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**The meaning of objects: A contextual analysis of experiences of
Chinese students in their home and host country**

Bih, Herng-Dar, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1992

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A

**THE MEANING OF OBJECTS:
A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF EXPERIENCES OF CHINESE STUDENTS
IN THEIR HOME AND HOST COUNTRY**

by
HERNG-DAR BIH

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1992

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Herng-Dar Bih

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

THE MEANING OF OBJECTS:
A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF EXPERIENCES OF CHINESE STUDENTS
IN THEIR HOME AND HOST COUNTRY

by

Herng-Dar Bih

Advisor: Professor Gary Winkel

The purpose of this research was to explore and examine the integrating role of objects for people in everyday life. An empirical study was conducted to obtain qualitative information and to derive descriptive structural invariants of the experience of objects and changes of object meanings particularly in the process of adapting to a new environment. Thirty-five Chinese students were interviewed before they left Taiwan, as well as a few weeks and one semester after their arrival in New York. Objects, in this dissertation, were not confined to those associated with positive feelings, on display, or currently valued. I included objects with both positive and “negative” meanings, objects with current significance, lost objects, objects people left behind in the old environment, and desirable objects. Questions about students’ future plans and goals, social relations, school work, daily activities, and the physical environment were also asked in an open-ended interview.

Based on these qualitative data, a structure of object meanings was proposed which included instrumental, deepening experiences, manifestations of achievement, extensions of memory, enhancing social exchange, religious or spiritual, and extensions of the self. The temporal/spatial dimensions of object meanings were discussed. The analysis was then focused on students’ experiences in environmental transitions. The process of their relating and adapting to the new environment as well as issues about social relations and the

physical environment were discussed. In addition, changes of object meanings for these students were described as in the context of environmental transitions. In conclusion, a model for describing the process of object meanings was proposed and then this research was situated in the transactional paradigm and the existing literature on person-object relationships.

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Interviewees of this research generously shared their lives with me and I hope that my research can benefit foreign students in general.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study of the meaning of objects represents my continuing interest in people's experiences of the physical environment. Although objects are the smallest units of the environment, they play an important role in people's daily lives. Graumann (1974) indicated in his article: "Psychology and the World of Things" that if we

try to think of any ten everyday human activities, which we prefer to call behaviors; then we soon find out that most of them are intimately related with everyday things: Getting up in the morning is getting up from a bed, being alarmed by a clock, . . . going through today's mail, reading, dictating letters. . . ." (p. 390).

In addition, a child's attachment to a blanket, the display of one's family photo in the living room, the "cultivation" of a tea set, or the devotion of psychic energy on one's car is a common experience in daily life. And it "is precisely because human-object interaction is so common that it is generally taken for granted" (Riggins, 1985, p. 69) and under-researched by social scientists. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to contribute to a significant but under-researched area of literature in environmental psychology. Although the scale of objects is relatively small, I hope to show that people are not detached spectators in relation to objects. They are constantly experiencing and interpreting objects based on the qualities of objects and the situation defined in terms of the relevance of their plans and goals in a particular social, physical, and cultural milieu. The understanding of transactions between people and objects hopefully could shed light on people-environment relations as well.

A. OBJECT

What do we mean by objects? According to The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology, "object" means "1. Most broadly, *anything*. 2. Within the study of perception and cognition, an aspect of the environment of which one is aware. . . . 3. A goal or an end state. . . . 4. In psychoanalytic theory, a person, a part of a person, or a symbol representative of either, toward which behaviors, thoughts and desires are oriented." Here we find that "these meanings run quite a gamut from the physical to the perceptual, the conceptual and the symbolic as well as from the inanimate to the personal" (Reber, 1985, p. 483, italics original). In order to make my conceptualization manageable, I will confine the word "object" to mean something which is inanimate, tangible, and movable. Thus, it could not be a poem unless it takes a material form, nor could it be a house unless people carry it from one place to another .

There are some characteristics of objects (defined above) that we should keep in mind before I review the literature of objects.

1. The tangibility and durability of physical objects set them apart from other human actions. Energy transmitted verbally and even nonverbally dissipates very rapidly, but physical objects are relatively more durable. "Objects might be seen as an aid to memory, as a resource helping to assure continuity in communication" (Foote, 1988, p. 245). "Friends depart; but their letters are tangible evidence of their continuing esteem. Relatives die and yet remain present and smiling in the family album" (Tuan, 1977, p. 187).

2. The line between object and environment is difficult to draw. The study of objects does not necessarily imply separating person and objects as if they are two isolated entities. The transactions between a person and objects involve multi-modal processes. The presence of meanings and motivational messages carried by objects are intertwined with the person's actions and larger purposes as well. Drawing on Hall's (1966) concepts, Rapoport (1982) proposed that the environment has three elements: fixed-feature,

semifixed-feature, and nonfixed-feature elements¹. Objects as defined in my dissertation are close to Rapoport's formulation of semifixed-features. But there is a continuum between object and environment. The book wall, the wall filled with memorable objects, and the furnishings of the room may create the sense of enclosure (McCracken, 1987). Controllability is another issue. Most people move into a ready-made environment (layout and structure of a house) which is rarely altered, while people use objects to personalize their new environment. It is easier for people to express their personal preference and social membership by using objects. Thus, semifixed environmental elements are of particular importance in studying meaning in our current environment (Rapoport, 1982).

3. Physical qualities play different roles in people's object experiences. Objects can function as means or as goals in themselves. "And many of our everyday things have all these functions rolled into one" (Graumann, 1974, p. 391). For instance, newspapers and music tapes are media. Usually people desire information or music rather than "papers" or "tapes." But the physical qualities of stuffed animals, sculptures, or plants constitute a major component of the object experience. However, reality is always more complex. Television programs deliver messages, but the television set, itself, may become a symbol of social status, and the presence of a television set can influence patterns of social interaction at home. The physical quality of a gift is both arbitrary and unique. It matters little what object is involved, but once it has been given, and because of this, it is this object and not another (Baudrillard, 1981).

¹"Fixed-feature elements are those that are basically fixed, or those that change rarely and slowly," (Rapoport, 1982, p. 88) such as walls, ceilings, streets, and buildings in cities. Semifixed-feature elements range from clothing, plants, the arrangement of furniture to garden layouts, advertising signs, and window displays in shops. Nonfixed-feature elements refer to spatial relations of people, body positions, facial expressions, speech rates, etc.

Objects have been studied in different disciplines. Economists study the supply and demand of goods, sociologists focus on the status signification of material objects (e.g., Chapin 1935; Laumann & House, 1970), and anthropologists consider material goods as culturally shared symbols (e.g., Appadurai, 1986; Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Sahlins, 1976). But the dynamics of the transactions between persons and objects in the lived world is not well studied. The purpose of this dissertation is to understand the significance of objects in people's lives and the changes of object meanings for an individual in different environmental/social/cultural contexts. I will concentrate on the social/psychological aspects of meanings of objects. Before describing my conceptual approach I will first review major existing theories and empirical studies on this area.

1. PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH

The nonhuman environment is not the main interest of Freudian psychoanalytic theory. For Freud, it is the social and interpersonal environment which shapes and guides a person's life. In this theory, objects are only the manifestation of psychosexual needs and conflicts. Objects play a passive role in human life. The intrinsic qualities of objects are essentially reduced to elements of the body or a person. In addition, he paid attention to the pathology of people's attachment to objects, as described in the concept of fetish, rather than the facilitation of human growth by the object itself (Freud, 1961).

Winnicott (1971) was interested in children's attachment to blankets or stuffed animals and proposed the concept of "transitional objects." For an infant, a transitional object is created by the infant and also it is there in the environment for the infant's use (Stevenson, 1954). It links inner and outer, illusion and reality. And "[t]he most important dimension of transitional phenomena is not the objects themselves, but the nature of the relationship to the objects, representing a developmental way station between hallucinatory omnipotence and the recognition of objective reality" (Greenberg & Mitchell,

1983, p. 195). Winnicott saw the attachment to transitional objects not as pathological but as a facilitator of continued healthy growth (Myers, 1985). Most research following Winnicott has been focused on children (e.g., Grolnick, Barkin, & Muensterberger, 1978; Horton, Gewirtz, & Kreutter, 1988). Vlosky (1979) examined past and present special possessions for adults. However, his analysis was constrained by using five instruments (such as thing-person oriented inventory, psychosomatic illness probeness checklist, and personality inventory, etc.) to test thirty-four hypotheses without further emergent exploration.

Using clinical data, Searles (1960) claimed the importance of emotionally significant relatedness with the nonhuman environment for mature development. Objects were understood as a constituent part of the nonhuman environment. He proposed the following psychological benefits which derived from a mature relatedness with one's nonhuman environment: (1) the assuagement of various painful and anxiety-laden states of feeling; (2) the fostering of self-realization; (3) the deepening of one's feeling about reality; (4) the fostering of one's appreciation, and acceptance of one's fellow man. He also presented some examples in which objects played an active role in human development, such as their contribution to a child's physical dexterity, imagination and discrimination in toy-playing; and the security of dwelling in familiar surroundings.

Cooper (1974) adopted a conceptual framework based on Jungian theory that there is a universal or collective unconscious linking man to his primitive past. The archetype is a node of psychic energy which must be outwardly manifested by a symbol. Copper proposed that the house (including objects inside the house) was a basic symbol of the self. She used social science research, literature, poetry and dream-analysis to show that the home reflected how a person viewed himself or herself both as an individual psyche and in relation to the outside world. However, objects may not only signify the identity of the individual as a unique person but also signify group identity (Pratt, 1982). Moreover, her

arguments about the single house as a universal, unchanging, symbolic form are static and ignore social and historical contexts.

2. SENSE OF CONTROL AND THE SELF

Psychoanalytic theory reveals the importance of childhood experience but overlooks the concrete experience of objects in the child's developmental process. Most literature in the field of "physical environment and child development" deals with how the availability, diversity, complexity, and responsivity of objects (environment) contribute to a child's mental and motor development (Wohlwill & Heft, 1987). Furby's work (1978, 1980) also deals with the child's sense of competence. But she was concerned with the formation of a sense of self in terms of the sense of control and the process of socialization. By interviewing people in different cultures (the United States and Israel), she claimed that both the meaning of and the motivation for possession seem to depend significantly on a sense of effectance or competence. However, it is one's interaction with environmental restriction which influences the development of a notion of possession and a sense of self. As the child's mobility increases, adults and siblings often try to interfere with the child's interactions with objects to prevent damage to the objects or to prevent fights among children. The child learns to identify which object is "mine," "yours," or "theirs;" and to distinguish the "me" and the "not me." Furby (1978) also suggested that possessions were the sign of social power and status as well as extensions of the self. However, the sense of competence and the interference with a child's interactions with objects represents only one aspect of a child's development. For instance, she focuses on the external control and leaves out the fostering of self-realization or the appreciation of other people in the object experience (Searles, 1960). More research which incorporates the analysis of the complexity of object meanings and other social relations is needed.

3. OBJECTS AS A SIGN OF SOCIAL STATUS

Chapin (1935) tried to locate people's social-economic status through four scales: cultural equipment, effective income, material possessions, and participation in the group activities of the community. He found that knowing which objects were present in a person's living room was sufficient to determine socio-economic status. This analysis only reveals that there is a high correlation between living room furniture and the other three indices. But using living room equipment as an index of social-economic status falls into a vicious circle, since the social category has already been described on the basis of these objects (Baudrillard, 1981). His approach is a-theoretical. It also neglects the subjective significance of objects for people.

Drawing on the concepts of Veblen's (1899) "conspicuous consumption" and Goffman's (1959) "front region," many researchers (Amaturo, Costagliola, & Ragone, 1987; Bonnes, Giuliani, Amoni, & Bernard, 1987; Duncan & Duncan, 1976; Laumann & House, 1970; Pratt, 1982; Weisner & Weibel, 1981) have also studied the relationship between arrangements in the living room and people's social status, assuming that the living room reflects the individual's attempts to express a social identity. However, the basic approach, in most cases, still involves only searching for a correlation between two separable variables: social status and living room furniture. But these researchers defined variables in a more refined and complex manner. Some researchers were interested not only in a scale of social status but the resident's social and political attributes as well (Laumann & House, 1970). Some considered not only an inventory of living room equipment, but its style (Laumann & House, 1970), arrangement, and maintenance (Amaturo, Costagliola, & Ragone, 1987). But no matter how subtle the empirical correlations may be, these studies will never give us the image of a stratified society because they do not account for the social processes of the power structure (Baudrillard, 1981).

Duncan and Duncan (1976a) were interested in different ways of expressing people's social status for different social groups. They compared household consumption patterns between the old elite and the new elite both in Boston and in India. They proposed the impermeability of social networks to explain the difference between the old elite and the new elite. The old elite spent their money on parties or social events instead of their houses to express their memberships in their social groups. They had highly connected social networks. They could rely on word of mouth as a method for establishing and maintaining their reputation. But the new rich are in a loose and unbound social network, so they need to provide relatively permanent and visible evidence of wealth, such as a house or furniture which is used repeatedly to present themselves to a variety of new audiences without depleting their resources. Pratt (1982) reported similar findings. She interviewed two groups of women--the "established elite" and the "new elite" in Vancouver. She found that the members of a tightly integrated social world used decorations as a manifestation of group values and not as an important expression of an individual's identity. Rather, the more upwardly mobile women used decorations as a medium for expressing their individual personality.

These studies represent a tradition in social sciences positing that signifying social status is the chief meaning carried by objects in a consumer society. It does not tell the whole story. In an anthropological study of modern North American homes, McCracken (1987) found that many middle class people used objects to create homeyness as their bulwark against status competition. This homey environment provides solidarities and satisfactions and turns the resident's attention away from a ceaseless battle for prestige. Literature on personalization and cherished objects (reviewed below) also suggests other aspects of object meanings.

4. PERSONALIZATION

Other studies of home decoration (Gee, 1988; Hansen & Altman, 1976; Vinsel, Brown, Altman, & Foss, 1980) emphasize personalization rather than status symbolization. By interviewing fourteen people, Gee (1988) found that people put objects in their familiar surroundings as a reflection of self, identity, control, memories, and aesthetic values.

Hansen and Altman (1976) recorded the decorations of forty-one double occupancy rooms in a college dormitory in the second week of school and at the end of an autumn quarter. They found that the overall volume of wall space covered by decorations had increased through the quarter; and "[t]hose who eventually dropped out of school . . . reliably decorated *less* than those who stayed in school, in overall amount of personalizing, and in volume of personal relationship and personal interest items" (p. 503, italics original). In this analysis, decorations are categorized and correlated with drop-out rate, while the respondent's intentions and interpretations in the process of personalization are neglected. A similar study conducted by Vinsel, Brown, Altman, and Foss (1980) later revealed an opposite pattern in terms of quantity of decorations. In the meanwhile, they found that "dropouts" tended to decorate their rooms more than "stayers," but their decorations showed less diversity and less commitment to the university setting. They were also less skillful in using privacy regulation mechanisms and less satisfied with their lives.

Despite the constraints of their conceptualization and methodology, it is interesting to connect these two studies with Wofsey, Rierdan, and Wapner's work (1979) of the self-world distancing of college students (though they were not particularly interested in objects). In Vinsel, Brown, Altman, and Foss's case, dropouts' displays suggested a greater commitment to their past life as well as their parents and friends in their hometowns; stayers' decorations indicated commitment to the university setting. As for senior students

who were leaving their college, in the Wofsey, Rierdan, and Wapner's study, those with more articulated plans after graduation construed the base environment in which they were still located in a manner reflecting greater self-world distancing. They left the present environment psychologically before departing physically. The implication is that the relationship between person and environment does not just involve the present. "[T]he 'meaning' of the past work is defined in terms of the questions put to it from the present...the questions we ask are ordered by the way we project ourselves in understanding into the future" (Palmer, 1969, p. 182). A person's "[p]ast memories, present experiences, and future dreams are inextricably linked to the objects that comprise his or her environment (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). In other words, in order to understand the meaning of objects we need to put it in a temporal context.

