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Working for a Dream and Living for the Future: Leisure Constraints and Negotiation Strategies among Chinese International Graduate Students

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Abstract. The goal of this study was to investigate the meanings behind leisure constraints experienced by Chinese international graduate students and the negotiation efforts that they had adopted. The study was based on 16 semi-structured conversational interviews with Chinese graduate students attending the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the academic year of 2003/2004. The constraints negotiation framework proposed by Jackson et al. (1993) was employed in this study to analyze negotiation of constraints in leisure and non-leisure aspects of life and on behavioural and cognitive levels. The interviews revealed that participants experienced a number of constraints on leisure, including lack of time, language barrier and cultural differences, lack of friends, and feelings of lack of entitlement to leisure. Their constraints negotiation strategies were mostly of cognitive nature and involved devaluing the importance of leisure and, at the same time, highlighting the importance of work and study, seeking positive aspects of life, as well as framing their situation as temporary and focusing on the future. Their behavioural strategies involved mainly leisure aspects of life and included substituting recreation activities, using various time management strategies, learning English, maintaining long-distance relationship with home communities, and pursuing mainly Chinese pastimes within the confines of their ethnic community on campus.

Keywords. Leisure, constraints, negotiation, international students, Chinese

Résumé. Basé sur 16 entrevues avec des étudiants Chinois internationaux, de troisième cycle en étude à l'université de l'Illinois à Urbana-Champaigne durant l'année scolaire

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de 2003/2004. L'étude porte sur la question des contraintes aux loisirs et leurs négociations par ces étudiants. Le cadre théorique des contraintes des loisirs proposés par Jackson et autres (1993) nous aides à analyser la négociation des contraintes aux loisirs dans les aspects de loisir et de non loisir, et aux niveaux des comportementaux et du cognitif. Les 16 entrevues indiquent que les participants éprouvent un certain nombre de contraintes en loisir, y compris un manque de temps, barrière linguistique et différences culturelles, manque d'amis, et sentiment d'exclusion aux loisirs. Pour la plupart de ces participants leurs stratégies de négociation de contraintes des loisirs étaient de nature cognitive, ce qui veut dire qu'ils dévaluent l'importance des loisirs et en même temps redouble l'importance du travail et les études. D'autres participants ont remarqué que c'est situations sont provisoire, et il faut donc se concentrer sur le futur. Le remplacement des activités de récréation par d'autres activités, l'utilisation de diverses stratégies de gestion du temps, l'apprentissage de la langue anglais, le maintien des rapports familiaux démontre des négociations comportementales aux contraintes des loisirs par les étudiants chinois.

Mots-clefs. loisirs, contraintes des loisirs, négociation, étudiantes internationales, culture chinoise

Over the last 20 years, research on leisure constraints has developed into a distinct subfield of leisure research and is still experiencing a sustained interest from leisure researchers and practitioners alike (e.g., Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1993a,b; Hubbard & Mannell, 2001; Jackson, 2000, 2005; Jackson, Crawford, & Godbey, 1993; Nadirova & Jackson, 2000; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997; Walker & Virden, 2005). Since the publication of a set of constraints models (Crawford & Godbey; Crawford et al.), a large number of empirical investigations have been conducted on the constraints that people experience in their leisure pursuits and on the ways in which they are able to "remove, alleviate, adapt to, or otherwise negotiate through [them]" (Jackson & Rucks, 1995, p. 86). Such research provided a significant contribution to the understanding of constrained leisure (Jackson & Scott, 1999). Although a large number of studies exist that explore the variety of factors that negatively affect the quantity and quality of leisure participation, constraints on leisure were relatively seldom examined as experiences embedded in people's everyday lives (e.g., Gilbert & Hudson, 2000; Henderson & Rannells, 1988; Samdahl & Jekubovich). Comparatively fewer studies have been conducted to tackle the dynamics of leisure experiences and the richness of the meanings of leisure constraints and the negotiation processes (e.g., Frederick & Shaw, 1995; Parry & Shaw, 1999). As Samdahl and Jekubovich argued, the majority of previous research did not fully recognize the meanings of leisure constraints embedded in the social environment in

which they occur and, thus, did not effectively capture the spirit in which people arranged their lives or the way they sought out favourite leisure pursuits. Thus, more research efforts whose goal is to answer the "why" question (p. 449) are needed to provide deeper understanding of the dynamic and complex phenomena of leisure constraints.

Using data obtained from conversational interviews with a group of Chinese international graduate students in the U.S., the study presented here attempts to examine leisure constraints based on the individuals' interpretation of their living experiences. The goal of this study was to investigate the meanings behind leisure constraints experienced by the participants as well as their negotiation efforts. Such investigation would help one understand how the participants, who lived in the U.S. only temporarily for the purpose of education, interpreted and constructed their leisure experiences in the context of everyday lives. The constraints negotiation framework proposed by Jackson et al. (1993) and tested by Jackson and Rucks (1995) was employed in this study to analyze negotiation of constraints in *leisure* and *non-leisure* aspects of life and on *behavioural* and *cognitive* levels, with the intention to understand why certain negotiation strategies were employed.

International students were chosen as the focus of this study since only a limited volume of research exists on their leisure experiences and on constraints they face. This is the case, despite the fact that international students constitute a significant proportion of the student body on American and Canadian campuses. According to the information released by the Institute of International Education (IIE) (2004) and Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2004), the number of international students in 2002/2003 academic year reached 586,323 in the U.S. and 61,293 in Canada. International students from the People's Republic of China ranked as the second largest international student group in the U.S. (61,757) and in Canada (9,822) (Citizenship and Immigration Canada; IIE). Out of the 117,300 students China sent overseas in 2003, over 60% chose the U.S. and Canada as their destinations (The Ministry of Education of China, 2004).

