show minimal involvement in participants’ transition.

Resources is the last theme, and it covers material and non-material resources. Participants identified the lack of financial resources as a barrier for themselves and for their families. My study also indicated positive correlations between feeling secure in social interactions and establishing social bonds and positive interactions in the community for people with intellectual disabilities. There is a need to eliminate negative attitudes and promote a more positive image for people with intellectual disabilities in the community.

In the next chapter I will return to my research questions and draw on my findings to describe some of the most important things, make connections to different assumptions about disability that emerged in my findings that align with the social model of disability and Social Darwinism, as well as to explore practical implications of my research, especially for transition programs that work with immigrant students.
Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction

In this chapter I will return to my research questions and draw on my findings discussed in the previous chapters to describe some of the most important things I learned. I will also make connections to different assumptions about disability that emerged in my findings that align with the social model of disability and Social Darwinism. Next, I’ll explore practical implications of my research, especially for transition programs that work with immigrant students. I’ll end this chapter by discussing the limitations of the research and suggestions for further research.

Research questions

The Chinese culture and its history of immigration to the United States presents unique challenges in overcoming cultural attitudes toward people with disabilities and in accommodating peoples’ lack of awareness of “disability rights.” In order to discover what challenges and opportunities there are for Chinese immigrant students with intellectual disabilities, my study answered three research questions. My first research questions focused on the experiences of newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities in the United States. My second two questions focused on participants’ quality of life, communication styles and friendships, as well as how their families make sense of their disabilities and their experiences in transition programs. For my research, I collected and interpreted data of experiences of newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities in general in addition to researching what their experience have been in transition programs. I’m going to synthesize both the findings and the discussions yielded in previous chapters one by one. The
first question is more general and the second two are more specific, both are but still about participants’ experiences, so there is some overlap in the issues discussed.

Perceptions of participants

Perceptions of combined resources

One of the most obvious experiences of newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities in the United States is the perception of the combined resources they have such as money, job security, places to live, the risks they can bear, and the choices they have. Participants and their parents revealed that survival is their biggest priority. They are lower income families, and parents have to work longer hours to offset low wages and do not have time to look after their kids. They identified the lack of financial resources as a barrier for themselves and their families. This fact became the hidden clue and a driving force during the whole process of my interviews. Most of my participants answered the questions “Where do you live? Do you rent your house or own?” with tears, long responses, and deep emotions. Not only did they keep repeating the vocabulary of poverty such as lacking rice, gas, and milk, but also displayed a pool of poverty related reasoning. For example, one participant revealed that he spent a substantial amount of income to buy lottery tickets with the hope of paying off bills when he wins the lottery. He said, “During my lunch break, I did not eat lunch. I saved my time, hurry up to lottery station and give them all money I have.”

Poverty impacts the families I interviewed on a large scale because it affects many factors in participants’ life. It is not just about money; it also limits their choices. Participants not only focused on economic definitions of poverty but also include more multidimensional measures such as access to health, education or food security. For example, waiting long hours at Cook
County Hospital made one participant’s health even worse. Had she had health care, instead, she would have paid $60 cash up front and received care to at least control her symptoms.

Participants’ perceptions of combined resources also include non-material resources, such as the knowledge required to seek the right interventions, to understand rules and instructions in explicit ways, to facilitate communication with schools and other parents, and to set up realistic transition goals. They also reported language barriers, not understanding American culture, and needing background information when they are in contact with professionals. The data collected from my interviews clearly show participants’ lack of non-material resources, such as low relevant knowledge or skills, limited knowledge of English, and thoughts and views that might be different from the mainstream. For example, participants got accustomed to using body language or silence instead of expressing their thoughts and feedback explicitly according to rules and procedures.

On the other hand, the lack of resources becomes a double-edged sword, motivating participants and their families to work hard no matter where they work, to help each other with blood family relations, and to be respectful as ways to combine their strengths for mutual benefits to overcome the current hardship and to look forward to tomorrow’s sunrise. Interview results revealed the advantages of Chinese culture in fighting against poverty and making progress as a group, even in the most difficult situation. One participant said that “I’m willing to work extra hours in order to save money and give to my relatives who need it the most.” This mindset creates a strong defense for participants’ survival as a group. Participants exhibit characteristics of extreme bravery and generosity within blood family relationships. Because of their joint efforts, each set of my interview notes can be translated into a vivid story recording their progression in settling down in the new environment which might end with them getting
jobs, buying houses, earning education and skills, and living healthy and meaningful lives in the long run. In Chinese culture people believe that “everybody should work,” “women should work,” and “people with disabilities should work” in order to make contributions. Having a job itself brings about pride not only financially, but also spiritually. For example, one participant shared the following: “I work as a dish washer. I feel proud that I have a job.” This was the attitude of all of the participants, that having a job is an important part of having a meaningful life, especially in Chinese culture. On one hand, not relying on social services makes them struggle in the short run. On the other hand, they experience self-growth during the suffering and thus become more sufficient.