5. CHERISHED OBJECTS

Unlike sociologists' interest in objects as a status symbol, some researchers are more interested in cherished objects in households or institutions as expressions of one's self, social relations, and memories. Duncan and Duncan (1976a) studied homes of the wealthy because only they could afford to make their homes conform to their values (Kron, 1983). Laumann and House (1970) focus only on the objects which are seen in the living-room, assuming that objects shown to people are generally present in the living room. In contrast, the studies of cherished objects focus on all objects which are significant, meaningful or highly valued by the respondents. These objects can be present in living-room, bedroom, kitchen, or any other place; and they are not as influenced by the resident's economic ability, compared to an inventory of living-room furniture. The Meaning of Things (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981), Special Possessions (Myers, 1985) and Special Objects (Oury, 1987) represent three systematic studies on cherished objects.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) interviewed eighty-two families in their homes in the Chicago metropolitan area. The interviewees were black and white, upper middle class and lower middle class. In each family, both parents were interviewed as well as at least one of the grandparents and at least one of the children. The respondents were asked to name what household objects they cherished. They were then asked why each object named was special, what it would mean to them not to have this thing, and when and how it was acquired. The authors found that children and male adults tended to mention objects of action, while the elderly and female adults tended to mention objects of contemplation, by aggregated data. But the internal symbolic differentiation and integration within a family was not dealt with. In addition, their conclusion that people are addicted to terminal consumption is not justified by the findings. Indeed, they found that, as they got older, people learned to value things as part of their social relationships rather than for their private selves.

In Myers's study (1985) on special possessions, twelve "relatively mature, well-functioning" adults ranging in age from thirty-five to fifty-nine were interviewed in depth concerning their "possessions of special importance," both past and present. This research was an exploratory and qualitative one. Patterns in the developmental function served by special possessions at different ages, such as school-age children, adolescents, young adults, and adults, were found. The significance of special possessions in the process of growth was discussed and the limitations of retrospective data with a restricted population were also acknowledged.

In Oury's dissertation (1987), high school and college students were asked, in a questionnaire, to describe objects that had been especially important to them at some time in their lives from childhood to the present. Adopting Jungian concepts, the author categorized the reasons for the importance of objects into those experienced through thinking, sensing, feeling, and intuiting. Themes of transition and transformation of

meaning were identified. The relationships between the qualities of objects and the meanings that they carry were discussed. Gender differences were also found. Women were more interested in personal and home objects (such as dolls, jewelry, and furniture), while men were more interested in things of the wider world (such as sports objects and guns).

6. OVERVIEW

Psychoanalytic theory, based on clinical evidence and anecdotal observation, proposes the importance of the symbolic meaning of objects. But theorists are not interested in the object in itself. Objects are the projection of psychosexual needs and conflicts or the collective unconsciousness. The role of objects is passive and static.

Sociological studies about objects are confined to the symbolization of social status. Possession and use of objects is correlated with social-economic status and social-political attributes. Most studies are descriptive. The upper and middle classes are revealed as bearers of objects. Their political strategies of the manipulation of signification systems are concealed. However, some researchers (Duncan & Duncan, 1976a; Pratt, 1982) propose that the *nouveaux riches* or people with higher social mobility change their consumption patterns more frequently to express their identities.

Most studies of cherished objects (Hansen & Altman, 1976; Kalymu, 1983; Millard & Smith, 1981) demonstrate a correlation of two independent variables, (1) environment: possessions; and (2) behavior: satisfaction, adjustment, or decision. The holistic and dynamic role of possessions is not articulated. The Meaning of Things (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981) deals with the dynamics of objects and family life; Special Objects (Oury, 1987) mentions the transition and transformation of meanings of objects, but in both instances description and categorization of objects form the major analyses. Some research on transition (e.g., Kalymun, 1983) deals with relocation as a single event

rather than a process of adaptation to a new place. In Myers's study (1985), the significance of special possessions in a life span was studied. However, the results were based on retrospective data. The person's life context in relation to special possessions could have been made more explicit as well.

To investigate the dynamics of the transaction between persons and objects, foreign students' experiences in their home and host country are the focus for my dissertation. There are two reasons to choose this phenomenon. (1) Going abroad to study automatically results in a change of social and environmental situations. (2) Going abroad to study may represent a subjective life stage² (Stokols & Shumaker, 1982) for students. Focusing on the experiences of foreign students provides an opportunity to compare the meanings of objects in different contexts and to understand how meanings are situated in the life course.

B. PILOT STUDY

For the pilot study (Bih, 1988), I interviewed fourteen Chinese students from Taiwan one semester after they arrived in the United States. In that study, the major issues involved the meanings of objects for foreign students and how they maintained personal, social, and physical continuity in a new setting. The interviewees' ages ranged from twenty-three to twenty-eight. They all had come to the United States for the first time. Half of them were male and half female. They were all graduate students, studying in three different universities in New York and with seven different majors. The interview included questions about the objects they brought to New York, objects they added here, special

²Subjective life stages are defined as spatially and temporally bounded phases of a person's life that are associated with particular goals and plans (Stokols & Shumaker, 1982).

objects, the meanings of these objects, where they kept these objects, their use of these objects since they arrived in the United States, why they came here, the nature of their social relationships, their major concerns, and their future goals. The average interviewing time was two hours. All interviews were done in Chinese, tape recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed.

The meaning of objects was understood in the context of continuity/ discontinuity, old/new environment, and people's intentions. They were categorized as objects which were constantly significant, objects whose meanings were transitional, objects whose meanings were created or reinforced by distancing from the respondent's family, friends, or country, objects left behind, objects for the new environment and future objects, objects with meaning hiatus³, and objects sent between the old and new environment--keeping and updating relationships and information. Then the integrated role of objects in the lives of five students who could be classified as desiring to live in the past, maintaining continuity with their past lives, living as a traveller, or experiencing discontinuity was discussed (Bih, 1991).

In the pilot study, the transformation of the meaning of objects as part of an environmental transition was discussed. However, the respondents were only interviewed once one semester after they came to the United States. I did not have enough information about their special objects, home environment, social relations, and academic achievement in their home country. This information is needed to give us a more complete understanding of the dynamics of the meaning of objects.

³When encountering a new environment, some students concentrate their energy on new experiences. The significance of some objects fades into the background temporarily.

C. A PERSPECTIVE ON PERSON-OBJECT TRANSACTIONS

Based on my review and analysis of the theoretical and empirical work as well as on my own pilot study, I have developed a basic conceptual framework as a guide for this research.

1. People and objects are not isolated. They should be understood in a larger social-cultural-environmental-historical context. An object has its history and changes its meaning in a different context. A person is a social being. He or she constructs the meaning of objects according to his or her experience and expectations, and he or she is constructed in a particular society.

2. The meaning of objects is not dictated by the intrinsic qualities of the objects or the respondents' intentions *per se*. The object's intrinsic qualities lend certain probable meanings to objects but it is the person (in a social/cultural/environmental context) who perceives and assigns meanings to objects. For instance, photographs of one's significant others can be a soothing agent or an agent of social interaction, have a transitional meaning when one encounters a new environment, or be a burden by imposing too much psychic pressure on the person.

3. The role of objects is not passive. Aesthetic expression through an object is not just the projection of inner experiences or imaginings onto the object but it involves a realization of meaning through interaction with the inherent qualities of the object. Many researchers identify reasons why a specific object is cherished, such as memories, status symbols, or associations. Actually, these reasons do not exhaust the meanings of objects. The consequences of interacting with objects are significant too. For instance, from reading diaries, people not only recall the people and the experiences of an earlier time but also interpret them in the present context and enrich their conception of the world and a sense of the self. Thus, diaries and photographs are not just representations of personal

history or experiences *per se*, they suggest new interpretations and the possibility of human development.

4. Objects have personal, social and cultural meanings which are mixed and, in addition, people may assign different meanings to the same object. A gift in a Chinese style may have a cultural meaning and a social function. Photographs may be the representation of one's friend and of one's skill in photography. Music tapes recorded and sent by one's family may unify one's personal interest and social relationship.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

A. PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS

“Methods and methodology are not simply techniques and rationales for the conduct of research” (Reinharz, 1983, P. 162). Every methodology presumes a certain philosophical viewpoint on the nature of human beings and knowledge, even if the researcher is not aware of it and does not address it in the research process. The philosophical underpinnings influence the selection of subject matter and the methodology to approach it. In the empiricist tradition, physical science is taken as the model of social scientific research. And its commitment to science is stronger than its commitment to human beings (Giorgi, 1970). The subject matter which cannot be approached by the “scientific method” is ruled out in the science. The subject matter, therefore, is dictated by the scientific method, not the other way around. Human beings are treated as a thing or a machine.

The difference between human beings and the subject matter of physical science is that human beings constantly interpret and give meanings to their everyday actions and relation to other human beings and things (Christensen, 1982). So we need a proper human science which can capture the depth and complexity of human meanings.

According to hermeneutics, human beings are essentially self-interpreting. Therefore, interpretation is the proper method for studying human beings. Truth stands for the process of unconcealment, not the correspondence between what is and what is claimed. And “the historicity of the historian’s interpretation is one of the necessary pre-conditions of his hermeneutic understanding” (Kockelmans, 1975, p. 83). So the fore-knowledge is the basic condition which makes interpretation possible. This fore-

knowledge is the access to the hermeneutic circle of understanding and interpretation, and “what is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 195). In the hermeneutic circle, a phenomenon is articulated through a process of understanding between parts and the whole. The fore-knowledge is constantly reflected and challenged.

According to Dewey and Bentley (1949), there are three levels of human inquiry. For *self-action* approach, things are acting under their own powers. The *interaction* perspective views the world as a process of simple forces between separate and unalterable particles. Space and time are treated as the absolute and fixed. However, based on the *transaction* approach, no one constituent can be adequately specified apart from the specification of other constituents of the full subject matter. Time is an inherent quality of the phenomenon. There is no basic separation between the knower and the known. These different perspectives could influence the decision on research design, method, measurement, and interpretation of the data. So what would be the different methodologies to approach the phenomenon of the person-object relationship? Based on the self-action approach, we may provide a psychological test to measure the respondent’s personality in term of introverted vs. extroverted or thing-oriented vs. people-oriented. We then study how different types of person use objects. By adopting the interaction perspective, we may define two sets of variables--the quality and quantity of personal objects as well as a scale of satisfaction or adjustment--and study the correlation between the two. The current research was guided by the transaction approach, so a different kind of research design was used, described as follow.

B. METHOD

In order to understand the dynamics of person-object transactions in different social and environmental contexts, a longitudinal study with in-depth interviews was conducted.

In the present research, a longitudinal study means the study of naturally-occurring rather than experimentally-induced changes in an appreciable period of time (Miller, 1987). Most existing literature on objects and foreign students' experiences was based on one time or cross-sectional study. It failed to see the dynamics of human phenomena. In addition, its ability to make sense of respondents' behavior was dependent upon a very brief interaction with respondents only. In a longitudinal study, intra-individual development can be revealed. Since it was hardly possible to observe foreign student's experiences of objects in everyday life, in-depth interviews at different times was the major method for collecting data. Each student was interviewed three times while in different stages. The first interview was conducted a few weeks before students left their home country, the second interview a few weeks after they arrived in the United States and the third interview one semester after their arrival. It was assumed that they would have experiences of writing term papers or taking an examination as well as having a certain familiarity with the social and physical environment after one semester. While change and adaptation would continue, I expected to catch the adaptive process during critical transitional periods.

C. PARTICIPANTS

Since I am a Chinese student only students who are Chinese from Taiwan were chosen to be interviewed in order to reduce cross-cultural variation for both interviewees and the interviewer. In addition, only students who lived or studied in the Taipei area and were going to New York City to study in a graduate program were considered due to issues of accessibility and feasibility. I planned to interview thirty students for this study. In the event of loss some interviewees through the repetitive interviews, I planned to include ten additional students in the sample.

Three strategies were used to find the interviewees. (1) Each year some Chinese Student Associations in universities in New York (such as New York University,

Columbia University, Queens College of the City University of New York, etc.) hold orientations in Taiwan for incoming students. I attended three of these orientations. There were about thirty to fifty attenders for each orientation. Then I called them and asked for their cooperation. (2) There are the Bureau of International Cultural and Educational Relations, the Scholars Exchange Foundation, and some other private organizations in Taipei which give courses on the GRE and TOFEL test as well as consultations on applications and travel. Students who are looking for companions to travel together leave information--such as their name, address, telephone number, and the school they are going to study--in these places. This information is accessible to the public. I found about twenty potential interviewees from the Scholars Exchange Foundation and about eighty students from a private organization. (3) I put some flyers regarding my research on bulletin boards on campuses and in the organizations mentioned above to solicit volunteers. I recognized that not all students going to another country attended orientations or left their name in agencies to look for companions. However these were the most probable ways to identify students who planned to study in New York City.

As mentioned above, there was no intent to achieve any statistical generalizations from the findings of this study, nor to test some hypotheses, so the group of students whom I interviewed were not representative in a statistical sense at all. Instead, through a close analysis of a reasonably sized group of people, I expected to obtain a rich description of experiences from them. Therefore, the only criterion for selecting interviewees was to find people who varied across three variables--sex, the school and major in which they were going to study in the United States--which I could identify before I contacted the interviewee. In addition, because I was interested in students' experiences of being in a new physical, social and cultural environment, I would interview only students who were

coming to the United States for the first time⁴. Other important variables suggested by the existing literature are marital status, age, expected years of stay in the United States, and living conditions--living in a dorm or an apartment, in a single or a double room. These issues will be considered in the analysis but not for the sampling because of the difficulty of controlling and the constraints of a small sample size.

I did not have the forty interviewees at one time. Rather the next sample was decided according to the sample that I had already had and the consideration of balancing the sample based on the criteria mentioned above. Students left their names in those institutions at different times. In addition, I was the president of the Chinese Student Association at the Graduate Center, the City University of New York (CUNY). So information about my name and telephone number was available in those institutions as well. Students called me to ask information about New York.

Among students whom I called, eight people said that they were busy at that time. I tried twice more and then gave up. I interviewed forty students in total. Among them, eighteen were found through a private institution, fourteen through school orientations, two through the Scholars Exchange Foundation, and five students called me by themselves--four were CUNY students, one saw the flier that I put out.

I explained to all the interviewees that this was a longitudinal study. They would be interviewed three times. I gave them a postcard with my address in the United States on it in the first interview and asked them to send it to me after they arrived in New York. I received postcards from twenty-eight interviewees between August and October. Then I called the Department or students in the same school according to the information I got

⁴In result, one student whom I interviewed had studied in the United States for a masters degree. I was not able to contact him in the United States. So I discarded this interviewee from my sample.

from the first interview in order to locate the rest of the interviewees. I had the opportunity to contact eight interviewees. Among them one refused to be interviewed because of lack of interest. The remaining four interviewees could not be located. My speculation is that they might have stayed in Taiwan or have gone to another school to study. In total, I was able to contact thirty-five interviewees (not including the one who refused to be interviewed) in the United States. But three interviewees said they were very busy when I called them for the second interview. As a result, I interviewed thirty-two students for the second interview--mostly in October and November--and thirty-five students for the third interview--basically between February and April in the following year. Through repetitive interviews many interviewees became my friends. After I had done some preliminary analysis of the data, I interviewed eleven interviewees based on the variety of their experiences and accessibility for the fourth time a year after the third interview.