For the most part, the existing research on leisure behaviour of Chinese nationals and on their constraints in particular has failed to acknowledge the heterogeneity of this population. However, we argue that it would be erroneous to assume that culture, and thus leisure behaviour, of mainland Chinese living in their home country is a direct equivalent of culture of overseas Chinese community in the U.S. or Canada, or those who arrived to these countries only for a limited period of time. Tempo-

rary migrants, such as international students, are likely to face a plethora of constraints similar to the ones experienced by permanent immigrants (e.g., language barrier, lack of familiarity with the local environment, broken social ties), but also a number of unique constraints that are related to their temporary status. They may lack the support of family members and other co-ethnics who migrated before them and the broader ethnic community at the place of destination (international students are often treated as outsiders by more established ethnics). They may also lack the governmental and/or community support that is available to some immigrants and refugees in their immediate period after arrival. On the other hand, the effect of these constraints might be mitigated by their better language skills, support from the university community, frequent previous exposure to the Western culture, and other benefits associated with their generally higher socio-economic status. Our study is designed to fill this gap in the existing constraints and ethnic leisure discourse.

Theoretical Framework: Leisure Constraints and Constraints Negotiation

It is not the purpose of this section of the manuscript to provide a comprehensive review of leisure constraints and constraints negotiation research. Readers may refer to the excellent summaries and critiques of the constraints literature by Jackson and Scott (1999) and by Jackson (2005). The goal of this section is merely to build a foundation for what our study is meant to accomplish and to provide background that will help readers less familiar with the constraints literature to understand the framework within which Jackson's et al. (1993) classification of negotiation efforts had been developed.

It can be argued that the assumptions regarding the nature of constraints that were initially adopted, such as that constraints only intervene between preferences and participation, that they are insurmountable obstacles resulting in nonparticipation, and that those who participate in leisure must be unconstrained, had been challenged in the early 1990s. Since then, studies have begun to provide evidence that people's participation in leisure is not always determined by constraints they face and that people who do participate in leisure are often as constrained as those who refrain from participation. Constraints, thus, have been recognized not as insurmountable obstacles to participation, but as factors that can be successfully negotiated (Kay & Jackson, 1991; Shaw, Bonen, & McCabe, 1991).

A series of propositions and hypotheses about how people might negotiate through constraints to achieve leisure-related goals were orig-

inally proposed by Crawford and Godbey (1987), and later refined and tested by other researchers (Crawford et al., 1991; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1993a; Hubbard & Mannell, 2001; Jackson et al., 1993; Nadir-ova & Jackson, 2000). Crawford and Godbey classified constraints into intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. Crawford et al. integrated these three constraints categories into a single hierarchical system in which people were believed to encounter and negotiate constraints sequentially. Henderson and Bialeschki developed an expanded model in which constraints were not experienced sequentially and hierarchically, but rather involved in complex and interactive relationships. Although Samdahl and Jekubovich's (1997) data were "somewhat supportive" of the hierarchical structure of constraints negotiation, the authors criticized the existing frameworks for their inability to fully explain the complex phenomena of leisure behaviour. They found evidence of people's negotiating of their leisure constraints, but they were reluctant to use the term "negotiation" to describe the phenomenon. More recently, Nadirova and Jackson's study showed that constraints might be experienced and negotiated sequentially not only between, but within categories. The possible interrelations among motivations, constraints, negotiation, and participation were further investigated by Hubbard and Mannell. They proposed four theoretical models (independence model, negotiation-buffer model, constraint-effect-mitigation model, and perceived-constraint-reduction model) to describe possible relationships between the concepts. The constraint-effect-mitigation model was strongly supported by the findings of their study. It suggested that motivation not only directly and positively influences participation, but also has an indirect impact on participation by encouraging greater use of negotiation resources and strategies.

Since it was first recognized that constraints do not necessarily lead to nonparticipation, an increasing number of studies have focused specifically on the issue of constraints negotiation. For instance, Scott (1991) explored negotiation strategies employed by people who participate in contract bridge, while Livengood and Stodolska (2004) addressed the subject in the context of Muslim immigrants in post-September 11 America. Negotiation efforts undertaken to overcome obstacles to a number of specific leisure activities were investigated. In her 2002 paper, Auster focused on motorcycle riders, James (2000) investigated participation of adolescent girls in recreation swimming, Henderson and Bialeschki (1993b) examined participation in physical recreation, and Little (2002) in adventure recreation. Moreover, a number of distinctive groups of recreationists, such as people with disabilities, women, and members of

ethnic minorities were investigated (Henderson, Bedini, Hecht, & Schuler, 1995; Little; Livengood & Stodolska). Participant's approach to experienced constraints or the strategies they adopted to negotiate them were also used to establish categories of "negotiators" (Henderson & Bialeschki; Henderson et al.; James). For instance, based on their approach to encountered constraints, Henderson et al. divided women with disabilities who participated in their study into "achievers," "attempters," "changers," "passive responders," and "various participants."

In an effort to conceptualize leisure negotiation process, Jackson et al. (1993) proposed that there exist two types of negotiation strategies—behavioural and cognitive. At the *behavioural* level, Jackson et al. suggested that people may modify *non-leisure* aspects of life (e.g., adjusting schedule of other activities and limiting other expenses), or *leisure* aspects of life (e.g., acquisition of information about potential leisure opportunities and alteration of time or frequency of participation in leisure activities) to accommodate their leisure needs. Besides the widely reported behavioural negotiation strategies (Kay & Jackson, 1991; Scott, 1991), Jackson et al. proposed that people also negotiate constraints at *cognitive* level by intentionally reducing "psychic discomfort" (p. 9). In other words, people may "devalue" leisure activities that one might like to participate in, but perceives them as not obtainable (constrained) in terms of preference, and thereby reduce cognitive dissonance. This typology was subsequently employed by Jackson and Rucks (1995) in the first empirical study whose explicit objective was investigation of leisure constraints negotiation. The results of their research showed that the majority of respondents adopted behavioural strategies to negotiate constraints and preferred to modify non-leisure aspects of their lives, rather than to modify their leisure itself.