In addition, in the collectivist Chinese culture people have developed a strong resistance to the lack of food and resources. For example, Chinese people are very generous in sharing food. Every time I went to participants’ homes, I was invited to eat or given a pack of food to take home. One participant said, “Be happy at least we have something to eat right now.” Another participant said, “Even though I don’t have much food, I don’t mind sharing half to my friend.” Because China does not have a stable insurance system, people who were raised in the Chinese culture save money and accumulate assets in order to be prepared for risk and uncertainty. In this culture, people save money instead of “enjoying life.” American culture encourages “the pursuit of happiness” while Chinese culture encourages people to “eat bitter, grow harder”. With China’s limited resources and oversized population, the understanding is that everybody should undertake some burden for the community.

In this section, I summarized the perceptions of combined resources my participants have based on the results of previous chapters which analyzed participants’ vocabularies, reasoning, the way they answered interview questions, such as the use of body language, eye contact,
gestures, as well as how they describe certain objects through their viewpoints. Having a child with a disability negatively impacts a family’s resources. Poverty is a defining issue. It is the backdrop in the lives of my participants. However, these families are strong and brave in the face of poverty. In the following section, I’m going to summarize the findings and analyses of my second research question, which is about participants’ quality of life and communication styles, and their participation in decision-making. Although my summary is specific to the areas mentioned above, my findings still belong to the doctrine of participants’ experiences as immigrants as discussed in the previous section.

**Self-perceptions**

Participants expressed positive self-perceptions through their descriptions of being involved, being able to show love and care to others, being valued as a member of a group. Participants also revealed the negative self-perceptions of being people with intellectual disabilities and of being new immigrants. Negative identity-forming perceptions frequently appeared in answering interview questions explicitly or indirectly. Participants said, “I’m stupid” and “I don’t believe I have the ability to do that.” I also found that participants had already developed a vocabulary to distinguish themselves as “regular people without disabilities” in order to define themselves as “normal”. My study also addressed participants’ quality of life. Many expressed feelings of loneliness, feeling stressed out, feeling different, feeling anxiety and pain, feeling unhappy, and feeling scared.

In my research, I discovered that in terms of cultural self-determination, Chinese culture requires that people focus on collective wisdom and the unwritten message is “minimize what individuals feel,” while American culture causes people to focus on individualism. Chinese culture causes people to focus away from how people feel. This is directly correlated to
participants’ lower quality of life. Although they want to say something; they are not sure if other people care. During the study, words that frequently appeared in the interview notes such as “comply”, “complete”, “follow”, “attend”, “obey”, clearly show participants’ often lack self-determination and the represents collectivist side of the Chinese culture. Participants showed discomfort talking about the topic of self-determination. They sometimes told me that they did not want to discuss self-determination, and other times they changed the subject. In addition, some participants seemed to be confused about the meaning of self-determination, as well as how to interpret the idea into rights and obligations. Although transition programs expect participants to demonstrate self-control and appropriate behavior, participants reflected that they were actually accepting little autonomy. Even when some participants were required to act with autonomy and control, they referred to having self-control as a problem that frequently occurred. Participants would rather stay with their assumption that it is the family’s sole responsibility to make decisions for them since in the Chinese culture, since the safety network is family based--blood relationships, extended family, and close friends. On one hand, the collective side of Chinese culture makes them rely on their group. On the other hand, the wording of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights should empower them to see the world as an individual. In addition, words, such as equality, privacy, dignity, option, property, happiness, appeared in my interview notes when participants answered interview questions. The knowledge of these words represents effective personal empowerment, even if sometimes they did not explicitly express this as social, economic and cultural human rights. I assume that they learned these words in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from transition programs, and I’m happy that learning enhances their self-confidence through its fruits of knowledge, skills and problem solving.
In this section, I discussed participants’ positive and negative senses of self, their quality of life, and their senses of self-determination. In the next section, I’m going to discuss how my participants’ families make sense of their children’s disabilities.

**Family perceptions about disabilities**

Participants’ comments revealed that they saw a disability as the result of “a sin in the past,” which resulted in the idea of them needing to “make sacrifices to reduce my sin.” This is a common perception in Chinese culture. Therefore, one participant said, “I lower myself and make myself humble” because they thought it was something to reduce the results of any wrongdoing. Another participant said “I donated a threshold for a temple on my behalf and let thousands of people to step on it in order to reduce my sin”. This is different from the ideas put forth in American culture, which often empowers dignity, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness, as well as promoting the brightness of human character and personality.