For this dissertation, I will incorporate data from the pilot study. Information about interviewees is represented in the following table.

Table 1
Reference Table for the Interviews

No.	Age	Major in the U.S.	Interviews				Pages on which interviewees were mentioned
			1st	2nd	3rd	4th	
PM1	23	M.B.A.	12/87				48, 61, 62, 93, 152, 192, 203, 212
PM2	23	M.B.A.	1/88				48, 100
PM3	24	Architecture	12/87				50, 110, 200, 203, 204
PM4	24	Design	1/88				52, 133, 143, 214, 215
PF5	23	Arts	1/88				56, 62, 65, 70
PM6	24	Architecture	1/88				54, 55, 87, 94
PF7	27	Humanities#	2/88				76
PF8	22	M.B.A.	2/88				
PF9	24	Engineering#	3/88				73, 78, 96, 198
PF10	23	Social Sci.	2/88				103, 176, 178, 179, 188, 198
PF11	23	M.B.A.	2/88				64, 95, 168, 179, 189, 226
PM12	23	M.B.A.	1/88				
PF13	25	Social Sci.#	1/88				32, 41, 45, 85, 154
PM14	24	Social Sci.#	12/87				39, 52, 130, 143, 213
DF1	25	Education	6/89	11/89	2/90	6/91	65, 70, 91, 105, 111, 166, 175, 188, 192
DF2	22	Natural Sci.	6/89	10/89	3/90		80, 112, 113
DF3	23	Natural Sci.#	6/89	10/89	4/90	6/91	40, 49, 50, 64, 70, 104, 109, 111, 113, 117, 163, 168, 169, 201, 205
DM4	25	Engineering	6/89	11/89	4/90		57, 58, 81, 167, 170, 173, 181, 189
DM5	24	Medicine	6/89	10/89	2/90		38, 96, 105, 107, 108, 157, 162, 198
DF6	29	Arts	6/89	11/89	2/90	3/91	36, 41, 59, 65, 78, 94, 111, 113, 117, 161, 163, 168, 169, 170, 172, 174, 175, 182, 188, 191, 202, 205
DM7	25	Engineering	7/89	11/89	3/90		37, 53, 138, 143, 162
DM8	24	Engineering	7/89	11/89	3/90		63, 116, 155, 181, 190, 197
DM9	23	Engineering	6/89	10/89	2/90	3/91	36, 42, 46, 51, 70, 80, 81, 92, 111, 117, 157, 161, 199
DF10	23	Arts	6/89	10/89	4/90		41, 42, 81, 94, 162, 163, 167, 175, 179, 181
DM11	25	Medicine	6/89	12/89	3/90		42, 79, 109, 113, 117, 121, 143
DM12	27*	Engineering#	7/89	11/89	3/90		59, 80, 92, 131, 143, 163
DF13	25*	M.B.A.	7/89	10/89	4/90		116, 117
DF14	27	M.B.A.	6/89	11/89	3/90		103, 111, 114, 162, 172, 173, 174, 190, 191, 210
DM15	27*	M.B.A.	6/89	10/89	2/90		38, 39, 49, 51, 112, 117, 162, 163, 174, 199
DM16	25		7/89				
DF17	26	M.B.A.	7/89		2/90		108, 114
DF18	25*		6/89				101
DF19	25	Arts	6/89	10/89	2/90	1/91	38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 64, 79, 80, 96, 98, 103, 104, 112, 114, 115, 117, 162, 164, 167, 169, 181, 186, 191, 196, 197, 212
DM20	27	Arts	6/89	10/89	2/90		33, 47, 62, 81, 100, 113, 117, 161, 171
DF21	24	Humanities	6/89	10/89	4/90		35, 38, 43, 45, 58, 64, 70, 77, 80, 94, 99, 110, 112, 135, 143, 161
DF22	25	Social Sci.	7/89	10/89	4/90		65, 81, 91, 114, 117
DM23	24	M.B.A.	7/89		3/90	3/91	75, 81, 107, 115, 127, 143

No.	Age	Major in the U.S.	Interviews				Pages on which interviewees were mentioned
			1st	2nd	3rd	4th	
DF24	25	Medicine#	7/89	11/89	3/90		56, 58, 61, 81, 104, 113, 162, 167, 171, 181, 185, 207
DM25	34*	Arts#	7/89	11/89	3/90		38, 39, 41, 51, 56, 65, 69, 70, 81, 105, 110, 113, 116, 162, 165, 169, 180, 188, 196, 211
DM26	42		7/89				80
DM27	22	Natural Sci.#	7/89	10/89	2/90	4/91	49, 50, 52, 58, 63, 75, 81, 100, 105, 107, 141, 143, 161, 180, 188, 199
DM28	28	Natural Sci.#	8/89	10/89	3/90		114
DM29							
DF30	22	Social Sci.	6/89	11/89	2/90		81, 108, 111, 116
DF31	23	M.B.A.	7/89	11/89	2/90		65, 110, 174, 189
DF32	24	Arts	7/89	10/89	2/90	12/90	48, 100, 146, 162, 181, 182, 199, 213
DF33	26	M.B.A.	7/89				113
DF34	24	Education	7/89		4/90		113, 117, 163
DM35	25	Social Sci.	6/89	10/89	3/90		181
DM36	25	M.B.A.	7/89	11/89	3/90		55, 144
DM37	25	Engineering	7/89	10/89	2/90	5/91	39, 73, 81, 111, 112, 162, 172, 173, 180, 183, 189
DM38	25	Engineering	7/89	11/89	3/90	3/91	49, 51, 57, 73, 74, 180, 186, 211
DM39	29*	Engineering	8/89	10/89	2/90	1/91	43, 44, 45, 52, 66, 68, 171, 177
DM40	28	M.B.A.	8/89	12/89	4/90		48, 63, 64, 65, 76, 180

P: Pilot Study

D: Dissertation

F: Female

M: Male

* after Age: Married

after Major: Studying in a Doctoral Program

Notes: Engineering includes Computer Science, Mechanical Engineering, and Electrical Engineering. Arts includes Music, Cinema, Theater, and Television. Social Science includes Political Science, Social Work, and Anthropology. Natural Science includes Chemistry, Biology, and Statistics. Humanities includes Literature and Linguistics.

D. INTERVIEW

Although interview is a common method to elicit meanings in social sciences, it has been considered as a “standardized experiment” rather than a form of discourse. “Questions and answers. . . are regarded as analogues of stimuli and responses” (Mishler, 1986, p. viii). Therefore, massive efforts are made to standardize questions and interviewer behavior so that all respondents will receive the same “stimulus.” By rejecting this stimulus-response model, the interview is recognized by the interpretive and feminist social scientists (e.g., Reinhartz, 1983; Rowles, 1978b) as a process of joint construction of meaning. Along the same line, the open-ended, “unstructured” interview is preferred, and the researcher and the subject are seen as collaborators.

All interviews were to be conducted in the interviewee’s house for the following reasons. (1) In the context of home, it might be easier for interviewees to think about their experiences. (2) I was able to see the interviewee’s personal objects and home environments, and raise some questions about what I saw. (3) In the home environment, the interviewee could have more sense of control over the interviewing situation. However, two-thirds of the interviewees refused to allow me to conduct the first interview in their homes. The reason was basically that I was a stranger to them at that time. So we met either in a park or in a fast-food restaurant. After they came to the United States only one person refused to allow me to go to her house to do the interview. She said that it was inconvenient because she shared a house with other people. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed in Chinese. I also took pictures of their rooms to record their personalizations and home environments.

There was no pre-determined order or specified wording to the interview questions, but I did have a list of areas that I planned to cover in each interview. Generally, I started with the first question: “Please tell me when and why you had the idea of studying abroad.” for the first interview; and “Please tell me what happened after the last interview.” for other

interviews after some polite conversations. To elicit interviewee's object experiences, different questions were asked. I asked them about objects which were important or meaningful in their lives, about which they had feelings, and which were irreplaceable. The point was not to place the meaning in a pre-defined scale of the significance of objects. Rather, their description of object experiences was more important. Other interviewees' experiences were constantly raised to trigger their thinking. Some frequently mentioned objects, such as photographs, a diary, letters, gifts, newspapers, and books were asked about. Because I interviewed them in their own living space, I also asked about objects which were on display.

The first interview included three sets of open-ended questions. (1) Going abroad: the reasons and process of applying for schools and preparing for going abroad, previous experiences of leaving home, feelings about going abroad, expectations or images of a foreign student's life, short and long term plans and goals, family members' and friends' attitudes toward their studying abroad. (2) General experiences: daily activities (what, when, and where), major concerns, social relations, feelings about one's home and room. (3) Objects: significant and meaningful objects--when they were acquired, why they were important, when and how they were used, feelings about objects, and with whom they shared objects.

The second and third interview included the second and third sets of questions mentioned above. Other questions concerning feelings about leaving, when they came to the United States, impressions of New York, the comparison of experiences in different countries, relations with people in the home country, the process of adjustment, future goals, and the influence of first interview were asked. I also compared the lists of significant objects mentioned in the present interview to those mentioned in the previous interview(s), and then asked the interviewees the reasons for differences in order to know

about different objects cherished in different contexts and the transformation of meaning of the same object.

Considering that the interview itself might influence the interviewee's experiences of objects, ten among the forty students were interviewed about the first and second sets of questions without being asked questions specific to objects in the first interview. However, I only found a very limited influence on their selection of objects that interviewees brought to the United States and their object experiences. Since object experiences could only be understood in a person's larger life experiences and social context, I asked interviewees about their feelings regarding studying abroad, social relations, future plans, feelings about home and the larger environment, and daily activities in addition to questions about objects. So questions about objects did not stand out as the major focus of this study. Many interviewees perceived this study as a study about foreign students' general experiences of adapting to a new environment. Generally, interviewees felt that the interviews were like common social conversations with their friends. Interviews made them think more about their experiences. A few interviewees explicitly realized the significance of their personal belongings through the interviewing process.

In terms of the selection of objects, the first interview had a very limited influence because the interview was only one of many factors which affected their selection of objects. First, they should confirm the baggage weight restriction set by the airline company, although a few interviewees did send some of their objects by mail. They consulted their teachers or friends who had the experience of studying abroad. Moreover, some consulting agencies published small booklets describing objects needed for studying abroad. I found that it suggested more than one hundred items of objects, ranging from documents, clothing, books, dictionaries, a rice cooker, a sleeping bag, stationery, to gifts and photographs. Some interviewees' parents also screened their baggage and suggested some objects, such as necessities, a Buddhist rosary or necklace. In addition, interviewees

had an expectation of their lives in the United States. They intended not to bring some of their favorite objects whose significance was recognized in the interview.⁵

E. DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis used in this study was informed by grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), the interpretive approach (Gadamer, 1989; Kockelmans, 1975; Christensen, 1982; Polkinghorne, 1989), and the transactional approach (Dewey & Bentley, 1949). I did not start with clearly preconceived hypotheses, but rather the study was based on only a general theoretical perspective of phenomenon--a transactional approach (Wapner, Kaplan, & Cohen, 1973; Altman & Rogoff, 1987). The specific concepts or categories of object meanings developed from previous studies (e.g., Vinsel, Brown, Altman, & Foss, 1980; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Oury, 1987; Rubinstein, 1989) enabled me to be more sensitive to the phenomenon (Kockelmans, 1975), but were not imposed on the data.

As described by grounded theory, the research process is not a linear process from generating hypotheses, collecting data, to verification, rather it is a back-and-forth procedure between data collection, coding, memo writing, literature review, and writing. The existing literature and my personal experiences formed the basic entry point to the phenomena in which I was interested. Each previous interview might generate comparative data for the following interviews. After some themes or categories were identified from the data, they were further compared with literature. So the data analysis did not wait for the finish of data collection to start. Rather, it was inextricably linked to the data collection process and literature review. This is echoed by the core concept of hermeneutics--the

⁵I will discuss objects left behind in Chapter VII.

hermeneutic circle. An understanding of a phenomenon or an action is achieved by the reciprocal interpretation of a whole and its constituent parts. The hermeneutic circle involves different aspects of part-whole-relationship. As in this study, it involved the relationship between an object and a person's possessions as a whole, object experiences and life experiences, an individual and the whole sample, as well as Chinese students and their social, cultural context. In addition, the data analysis involved comparisons between a person's experiences in different periods of time as well as between the data and existing literature, and imaginative thought experiments, such as imaginative experiences of losing a particular object.

Basically I read the transcript of each interview very carefully to get a sense of the whole. Then the meaning of every single object was coded and categorized in relation to the student's adaptation to the new environment. Objects for each student were then understood as a whole in the context of a student's broader life experiences. Comparisons among interviewees proceeded according to object meaning structure and other themes, such as social relations and future plans. As repetitive interviews went on, a similar process was followed. Through such a reciprocal process of understanding between different interviews for the same person, object experiences and broader life experiences, as well as the individual case and the whole group, the understanding of person-object transactions was refined.

Based on Heidegger and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, the human being is essentially self-interpreting and temporal. The human experiences that I am interpreting are already interpreted by the interviewees. I do not impose a scientific language on their experiences. Rather, the product of this research is a joint construction by the author and the interviewees. It involves an understanding of how the interviewees interpret and act on their personal objects in a temporal and environmental context as well as how I relate my own experiences and knowledge to the interviewees in relation to their interpretation and

actions. As described by Gadamer, in order to understand "the other" you have to bring yourselves. So the author is always a part of the process of the construction of meanings. In addition, he argues that interpretation is a dialogical process. You always presume that you can learn new things from others. Every person's experiences are valid, significant, and respected. Unlike statistical analysis in which the "unique" data are treated as "deviant" and deleted in the data analysis or other studies in which the interviewees' experiences are selected to support a researcher's theory, I try to understand every single interviewee's experiences in order to know the possible range of object experiences and adaptational process in environmental transitions. In writing my interpretation, I also try to select experiences of as many different interviewees as possible.

F. NOTES ON THE INTERVIEW AND THE INTERVIEWEE

Before I report the result of this study in the next chapter, I would like to mention the relationship between myself and the interviewees as well as some examples of the emergence of meanings in the interview process.

All interviewees in this research were volunteers. They did not get paid for spending time and providing their personal experiences for my research. It would be helpful to describe what they said about reasons for participating in this study. Mostly it was their sincere intention to help a student to finish his study. They felt that the interview did not do harm to them. Some also anticipated that this research would benefit other foreign students. Being a senior student in the United States, I hoped that I could give some information to them before they came here to study. And they did ask me about New York, schools, living conditions, transportation, banking, and many other issues. An interviewee said that he had an undescrivable feeling of intimacy and security knowing a person from New York. Going abroad to study was a significant event in some

interviewees' lives. One interviewee was eager to express his excitement and future plans before his departure.

I was surprised that most of the interviewees did contact me after they came to the United States. I knew that they would be very busy right before and after their arrival in New York. As a result, only one interviewee refused to continue the interview in addition to other four interviewees who might not come to New York to study. This continuation rate was very high, compared with Hormuth's longitudinal study (1990). He used questionnaire, offered participation fee, and lost over 40% of subjects till the fourth mailing.

As the repeated interviews went on, I developed a closer relationship with a few interviewees. We made phone calls, exchanged information, or went to concerts together. I was happy that I could help a student with the skill of writing a paper and offered some information about New York for several interviewees.