Literature Review

Leisure Constraints among Overseas Chinese

Studies have shown that ethnic minorities display different leisure preferences, constraints, and participation patterns (e.g., Cainkar, 1999; Chavez, 1996; Crespo, 2000; Gobster, 2002; Hutchison, 1987; Livengood & Stodolska, 2004; Stodolska & Alexandris, 2004; Stodolska & Yi-Kook, 2005; Wang & Stringer, 2000). Lower levels of discretionary income, lack of time associated with strenuous employment, and residential segregation have been reported as some of the factors that restrict leisure options of ethnic minorities. For example, Crespo indicated that minorities in general, and Latino(a)s in particular, are more likely to be employed in occupations that require higher energy expenditures com-

pared to their non-Hispanic White counterparts, which could potentially lower their participation rates in physical activity during leisure time. In another example, safety issues in minority neighborhoods were shown to negatively affect participation of minorities, and minority women in particular, in out-of-home leisure activities (Cainkar; Crespo). Moreover, there is a large volume of evidence that cultural traits may be responsible for determining constraints on leisure faced by minorities (Stodolska & Yi-Kook). For instance, Livengood and Stodolska's study on Muslim immigrants demonstrated that their recreation participation was constrained by lack of family-oriented facilities, lack of large outdoor recreation spaces, lack of single-sex facilities, and lack of private locations in recreation places. Gobster also observed that distance to the park and resulting transportation problems restricted access to parks for large, family-oriented groups of Latinos and Asians.

Although the studied populations have comprised of people from diverse ethnic groups, previous research on leisure constraints has mostly been conducted using Western conceptual frameworks (Stodolska, 1998). Relatively few studies have investigated leisure behaviour of non-Westerners, including Asians and, specifically, Chinese immigrants (Tsai & Coleman, 1999; Walker, Deng, & Dieser, 2001). It could be expected, however, that this population might face unique patterns of leisure constraints related to their racial and cultural differences, and immigrant or temporary resident status. In the case of Chinese living in the U.S. and other Western countries, the research that does exist focuses mainly on their adjustment to life abroad, their leisure behaviour patterns, motivations for and constraints on leisure, and the meaning of leisure in their lives (Allison & Geiger, 1993; Tsai & Coleman; Walker & Deng, 2004; Walker et al.; Yu & Berryman, 1996).

Tsai and Coleman (1999), who explored leisure constraints of Chinese immigrants in Australia, reported that their leisure was negatively affected by six types of constraints. Among these, resources constraints (e.g., lack of time and financial cost), interpersonal constraints (e.g., no one to participate with), and social-cultural constraints (e.g., language barrier, feeling uncomfortable with different cultures, feeling insecure, and lack of sense of belonging) were the most important ones. Although leisure constraints faced by Chinese immigrants were explicitly addressed only in Tsai and Coleman's study, other researchers have also identified a range of problems Chinese newcomers face after arrival. For instance, Yu and Berryman (1996) claimed that the process of adjustment was difficult for most Chinese immigrants to the U.S. It generated problems related to language barrier and cultural incompatibility which, in

turn, affected their enjoyment of leisure. Leisure of young immigrants to the New York City who participated in their study appeared to be less organized, less expensive, less physically active, and less skill-oriented than that of the mainstream Americans.

Difficulty in achieving positive leisure experiences among Asian Americans, including Chinese immigrants, was suggested to have deep roots in their traditional cultural values. Some researchers have argued that Asians prioritize work, have deep respect for learning and, subsequently, hold a generally negative attitude toward leisure (Manrai & Manrai, 1995; Schütte & Ciarlante, 1998; Wang & Stringer, 2000). Similarly, Yu and Berryman (1996) found that Chinese in general tend to be more work-oriented and many are unable to identify much in the way of American leisure in their lives. In line with this argument, Walker and Deng (2004) reported that a sense of guilt was often associated with leisure experiences among Chinese immigrants. Other researchers, such as Li and Stodolska (2006), who studied Chinese transmigrant populations, confirmed that they were strongly work-oriented, but also deeply valued leisure in their lives. Young Chinese transmigrants interviewed in their study reported strong desire for meaningful leisure lives and attributed their work orientation to their desire to maximize outcomes of their study abroad.

Constraints among Asian International Students

Although not explicitly referred to as “constraints research,” many efforts have been made in the education literature to identify the difficulties international students encounter in North American educational system and to explore the ways in which they cope with their problems (e.g., Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Thorstensson, 2001; Wang, 2004). Mordkowitz and Ginsburg (1986) indicated that Asian students tend to be highly motivated by the academic achievement and success in their study. This pressure to succeed academically can be often overwhelming for Asian students, particularly when compounded by problems with adjustment to the campus life. Adjustment problems reported by Asian international students were usually related to the necessity to adapt to a foreign academic environment, language, and culture markedly different from that of their home countries (Thorstensson). Thorstensson also reported that it was difficult for Asian international students to contribute to conversations with mainstream Americans whom they sometimes regarded as pushy, overly talkative, and impatient. Heggins and Jackson claimed that it was due to cultural differences that the classroom behaviour of Asian students was often perceived as passive and shy.

Past studies have suggested that when faced with problems, Asian students usually seek help from other members of their ethnic community and avoid utilizing services of professional counselors and other resources provided by the university (Ong, 1989; Root, 1985). They were found to socialize mainly with other Asians and attempt to stay connected to their culture through reading books, speaking their native language, and participating in cultural festivals (Heggins & Jackson, 2003). Interestingly, studies also suggested that although facing many difficulties, Asian international students often express positive attitudes to life and participate in recreational activities for the purpose of meeting people, having fun, and learning about the American culture (Heggins & Jackson; Thorstensson, 2001).