Participants’ parents showed panic, fear, worry, and a sense of loss, and suffering because they were not able to contribute much to their group success. Because of the lack of resources and huge population, competition between groups is high in China and the benefits of the competition go to the whole group. The quickly growing GDP, the rapid innovation of science and technology, and the expansion of higher education contribute to the sense that “only the one best group can survive.” In contrast, American culture promotes involvement in school and in the workplace and “provides reasonable accommodation to perform essential job functions.” American education is “achievement based” and encourages students to be “as good as they can be.” The Chinese “talent selection system” is very competitive and very selective. This prevents people with disabilities from developing a sense of engagement and contentment.
with being as they are, and prevents them from recognizing the importance of their active participation.

Participants found that people in the community hold substantial reservations about interacting with them. Disability movements in China are far less mature than in American culture. However, many of the stigmas regarding people with disabilities experienced in Chinese culture were also experienced in American history. For example, unfair laws in America, which were on the books in some cities until the 1970s, deemed it illegal for people with disabilities to be in public places. It is a popular belief in Chinese culture that intellectual disabilities are diseases that are contagious and so Chinese people “feel shame to let them go to the public place.” Because of this, people try to avoid building close relationships with the families of disabled people because they are afraid of being affected by “the disease,” and many families of disabled people just don’t want other people to know about their disabled family members and try to avoid the conversation. Many Chinese people tend to respond with fear, discomfort, and aversion when they come into contact with people with intellectual disabilities. This makes disabled people lose opportunities to become meaningful members of the community and makes actively participating in transition placement, curriculum, instruction and evaluation very difficult. People with intellectual disabilities may lose opportunities to cultivate their social skills and may, therefore, participate much less in social and recreational activities. In addition, many participants revealed that people in the community don’t even believe that people with intellectual disabilities could gain independent living skills, job skills and communication skills through transition and intervention. They only believe that people with disabilities belong in sheltered, government sponsored work sites, so they may assume that it is not worth it to make the effort to participate in transition. Putting lower expectations on people with disabilities could
limit their self-confidence and creativity. There is a need to promote the idea that participating in transition not only benefits participants financially, but also benefits the society through increasing economic productivity for the community. This would increase the acceptance level of people with intellectual disabilities.

In this section, I discussed how my participants’ families make sense of their child’s disabilities. Findings show that many stigmas experienced in Chinese culture were also experienced in American history. Participants saw having a disability as “a sin in the past,” which resulted in the idea that people needed to make sacrifices to reduce the sin. There is a need to break the attitudinal barriers that are associated with people who have disabilities.

**Common assumptions emerged as themes**

The previous part of this chapter analyzed research questions was about the experiences of newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities in the United States: participants’ quality of life; communication styles and friendships; the ways in which their families make sense of their disabilities and their experiences. Drawing from these findings, this section analyzes common assumptions, which emerged as themes through analysis. In analyzing the themes that emerged in the previous sections, I found that most of the participants’ perceptions were underpinned or influenced by a social model of disability and/or by a Social Darwinism, which will be discussed as follows.

**Social Model of disability**

From the way participants talked, and the words they used to describe their lived stories, the themes that emerged largely reflected their perceptions of the barriers they have to overcome because of society’s perception of a disability as simply a medical and biologically based condition. From my interview notes, I summarized clues about how these barriers affect their
abilities to be independent and equal in community engagement and social interactions. The attitudinal barriers about people with disabilities can be witnessed through society members’ intimidation, bias, and panic. One participant revealed that “When I receive positive experiences, such as being involved, loved and cared for, as well as been valued as a member of a group, I feel relaxed and show appreciation.” Many findings in the previous chapter such as “Half Apple’s Appreciation” and “I play good piano, and people were singing and dancing surround me” also correspond with this. However, I also heard many comments like “When I receive negative experiences such as being a person with intellectual disabilities as well as being a new immigrant, I feel lonely, helpless, stressed out, different, wanting to hide, feeling anxiety and pain, unhappy, as well as being scared”. Data collected in my study show positive correlations between the way participants feel and the narratives expressed by other people in the community. Sometimes these narratives were not directly or verbally expressed, with people using half-expressed language, or they could be in forms of body language or eye contact. Findings from previous chapters showed the connection between feeling loved and belonging and the extent of participants’ community engagement and social interactions. Participants revealed that ways community members contacted them were important, as they could facilitate or limit contact between participants and members of the public. Participants expressed that they do appreciate love, care, and involvement during interactions with other people. Interview data show that they actually want to participate, but were afraid of attitudes that might hurt them further, since their self-confidence is low. Participants revealed tremendous fear of looking bad in front of others, which caused a great sense of loneliness and lack of self-confidence. Some participants reported feeling that they remain socially outside, looking in and being silent, and passive in community
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settings. Data collected from interview also show participants’ low levels of interaction in collaborative activities which translated into “no interactions, no hurts”.