Many interviewees felt that the interview was like talking with their friends. Firstly, this was not a psychological experiment or test. Secondly, the interview was open-ended. They felt free to speak about what was relevant to their lives. Lastly, they felt that I did not ask them about "personal" experiences, such as their "first romantic love experience," or "three saddest events" in their lives. All interviews in New York were conducted in the respondents' homes except one. They could have more sense of control of the interviewing situation in their own living spaces. Rather than being an authoritative psychologist I was more like a guest. Some interviewees did invite me for lunch or dinner at their houses. In their own spaces, they could decide where to sit for both of us. Usually I was served a cup of tea or juice. So they were not passive subjects who had no control of the situation. Some interviewees listened to their favorite music while doing the interview. Some played with their stuffed animals. In a sense this was like an ordinary social conversation event. As mentioned earlier I was not the only person who led the

questions. In the first interview, they usually asked me questions about studying abroad and New York after we finished the interview. However, it was not rare that they asked me questions in the midst of the interview. Some asked me about other interviewees' answers. An interviewee not only asked me about my cherished objects, questioned whether I had reviewed the previous interview in advance, but also tested me to see if I remembered the decorations in her room from the previous interview.

As mentioned earlier, the interview is a process of a joint construction of meaning by the interviewer and the interviewee. It is not to elicit a response by a pre-determined stimulus, nor is it simply to represent what is already in the interviewee's mind before the interview. Rather it is a circular process to arrive at a shared meaning which both can understand. The following examples will illustrate how the interviewee realized object meanings in the process of interviewing. The first woman (PF13) cherished her tea set. In the beginning she described her experience of drinking tea as similar to other activities that she liked. As she reflected on her experience more, the meaning was getting richer and more complex. It involved the physical movement of the "cultivation" of the tea pot, the sharing experience with her friends, the skill of making tea, and its embeddedness in the cultural tradition.

Bih: Why do you like to drink tea?

PF13: Drinking tea itself is a way of life. It makes me feel . . . I don't know. When I am drinking tea, I feel . . . I live in my inner world, a satisfied, harmonious world.

Bih: Is it related to the process of making tea?

PF13: No. The process is not important for me. Drinking tea is just like reading books, listening to the music, or watching ballet. Their meanings are the same. They are things that I like.

Bih: Then, why do you drink tea instead of others. Let's say, you can drink wine.

PF13: I don't know. . . . I think it is related to the vogue, to some degree. People in this society like to drink tea. My friends like to drink tea. We influence and reinforce each other. . . . Maybe it has to do with the process of making tea. My uncle collects tea pots. He taught me how to "cultivate" tea pots and how to make tea. So after you have learned the skill of making tea and the role of tea in the lives of traditional Chinese literati, your pleasure of drinking tea is enhanced. . . . Every time when I visit my friends, we make tea. We feel we are touching each other's heart. The experience imprints on our mind permanently. It is very easy to express our feelings and to talk.

The second man (DM20) kept his films, but not transcripts. He asked himself what these films proved.

DM20: . . . the film counts only when you show it. . . . It is a proof. It proves that I have spent a lot of energy and have accomplished a lot of things in this period of time. Without it, I don't have any other proof. I don't care if the transcript was burned. I remember what I have learned.

Bih: You don't need to prove to yourself.

DM20: That's right. But it is not a proof to other people unless it is a really good stuff and it is going to be shown in the public or in a competition. Otherwise, I would not show it to other people. So, to whom I am going to prove? To myself? Maybe. In the long run, I will keep every film that I shoot. They are the record of the development of my life. . . . It is not to prove to myself. Because I don't need a real thing to prove to myself. I know myself. But it is not good enough to be shown to people. Maybe it will acquire a special meaning when I have all my films as a whole in the future. Maybe twenty years later, my student movie will mean. . . . [20]

The third woman (PF10) tried to deny the significance of photographs by stressing the inner feeling. She attributed her display of photographs to an accidental reason. She then realized their importance through the interview.

Bih: Could you talk about photographs?

PF10: You don't look at photographs without a particular reason. I feel that the inner feeling is more important. . . . Although I put some photographs on my desk, it doesn't mean that I intend to show them. Rather, it's only because I happened to buy frames.

Bih: Why did you buy frames?

PF10: Because I have many photographs and these frames are cheap. . . . Even if I display these photographs, I can't see them clearly because usually I don't wear my glasses. They are not displayed for other people either. . . .

Bih: So you bought frames because you had photographs and you displayed your photographs because you had frames.

PF10: Sure. You won't buy frames and keep them if you don't have photographs.

Bih: So you displayed your photographs not just because you had frames.

PF10: Are you saying that I bought frames in order to display my photographs?

Bih: I don't know.

PF10: Right! . . . I always feel that it makes no difference whether I display them or not. Maybe it does make a difference. I used to put them on the night table. Later we bought a TV set. So I moved these photographs to my desk. I guess there are some psychological reasons involved. You want to highlight something, some kinds of identification. . . . You were very busy when you first arrive at this strange environment. But the longer I stay here, my feelings about these photographs are deeper.

CHAPTER III

A MEANING STRUCTURE OF OBJECT MEANINGS

When we talk about meanings, we first need to know: To what does the meaning refer? Is it a personal ideal or religious belief? Is it a person's past memory or future projection? Does it reveal personal power or nurturance? Second, meanings do not exist in a vacuum. They are realized in a particular personal, environmental, and historical context. Therefore, a person's life experiences and the larger social, cultural, and environmental context should be taken into account. Third, meanings are not static or fixed. We need to examine how meanings *change* in different situations and to understand the *process* of attachment to objects. Fourth, meanings do not just exist in the external world nor inside a person's head. They involve continuous transactions between persons and objects. Another issue is how do people use objects? Where do they keep objects? What are the consequences of interacting with objects? Fifth, since I am interested in object meanings, one question that needs to be asked is why do people need objects in the first place? What is the role of the material nature of objects in the object meanings? How are object meanings different from other kinds of meaning systems, such as verbal communication?

It is impossible to develop only one categorical system which could deal with all the different dimensions of meanings exhaustively. In this chapter, I will discuss the constituent elements of the structure of object meanings first, but at the same time I will talk about the role of the materiality of objects in object meanings under each category, when appropriate. In the following chapters, I will deal with the temporal dimension of object meanings and changes of meanings in the context of Chinese students in the United States.

Any kind of categorical system is artificial. It simplifies the complexity of human experiences. It exists only for its analytic purpose. Readers should keep in mind that these

categories are not independent entities which can be pieced together into the whole. When I use certain object experiences as illustrations of each category of meaning structure, the meaning of a particular object is not necessarily exhausted by that category. It is also important to note that object meanings are not static. The content and depth of meaning may change in different situations. The following categories represent the major constituent items of the meaning structure of objects identified in this study.

Before I describe the meaning structure, I would like to give some examples of the complexity of object meanings. An interviewee (DF21) cherished a stuff animal--Garfield. It was given by her boyfriend. It symbolized social connections, gave her physical comfort, and represented a desirable personality.

It has accompanied me for many years. I am used to its existence. I "hit" it when I am unhappy. I hug it when I am glad. . . . I like it. It's very cute. I play with it. Sometimes I "torture" it. . . . I hold it to sleep. I feel very warm. . . . It's a prototype. Like the cartoon Garfield, it's lazy. Everybody feels that it is not good to be like this. Now exercise, health, and diet are on vogue. But Garfield always goes it's own way. I like its personality.

The meaning of books for me is another example. I am a book lover. Sometimes I have an imperative to buy books. But not until I conducted this research and reflected on my own experiences, did I realize many aspects of meanings of possessing books for me. Of course, books have a function. They serve as a medium of learning and experiencing. To possess books that I may read someday in the future does help me a lot. While I am writing this dissertation, it saves a lot of time when most books that I need are around. I skim different books during my leisure time without any particular direction. It is a voyage of discovery. New ideas may just come accidentally. Browsing for books in a used-book store is also a discovery. I expected after I go back to my country it would be difficult for me to buy books inexpensively. Therefore, I justify spending a certain amount of time and money on finding and buying books for those reasons. But the more I reflected on myself, I began to realize some meanings of books of which I was not aware or tried to suppress. As Benjamin (1969) pointed out, a book collector perceives

her/himself as a rescuer. Sartre (1956) also mentioned that an object in a salesroom is only a material thing. Through ownership I raise it up to a certain type of functional being. It “exists” by my insertion of it into the total form of my environment. Therefore, I found a book “lonely and abandoned on the market place and bought it to give it its freedom” (Benjamin, 1969, p. 64). The “true freedom of all books is somewhere on [my] shelves” (p. 64), although many books has never been read. There is another aspect of meaning of books that I unconsciously deny. It is the function of “making believe.” Baudrillard (1981) once indicated that objects can reflect people’s social status positively. On the contrary, objects can also represent the artificial mobility of decor that compensate for social inertia or the failure of desired mobility. I am not a confident person. I am always bothered by not having enough knowledge. So buying books becomes a constant activity for me to soothe my fear of lacking knowledge. However, it is only make believe that to possess a book itself is to possess the knowledge in that book. These different aspects of meaning weave a complicated web of meaning. No one is dominant and no one can be denied.

A. INSTRUMENTAL

Every object has its function--a cup for drinking, a pen for writing, and a chair for sitting. However, all utility is framed by a social and cultural context (Sahlins, 1976). Even our interaction with the most mundane objects in daily life operate within a symbolic field (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). So in some sense, every object has both functional and symbolic correlates. Clothes do not just keep a person warm. They may also communicate a person’s personality and the nature of a social situation. A telephone with keyboard design, a pencil box with guitar design, and a box with piano design may reflect that the owner is a music lover. (DF6) An interviewee (DM9) felt that a radio was intimate to him. This radio he bought in New York was exactly the same model

as that he gave to his sister as a birthday gift. He was familiar with the functions of the radio. And many of his cassettes were recorded by that radio. He said he would not lend this radio to other people. For him, this radio was more than well functioning, it gave him a sense of familiarity and expressed his connection to his sister.

But in this category, I include only those objects in which function constitutes the major meaning. For instance, a computer was important for an interviewee when it was in use. There was no emotion or self-identity involved in the relationship between the person and the object.

An interviewee (DM7) explicitly expressed that he would not invest emotions in objects.

No object is meaningful. If something is missing, it may only cause inconvenience. I would not feel sad for it. You need to be mature. Don't take it too seriously. . . . You can't invest your feelings in too many things. If you are attached to things, you can't stop worrying. Only when you free yourself, can you deal with adversity. . . . I can't treat this room as my permanent nest. Maybe I'll move out next year. I can't invest my feelings in it. I can't spend much money to decorate it. I can only say that it is my space for survival. I am utilizing it. I am not here to cultivate an attachment to it. I make this very clear.

He was detached from objects and his immediate physical environment. Objects were instrumental. They were only a means for him to survive. He wanted to control objects without being constrained by them.

B. DEEPENING EXPERIENCES

Deepening experiences include both the idealistic and emotional. The object may be described as an embodiment of cultural or personal values, ideals, or beliefs to improve a person's thinking, guide actions, or help make sense of life. In other cases, people get enjoyment or pleasure, and express or transform their feelings and emotions through interacting with the object.

Objects could be a *medium* for learning and expressing (e.g., books, musical instruments) , a *marker* of experiences (e.g., travelling photos, posters of a play) , or an

end in itself of experiencing (e.g., stuffed animals). This categorization is only a matter of distinguishing but not separating. And many of our everyday objects involve all these functions as a whole. For instance, a tea pot is not just functional. It facilitates a sharing, imaginative experience. In addition, the material and design of it are also desirable for its aesthetic value. A Garfield (stuffed animal) mentioned in the beginning of this chapter was cherished by a woman (DF21) because: “My boyfriend gave it to me. . . . It’s cute. . . . I hold it to sleep. I feel very warm. . . . Garfield always goes it’s own way. I like its personality.”

1. MEDIUM

It is natural that many students mentioned books as a medium of learning and expressing. But it is interesting that few students cherished textbooks. They considered textbooks as only instrumental. Textbooks were indispensable and important to acquire professional knowledge and to do homework; but most students did not express feelings toward them. Instead of textbooks, they cherished books of literature, biography, mystery, or music. Through reading books, their knowledge was enhanced, their feelings were soothed, and their imaginations were fired. “Books are sources of knowledge, or a place to consign your emotions.” (DM25) “There are a lot of new ideas in books.” (DM5) “From books [biographies], you can learn other people’s life experiences of struggling, the ups and downs of their lives. You can test them in your own life. When I encounter a similar situation, their experiences could be my references and lessons. I can learn about history too.” (DM15) “Her [a Chinese writer] writing has a very strong theatric tension. I like its delicacy, splendor, gloom, and terror. It is a composite of different melodies. The tragedy is not just a simple and terrible tragedy, it lets you feel the thrill of human nature. I love it.” (DF19)

A few people mentioned a television set as a medium of learning in the United States. In contemporary society, television is a major source of knowledge in addition to books. For foreign students, they can learn English and the new culture from television programs. But more often, watching television is a kind of passive activity. “[P]eople, in fact, use the medium simply as a pacifier. . . when one is too tired to seek genuine experiences.” (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981, p. 75). An interviewee (DF19) said: “When I am annoyed, television ‘paralyzes’ me.” So for some students, learning English could become an excuse to justify watching television for entertainment.

I bought a television set. I don’t have an opportunity to speak English, at least I can listen to the television. It’s for entertainment, also for learning. . . . Sometimes I am bored of reading textbooks. Only while watching television can I forget everything. After watching television for a while, I think about doing other things. Hurry up! Studying! After a little while, I am bored of studying. Once the television is turned on, I forget everything again. [laughing] (DM37)

Another student (PM14) could not stop himself from watching television. For him, watching television was an escape from the weight and woes in the world. But it could not solve his problems. Finally, he gave his television set to his friend.

Maps mentioned by one student (DM15) are another example of objects as a medium of learning. He put one city map, one map of the United States, and one world map on the wall. Maps gave him orientation in the world literally and metaphorically.

With a map at hand I know which way I should go. When my friends call me in other states I look at the map to see where they live and how far away we are. When I read a newspaper, I look at the map. Knowing the location of an event makes the event more real. Without a map I would feel very uneasy. For instance, a survey showed that many Hispanics came from Puerto Rico, then I was anxious to know where it was located. . . . A map lets you know where to locate yourself. The world is huge. It is not just the little point where you stand. You recognize that Taiwan is only a small island. A map opens your mind. . . . It is like coordinates. It lets me know where to impose my influence, where to impose my nation’s influence.

Diaries were frequently mentioned as a medium of expressing people’s feelings or of self-learning. By keeping a diary people can communicate with themselves and “let myself do something contemplative and self-reflective.” (DM25) With objectification

through a material thing, people's feelings and emotions find an outlet to vent without the need to interact with another person. "Sometimes you are very angry at some incidents. Those incidents involve other people. You don't want to tell somebody else and make those incidents more complicated. So you keep a diary." (DF3) When people have a strong feeling, positive or negative, they may share it with their friends. However, you may not be able to spell it out to those who do not have the experience, and you can only, to some extent, light up that experience for those who have had a similar experience before (Dreyfus, 1991). So instead of telling other people, keeping a diary is another way to express feelings. By keeping a diary, the emotion finds an outlet and the self is transformed. Here is an example.

Keeping a diary is like taking a bath. You can clean yourself. When I have a very wonderful experience and I cannot find any friend to share it with, I talk to my diary. Sometimes I talk to my friends but I know that they don't understand me according to their reactions. So what else can I do? Or when I am very sad, people cannot understand how deep my feeling is, then I keep a diary. . . . Sometimes I feel I am "full," I need to find a place to vent my emotion. Sometimes I feel I am "empty," I may just write a few sentences to force myself to stop that kind of "emptiness," to push myself to do something substantial. (DF19)

Because keeping a diary was a time people sat down, thought about what they had done, and reviewed their feelings and thinking, people might not keep a diary if they did not want to reflect on themselves.