Although education literature has provided many insights into the academic life of Asian international students, a better understanding of their overall life experience cannot be achieved without analyzing the leisure aspects of their overseas study.

Methods

This study involved 16 semi-structured conversational interviews with international graduate students selected from the pool of Chinese international students enrolled in the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the academic year of 2003/2004. At the time of the study, 37,000 students, including 4,759 international students from 114 countries were attending the university. Among these international students, 881 were from China. The data used in this study were collected between December 2003 and January 2004. Participants were selected using purposive and theoretical sampling methods. Existing connections of the authors were initially used to contact participants. Emerging theory and progressing understanding of the subject guided the selection of the remaining participants. Interviewees included eight males and eight females, between 25 and 40 years of age. Their length of residence in the U.S. ranged from two months to five years. Participants represented a variety of scholarly disciplines: Electronic Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Human and Community Development, Communications, Accountancy, Social Work, Education Psychology, Computer Science, Anthropology, Remote Sensing, Advertising, Library and Information Science, and Crop Sciences.

Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and was conducted either in participants' homes or in various places on the university campus. All interviews with the exception of two were carried out in Mandarin by the first author of the paper. During each interview,

the participant was asked a set of questions dealing with issues of his or her everyday leisure experiences. Specific questions included: How does your typical workday look like? How does your typical weekend look like? What do you usually do after school? Are you satisfied with your life in general? Are you satisfied with your leisure? What obstacles to leisure do you face? How do you try to deal with these problems? The main questions were followed by a series of probes intended to elicit more detailed responses from interviewees.

All interviews, with the exception of two were tape recorded. In the instances when recording was not possible, detailed, contemporaneous notes were taken. The interviews were later transcribed verbatim and translated into English by the first author of the paper who, at the time of the study, was herself a graduate student from China. To ensure the accuracy of translation, two people fluent in English and Mandarin were invited to review the transcripts. The process of data analysis was inductive and data-led. Initial coding proceeded through examining each line of data and then defining actions or events within it (Glaser, 1978). In the process of breaking down the data into constituent parts, special attention was paid to the descriptive accounts of the problems and difficulties the participants experienced in their lives and leisure and the ways in which they tried to overcome or negotiate these constraints. During the next step, constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used. We sorted, organized and grouped the interview transcripts into categories by constantly comparing, contrasting, and labeling people's views, situations, actions, and experiences to each other. After we obtained tentative themes, we employed "axial coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to explore the connection between the sub-themes and major themes. Interview transcripts were re-read several times to ascertain that the true meaning of the interviews was represented in the identified categories to the largest extent possible. In addition, in order to increase credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), interview transcripts were sent to the participants for verification and feedback. External sources such as people working for the Chinese Student and Scholar Association at the University of Illinois were consulted during the data analysis stage for the purpose of verifying the identified themes. Pseudonyms were assigned to each interviewee to protect his or her identity.

Findings

The findings of this study were divided into two main sections. First, we discuss how the participants described the most important leisure constraints they encountered in their everyday lives. Subsequently, we ana-

lyze the negotiation efforts employed by the interviewees at both behavioural and cognitive levels.

Leisure Constraints

Since the word "leisure" appeared in everyday Chinese language not so long ago and little is known about the understanding of this term in the Chinese culture, a question about the meaning of leisure (translated as *xiuxian*) was asked prior to the discussion of participants' leisure experiences and constraints that they encountered. Our interviews had shown that the perception of leisure among the participants was similar, but not identical, to that of "mainstream" Americans and Canadians. Most of our participants (14 out of 16), when talking about leisure in general, recognized and appreciated the importance of leisure as a feeling of relaxation that helped them refresh from the hardships of work and as an opportunity to learn new things outside of the work domain. The suggestion that people from Eastern cultures hold negative attitudes toward the idea of leisure (Manrai & Manrai, 1995; Schütte & Ciarlante, 1998; Wang & Stringer, 2000) was not confirmed in this study. This subject has been discussed in detail in another paper resulting from this study (see Li & Stodolska, 2006).

Interestingly, although the majority of our participants appreciated the general idea of leisure, such appreciation did not lead to an active pursuit of free time activities in everyday life. Participants' attitude toward leisure in general and toward leisure in their personal lives appeared to be separated from each other. Their narratives revealed that leisure was not something they could easily afford and could fully enjoy given their status as international students. Moreover, some participants seemed to consciously sacrifice leisure domain during the period of their study abroad. Constraints of structural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal nature, clearly surfaced in our conversations with Chinese masters and doctoral students. Among these, lack of time, language barrier and cultural differences, lack of friends, and feelings of lack of entitlement to pursue leisure appeared to be the most prominent ones. We will discuss these constraints in detail in the following sections of the manuscript.

Limited Time

All of the participants were very determined to accomplish the goals of their study abroad by advancing their education and preparing for future careers. Thus, prioritizing work over leisure came to them naturally. The feeling of lack of time penetrated into every sphere of their lives and remained a constant pressure among the participants. "Time is limited," as one interviewee put it, "we have no choices." When asked to describe

their everyday life in the U.S., some participants seemed eager to complain about it. Jie, a 30-year-old doctoral student in Anthropology was happy with his school performance, but concerned about other aspects of his life. It was common for him to spend 16–18 hours a day on study and work. His life was solely occupied by research activities, assistantship duties, sleep, and having meals. He claimed he had no time for any leisure activities at all. He used to have a habit of reading Chinese poems and prose before bedtime, but had to give it up “the first day after arrival to the U.S.” since “there were hundreds of papers and books on the desk and much more in the library [for him to read].” He felt that he gave up something that partly defined him as a well-educated Chinese young man.