Environmental barriers, which limit the access of people with disabilities to environments or facilities, create further disabilities by building obstacles to inclusion. Participants feel thankful that better facilities and access help them to interact with the community and ultimately helps with their confidence level. One participant said, “I’m so happy that I can use wheelchairs to go public facilities such as the aquarium and the Field Museum.” Another participant said “Back in China, we do not have wheelchair access in many public places.” Institutional barriers, which include legislation, policies, and procedures, may create discrimination against people with disabilities. According to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, attempts to change, “fix,” or “cure” individuals could be considered discriminatory prejudiced, especially when used against the wishes of people with disabilities. However, in large part due to the portrayal that those who have disabilities are unable to make choices or lack agency they are often seen as dependent on others (Grigal & Hart, 2008). For example, participants show that they did not want to discuss topics of self-determination. They would rather stay with their pre-assumption that it is the family’s sole responsibility to make decisions for them since the Chinese safety network is family based--blood relationships, extended family, and close friends.

In order to remove these barriers which affect the ability of people with disabilities to be independent and equal in community engagement and social interactions, activists have made progress by looking at how society is organized rather than looking at a person’s impairment (Fairclough, 2010). Advocates argued that having a disability is a social condition that brings about discrimination and unmerited stigma, which needlessly harms and restricts the lives of those with disabilities and results in economic disparities, social isolation, and oppression. Just as
American society is further along than China in disability rights, as well as in the social model of disabilities. The rights people already achieved were the results of efforts made by activists and intellectual theorists, which made the American disability movement better off than some other countries. The disability movement has progressed for decades. Disability advocates are working globally to break working, education, and social barriers which limit people with disabilities from performing like other citizens. For example, Easter Seals was founded in 1919 to serve people who were excluded from the community. In the 1950s, disabled veterans and people with disabilities began the barrier-free movement. In 1978, the National Council on Disabilities was established to promote policies, programs, practices, and procedures that guarantee equal opportunity for all people with disabilities.

However, the disability movement has a long way to go in promoting the social model of disabilities and breaking social barriers. For example, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment and requires equal rights for all people with disabilities in areas of transportation and accessibility to public facilities, equal rights in education and employment, as well as equal housing and independent living. However, the literature I reviewed shows that students with intellectual disabilities often remain socially outside, looking in, being silent, and passively participating in their communities (Qualter, Brown, Munn and Rotenberg, 2010). One participant said “I was so happy that the
Chicago Aquarium has wheel chair access so I can go there. However, most of us still can’t because of other factors such as the cost.”

In summary, those working from a social model of disability are working toward breaking barriers by looking at how society is organized rather than by looking at a person’s impairment. American society is further along in disability rights, as well as in the social model of disabilities. However, participants still reveal the existence of transportation and institutional barriers. There is a need to promote the social model of disability further in order to counter this.

**Social Darwinism**

Social Darwinism applies to “survival of the fittest.” In human society, it is the belief that the best will thrive and the weak ones will be weeded out. The theory states that individuals in society are subject to the same biological concepts as plants and animals. From this perspective, the right to survive is not equal since the strongest and the fittest individuals gain the priority to survive and flourish, while the weak and unfit ones perish. Life is interpreted as a test of genes and the ability to think, which lead to extending or terminating people’s genetic or family line. Instead of promoting “equal rights to survive,” the theory discriminates against or excludes various groups of people on the basis of perceived biological inferiority. Data collected during my interviews disseminate participants’ reflections and questions about being ostracized and rejected in society. One participant said, “I don’t often express my feelings and happiness, because nobody will listen. No contact, no communication, no common interest. There seems a glass wall between me and people around me.” Based on the assumptions around “the weak ones will perish,” new immigrant Chinese students and their families often have extensive negative attitudes towards participating in transition programs, for example, refusing to attend transition programs and feeling shame in talking about their disabilities. This is because participating in
transition programs means putting on the label “I have a disability, so I will perish” and letting the whole world know that they have a disability. Instead of attaining skills needed to become meaningful members of the community, many families just don’t want other people to know. I have three critiques of Social Darwinism, which was expressed or implied in most of participants’ perceptions during my research. First of all, having a disability does not mean that one will perish. During human history, disabilities have been viewed in different ways as cultural responses across time, culture, and place. For example, indigenous cultures believed disability occurred when someone lacked or had weak community relations (Nielsen, 2012).

Many legislations, such as Affirmative Action and the Americans with Disabilities Acts work against discrimination based upon “genes” in forms of race and disabilities in order to create a fair and equitable society. During my interviews, participants to some extent expressed that being different was not just described as something negative. One participant said, “with my disability, I’m still a skillful worker.” Another participant said, “I use my income to purchase my food, what law did I offend?” There is a need to help participants and families view human society as something that promotes humanity, rights, equity, and dignity. Transition programs need to teach Universal Human Rights and disability studies approaches that reject charity models. Back in China, Darwin’s (1859) the science of evolution was endorsed after 1949 by the communist party with the purpose to motivate people to work hard rather than putting people on a scale to decide who should survive (Ellegård, 1990). “Struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest” were written down in school textbooks together with “everybody should participate in workforce,” “everybody vote,” and “everybody should receive nine years of education”.