I have not kept a diary for a long time. I am afraid of reading it too. Try to avoid facing your own problems! Because once you keep a diary you need to examine yourself very seriously. And you find that everyday is the same. Time just passes by. (DF19)

Keeping a diary was a way of communicating with oneself or venting one's feelings and thinking. For some students, reading a diary was more interesting. Because diaries were an extension of memory, people could learn from their past experiences and acquire more understanding of the self and the world from diaries. A new diary may mean a new beginning of one's life. Throwing out one's diaries may mean discarding one's past

self. (DF6) A diary could also function as a way of communicating with other people. (DM25) I will discuss these aspects of meanings later.

Drinking tea was also mentioned by some interviewees as a way of deepening one's experience. A woman (PF13) cherished a tea set because she could have a warm and peaceful experience by drinking tea.

Drinking tea itself is a way of life. It makes me feel . . . I don't know. When I am drinking tea, I feel . . . I live in my inner world, a satisfied, harmonious world. . . . Every time when I visit my friends, we make tea. We feel we are touching each other's heart. The experience imprints on our mind permanently. It is very easy to express our feelings and to talk.

Drinking tea by using a whole tea set is a much richer experience than simply pouring hot water over tea bags. Warming the teapot and pouring tea into small teacups are part of a delicate physical performance. By these movements and the ritual that occurs people cultivate themselves. A teapot is like a living creature. It needs to be "cultivated" too. Being constantly used and cared, a teapot can not only keep the flavor of tea but also be nurtured. When a person cultivates a habit of the tea ritual, both the nature of that tea set and the self identity of that person can be enhanced by the transaction. Drinking tea is a sharing experience as well. By taking teacups from a tea plate together and putting teacups back on it repeatedly, people are constantly drawn to a center--the tea set. A person is responsible for distributing tea to teacups. S/he serves other people; they appreciate her/him. So drinking tea is not just to have tea. Rather it is a sharing and cultivating experience. This woman had cultivated her tea set for a long time. It stored her energy and care, and opened up a world for her.

Musical instruments and music tapes were also media for expressing one's emotions. By interacting with a musical instrument, people could vent their emotions, cultivate creative expressions, and acquire a sense of achievement. A music major (DF10) talked about her feelings about the cello.

I like its sound. It is very similar to the human voice. It lets me feel a lot of what I cannot express by verbal language. When I am playing the cello I forget many

things. On the other hand, it lets me think about many things. There is something that you feel but are unable to say, but you can express it through the cello. People often don't know how to express their feelings. Sometimes language becomes redundant. I feel free while I am playing the cello. It can express a lot of things.

Music is another form of language. Through playing a musical instrument, people are able to speak about that which cannot be expressed by verbal language. At the same time people enter a new world where worries and routines are forgotten. Here it is useful to review a woman's experience of keeping a diary mentioned earlier. She (DF19) kept a diary especially when she felt "full," or "empty." When she felt full she kept a diary to vent her emotions. When she felt empty she kept a diary to stop the emptiness. There is no contradiction here. Rather it reveals that keeping a diary can objectify and transform a person's feelings and thinking. It happened for the music major (DF10) too. Playing cello let her forget her undesirable feelings, while it also provided a channel to express her feelings.

Among students who did not study music, one mentioned a cello, one mentioned a violin, and three mentioned a guitar as a favorite object. Learning music was a desirable thing for these Chinese. A popular advertisement said: "The child who learns to play piano will not be a bad child." But most families could not afford to support their children learning to play a piano, cello, or violin. It was a privileged thing. In contrast, the guitar was easy to play, affordable, and popular among the younger generation. A student (DM38) who cherished his guitar said: "The guitar is simple, intimate, and easy to control. When I am in a good or in a bad mood, I play the guitar." Another computer major (DM9) considered a computer only functional, but had a feeling about his violin.

The violin can take me into a totally different kind of life. It can change my mood. Music is magical, especially classical music. The violin has accompanied me for many years. I will be angry and sad if it is broken. . . . If I buy a new computer, I will discard the old computer. But even if I buy another million-dollar violin, I would not throw the old one away. . . . I have played this violin for a long time. I am used to it. The violin knows who its master is. It resonates with me.

As mentioned above, music can take people out of their daily routine lives. A student (DM11) who got caught in a "dirty society" (his word) liked a keyboard and a guitar. In a

world where people were interested only in making money, for him religion and music were the only things which could “wash out the dirt,” and by playing the keyboard or the guitar he could sublimate himself from profane reality temporarily.

Music tapes were more frequently mentioned than musical instruments as favorite objects. Many students liked to listen to music while they were studying or doing housework, especially when they were alone at night. Music could help them vent their emotions, soothe and comfort their feelings. The following two examples are well-articulated illustrations of people's experiences of listening to the music.

I like classical music, because I can get a peaceful mood from it. When I am very agitated, sad, or in a fury, the music of Bach or Beethoven lets me feel calm. Some of the tapes of popular songs were given by my friends. There are a lot of stories behind them. . . . You can tell my personality and my interest from my collection of music tapes. When I was young, I was more sentimental. I listened to “You are my entire memory” or “Old love, new love.” Maybe because I had some trouble with my romantic relationship at that time, my sentiment was extremely expressed. One time I was agitated, I listened to Bach's music. The melody of his Unaccompanied Cello Suites is harmonious. It comforted my feelings. Later I was more sophisticated, I listened to songs of Lou Da-Yo [He is like Bob Dylan in Taiwan]. (DF21)

Music is like a diary; it can help me wash myself. It washes out dirt. The music of the Chinese fiddle or cello make me calm. Rod Stewart helps me vent my emotion. Chi Yu [Her voice is like Joan Baez], when I have a little melancholy. Mozart, when I am very happy. . . . Sometimes I am bored. I feel that I don't learn new things. So I concentrate on the music trying to get something from it. I like soundtracks, such as Mission, The Last Emperor, and Merry Christmas! Mr. Lawrence. When I listen to the soundtrack, I think about the movie. For instance, the music of Mission lets me think about the spirit of sacrifice. (DF19)

People attached their experiences of listening to the music to music tapes. Thus, music tapes became not just a medium of music. They were unique and irreplaceable. A woman (DF19) had different feelings about two tapes with exactly the same music.

My music tape of Rod Stewart was broken. I bought a new one. It's the same, but I just don't like it. I remember one time while I was listening to the old tape, it was raining. So the sound of rain was attached to the tape. When I listen to the new tape, I cannot find the sound of rain anymore.

Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton (1981) found that many children cherished a stereo. They argued that

a stereo can take on new meanings with each record played because its function is to serve as a medium for music. Old meanings and identities can thus easily be discarded and new ones take their place, as a youth pleases or as the fashions dictate. (p. 97)

Children valued a stereo “as a means to hear their records and created moods and not for its own qualities” (p. 97). In contrast, older people cherished photos. “A photo is completed as an object; it can take on new meanings only in contemplation” (p. 97). In the present study, students rarely mentioned a stereo as a cherished object. If they did, it was usually because of the memory attached to it. Unlike children in Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton’s study, students considered a stereo only as a functional object, just like a refrigerator or an electric fan. As the authors said above: “a stereo can take on new meanings with each record played.” But on the contrary, students cherished music tapes just because the music that they enjoyed was more in the tapes than in the stereo. And they connected their experiences with the music tape not with a stereo. This was true for them when they were in Taiwan. It was even more evident after they came to the United States, because usually they brought their favorite tapes to the United States, but they bought a new stereo in the United States.

One plausible explanation of the difference is the relative nature of consumption. A stereo for children in their study (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981) could be a conspicuous object but it was a very common object for students in my study. Having a stereo was taken for granted. They did not cherish it for the reason that it enabled them to listen to the music. Rather, tapes were chosen and purchased by them. An expensive stereo could be a sign of status, but music tapes were better manifestation of their personal interests or personalities.

People’s state of feeling or emotion may be expressed in different ways, such as talking to friends, keeping a diary, going shopping, seeing a movie, listening to music, or drinking tea. Music is a very popular medium. And verbal language is another articulated form of expression. Each has its own quality which is irreplaceable completely by one

another. Keeping a diary is expressing through writing. The following examples show expressing through reading written texts by other people. A student (DF21) put some Chinese poems on her wall. Those poems depicted her feelings about studying abroad very well. She said:

Poems are a kind of psychological projection. For instance, XXX [she recited a poem to me] means that I feel a little bit sad when I leave. Even if I want to stay, I know I will leave some day. So let us say "we miss each other." We will meet again someday, so let us work hard. Do not just look at the present, our achievement is in the future. This poem depicts my present situation.

Another woman (PF13) mentioned a poem written by her friend. She kept it on the wall when she first arrived in New York. The poem said: "There is a person, just like a cloud, always drifting and wandering." She felt that the poem expressed her present experiences and mood very poetically. She also liked a published diary of a Chinese student in Paris in the 1940's.

I have the same mood of being a foreign student as the author. When I read the book, it fosters my thinking. I think about my life, the surroundings, and the future of human beings. It is a time of introspection.

This book not only helped her express her feelings but also made her think about her situation, her confrontation with a new culture, and the contemporary history of China. It, therefore, was not merely a record of a student's life in the past. While reading this book, the interviewee's thoughts moved between the past, the present, and the future. So in a sense, these objects do not project people's inner feelings passively. Rather, their feelings become transformed in the act of interacting with objects.

In this section I described how the object served as a medium of experiencing in different ways. People participated in the object experience at different levels, from passive to active in a different sense (from listening to a music tape to playing a musical instrument; from reading a poem to keeping a diary; from venting inner emotion, learning, to actively creating). Object experiences involved different senses: kinetic (playing a music instrument), visual (reading), auditory (listening to the music), tactile (holding a stuffed

animal), and sense of taste (eating food, will be mentioned in a later section); and in most cases different senses functioned effectively at the same time. In summary, through the interaction between a person and objects the person's emotion is vented, feeling expressed, thinking fostered, and the meaning of life expanded.

2. MARKERS

Unlike objects as a medium of learning or expressing, some objects function more like a marker of people's experiences. "It is an essential characteristic of being human that we feel the urge to reify experience, to give those fleeting moments of pleasure and pain a narrative outline or visual shape" (Tuan, 1980, p. 462). Students mentioned photographs, maps, or playbills as a way to preserve their experiences. One student (DM9) spent a week with his friend in New York on a winter vacation. He then put the cover of the playbill of A Chorus Line and a map of the Bronx Zoo on his wall. As he stayed in New York longer, more playbills and maps covered his wall. These objects reminded him of memorable experiences and left traces of his life in New York. Markers of experiences often function as an extension of memory too. They can also be a medium of self representation to others or social exchange. I will discuss these aspects of object meanings later.

3. END -- INTRINSIC QUALITIES OF OBJECTS

In addition to a medium of experiencing or a marker of an experience, an object could be an end in itself. It is the quality or material of the object that formed the focus of people's experiences. For instance, a stuffed animal could be a manifestation of love: "My boyfriend gave it to me," but holding the stuffed animal is a desirable experience: "It's cute. . . . I hold it to sleep. I feel very warm." Some other interviewees told me that they did

not miss home but they missed some particular food in the night market in Taiwan very much because of the taste of the food.

Most students cherished objects because of the significance, such as social relation and achievement, manifested by objects. However, an interviewee (DM20), who studied fine art and cinema, reported his object experiences in terms of the material, texture, and design of the object.

I was interested in the baseball glove. I always took it apart to see how it was made. . . . I am also interested in knives, especially the hunting knife. It's not because of the meaning it represents. Rather it is delicate. The handle is made of wood and leather. The shape of the blade is nice too. . . . In the beginning, it's because of curiosity. I wondered how it [such as a puppet or a baseball glove] was made. Then there was pleasure in knowing how it was made. It stimulated my imagination. Then I tried to copy it or to make it in a different way. I liked the feeling of participation and involvement in the material.

He liked wood, leather, soap, and clay because he could interact with the material so that the nature and quality of the material and his ideas could be realized in this process of making.

C. MANIFESTATIONS OF ACHIEVEMENT

Objects could be the product of a person's devotion of personal energy, a tangible mark of achievement, or facilitation of a sense of achievement.

1. INDICATORS TOWARD ACHIEVEMENT

In their self-completion theory, Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982) conceive of the human as striving toward self-defining goals. People use socially recognized symbols, such as personal possessions, titles, uniforms, or certain behavioral acts, as indicators of goal-striving activity to reduce the goal-striving tension. This is similar to the concept of "role models" proposed by Rochberg-Halton (1984). Material objects are used as important signs of the process of cultivation to reveal goals and values, and serve as a means to realize those aims.

A music major (DF32) put a poster of a piano recital on her wall. "I know I can play piano as well as she [the pianist on the poster] does, maybe even better. The poster is above my piano. I face it every morning. I use it to arouse and to encourage myself." One M.B.A. student (PM2) mentioned two special objects -- a brief case and his suits. He used them very often for presentations in school or for interviews with private companies. These objects represented his idealized image of being a successful businessman in the future. Another student (PM1) learned from his parents:

I did not bring the pictures of my parents taken at the present time. I brought their wedding picture. They were very poor at that time. They had nothing. But now they can support me to study abroad. The story is very meaningful for me. The picture shows them standing on the ground in the countryside. It gives me much encouragement.

His parents made it possible for him to go to a foreign country to study. They were more than just the persons that he was close to, but they provided a good model for him to emulate.

Proshansky and his colleagues (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983) indicated that physical settings or arrangements of objects could help to define people's roles and to tell us who we are and what we may become. An M.B.A. student (DM40) arranged his desk facing the door to project his future social position. "It satisfies my latent desire. It is like I am a manager. 'Come in!' [He rehearsed being a manager calling his subordinates to come into his room.]"

There are other people who wrote some aspirational or self-reflective words and put them on the wall to discipline or to encourage themselves. People's wills are sometimes not strong enough. They need an event, a ritual, or objects to fix or support their wills. People like to make a wish of self-change at New Year Day or their birthdays because it is a change in the objective world and it deeply imprints on a person's memory because of its context. Through a ritual or an environmental change, their wills are objectified and reinforced. And the environmental change out there constantly remind people of their

expectations over time. A woman (DF3) in this study mentioned that she rearranged her furniture frequently to become motivated to study. Functionally speaking, this act made it easier for her to study by cleaning and making more space on her desk. But psychologically speaking, it was “make believe,” or a transference from her own inner will to the outside environment. And sometimes it worked.

I am not the kind of person who likes to study very much. Rearranging my furniture gives me a feeling of freshness. I have more motivation to study. . . . Later I realized that you should know yourself. Rearranging the furniture or not has nothing to do with your studying.

Her experience was shared by another woman who used a new diary whenever she tried to bring about self-change. Similar to rearranging the furniture, other students used verbal forms as a reminder or stimulant to their actions. “JEN,” a big Chinese character, which means to forcibly restrain one’s temper was on the wall of a student who just had an argument with his landlord. (DM15) Other people wrote: “(1) Don’t repeat the same mistake. (2) Face your own weakness. (3) Don’t waste time. . . .” (DM39) “Quit Smoking!” (DM38) “Be nice to your girlfriend.” (DM27) These words written by themselves reflected the discrepancy between their expectations and their behavior. It also showed that they had the intention to solve their personal problems. By forcing themselves to face these words every day and by embarrassing themselves in front of their friends if they did not do anything, they wished that they could change or overcome themselves.

Another student (DM39) mentioned his interaction with his working desk. He said he was not good looking, but people liked to judge people by how they looked (face, hair, and clothes). Only when he sat in front of his working desk did he feel he achieved something. He could be “himself.”