The nature of work undertaken by the graduate students also appeared to negatively affect their leisure lives. Since the work “could never be clearly completed,” it left limited room for leisure. Liu, who took four classes and, at the same time, worked both as a Research Assistant and a Teaching Assistant explained why he was always short on time:

RA work is endless, you can't say, “OK, I am paid 20 hours a week, I am going to do a 20-hour work,” it is impossible. And more importantly, it is related to my own research topic. It is on my mind every minute I am awake.

One can argue that such constraints are common not only among graduate students, but also among most other professionals who are unable or unwilling to “leave their work behind” after the end of the day. They are likely to affect quantity *and* quality of one's leisure. Feelings of guilt that may accompany leisure, which many perceive as been “stolen” from more productive (i.e., work-related) pursuits, are likely to be common among many professionals. One can draw parallels to leisure of young mothers, women in general, and care givers who believe that they are not *entitled* to spend time on “unproductive” or self-oriented leisure pursuits (Bethoux, Calmels, Gautheron, & Minaire, 1996; Chambers, 1986; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991; Shaw, 1994; Thommessen, Wyller, Bautz-Holter, & Laake, 2001). The subject of lack of entitlement to leisure as one of the constraints will be further explored in subsequent sections of this manuscript.

Interestingly, for some of our participants, “lack of time” was a subjective constraint and was more related to participants' priorities, rather than to an objective inability to set aside a period of time for leisure participation. Yu, a 28-year-old doctoral student in Mechanical Engineering

observed that the spillover of pressures from school into leisure “ruin[ed] the feeling” of leisure participation. As an avid violinist, he brought his violin to the U.S., but had not practised it for almost two years. He commented that it was “ridiculous to say that I totally had no time to play it,” but that playing violin for him required “quality time, a period of time that you are in the mood for it.” Time pressures made even grocery shopping, a common household errand which was regarded as a leisure activity by many participants, lose its “leisure” aspect. As Zhou described,

I like shopping, especially shopping with my friends but, you know, with the deadlines of everything, like class papers, project reports, conference presentations lingering in your mind, it is not leisure anymore. If you have to do it within, say, 1 hour, and you have to check your watch from time to time, it is just shopping, not leisure anymore.

The fact that time pressures often lead to replacing time-consuming activities for ones that can be done more quickly and thus decrease the quality of leisure was also observed by Robinson and Godbey (1997). Consequently, it can be asserted that such pressures are not unique to international graduate students, but are likely to characterize significant portions of the American, Canadian, and other industrialized societies. What seems to be unique to international students, however, is the fact that similarly to other transnational migrants, they take such sacrifices to the extreme and are willing to forgo certain parts of their lives for the sake of improvement of their livelihood following the return to their home country (Bailey, Wright, Mountz, & Miyares, 2002; Stodolska & Santos, 2006).

New Environment—Language and Cultural Differences

A certain anxiety toward life in an alien environment could clearly be sensed in the narratives of the participants. It appeared that the adjustment problems related to language barrier and cultural differences reported by Tsai and Coleman (1999) and by Yu and Berryman (1996) were also common among students interviewed in this study. Such problems constituted constraints on participation particularly in “American-style” leisure, such as socializing with mainstream Americans. Every participant interviewed in this study agreed that inability to speak fluent English was an important barrier. It was especially pronounced among those who came to the U.S. only recently. Ye, a 30-year-old masters student in Advertising, stayed in the U.S. for just two months at the time of the interview. She was happy that she had made some friends, but

disappointed that most of them were Chinese. "I would like to have some American friends," she said, but

... my [English] language is so bad; it is difficult for me to communicate with Americans. I tried to go to the local bars at weekend once or twice. Why I go there? Practice English. It is a task, a burden, something I push myself to do. It is no fun.

Although many students talked about their concerns related to language skills, it seemed that cultural differences affected their participation in American-style leisure more than the language-related problems *per se*. Some of the participants commented that while it was possible to overcome the language barrier after years of practising, cultural differences were much more persistent. As 34-year-old Yao, who had resided in the U.S. for three years, commented,

We are in school, kind of isolated from the outside world. Although I have been here for three years, I still have no idea about American society. And, when you are my age, you realize that you are so Chinese, [that] this is something you can never change. It is not like you stay here for some years then naturally you can adapt to the culture here. It is just not happening that way.

Zhou, who had been in the U.S. for more than four years, still found himself "not quite into [the] American culture." He attempted to expose himself to the American way of life by sharing an apartment with an American student, but soon found out that they did nothing together except for some occasional conversations. He went to the local bars with his roommate once or twice, but could not enjoy the experience. "I did not know what they were talking about. I did not understand what they were laughing at. I felt I was totally an outsider," he recalled. When asked about the reasons why he did not go out with American friends, Yu, a third-year doctoral student, replied, "I feel being forced if I have to go to bars and drink beer. I force myself to do presentations, but I don't want to force myself into [the] bar culture."

Similarly to Zhou and Yu, many students maintained a close relationship with Americans or with people from other countries in work settings, but not in leisure-related environments. For Li, who shared an office with four American and two Indian students, leisure was more difficult than school life because she was familiar with the conversation topics related to her work duties, but felt "lost" when the conversation strayed into everyday issues. Attempts at socializing with her officemates after work made her feel uncomfortable and nervous:

I do communicate with them a lot at work, but not in leisure. Language could be one thing. We use many technical words at work, but that is not the case in leisure. Sometimes I cannot understand [them] well if our conversation covers topics outside research. Another thing is that I feel I don't know what they are interested in. It is different when I am with Chinese friends. I know what they are into. We share similar interests. We were brought up in the same background. With Americans, I don't even know what they like and what they don't [like], it is not easy to join them or invite them [to the party]. This seems to be a major problem.