Second, from Social Darwinism, people were divided into “classes” with the “fittest” ones superior to the “unfit” ones of the world. The result was unjust and uniform policies and
practices toward people “the unfit ones”. This corresponds with the Industrial Revolution, which brought systematic industrialization, urbanization, and the material and ideological changes associated with capitalist development. Therefore, “capability of work” which was associated with wage labor and paid employment became an important factor to “weigh the importance of individuals.” During my interviews, participants talked about “uniform,” “full-time, paid employment.” They were so proud without my even asking. I told them, “Even without this, you are still a valuable member of our society.” Chinese culture seems similar since it promotes brightness of joint strength and the idea that everybody must contribute. In this culture people who are not able to contribute that much may feel ashamed and “downgraded.” Participants believe that the people who have the most resources and make the most contributions are “higher”. Since people with disabilities have fewer resources and sometimes less “ability,” they saw themselves as “lower class people.” Therefore, individuals with disabilities are often subject to the assumption that they are unable to contribute to society or become productive and independent citizens (Duvdevany & Arar, 2004).

Third, instead of “the pursuit if happiness,” fears and prejudices were produced since individuals were subject to the same Darwinian laws of natural selection as plants and animals in sharing resources. My study reflects participants’ families’ panic, fear, worry, sense of loss, and suffering because they have to undertake the burden of having a child with intellectual disability. My study also revealed participants’ lower quality of life brought about by their feeling lonely, helpless, stressed out, different, and wanting to hide, feeling anxious and pained, unhappy, and scared. One participant said, “My mom feels panic when seeing caller ID from my school because she was too stressed out.” Another participant said, “The goals of expected behavior instruction is to encourage common rules and make the society peaceful and harmony, not to
judge people into different classes”. Social Darwinism discourages providing help and support because “the fittest of all walks of life favors stronger, genuinely deserving people.” The combination of efforts to enhance the lives of people with disabilities tries to break a range of material, political and cultural barriers to meaningful mainstream employment and social participation for people with disabilities. Work is only a part of human life; life is as bright as they are.

I saw these two different sets of assumptions—the social model of disabilities and Social Darwinism—play out in my interviews. Some participants even used both beliefs to describe the same events. One participant said “I must work hard, so my supervisor can give me extra hours instead of fire me. My work place provide me accommodation, so I can function well to complete my work.” From this, I saw that social model of disabilities and Social Darwinism appears in one sentence and from one participant. Based on my interview data, Survival of the fittest did exist in many aspects of our lives, with assigning an equal sign between having a disability and perish. The other participant said, “I need to learn work skills to survive, then I can help my family to grow instead of dragging them down.” Some participants also acknowledge some aspects of the theory as motivating competition and the progression of human beings to “grow harder”.

In summary, Social Darwinism applies to “survival of the fittest” with the belief that the best will thrive and the weak ones will be weeded out. While criticizing Social Darwinism in assigning unequal rights and, dividing human beings into classes with the “fittest” ones superior to the “unfit” ones of the world, as well as in creating worry and fear, I saw these two different sets of assumptions play out in my interviews.

The practical implications of my study
My study analyzed the life experiences of students in transition programs and their families, as well as analyzing their mindsets and cultures. The major findings of my research are outlined above. The practical implications of my study are that people working with new Chinese immigrants need to understand the two cultures—American and Chinese.

The first practical implication of my study is advocacy versus the collectivist culture back in China. Participants revealed that when they were back in China, they got used to a collectivistic culture which focus on the needs and interests of the group as a whole over the needs and desires of individuals. In the collectivist culture, relationships with other members of the group and personal relations play a central role in each person's identity. People focus on their position in the group instead of what they actually get as an individual. For example, people who sit in front have higher positions and can have more influence in the group. A group can be one family, one working team or a school class. When the group succeeds, everyone succeeds. When the group fails, everyone suffers. What an individual can get is based on the decisions of people who have authority in the group. They usually consider the interest of the whole group, while caring for people with special needs. One participant said, “resources are not always enough, peaceful and collaboration has the first priority.” Since the Chinese culture is based on focusing the goals of a group or a community over the individual, working together to create peace and harmony among group members is strongly encouraged. Giving up one piece of individualism may facilitate group prosperity. Therefore, advocating for self-interest could be regarded as disrespectful and selfish, and asking for something might be seen as disrespectful.