My working desk represents me. Three hundred sixty-five days a year, I never clean it. When I have something to do, I go there. Or if any electric equipment in my house is broken, I go there to fix it. While I am at home, I like to sit there. Everything of mine is there. I studied circuit design, for instance how to make a radio or an amplifier. Sometimes my wife complains that I am with her too little. I can only be myself when I sit there. I don’t like to arrange my hair. It’s like a mess. My classmates in college called me a rascal. My military instructor [in

college] even told my classmates not to be with me because I was a juvenile delinquent. I am used to it. When I go out, I behave as though I don't take things seriously. When I sit by my desk, I feel that I can make something. It's really me. I really have learned something. It is more coherent to my inner self.

2. PRODUCTS OF ACHIEVEMENT

Regardless of the functional aspects of objects or as means to an end, people cherished some objects because these objects are products of their investment of personal energy. Thus, these people have double relations with these objects: first they are "objects for everyday use" and second they are objects representing "my own work" (Sartre, 1956, p. 737).

One architecture major (PM3) brought some black and white photographs which he had taken in Taiwan. He selected photographs with good composition rather than those with his family or friends in them. Sometimes he kept only one photograph from a roll of film. When he took new photographs he would study his techniques to see if his skill had improved. These photographs represented his achievement and provided him an opportunity to improve his skill. He said those photographs were part of his "self," just as were his architectural design works.

An interviewee (DF3) cherished a tape. She had an argument with her high school classmate. She wrote down her feelings and thoughts and sent this essay to a popular radio program. She listened to this program everyday and had her tape recorder at hand. One week later the hostess recited her article. She recorded it and listened to the tape often. She was proud that she could write such a good essay and it was broadcasted to an audience of thousands.

Another student (DM27) mentioned one of his own drawings as a cherished object and then related it to his experimental data.

So far this drawing is my best. Sure, I like it. I have a strong feeling about it. It is like photographs. But you just press the button and the photograph is taken. This drawing belongs more to myself. It's just like my own data from experiments. No matter where I go I will carry them with me. Knowledge is one thing. You can

learn it from papers in the journal. But experimental technique belongs to yourself. Everyone has his own secret technique of doing an experiment.

As the experimental data, notes were also obvious products of achievement for students. Notes represented a certain level of understanding of teaching materials by students. It was a kind of appropriation of the knowledge from books. One student (DM39) showed me the edge of one of his books. I could clearly see a string with a deeper color which indicated pages he had read. He pointed to the edge:

Our teacher taught us from this page. I like to keep books clean, but I am not hesitant to keep notes on the book. It shows my achievement. If you are able to keep notes, it means that you understand the materials. My notes are very dense. I feel good about it.

There are different levels of participation when making an object ranging from crafts and drawings to self-assembled furniture or found objects.

A student (DM9) assembled a personal computer and a desk by himself. "This computer is important to me. It is not easy to assemble a 'healthy' computer. I wouldn't let other people use it if I am not watching." When his friends visited him and mentioned that his desk was big, of course, he would tell them that he spent a whole afternoon to assemble this desk screw by screw. For another student (DM25) the way to get books added meanings to his books.

I care about books. On the one hand, it's because they are needed for classes. On the other hand, most books were acquired through a lot of searching. So I have a special feeling about them. Only finding books in a used-books-store is itself an achievement. If I finish reading them, they are even more special.

3. MARKER OF ACHIEVEMENT

Instead of being the product of a person's devotion of personal energy, some objects are markers of a person's endeavor. For instance, a paper written by a student is the product, but an award given for that paper would be a marker of achievement. For a student (DM15), transcripts, citations, awards, or diplomas are direct proof of their academic achievements.

Because I was the president of the Department Student Association, students gave me a medal inscribed "WISE LEADERSHIP." Most medals are for academic achievement. I was the best in my primary school. I got the Mayor's Prize. I got another Mayor's Prize in middle high school too. In college, I participated in too many extracurricular activities. I failed many courses. But I still had the highest grades once. I also got many medals for oratorical contests from the time I was in primary school. . . . When I see those medals, I recollect my glorious history. Projecting my future, I cannot fail. It's a sense of satisfaction, also a force of push.

A student (DM27) cherished his diplomas and awards because they were the best markers of his academic achievement. "I will frame all my diplomas from kindergarten to college as well as all the citations and awards I have, and hang them on the wall in my study."

A pen was a special object for one student (PM4). He found the same kind of pen in Taiwan. It is a good pen made in France but is very expensive. The pen has a black body with a white head. The pattern is like a mountain covered by snow. He liked it very much. The pen was much cheaper in the United States. He planned to buy it for himself as a graduation gift. So the pen would not be just a good pen that he was longing for but would acquire a new meaning as a marker of his achievement [a master's degree].

4. A SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT

Objects in this category are not products or markers of a person's investment of psychic energy. Rather a person gets a sense of achievement through interacting with these objects.

One student (PM14) described his enjoyment when reading a Chinese newspaper:

It is a "high level" enjoyment. Lying down on my bed with a bottle of beer at hand, I can read a newspaper for about two hours each time. . . . I can read it from the first page to the last page. . . . The aim of reading a newspaper in Taiwan was to get a sense of what happening, that's all. The situation here is totally different. It's also different from reading an English textbook. I don't need to look up a word in a dictionary when reading a Chinese newspaper. I am totally relaxed. I seek pleasure to my heart's content. It's really an enjoyment.

He mentioned that reading a Chinese newspaper was different from reading a newspaper in Taiwan and reading an English textbook. He also mentioned that he had difficulty in

course-work and people were not friendly in New York. Because of the separation, reading a Chinese newspaper was the major source of news about his own country. On the other hand, the loss of his competence in communication affected his performance in school and his social relations with other people in the new environment. Of course, in reading Chinese newspapers and magazines, he found connections with Chinese culture and things happening in Taiwan. But the more significant meaning was that he retrieved his sense of competence through reading Chinese newspapers. He could, therefore, reclaim his self-esteem and be "himself."

A sense of achievement could also be acquired through control of objects. The sense of control gave a person self-confidence. A man (DM7) described his experiences of driving a car.

Driving a car is like riding a horse. There is something obeying you. I feel I and the car are one thing when I am driving a car. It turns to the right or left; it speeds up or slows down as I wish. It's a big thing but it obeys you while you sit in the center. You feel it's the right time to brake. It does brake at the right place. You feel this sharp turn would be a beautiful turn. It really does as you imagine. You feel you are confident. I feel I can control this car. It looks like a big thing, but it obeys you.

Mueller observed that when a child moves a toy train by pulling it, s/he may have another child follow her/him without physically pulling that child (Furby, 1980). This suggests that the control of an object becomes closely tied to the control of other people. A nice car has the same function too. A person does not only control the car while driving it but show one's social status by possessing or driving the car. I will describe the meaning of objects as a sign of social status in a later section.

D. EXTENSIONS OF MEMORY

Although human experiences, such as pleasures and the fulfillment of desires, may leave no traces in the world, and each moment is wiped out by the next (Tuan, 1980), they could come to us by free associations, "in monuments, relics, and mementoes . . . in the

dwelling we inhabit . . . in the collective memories we share with each other as coexperiencers of certain situations” (Casey, 1985, p. 45), and via repeated events, such as celebrating birthdays, festivals, or sports events (Wood, 1985).

Since I interviewed students three or four times, each interview reminded the interviewee and myself of former interviews. Transcriptions of interviews brought out not only the past verbal conversations but also other emotions, feelings, and physical contexts which were not registered in words. When I first interviewed a student in the United States, she recalled her experience of talking with her close friends in Taiwan. An interviewee mentioned that her friend came from Taiwan to visit her in New York. They did the same thing as they usually did in Taipei. They felt that they relived their past experiences in Taipei. Photographs, gifts, a diary, and Chinese food also brought out their past experiences.

Material objects have durability. They can connect series of interactions through time and space (Foote, 1988), and give a tangible manifestation to the fleeting moments of joy and pain. Objects may represent a particular event: “Invitation cards for our engagement remind me of that ceremony,” or life in a particular period of time: “The experiences in graduate school are very important for me. This photograph is the epitome of the life in those two years. It easily makes me think a lot of things.”

One student (PM6) mentioned a cassette as a cherished object. Just a few days before he left Taiwan, his friends got together and everybody said something about their feelings about or wishes for him. “Some made jokes about me. Some referred to the words in the Bible. Some just sang a song. The atmosphere, their voices and laughs are still around me and give me a lot of lovely memories.” As indicated by this student, through the help of an object, a person’s memory could be temporally and spatially articulated and include a lot of details, such as “sunshine, temperature, and people beside

me.” Meanwhile some other objects aroused a vague global experience only, such as “it’s a wonderful time,” or “I was cute when I was a child.”

As mentioned before, many people wrote down their daily activities, feelings, and thoughts in a diary. A diary is a very good aid to a person’s memory. When people kept a diary, they usually reviewed some former pages of their diaries, so that a diary accumulated a person’s experiences from the past to the present. As a diary, an object could have its own history of the interaction between the person and the object. And the meaning of that object was enriched over time. Or the memory attached to an object could change over time. A student (DM36) cherished music tapes that he had brought from Taiwan to the United States. “It triggers my memory. When the music is repeating, you recollect what you were doing last time you listened to the music. It easily stimulates your nostalgic feeling.” As time went by, when he listened to the music again, he thought about “my memory in New York.” It was not a memory of his experiences in Taiwan anymore.

Actually the present cannot be left in order to go into the past; the meaning of the past cannot be seen solely in terms of itself (Palmer, 1969). People constantly select and reinterpret their past in relation to their present conditions and future projections. So the object does not just passively represent what happened in the past, but rather “open[s] up the real towards the possible” (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 295).

A student (PM6) reflected on his diaries:

Sometimes I read my old diaries. I find that all my thoughts followed what teachers had told me. I did not have my own opinion. I was too rigid. I cared about other people’s opinions too much. But I do not want to destroy those diaries. Anyway, that was me at that time. . . . The diaries are the record of a period of quite ignorant days. From reading these diaries I can understand other children much more. Now I do not intend to impose my own thinking on them because I was just as ignorant then as they are now.

He approached his past from an intellectual standpoint. Through the process, he enriched his conception of the world and had a deeper understanding of people and a deeper sense of self.

A woman (PF5) brought photographs of "the good old days":

I look at these photographs when I am in a bad mood. I think about the good old days. The story behind the photograph was filled with anger, happiness, and sadness. Then I think about the present situation. It is filled with anger, happiness, and sadness too. So I calm down.

"The good old days" represented in these photographs was not an objective reality. It reflected a personal judgement based on a standpoint in the present situation. Being immersed in a real and challenging world, this woman needed to face the pressure from schoolwork and the feeling of loneliness. The past without concrete personal involvement was idealized. But through a reflective comparison, the idealization of the past was realized and the present became much more tolerable. The experience of passing through past difficulties gave her confidence that she could manage present ones.

Not all memories are desirable. People try to "mute the negative." In so doing it "further the purposes of continuity of identity by reassuring the now self that it is 'as it was then': deserving, qualified, and fully capable of surmounting the fears and uncertainties that lie ahead" (Davis, 1979, p. 39). For instance, one student (DM25) had a very difficult time when he first arrived in New York. Due to pressure from school and the danger in New York City, he "locked" himself in his small room. He listened to music to comfort himself. But he had only a few compact discs which were his favorites. He listened to that music over and over again. In the second semester, he would not listen to them anymore because they triggered in him those painful memories of being confined in a small room, being lonely, and struggling with his school requirements. Another student (DF24) hid her photographs not because of the pain in her past. Rather, she no longer had the joy that she had in the past. The past only made her challenging present more unbearable. "I don't want to let myself feel bad. I don't have time to look at them. All I need right now is continuous stimulation. Give me excitement! I cannot be depressed. I should be excited."

These examples indicated that people avoided interacting with some objects which were connected with an undesirable memory of a segment of their lives. However, for some students, generally speaking, they just did not keep objects as an aid to memory because 1). "If it's important I would remember it." 2). "I have always done the wrong thing. The memory is painful. I don't want to think about my past at all."

A married student said he felt something of a loss and sorrowful when he recalled his relationship with his ex-girlfriend. He did not want to think about her but could not forget her completely. He discarded letters and other things related to his ex-girlfriend. "When you are busy you don't think about it. If you kept those things, they will trigger your thinking when you open your drawers." For some students, there was unexpected surprise and happiness when they found some objects, such as letters or photographs, unintentionally. For him it aroused an unnecessary nostalgic feeling which did not make him feel good.

In the following section I will describe how the tangibility and durability of an object can function as an aid to memory. And then I will show two examples in which interviewees deliberately kept objects to keep memories of their past.

People did remember critical experiences in their lives, but sometimes it was not easy to retrieve the memory that you were interested in at a particular moment.

[Without objects], it would be more difficult for me to retrieve my memory. Too many things happened in my life. Too many ordinary things. I remember that people asked me to recollect the three most important events in my life. I could not answer it. My head is not a video recorder. I cannot remember. Let me look at objects. Then I can start to think about something. (DM39)

There are so many things that happened between me and my girl friend that I can think about. Photographs function as a coordinate. Too many things to think about. I cannot think about everything from when we first met till we separated. I cannot think through all this in one time. [With photographs] I can think about that we travelled to some places one time, and we had a quarrel another time. With a fixed point you can think about the detail. (DM4)

Objects can function as an anchor point of a person's memory, give the memory more texture and details, and open a new world for the person.

Look at the picture where I stood in front of a red column with my friend. I recall that it was hot that day. I finally met her with a lot of effort. We had tea and dinner together. Then I might think about that she broke with her boyfriend after he went to the army. The affairs of the world is like the floating cloud which is always changing in an unpredictable way. (DF21)

Objects can also arouse a person's feelings and offer a richness of imagery which inner imagination can never offer. A student (DM4) mentioned a craft given by his girl friend. "I am thinking of her anyway. But if I look at that object, it gives me a much stronger feeling of sweetness. It makes me appreciate the time and energy she spent to make this thing."

There was another kind of object which was not an extension of memory but rather created an imaginary atmosphere so that the person could recollect her/his memories more easily. A student (DM27) cherished a music box not because of the memory in the box itself, but the atmosphere it created. He began to like the music box when he was in high school. But only after he came to the United States, did his sister buy this music box in Japan and send it to him.

I was so happy when I opened the music box. Unexpectedly, the song is 'memory.' Suddenly, I realized what I was trying to collect was not real things but memory. . . . I just let the music be floating. I feel calm. . . . It's not because there is memory attached to it. Rather, it creates an atmosphere which makes it easier to think about my memory.

In some sense, a person is always what she/he already has been. But the significance of one's past history results from one's projection into a future (Kaelin, 1988) and one's present concerns. One student said: "Once I came to the United States, I did not plan to go back to Taiwan. I felt I needed to disconnect myself with my past." Another (DF24) said her only concern was to study. She did not have time to think about her past or her future. However, the significance of the past was mentioned by most interviewees and keeping objects was a way to preserve one's past. The following two quotations showed the significance of their past and reasons why they deliberately kept personal objects.