Liu had been teaching an undergraduate class for two semesters. The experience he had with his students gave him an impression that, as he put it, "we live in different worlds." He tried to talk with his students after class, but found it difficult to find common topics. "They must think I am very boring, I don't like bars, Eliminate, or the like, but I think they are boring too, they have no idea of what is going on in China," he commented.

Limited Social Networks

Considering the language barrier and cultural differences international students were facing in their everyday lives, it was not a surprise that most of them (13 out of 16), preferred to stay within the social circle of students from the same or similar ethnic background. Zhou liked to have dinners with his Chinese friends whenever he could. He emphasized that cooking and eating was not the primary purpose of such social engagements, but that "hanging out with friends" made him feel happy and relaxed. Spending time with fellow ethnics, however, was not always possible, as many students had limited social networks in the U.S. and the Chinese friends that they had were also preoccupied with work. Fang, a 28-year-old woman who spent almost three years alone in the U.S. turned emotional when discussing her feelings of loneliness:

Chinese friends here are different from my friends in China. Back at home, no matter what happened, I went to my friends, and they were always there for me. They'd console me and make it easy for me. Here everybody is busy, if I go to my friends when I have a problem, I feel like I take others' time. I don't know when is the right time to call. So friends here are not that close to each other. I don't want to become burden to my friends so I keep things to myself. I guess for the same reason, they do not want to come to me often either. We take care of ourselves most of the time.

Sun, a 28-year-old male student also complained about his social life:

Oh, my social life sucks. You don't have a lot of fun, you know what I mean? In Beijing, you always find places to go. Here you have to squeeze your mind and brain, you know, to think out a place to have fun. And it is always hard, your friends are not always available and sometimes you have to stay at home and kill time.

Similarly, many participants mentioned lack of partners as a constraint to participation in group-oriented leisure activities. For instance, Li loved to play badminton, one of the most popular sports among Chinese students. For her, playing badminton was not a group sport, but rather an activity that allowed friends to spend quality time together. Conflicting schedules of her friends, however, prevented her from enjoying participation in her favourite pastime.

State of Mind—Feelings of Lack of Entitlement to Leisure

It appeared that although the majority of the participants (11 out of 16) regarded leisure activities as important, they did not consider them as the right thing to do under current circumstances. They seemed to frame leisure as an experience belonging to either their past or their future, but not as something they were entitled to do at the current stage of life. Tan, a 36-year-old doctoral student in Educational Psychology, was an assistant professor of English Literature before she came to the U.S. She had good memories of how her former leisure pursuits, dancing and drama, enriched her life and improved her teaching abilities. She had a very positive attitude toward leisure, which for her meant not only relaxation and enjoyment, but also self-realization and fulfillment. However, when discussing leisure in her current life, Tan admitted that she constantly questioned herself if she had the *right* to dance, considering her other obligations. She commented, "I feel it is a luxury in my life. How can I spend several hours dancing when I am supposed to read papers?" First, she decided to cut her dancing time from once a week to once every other week, but now considered giving it up entirely. She knew that "if I go today, I want to go again tomorrow, and I can never stop. So it is better not to start, so I will not lose control."

Different from Tan, who dwelt in memories of her past, some other participants believed that leisure was a reward that waited for them in the future. Many interviewees commented that they will enjoy more leisure after they complete their study and find a stable job. For instance, for Li, leisure was a sign of success:

I am not saying that those guys who play everyday are successful, but if you have the ability to do an excellent job in less time, you can have more leisure. Although I am busy now, what I am doing is I'm developing such ability. It will pay off one day.

Related to this perception that leisure is something reserved for the future, many participants expressed a sense of guilt recalling their leisure moments in the U.S. Comments, such as "I spent too much time reading Chinese novels," "I feel bad after surfing the Internet for the whole afternoon," or "I travelled out for a week when a project was undergoing, it was not right," surfaced in the interviews frequently. It almost seemed as if the participants were making confessions to themselves while talking about their "indulgence" in leisure, because they were always aware that "there are millions of things that need to be done" and they had to be constantly "in the mood for study" at their current stage of life.

Negotiation of Leisure Constraints

Although with difficulties, most participants managed to carve out some leisure time for themselves. They negotiated constraints and constructed leisure experiences in their own ways. Since work was an absolute centre of their lives, it was not surprising that most students (15 out of 16) consciously or unconsciously modified their *leisure*, rather than *non-leisure* aspects of their lives to accommodate the need for leisure at both *behavioural* and *cognitive* levels (Jackson et al., 1993).

Leisure in Their Own Ways—Negotiation at the Behavioural Level

The participants devised a number of behavioural strategies to overcome constraints such as lack of time, lack of partners, lack of English fluency, and lack of familiarity with the local culture. "Stealing" short moments between classes, when classes were cancelled, or following major exams were common. For instance, Kai, a doctoral student in Electronic Engineering, commented, "If a class is cancelled, I may have some time for myself. I do it when I have time; you know, like after a paper or project." Yuan, a 28-year-old fourth-year doctoral student added that he was expecting to have some free time following his preliminary examination. He also chose to engage in readily-available activities that did not involve much planning such as watching TV, or surfing the Internet. He commented, "It is efficient. Whenever you have time, you log on and click on it and it is right there for you."

Moreover, some interviewees admitted that they tried to transform everyday activities such as doing laundry or grocery shopping into pleasurable moments during which they could clear their mind, forget about everyday problems, and spend time with other graduate students. Such activities were seen as "convenient" considering that they were the necessity of life, could be sandwiched in-between other obligations, "did not consume brain cells," and did not result in feelings of guilt.

Those who did lack sufficient social ties in the U.S. to support their leisure participation and who felt alienated in the local environment, turned to their home culture and to their friends from the home country for consort. During limited leisure time that they had the students checked Chinese news on the Internet and called or chatted on-line with family members and friends in China. For instance, during his first month in the U.S., Quan, a 27-year-old masters student in Communications, spent most of his free time chatting with his friends in China through MSN. He ended up with a phone bill of \$200. He commented that he was not that "crazy" anymore, but still kept constant contact with his friends back home and that talking with them was one of his favourite pastimes. His case highlights the importance of technological advancements in fostering transnational links between temporary migrants, such as Chinese international students, and their home communities (Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999; Pries, 2001).