However, American culture is strongly individualistic and emphasizes the interests of individuals over the entire group. In this cultural context, speaking out and advocating for themselves is encouraged. There is a need to educate participants about cultural differences.
between the two countries, the necessity of speaking out, and how to speak out. Some participants were afraid that speaking about their needs and asking for accommodation could be interpreted as saying “I cannot overcome hardship by myself.” However, in the American education system, asking for accommodation is allowed and encouraged since people need to fight for their rights. Therefore, there is a need to let new immigrants know that self-determination is not disobedience, standing up and speaking out is not dis-respectful, and requesting accommodation is not creating a burden for the society.

The second implication is community enrichment vs blood relationships. In Chinese culture, the blood-based relationship plays a rich role in helping people to join as a group and to defend against risk together. However, if an individual is only restricted to blood relationships, then people’s environments will be limited. Within the blood relationship, people are very generous and sharing, both financially and spiritually. For example, it is very hard to get insurance or a loan in China, but it is very easy to borrow money from people within the group. Another example is that blood-based relationships help many people find jobs because there is trust between the employer and the family, and people with referrals usually stay in the job longer. Most of the participants in my study got jobs from referrals through the blood based relationships or through long-term friends. “My dad is a janitor in the church, and I go there every afternoon. He taught me how to do cleaning, and I help him to do the work so we can go home earlier. When there was a position open, I got the job.” However, “favors must be paid back.” Since giving to community cannot get immediate and direct return, Chinese people are not as generous as American people to people they don’t know. One participant said “It is very, very hard for charity fundraising in the Chinese community.” Another participant said “People without that relationship are not easy to find job or get trust from employers.” In the US, a child's
disability is considered the community's responsibility, whereas in China, the responsibility rests upon the parents or within the blood relationship both financially and emotionally. New immigrants are afraid of drawing from the community because they may not even know that people living in the U.S. have a safety net that does not exist in some other countries. They believe that applying for social welfare might cause them to lose their immigrant status, and getting free money from anywhere else is a trap which might cause them to lose all their property. They would rather stay with their assumption that it is the family’s sole responsibility to support their kids with intellectual disabilities. Because they are afraid of drawing from the community, they don’t contribute much to the community. “When everybody contributes a little, our community will be better.” There is a need to advocate for contributing more to the community as well as not being afraid to draw from the community.

Reflections of the Researcher

This project took me two years. This a journey of my own learning about research, about participants, about disability, about myself as a researcher, and about transition services. I feel thankful for all I have learned.

This journey helped me realize that communication at this level needs far more than language skills. It requires skills such as relationship building, cultural sensitivity, an ability to talk about sensitive topics, translating between concrete languages and abstract questions/data, as well as analyzing assumptions behind what is said. I learned valuable skills such as how to talk to people from different social economic backgrounds, trying to take their perspectives and use their language, as well as learning to build trust by sitting down and eating together, touching their heart and letting them touch mine.
In addition, this journey increased the scope of my existing knowledge and reasoning. I realized that the world of disabled people is much bigger than getting the right treatment. This involves building sustainable economic resources, fulfilling one’s sense of love and belongings, establishing self-confidence and achievement, building friends and connections, as well as acquiring knowledge and skills for self-determination. This also involves a system which provides clean water, wheel chair access, food safety, adequate medical treatment, as well as appropriate education system.

**Recommendations**

I have the following recommendations for social workers and policy makers to counteract the different cultural assumptions. Participants feel thankful and appreciative of the services they receive. However, even with the support and services provided to their children by different educational settings, participants of this study reported that they faced language and cultural barriers. They revealed facing difficulties adjusting to new environments and, therefore, required more supports in translation, cultural adaptation, English proficiency, as well as in getting jobs and secure income resources. Sometimes they were not sure what they were expected to do. Communication differences make understanding the American educational system difficult when they are in contact with professionals, and they often require considerable academic and social supports. In addition, many participants revealed experiences of being denied or shuffled from one service provider to another because they cannot express their needs in an acceptable way. These are recommendations for transition programs. First, students should be taught the history of the disability rights movement. This will not only let students know how much progress has been made in the past decades, it will also encourage self-advocacy. American society is further along in disability rights. Disability advocates are working globally to break working, education,
and social barriers, which limit people with disabilities from performing like other citizens. However, disability movements in China are far less mature. Many stigmas experienced in Chinese culture were also experienced in America’s history. For example, the Immigration Act of 1924 increasingly restricted access by potential immigrants deemed defective morally, physically, or intellectually (Nielsen, 2012). There is a possibility that in many developing countries such as China, disability rights will grow through the efforts of disability advocates, through education, and through the development of local economies. Second, it is important to connect transition programs to disability rights organizations and network advocacy groups. Immigrants from China may not know that there are possibilities other than through personal relationships and blood-based families. There are organizations working to minimize employment, education, and social barriers that limit people with disabilities from performing like other citizens, if immigrants from China don’t know that these organizations exist, they cannot utilize them. This sheds a light on new immigrants coming from many developing countries that are working on equal rights in transportation and accessibility to public facilities, education and employment, and housing and independent living.