I kept report cards, drawings, course schedules, toys, letters. I kept almost everything. . . . I left a memo on my desk in the college dorm. If my friend could not find me there, they wrote messages on it. When I see it, I feel very warm. I feel my friends are still the same as they were. For instance, they called me Omega. 'Omega, are you still alive? How come I haven't seen you for a couple of days.' It is funny. Anyway, it is fun when you see any traces left by your friends. . . . The past has passed. Even if you had nightmares and troubles, such as you failed an exam, they have gone. You don't need to face them. Nothing you need to feel unhappy. A person who has no old stuff has nothing to say. In this sense, at least I am richer than her [his wife]. I have objects, memories; she doesn't have. . . . Your present depends on your past. You are not born as this. Your present is the outcome of the accumulation of your past endeavor and struggles. How could you throw away all your old stuff? That kind of person is hardhearted, terrible, and too practical (?). Of course it is important to grasp your present and future. But your past is also important. Without past, you don't have roots. Is that right? (DM12)

Another person reported that:

I keep every documents I have in my life. I cannot imagine why not. I kept even bus tickets or bookmarks. I have a lot of garbage. I have more than one thousand bookmarks. I am reluctant to throw away things. My parents always nag me. Boxes and boxes. They don't know what these are about. I never threw away my composition books, study plans and reports. For instance, some people see the homework on summer and winter vacation as garbage. They just copied something for the homework, but I did the homework very carefully. I am willing to keep them. I devoted much energy to them. I also kept calligraphy and all mementos, especially name plates. All kinds of strange name plates. A name plate for activities or parties. I keep anything with my name on it. With name plates only, they fit a whole box. I just like to keep all these odds and ends. I don't know why. Sometimes I rearrange them. It's fun. They are just like photographs. Especially I am a kind of person who cannot discard his past. I don't like to throw away things. I am afraid that I don't have anything if I throw away things. So I accumulated a lot of garbage. It's so cute that I even kept receipts and movie tickets when I was a child. Later I went through everything and threw them away. . . . The time you spend on your past is very limited. It is a transient comfort. Most of your time you still look forward to your future. It is unhealthy not to look at one's past. People will be crazy if they only think about their future. They would be too tense. . . . The present reality may swallow a person. It makes you forget who you are. Forget what kind of person you were and what life you had in your past. You are just busy and busy. You forget all your self-expectations. Sometimes looking at your old stuff, you would feel better. (DM38)

A woman (DF6) lived in Taipei by herself. Before she came to the United States she moved to her parents' house for a couple of weeks. Her parents went to Taipei to help her to move. They also accompanied her to the United States because they wanted to see her settle down in the new environment. While she was moving to her parents' house, she tore up some of her diaries and discarded other belongings.

I tore up many diaries. A diary is a private thing. You don't want to keep it at home [her parents' home]. It may be found by other people by accident. But diaries are too heavy, I cannot bring them all here. My luggage was screened by my father. He would consider diaries unimportant things and wondered why I wanted to carry them. I would be worried if I left them at home. I was not afraid that my parents read them, but there might be guests. . . . I felt unsecured. I tore up three diaries. I told my friend that I felt very bad. In the mean while, I felt very bad about moving, because I must discard many things. I could not carry them all. If I could not bring them back to Tainan [where her parents lived], they must be discarded. . . . My parents helped me to move. Many decisions needed to be made by them. I should discard many things that were important to me but were not important from my parents' point of view. I felt what I faced was not just a key point in my life--going abroad. I felt there was no way to retreat. My roots were uprooted one by one. My past was cut completely. I could only move forward. I felt bad. I could not look back. Because many objects of my past were destroyed. If I could not carry them, I destroyed them. Such as your diaries. Once it was torn up, it meant that you destroyed your past, your memory. I felt that I cut my past completely. It's like burning one's boats. It's like that either you succeed or you die. I felt unsecured. . . . The point is if I insisted on bringing them here, my father would pick them up. It is better that I picked them up by myself in advance. I did not want to let other people make the decision.

Although it was painful, she tore up her diaries anyway. To make herself feel a little better, she rationalized her action.

Those diaries were written at the time I was unhappy. . . . I lost my boyfriend. (laughing) So it's fine to tear them up. It means that I don't want those unhappy and pale memories. On the other hand, I don't have a similar experience right now. So I don't feel those diaries would play an important role in my life.

I have already shown how objects function as an extension of one's memory and enhancement of one's identity. This particular example portrays the significance of objects from one's past by the experience of losing objects. When her diaries were destroyed and her other things were discarded while moving, she felt that her past was uprooted too. Even her future was insecure as a consequence. The loss of her secure alternative added pressure on her future.

Although objects played an important role in her experience of insecurity, its significance lay in her life context. She had been a private tutor and teaching in a middle high school for many years. Going abroad meant giving up a very good and secure environment and entering an unknown situation. She would never fail if she stayed in

Taiwan. But she might succeed or fail in the United States. Once she made the decision, facing the unknown future was unavoidable.

E. ENHANCING SOCIAL EXCHANGE

1. SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

a. Tools of Social Communication

For foreign students, the telephone is a very important tool of social communication. In my study, students did not cherish or have a feeling about their telephone. However, many mentioned that a telephone was an important object in their lives. If it became broken, they bought a new one right away. They did not want to miss any phone calls. Without a telephone they lost a sense of security. This was similar to the experiences of other students who read a newspaper every day because they were afraid that something important might happen the day they did not read a newspaper.

b. Medium of Social Communication

Objects can initiate social conversations among strangers or friends. I recall that strangers talked to me about baseball games many times because I wore a Yankee's cap. A tee shirt, earrings, books, or a family photo are good topics to start a social conversation. An interviewee (DF24) liked to show her photographs to her friends. She put a photograph from her childhood on her desk to provoke comments. When her friends came to her house, they would look at the photograph and say that she was very cute. Then she would ask if they would like to see other photographs.

A student (PM1) brought an album of travel pictures to the United States. Those photographs were taken in fifteen different countries. He said that it was very helpful for the development of his social relations because everybody was interested in looking at them. While describing those photographs, he reminisced and shared his memorable

experiences with his friends, and recounted the privilege of traveling in so many different countries.

Another man (DM20) liked his boots because they could attract other people's attention.

Many people, especially black people, looked at me when I wore my boots. I wore them almost everyday until they were worn out. People asked me how much the boots cost me and where they could find the boots. It is interesting that a material object can give you psychological feelings.

Like clothes people are wearing or photographs on display, other personal objects displayed in a room, such as posters, books, or music tapes, are all potential, legitimate media of social communication. So to display or not to display an object, or where and how to display it is a subtle issue. Here I will use the display of photographs as an example to illustrate the meaning of the presence of photographs in regard to communication with others.

Photographs of a person's boy/girlfriend, in most cases, were tangible manifestations of their love and important memories. "They give me the feeling of security and familiarity. I feel comfortable even when I am thousands of miles away from her." (PM1) Photographs of persons of the opposite sex conveyed an obvious message that the person had an boy/girlfriend. Therefore, in addition to a manifestation and assurance of a romantic relationship, the message of these photographs might include "don't bother me," or "reducing the opportunity of knowing other people." The strategy of displaying these photographs depended upon the person's commitment to her/his boy/girlfriend, and her/his desire to know more people.

One student (PF5) intended not to bring photographs of her boyfriend because these photographs would put too much unbearable pressure on her.

It took me much effort to decide which photograph I should carry with me. My feelings about him were ambivalent. Since I was going abroad, I knew that I would miss him a lot. But I heard that if I went abroad our romantic relationship would change. It would change regardless of whether I was pessimistic or optimistic, faithful or unfaithful. I wanted to give both him and myself an

opportunity to meet new friends. So I brought some pictures with him amid my friends. But I didn't bring pictures of him *per se* in order to avoid thinking too much.

However, she brought a jade and a tee shirt given by her boyfriend to the United States. She cherished them very much. They were soothers while she was in a new setting where "no one really shares with my feelings." The jade and tee shirt did not convey a message to other people about their relationship, but her boyfriend's pictures were too obvious not to show that she had a boyfriend. By bringing her boyfriend's gifts instead of pictures, she maintained their relation and still opened the possibility of knowing other people. A photograph might also open a possibility for a third person. A woman was asked to display the photograph of her friend (female) in her room. In case some handsome men visited the interviewee, she could introduce her friend to these men.

Because the display of photographs of one's boy/girlfriend became a sign of one's commitment to their relationship, the major audience for photographs could be one's boy/girlfriend instead of general others. Some people were searching for different possibilities while they did not want to lose the one they already had. One student (DM8) put one photograph of himself with his girlfriend on his desk only because she was coming to New York to see him. Another student (DM40) hid his girlfriend's photograph behind his bookshelf. He explained: "I put it here because it is easier to reach it in case she came to see me. But I won't display it. Once other girls see it, your status drops down immediately."

In other cases, it is the interviewee's boy/girlfriend who displayed their photographs in the interviewee's room to secure their relationship. One student (DM27) took pictures with his girlfriend when they travelled together. He enlarged one and gave it to her. Then she hung it on the wall of his room. He said: "She wants to appropriate my room."

A student (DM38) noticed that many of his friends displayed their family photos, but he did not do so. He did not want to reveal things about his family by the object displayed.

Photographs are 'internal' things. It is not appropriate to display them as posters. I would show my photo album only to my close friends, but I would not put them out and let other people see them. They are internal things.

Another student (DM40) did this for a different reason. "It's strange to do that [display a family photo]. It's like you are under surveillance by your family all the time. I don't like it."

People could not be alone all the time. They needed to interact with other people. But their friends might not be available when needed. Or they might not share the depth of feeling. Objects could function as surrogates for social communication. As mentioned before, a woman (DF19) kept a diary as a way of dialoguing when "I have a very wonderful experience and I cannot find any friend to share it," "I talk to my friends but I know that they don't understand me according to their reactions," or "I am very sad, people cannot understand how deep my feeling is." Other people interacted with objects, so that they felt that some human beings were around.

In this room the stereo is the only thing that can make sound except me. It accompanies me dusk after dusk, night after night. Of course I have a strong feeling about it. (DF21)

When I just moved into this room, I felt lonely. I would like to have something alive to be with me. I am happy watching it [a plant] grow everyday. (DF3)

In these two incidents, interviewees endowed the object with some qualities of human beings based on the "autonomy"--making sound or growing-- of the object. They then acquired the feelings of being accompanied by "a human being."

2. SELF-PRESENTATION TO OTHERS

In an earlier section, I mentioned some objects, such as poems or a diary, which interviewees used to express their feelings and thinking. Basically, the audience was

themselves. Objects described in this section functioned more as a presentation to others. It was not either/or, rather a matter of relative importance. Some objects with socially shared qualities were likely to communicate the owner's self to others; some needed more explanation in order to reveal the owner's self. Family photos, music tapes, books, and posters on display, or the style of decoration of the room all more or less communicated a person's social relations, interests, or personalities. "With this family photo on the wall, I don't need to say anything. People can tell that I am a married man with two children." (DM25) "This plan chart communicates that I am an organized person." (DM40) "People said that it [the baby on the poster] is like me. It's cute and broad-minded." (DF31) "I did all the furnishing by myself; you can see my commitment to my home." (DM25)

All three interviewees who majored in music displayed a photograph of their recitals. Those photographs showed that they wore a formal dress playing a musical instrument on stage. Most people did not have the opportunity of performing in front of an audience. A recital was a significant moment for music majors. They liked to share their glories with other people. An interviewee (DF6) described the reason for the display of her photograph. "It was a vanity. By the way, I look beautiful in this photograph."

An interviewee (DF22) deliberately used earrings to communicate her happiness to other people.

I used to wear small earrings. People did not notice them. Now I wear big earrings because I am happy. I should let people know that I am happy. It makes a Dingdong sound which can reinforce my happy feelings too.

Another (PF5) collected photographs of her family and friends in an album which constituted the profile of her significant others who contributed to her identity.

The formation of my present self depends upon many 'others.' The parents' love and the friendship contribute to my identity. When I introduce myself to other people, by the help of these photographs, they can know me much better.

An interviewee (DF1) was surrounded by photographs. When I first interviewed her in New York (Nov. 1989), she displayed ten photographs in front of her desk. The

number of photographs tripled when I interviewed her three months later (Feb. 1990). In addition, new twenty Christmas cards surrounded her bookshelf. Photographs were not just stuck on the wall, their arrangement was carefully designed as a portfolio with the following comments in the space among photographs:

Love wears roses' elegance. The lilies move themselves to dance. Their beauty lies within them. They take their place, and dance with grace, when love comes in between them.

For love may stop, and love may hop, and love may sing, and love may spring, and love may rest in loving, and love may sleep, and love may leap, what mind can follow, proving?

Memory is a sweet sorrow.

Happy!! Food!! Smile!! Friends!! Smile!! Fun!! Joy!! Snow!!

Those wonderful, happy days will be always in my mind.

Many other students put photographs on their desks or on the wall, but no one devoted such a huge space to photographs as she did. Everybody who entered her room would be attracted by those photographs. When asked the reason why she did that, she laughed and said: "I am narcissistic." But if we consider her life experience, we may find that the meaning of her photographs is much more complex than that given by her comment.

The content of her photographs gives us the first hint. All photographs were taken in the United States--tourist sites or social events, except one photograph of her dog which was sent to her by her brother in Taiwan. On the contrary, most other students displayed family photos or photographs of their hometowns. In order to understand this difference, we need to know her experiences before and after her arrival in the United States for study. She had known her boyfriend for eight years, but they broke up before she left Taiwan.

He did not think that I had enough reason to come here because I had a master's degree already. But I knew how much knowledge I had. I could not stay in the same place. . . . In addition, my father opposed our relationship and encouraged me to go abroad. He [her boyfriend] thought I chose my father instead of him. He did not even see me off at the airport. . . . When I first came here, I called him every week. After all we had known each other for eight years. But he did not respond to me politely. He even said things to make me sad. I called him four times and wrote to him three times. He only wrote to me once. I cried for a couple of days every time I called him. Besides, I needed to bear the pressure from schoolwork. So I cried very often.

In Taiwan, her favorite objects included windchimes, a stuffed animal, and photographs. "These windchimes were given by my boyfriend on the Valentine's day. This stuffed bear was given by him on my birthday. They are my most precious objects. . . I like photographs. Every time we travel, we take a lot of photographs." She returned the windchimes and the stuffed animal to her boyfriend. She did not bring any photographs to the United States. She said that she forgot. But it is difficult to tell whether she really forgot or she intended to "forget" to bring them.

In spite of the loss of her boyfriend, she enjoyed living in this new environment. "This is a very good program. We have strong faculty. I have learned a teaching method which has never been used in Taiwan." She also travelled to different places and shared her experiences with her new friends. "When I first arrived in New York, some advanced [Chinese] students guided us to many places. We went to Central Park, South Street Seaport, Wall Street, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Yale University." She took the Circle Line on the Chinese Moon Festival Eve with hundreds of other Chinese students. She visited an American friend's house on Thanksgiving day, went to Cathedral of the St. John the Divine on Christmas Eve, went to Times Square and Central Park on New Year's Eve, and joined a potluck party on Chinese New Year Eve. Of course, there was the pressure from schoolwork. Sometimes she missed home. Friendship played an important role in her adaptation to this new environment.

Actually my favorite things are my friends. Nothing can compete with friendship. When I am happy, I like to share my happiness with my friends. When feeling sad, you really need friends. When I am happy, I make cakes and ask them all to come to share with me. When I am sad, I ask for their shoulders to lean on.

Based on the above descriptions, the meaning of her photographs is revealed more clearly. These photographs and Christmas cards were not so much comforters as a representation of her condition to her friends and also to herself. After she had gone through all the trauma, she was still strong. She could live very well and happily in the new environment. Not only was she not defeated, she succeeded very well. She proved

that her decision was right and her effort was worthy. Her own words confirm the above interpretation.

I sent photographs to my mother to *let her know that I live very well. . . .* [She pointed to some photographs.] We cooked the food and put it on the table. After we ate some, we felt. . . No! We make so much food. We should take a picture. *We should let other people know how good our lives are.* [The pictures showed that she did invite her friends to share her food and joy.] (italics mine)

3. MANIFESTATION OF CONNECTIONS TO OTHER PEOPLE

a. Expressions of Love

Most people keep a diary for themselves. A diary is a record of their activities, feelings, and thoughts. Keeping a diary is also self-reflecting. However, an interviewee (DM25) kept three diaries at the same time--one for himself, the other two for his children. He had kept his own diary for twenty years and his children's diaries since they were born without any break. He wrote down what his children were doing at that day and his thoughts about them. Once his children grew up, he would give their diaries to them.