Li liked to listen to Chinese music while driving and watched Chinese DVD/VCRs after exams. It appeared that the leisure sphere of life brought her closer to her home country and provided a sense of comfort and belonging that served as a buffer to difficulties she experienced in the U.S. Similarly, Sun noted,

I have too much American stuff at school, I want to be a Chinese at home. I feel truly relaxed when listening to Chinese songs, watching Chinese movies, or checking www.sina.com for news. I want to keep myself posted on what is happening in China. I talk with my friends in China via MSN whenever I can. It is fun part of my life. Also, I go back home every year.

Another occasion for the interviewees to get immersed in their home culture and strengthen the pride in their home country was attending games played by the Chinese NBA star—Yao Ming. Many Chinese students drove to the stadium to cheer for him when he came to play in Chicago. Some of the participants admitted that they were not basketball fans and the only reason they attended the game was to support their countryman. For instance, as Li commented, "I do not like basketball. I went there for him. He is cool, I am proud of him, and it feels good to see that American people like and admire him."

Learning English was also one of the behavioural negotiation strategies employed by the interviewed students. Interestingly, their narratives revealed that they were not so much concerned about improving the quality and quantity of their leisure experience, but, to the contrary, they *used leisure occasions* to practice English and thus, further their

work-related goals. As previously quoted Ye, a 30-year-old masters student in Advertising mentioned, she pushed herself to go to local bars and mingle with American students to practice the language. Another student—Liu, remarked that he liked to spend time with his American colleagues because he “learn[ed] things and practise[ed] language skills.” Similarly, the only reason Tian considered buying a TV was to “improve my English.” She commented that “the language professors use in class is different from the language Americans use in their life. Watching TV, like *Friends*, might be helpful to expose me to their everyday language and their culture.”

Leisure, an Attitude Issue—Negotiation at the Cognitive Level

As our interviews progressed, we developed a clear sense that the participants were actively and constantly struggling to ascertain the meaning of their lives. It appeared that by consciously or unconsciously devaluing the importance of leisure under current circumstances, the meanings of their lives revolved around their work and study. For instance, Sun shared with us his happy memories related to his leisure life in China. For him, life in the U.S., however, “was not that miserable” since

... back in China, sometimes I felt bored, my days were filled with eating, sleeping, too much pleasure. I kind of wanted a different lifestyle. That is why I got here. So essentially this is something I looked forward to, so I should not complain. It [life in the U.S.] is different, you cannot say it is better or worse. This is something I've always been pursuing, I've always wanted. Right now I am in it, and there you go.

Similar to Sun, many of our participants actively sought the positive aspects of their life in the U.S. Comments such as “I am happy with my life since I feel I don't waste my life here” and “I have dreams, I want meaningful things, I am working for my dream now. If I have to cut my leisure time, I do it” were heard frequently in the interviews. As one participant mentioned, “My leisure life is worse compared to my life in China, but there is something I can trade off. I can see many places that I would never be able to see if I did not come here.” It was also clear that for many students, the rewards they had gained from work and study helped them to make sense of life and compensated them for the feelings of loss in leisure. Jie, who explicitly expressed that work was his primary concern, stated, “My leisure life sucks, but I am doing very well at school. I work very hard. In all the classes I took, I got A. My dissertation is going very smoothly. That is why I am here.” Another participant made a similar comment: “I am satisfied with my life. I feel a kind of fulfillment at work. Leisure life is not perfect, but it is OK.”

Moreover, similar to other transnational migrants, many participants perceived their situation as temporary and chose to focus on the future. Yu put it in these words:

I think my life is fine, although I feel tired. But first you cannot just look at now. [You need to] look at the future, what I am doing now is done for the future. Second, I feel kind of fulfillment everyday, I learn things. I am still a student, it is a transition period. It is not forever. I want to finish as soon as possible. This is a time for study, not for play.

The choices that our participants were making in their lives and the decisions that they struggled with could be well summed up by Yao's poignant remark: "It is just an attitude problem. Life is like a travel. I would like to visit many places. No matter how the scenery looks like at each stop, I keep going, because it is my choice."

Discussion and Conclusions

Our study has shown that it is important to recognize the meanings of leisure constraints embedded in the social environment in which they occur if we intend to effectively capture the manner in which people arrange their lives or the way in which they seek out their favourite leisure pursuits (Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997). Our findings have also suggested that classification developed by Jackson et al. (1993) constitutes a useful tool to analyze strategies involved in constraint negotiation. It has to be acknowledged that our results differ somewhat from those obtained by Jackson and Rucks (1995). While in Jackson and Rucks' study, the great majority of respondents adopted behavioural strategies to negotiate constraints and slightly preferred to modify non-leisure aspects of life rather than to modify leisure itself, in our study, cognitive negotiation strategies aimed at reducing cognitive dissonance were prevalent. Instead of trying to ignore the problems or be positive and have fun (as did many of Jackson and Rucks' respondents), the Chinese graduate students chose to devalue leisure itself and stress other positive aspects of their life. Our interviewees perceived their situation as temporary and looked forward to the future. They made a conscious choice to sacrifice the quantity and quality of their current leisure in order to improve their lives (including the leisure aspect of such) in the future. In addition, the students who employed behavioural negotiation strategies primarily focused on modifying *leisure*, rather than non-leisure aspects of life. For instance, they substituted recreation activities and used technology to maintain long-distance relationships in the absence of local partners. The observed preference of the Chinese graduate students to

modify their leisure was most likely related to the fact that work and study was of primary importance to them and that they perceived their current situation as temporary. It is likely that inconsistencies between our findings and those obtained by Jackson and Rucks can be attributed to the differences in the populations under study—mainstream Canadian high school students versus international graduate students whose goal was maximizing the outcomes of their study abroad.