The third recommendation is to add the study of disability laws and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to transition program curricula. Transition programs are not just for job training, but to help students to be open to searching for possibilities. For example, students should know that The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 paved the way to secure equal opportunities and equal rights for all people with disabilities in areas of transportation and accessibility to public facilities, equal rights in education and employment, as well as equal housing and independent living. Understanding the definitions of equality, privacy, dignity, and options represents effective personal empowerment. Learning the Universal Declaration of
Human Rights enhances the self-confidence of people with disabilities through its fruits of knowledge, skills and problem solving. The last recommendation is to provide similar training for parents. This is to secure the atmosphere for family to acquire the same knowledge that students have. Parents need to understand, too.

The four recommendation is that parents become involved with students’ education and learn about the laws and rights in the U.S. Participants and their parents in my study identified the lack of participation and involvement because they were already stressed out by their current financial condition or because they thought disabilities were caused by a sin in the past. Being involved and learning about the laws and rights in the U.S. will help see more possibilities for people with disabilities and will help them solve problems. I would recommend parents to participant in the Newly Immigrated Parents Workshops at Chinatown library and find strategies to get them involved.

I also have recommendations on employment that parents need to change their expectations on transition programs’ career development. Students’ career should be based on their interests and abilities, as well as to be realistic. Their employment possibilities can be privately owned businesses such as childcare, retail, mailroom, or food service. Influenced by the Chinese culture, many participants only prefer to work at publicly owned enterprises and government agencies. They don’t even know that in the United States, only a small portion of employment is state institutions. I would recommend parents to participant in the employment workshops and get more information about what is realistic career development.

**Challenges of this study**

This study has two challenges. First of all, Chinese culture does not encourage people to admit to having intellectual disabilities, and people with disabilities try to hide their disabilities,
even in front of doctors, social workers, or EAP teachers. Although I established long term friendships with participants’ families and acted as their year-round contact person when they sought for help, they still tried to minimize their pain in front of me. There is a need to educate them to help increase their awareness.

The second challenge was participants’ English and Chinese proficiency levels during my interviews. Translating participants’ interview data into English was difficult because some of them don’t speak English well, and some do not speak Chinese well. China has several dialects and people from different regions may not completely understand each other. Even as a native speaker of Chinese who speaks English well, I, at times, still had difficulty finding exact words and phrases to fit what was stated in the participants’ local language. In addition, because this is four families in one area, of similar income, that these findings are not generalizable to all Chinese people, that Chinese people diverse and have diverse beliefs and this is looking at only families. Furthermore, people with different education levels may have different ways to describe things. I would sometimes interpret the participants’ “half-implied meaning” through my own experiences and views as an immigrant, rather than as each participant’s unique personal experience.

Recommendations for future research

My study was limited to newly migrated students from China in the Chicago area. I suggest that further research should include other Chinese immigrants in different regions, such as in the San Francisco Bay area, because there are immigrants with different occupations and education levels there. My study also suggests the need for similar studies on other groups of immigrants, such as immigrants from Mexico, because people from different cultures might have different perceptions of disabilities. I also recommend that future studies include the perceptions
of service staff working with new Chinese immigrants who have children with disabilities in order to have a view from both students and service providers.

I only evaluated the families of four participants because this topic is so sensitive. I would recommend gaining information from more participants in future studies. Even though I have been working in the community for years and know these families well, it took me a lot of direct and indirect effort to find participants and maintain their participation. My participant selection approach could possibly limit my study because I only interviewed people I knew personally.

Third, I recommend developing a way to maintain accuracy in sending and receiving information with participants who have certain intellectual disabilities, as well as to transcribe interview notes using the same criteria. For example, I used four different ways to explain the world “self-determination” to them. Our current mutual understanding is based on the relationship with my participants for years. I know my participants well, and I customized interview questions to fit their communication styles. People with certain intellectual disabilities may have reduced vocabularies, logic, or initiation to communicate. How we can get the most information from them directly, instead of from their caregivers is a question to explore. In receiving information, I try not to emphasize individuals understanding of each piece of their story, but to interpret them as a whole. Future research needs to evaluate the most appropriate language in talking to participants, as well as to help them by opening future lines of communication and networking.

**Conclusion**

My research addresses three questions:
What are the experiences of newly immigrated Chinese students with intellectual disabilities who are in transition services in the United States?

What is known about their quality of life, communication styles, and their ability to make and maintain friendships?

How do their families make sense of their children’s disabilities and their experiences in the program?

I conducted a qualitative ethnographic study. My choice of methodology served three purposes: first, it enabled me to explore the ethnographic cross-cultural description of the nature, types, and manifestations of Chinese views and traditions and its effects on people’s attitudes toward disabilities; second, it enhanced the general understanding of causes and consequences contributing to Chinese people’s views towards people with disabilities; third, it helped to inform the development of interventions of transition services for immigrant students with intellectual disabilities, as well as to bridge the service gap with mainstream transition services.