In the Conclusions to their paper, Jackson and Rucks (1995) observed that:

The types of [negotiation] strategies perceived and adopted are also generally consistent with the types of constraints encountered: most people who experienced a problem with time and commitments, for example, choose to negotiate this class of constraint by modifying their use of time. (p. 103)

They later added that there were “some important and innovative exceptions” and that “time constraints or lack of skills might be dealt with by modifying leisure aspirations or finding new partners” (pp. 103–104). We largely concur with this observation and add that negotiation strategies adopted are likely to depend not only on the constraints that are being negotiated, but also on cultural values (including preferences) of negotiators and on the timing and situation when the negotiation is to occur. For example, the strong work ethic in Chinese culture (Manrai & Manrai, 1995; Schütte & Ciarlante, 1998) might contribute to shaping the students’ motivation for negotiation. As shown in our study, the Chinese students whose cultural tradition values learning and achievement over fun and enjoyment (Tsai, 2005) chose to negotiate their constraints using mainly cognitive strategies and further devaluing leisure aspects of their lives. Moreover, the fact that the behavioural negotiation efforts of Chinese students appeared largely passive in nature could be a reflection of Chinese Taoism teachings, which advocate a tranquil and peaceful type of leisure through which people can gain true rest and relaxation and comprehend the harmony between their spirit and the objective world (Gong, 1998; Wang & Stringer, 2000). Lastly, the fact that they were international students pursuing education abroad and that, at the same time, they were temporary migrants whose limited stay in the U.S. had clearly defined goals, further influenced the negotiation strategies they adopted. Thus, our study serves to further stress the importance of context and taking into account cultural values of the studied populations when conducting constraints and constrains negotiation research.

The findings of our study have raised some important questions regarding the nature of the experience of constraints and the negotiation strategies adopted. They have shown that, in fact, some constraints are quite *temporary* in nature. Many of the constraints experienced by the international students were related to their temporary stay in the U.S. (e.g., lack of partners) and were likely to subside when the students moved to the next stage of their life. In a sense, graduate school or the stay abroad constituted one of the transitional periods when some constraints are experienced with increased intensity (Bialeschki & Michener, 1994; Crawford & Huston, 1993). Furthermore, the results of our study provided evidence for the temporal progression of constraints. We can argue that constraints not only predictably or unpredictably occur in certain transitional periods of life (e.g., parenthood, death of a spouse, accident), but that some people may willingly sacrifice the quality of life and impose certain constraints on their leisure today in order to improve their quality of life (and decrease the experience of constraints) in the future. So far, the majority of the existing leisure research not only has treated constraints as undesirable factors preventing desirable leisure participation (and not as desirable factors preventing participation in undesirable leisure), but also have considered constraints as something to be avoided. Our study has shown that, in some circumstances, people *voluntarily* impose constraints on their leisure. They do negotiate these constraints in order to minimize their impact, but they treat their existence as a natural consequence of their conscious choices. This finding supported the notion addressed by Walker and Chapman (2003) that under certain situations people might self-constrain themselves in terms of participating in recreation activities (cf. Walker & Virden, 2005, p. 213).

The findings of this study have certain practical implications for helping to improve the quality of life of international students during their overseas studies. Taking into account the sheer number of international students on American and Canadian campuses, the recreation providers at the university level should familiarize themselves with the preferences of their international student clientele that are a result of their unique cultural values and the temporary nature of their stay, so as to offer programs that better satisfy their needs. Specifically, we find it worthwhile for the administrators of American and Canadian universities and those responsible for provision of recreation services to consider decreasing solitary and passive leisure of international students. Moreover, faculty members who serve as the mentors for international students need to be keenly

aware of the problems that international students may encounter in their study and their leisure so as to adjust their strategies for better supervision.

The goal of this study was not to uncover a wide and all-encompassing inventory of constraints encountered by the students and the negotiation strategies they adopted, but rather to provide a rich in detail analysis of the topic. In this way, our study differs from that of Jackson and Rucks (1995). However, we do not see it as a limitation of this study, as research undertaken within the interpretive paradigm is by nature different from that whose goal is large-scale generalizations. Despite that, we believe it would have been beneficial to the study if we further probed into the additional constraints that might have been experienced by the students (such as, for instance, finances which have not been reported by the students as something limiting their leisure) and further delved into the effect they had on their everyday lives.

Moreover, we believe that additional useful information might have been obtained if the questionnaire survey was used to tackle these issues. For instance, the approaches that we employed did not allow us to provide a breakdown by activities constrained and negotiation strategies adopted. In the future studies, it would be interesting to examine which activities were most affected by the move abroad and what were the overall changes in people's leisure lives. Moreover, the results of our study point out that, in line with the suggestions of Robinson and Godbey (1997), time-related pressures forced participants to substitute complex and engaging pastimes such as dance, reading poetry, or playing violin for less complicated and readily available activities such as watching TV or surfing the Internet. It would be interesting to focus more deeply on these issues, as such tendencies are likely to mirror trends observable in the broader society and related to the decline in participation in highly involved, stimulating, and physically and emotionally engaging activities.

Future research could also examine whether the experience of leisure, the experience of constraints, and the negotiation efforts differ if the constraints are imposed *voluntarily* versus *involuntarily* (saving money for the retirement, study abroad, motherhood vs. accident, loss of income), if the constraints are *temporary* versus *permanent* (motherhood vs. permanent disability) and *predictable* versus *unpredictable* (retirement vs. sudden loss of spouse). We believe these issues constitute interesting areas of inquiry for future scholars investigating the concepts of leisure constraints and constraints negotiation.

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