The results of my study indicated that participants’ senses of self were informed largely by negative experiences with others, as well as by negative experiences of being a new immigrant. They expressed having lower quality of life, such as feeling lonely. They also expressed desperately wanting to change in areas such as acquiring basic needs and achieving better living standards. Research shows a need to encourage students to set realistic goal and adjust unrealistic goals. I discovered that there were a number of barriers to change: “no transition plan,” “nobody to ask for disability related information,” and “no role models.” In addition, study results showed that having an intellectual disability influenced participants and their families’ life choices and resulted in the perception of sacrifices being made, although parents show minimum involvement in participants’ transition. Regarding perceptions of
combined resources, participants identified lacking of financial resources as a barrier for themselves and their families. My study also indicated positive correlations between people who have intellectual disabilities feeling secure in social interactions and establishing bonds and interactions with the community. There is a need to eliminate negative attitudes and promote a more positive image for people with intellectual disabilities in the community.

I found two distinctly different sets of assumptions at work in my participants and their families. I saw some indication of a social model of disability and of Social Darwinism. This connected with cultural understandings of disability, with U.S. culture more advanced in relationship to disability rights. My study discussed practical implications such as advocacy versus the collectivist culture in China, and community enrichment versus blood relationship. My study also provided practical implications for social workers and policy makers, transition programs, and parents. Challenges and recommendations for future research were also discussed.
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Appendix A: Inform consent form

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges and successes of Chinese immigrant students with intellectual disabilities in transition services in the greater Chicago area. The researcher is a doctoral candidate of Disability and Equity in Education at National Louis University who has deep connections with the community. Dr. Terry Smith is supervising the research. Participants can contact the researcher and her supervisor if there is any questions or concerns about participants’ rights in this research.

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Participants agree to be interviewed and grant researcher the right to use information from recordings and notes taken in these interviews. Participation is voluntary and participants can refuse to answer any questions and can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or any negative consequence.

Participants will be interviewed three times in the form of semi-structured interviews, each interview may last 30 minutes. The interview will be recorded. Participants will be interviewed in the Chicago Chinatown library, unless they choose to be interviewed at their house.

Participants’ names will not be disclosed and the identities of participants will in no way be revealed. Findings will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to
individual participants. All information given will be kept confidential by assigning a code number. The list connecting participants’ names to this number will be kept in a locked file in the researcher’s office. After the interview is transcribed, the recorded interview will be destroyed to secure privacy.

There are no anticipated risks, harm, or discomfort related to this study. Information collected in this study can help in advocating for the rights of Chinese migrants with intellectual disabilities. It may also have some policy implications.

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign the form below. A signature will indicate agreement to participate.

Name of participant_______________________________________
Signature of participant____________________________________
Date______________________


Appendix B: Interview questions

I would like to thank you for taking time to become part of this study. My name is Xin Qing. I’m a Doctoral candidate in National Louis University Disability and Equity in Education program. I am conducting a study on lived experiences of migrated students with intellectual disabilities. I will conduct three interviews on each participant with 30 minutes for each interview. Our conversation will be tape recorded to ensure a complete and accurate representation is maintained. These questions are for the child to participant and parents are welcome to do expiation and translation, as well as to provide information and ideas.

Perceptions about yourself

How long have you been living in the US, how old were you when you came in the US?
How and why did you come to the United States of America?
Do you more like living in China or US? Why? What is best about each place?
What did you/your family do in China, what do you/your family do now, and what do you want to do in the future?
Do you have enough money?
Did you go vacation this year, any vacation plans?
How do you feel? When do you feel happy, sad, proud, lonely?
What do you do in your spare time?
Are you able to take care of your independent life skills, like brush teeth, doing laundry?
Can you take public transportation?

Family relations

Tell me about your family.
Who is the person you are closest to your family?
Are you currently living with your family?
Do you plan to live on your own one day?
Tell me the best day of your family.

Relationships with the external environment.

Are you a good worker?
What has helped you the most with work?
Tell me your best day at work.
Tell me about your worst day at work.
Were you a good student?
Tell me about your best day at school.
Tell me about your worst day at school.
Do you like your supervisor?
How does your supervisor treat you?
How do your coworkers treat you?
Do you have a best friend? What do you do together?
When and where did you participant in transition program?
Do you like it?
What did you learn?
Where do you work, where did you work before, where do you want to work in the future?
Are people in the community treat you well, do you treat them well? Do they hide away from you?
What services or help did you receive in China?
What service do you receive in US? Are you happy with the service you receive?

Wrapping up
Is there anything else you would like to share before we conclude? Do you have any questions you would like to ask before we wrapping up?