His unique behavior had to do with his experiences of being brought up in his family. His father was very strict and *unreasonable*. He could be punished by his father no matter if he was right or wrong. His childhood experience was a nightmare to him. When he had his own children, he kept reminding himself that he should never treat his children like his father did to him. The way his father treated him became the *negative* example for him. He devoted a huge amount of time, energy, and love to his children. Keeping diaries became one way to express his concerns about and love of his children. Actually, the writing of his children's diaries itself might be more significant to himself than to his children. They were still too young to understand their father's love. Although he would give those diaries to his children in the future, it did not promise that they would appreciate him. They might not be moved or might feel overburdened. However, those diaries signified to himself that he was a good father.

b. Gift Giving

Gift giving here is described as a means through which people communicate the value of or feelings about their significant others by giving tangible objects at a special

occasion or just in their daily lives. The following excerpts show the gifts given by different significant others on different occasions.

My mother gave this camera to me as my twenty-year-old birthday present. (DF3)

When I was still in high school, my mother prohibited me from buying an audio. She said that it was not a good thing to listen to the music while you were studying. After I went to college, my father bought a portable audio for me. I felt it was a mark of my growing up. Because you were in a college, you could listen to the music and study at the same time. No one would doubt whether you were really studying or not. Studying was your own business. It was a milestone in my growing up. (DF21)

I don't like to touch glossy material because of my skin. My son is very considerate. He knows it. He gave his own quilt to me. This quilt was given by my most beloved individual. I treasure his thoughtful idea, I treasure this quilt. (DM25)

It was drizzling the day I went to the airport. My father gave his own hat to me. He told me that "It may be raining in Tokyo or New York. Don't catch a flu." I don't have the habit of wearing a hat. The reason that I did not keep it in the closet but rather hung it on the wall is because it was given by my father. It is a memento. (DM9)

These windchimes were given by my boyfriend at the Valentine day. This stuffed bear was given by him at my birthday. They are my most precious objects. (DF1)

One woman (PF5) brought a tee shirt and a jade necklace given by her boy friend. In Taiwan, she hung this sport shirt on the wall as a decoration. After she came to the United States, she wore it to bed when she missed him. The jade had a particular meaning for her because her mother did not support her relationship with her boy friend, and this jade was given to her "in front of her mother" the night before she left. She wore it all the time. For her, the jade was the exteriorization of her boyfriend's love:

It attaches to my heart. It makes me not feel lonely. . . . When I just came here, everything was new and attractive. Gradually, the more people I knew the deeper my feelings of loneliness were. Although I have so many friends, no one really shares my feelings. . . . Only his love is sincere and faithful.

People kept gifts because gifts were the manifestation of care and love. An interviewee (DF3) mentioned a caddy of tea given by her new American friend who lived next door.

I am not acquainted with many Americans. She gave this to me. I was very impressed. I don't drink it. I just want to keep it. It's a keepsake. I feel if I drink it, it will be gone. I want to preserve it as it was when she gave it to me.

She kept this gift as a way of keeping the sincere relationship they once had. Actually they might not see each other again in the future, but the existence of the gift was a vivid reminder of the friendship.

She also cherished a music tape which was given by her ex-boyfriend. She brought it to the United States. The tape reminded her of the memorable friendship. She cherished this tape, but she did not like the music.

I don't listen to it because I don't like the music. It's not because I don't like this music tape. Even if I liked the music, I would make a copy so that I could keep the original as it was. I don't want to break it. Maybe someday I will have a quarrel with him, but I will remember the feeling I had at the moment he gave it to me. I guess I want to grasp at some memory.

She cherished gifts because she believed that people gave gifts with sincerity. And she wanted to preserve the feeling. She also took care of a stuffed whale given by her mother. She put this stuffed whale in a plastic bag and kept it in a drawer. Before she went to bed, she took it out and played with it. For her, to preserve a gift in a good condition showed that she "respected and treasured this object" and the love behind it.⁶

Although gifts meant a lot to her, she gave gifts that she received to other people if they needed them more and the gift was appropriate in that situation. Before she came to the United States, one of her friend gave her a picture of a Goddess to wish her luck. She cherished it.

⁶Some people might comment that the way she preserved the gift was too naive and unrealistic. But I think, for her, it was her attitude of human relationship that mattered, not the object. I remember when I was a child I was told that we could not sit on papers with words on them, such as books and newspapers. If you did that, you would lose your ability to read. We did obey. It was not because we were superstitious. Rather, it meant that we respected the language and the author. In contemporary society, people will laugh at you if you say this. It seems that science and technology demystify the world. A piece of paper is only a piece of paper. But on the other hand, people have lost the attachment to and appreciation of objects and the meanings conveyed by these objects.

My safety is consigned to this Goddess picture. Without it, I will feel . . . I watch it when I am in a bad mood, feel alone, miss home, or fail an exam. It comforts me. I believe someone is blessing me. I feel someone is beside me. It doesn't mean that it has a real magic power. I sort of believe Buddhism. The picture proves its truth. It reminds me that someone is blessing me.

Later, she found that another friend of hers was under pressure from her examinations. She then gave this picture to her friend to wish her luck because she thought her friend needed it more.

Her mother sent a doll with a smiling face to her from Taiwan. She liked it a lot. Whenever she looked at it, she felt her mother's concern. She was touched. If she was in a bad mood, she looked at this doll to recover from her bad mood. Later, she knew that her brother had brought another doll with a crying face with him. When she visited him in California, she gave her doll to her brother.

He was looking for a job. He was nervous and depressed. I wished I could help him. However, there was nothing I could do. I hoped he could be happier, so I gave the doll with the smiling face to him. Although I liked this doll very much, I was more concerned about his happiness.

These gifts were expressions of care, encouragement, and love. In a society where "I miss you" or "I love you" is not a daily language, body language, doing things for other people, or giving gifts could communicate some ideas or feelings which verbal language could not. On the other hand, it was so easy to say "I love you" without any further action or responsibility. The word vanished right away with no trace left. Gift giving with a considerate thought (such as the quilt given to an interviewee by his son) was very touching and affecting. It was out there as a constant manifestation and reminder of care and love. In addition, some objects were functional or were given at a very special occasion. They represented a new stage and opened a new possible horizon in a person's life. In many cases, these gifts established the presence of the absent gift giver, especially for foreign students who had departed from their families and close friends.

c. Sharing Objects

Objects were not just used privately or as signifiers of one person to another. In some object experiences, it was the sharing aspect of experiences that was important. A man (DM39) liked to look at their daughter's photographs with his wife. They talked about their past shared experiences and their future expectations of their daughter. A woman (PF9) mentioned an album.

This is my favorite. It contains all the photographs from when we [she and her boyfriend] just knew each other till now. Actually, it is “our” album. When we had a quarrel, we each look at those photographs. Then, we were friendly again.

A tea set was another example. The very act of drinking tea was sitting around the tea set. An interviewee said that she drank tea by herself. But she only drank tea by using a tea set when her friend visited her. Another interviewee (DM37) liked fish and plants. Although he wished he could raise fish and plants, he did not do that when he first came to the United States because he was too busy adapting to the new environment. After he met his new girlfriend, he began to do that. He taught his girlfriend how to cultivate plants. Small plants were all over his new room. His girlfriends also enjoyed taking care of them. These plants added more variety to their student lives and also became a focus for their care and concern.

d. Presence of Absent Others

A tangible object, be it a photograph or a gift, can remind a person of past social experiences or feelings of connection to other people. This person can carry the object with her/him when “the others” are not around. And the constant interaction with the object may strengthen the person’s memory and feelings connected with the object.

A woman (PF9) cherished peanut candy not because she liked it but because it was brought from her home country. It was not significant for her at all in Taiwan but now it became a symbol of her connection to her mother and her home country.

My mother came to the United States before. She told me that Chinese students like to eat peanut candy very much. She suggested bringing some peanut candy here for the Chinese students who helped me with my application. I brought twenty packages of peanut candy here. When I first arrived, I didn't give it to the Chinese students because I was not sure that they would like it. I ate some, but it killed my appetite later. In these two months I had many opportunities to give this candy to my friends, but I was reluctant to do that. The more I miss my family, the stronger the idea that I should keep the things brought from Taiwan. But I do not like to eat it any more. A few days ago I found that it had passed the expiration date.

She also mentioned medicine and a sewing kit prepared by her mother. Although she had not used them, she had a warm feeling every time she saw them.

A man (DM39) came to the United States with his wife but left their daughter behind. Photographs of their daughter were brought with them for the wife, but he was surprised that photographs turned out to be very important to him too.

In Taiwan I just looked at them once. That's enough. Here I look at them again and again, and never feel bored. . . . When I have leisure time or when I am depressed I look at those photographs. For instance, if I don't understand the lecture, I look at photographs of my daughter. They make me happy. . . . When you are happy, they make you feel happier. When you are in a bad mood, they give you comfort. [Without photographs] I would feel more depressed. . . I would "murmur against heaven and blame others." . . . why spend money to suffer here. . . . I would not be able to go back to study. . . . But while I am looking at the photograph, it brings back my memory. I can feel the happiness when I played with my daughter. She was happy and smiling. I would think that I have a good family. My daughter is cute. So my feeling is soothed. Forget it! Forget what happened today.

This case clearly shows the significance of an object. If he were just thinking, his sad feeling would feed upon itself and become more unbearable. His mind focused on all the negative sides of his situation: the separation from his daughter, wasting money, the difficulty of adapting to the new environment. With the presence of the photographs, his feeling was transformed. His mind would then be occupied with the sharing experience with his daughter. Although present life was difficult, he had a lovely family which no one could take from him. And once he finished his studies, he could provide a better future for his family.

e. Sense of Community

Rather than a manifestation of the attachment to significant others, an object can represent an attachment to a social community or a place. A student (DM27) who was very enthusiastic about his studies and his future cherished his college ID.

I like to see my student ID very much. It's like that you belong to a place. You get a sense of security. I love my school. I am happy that I am a member of it. With this ID I can walk on every block on the campus and nobody would stop you.

Some of the students in Columbia University wore a tee shirt with the school's logo when I interviewed them. The tee shirt might also represent that they were happy to be a member of this university.

People did not just identify with the present community. The student above and another interviewee's husband also kept and cherished their high school bags or jackets. These objects were not just a reminder of their youth but also an expression of their feelings of belongingness.

4. SIGNS FOR SOCIAL DISTINCTION

Instead of using objects to communicate with people or to express a person's connections to her/his significant others or a community, people also use objects to represent their social statuses and to differentiate themselves from others. Using an object as a sign of social status is a social phenomenon. It must be done vis-a-vis other individuals (Furby, 1978). Only when society values this object, can people acquire the meaning of social status through the object. Although they achieve differentiation from some people by identifying with another social group, in this object experience, social distinction is the major aim, not the identification or attachment to people.

An interviewee (DM23) said that other people could live with coarse tea and plain rice. But for him, quality of life meant a wealthy life. He dreamed that he would have an imported car and a good house in a good location in the future. "If you live in a very nice

house, nobody would say that you are poor. If you drive an imported car, nobody would say that you are incompetent.” He also said that he cherished nothing because nothing that he had was expensive. And he would not cherish an object because it was given by his friend. He would cherish it only if it was really “good.” This is echoed by another student (DM40) who said that money was the most important thing. “Cash is power.”

Another interviewee (PF7) mentioned a lot of special objects. All these objects, from stereo, clothes, to the Bible, were linked with one major theme: monetary value. I was so surprised that she could memorize all the details of these objects in terms of their prices, where they were made, and where she bought them. People describe and categorize things in different ways depending upon the interests they have. For instance, they may describe food in terms of how the food is cooked, or the taste of the food, or the amount of calories it contains. In this study, students described their special objects in relation to social connections, past memories, and so on. But for this woman, price and the country where the object was made reoccurred in her description of her special objects.

This AIWA stereo was made in Japan. It was the best and the newest model at that time. You could not find it in ordinary stores. It cost me five thousand New Taiwan (NT) dollars.

This mug is imported.

This sweater was made in Japan. It cost me four thousand NT dollars.

I have three pencils. One is Pentel, made in Japan. One is Park, made in the U.S.A. It costs me eight hundred NT dollars. The other is made in West Germany. It costs me six hundred NT dollars.

Even religious objects needed to be valued by their physical quality.

I bought this cross necklace in XX department store. It cost me three thousand NT dollars. I wear it everyday even though it is not good for my skin.

Two years ago I went to a bookstore. I saw Bibles which were better than what I had. There were two kinds. One had a real leather cover. The other was fake. The design was exactly the same. You could not tell the difference. But the prices were very different. Later I bought the leather one.

Her logic was that she liked objects of good quality and it happened to be that all things of good quality were expensive and imported. She trusted her taste and judgement. She kept saying that “you can’t tell that it is so expensive.” And she never bought things because they were in fashion.

I look at objects from an aesthetic perspective. Beautiful things attract me. I am very sensitive to colors. . . . I disregard money. I am disinterested in jewelry. . . . I spend a lot of money on dry flowers and a beautiful vase. It makes me feel comfortable. Actually, people don’t come to my room, so they don’t know that. . . . I disregard fashion. I trust my own taste. . . . I don’t like to see Chinese movies because they are bad. Most people like Rambo (a movie) and comedy, but I don’t watch them. My taste is different from others. And I don’t want to explain it. Of course, I will feel happy if people say that they are beautiful.

These statements revealed that she tried to make herself distinct from the “public” by her special tastes of art, media, or objects. She said that her objects were not to show off. However, possessing objects which many people can not afford made her special, at least to herself. The reality that she remembered prices and where she bought objects, as well as her focus on her distinctive taste was a proof. She still depended upon objects with good qualities and high prices. This is different from the way another woman (DF21) made herself special through interaction with her personal objects. The terms they used to describe their personal objects were different. She established an intimate relationship with objects not because of the monetary value. She liked earrings.

They need not be jewelry, rather every person has her own style. I believe that most people dare not wear these earrings. They are big and heavy. You can tell a person’s personality and aesthetic orientation by her dress.

She had feelings about her umbrella.

That umbrella, let’s say it’s one hundred dollars [NT dollars]. It costs twenty dollars to repair it once. You had better buy a new one if it is broken twice. However, I am the person who yearns for the past. So I would rather repair it. It’s clean and in a good condition. I have a strong impression on it. It’s black-green with the grid design. If it’s not missing, I can imagine that I would still keep it.

She also cherished her tea sets.

My tea pots are common. I am a student. I can’t afford expensive tea pots. However, you use them to make tea every day. You touch and feel them. I will be unwilling to give them to other people unless it’s the only way to express my

feeling. Although they are not good tea pots, I like them. They are irreplaceable. . . There are 'my fingerprints and odor in them.

F. RELIGIOUS OR SPIRITUAL

1. RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OR IDEALS

Religious books and mottos were mentioned primarily as a means of learning the wisdom and the meaning of life. An interviewee (PF9) confronted a very difficult situation when she first arrived in New York. She faced the problem of finding housing, the stress of a qualifying examination, and the pressure from research work. Everything seemed to be difficult for her. A Christian motto on her small dining table comforted her. Although she was devoid of everything, she felt that God never left her.

One woman (DF6) described her unforgettable experience. She was very well prepared for the examination, but she now was afraid of failing it.

I studied till three o'clock in the morning for two weeks before the examination. I even rehearsed answering the hypothetical questions. But in the examination, I kept watching my watch. I did not know what to answer. I felt terrible. The American beside me had finished a few pages with tidy writing. I had not finished even one page. In the past, it's always me who first finished all the questions, gazed around, and looked down upon the world. This is my first experience in my life of worrying about failing an examination. I felt unbalanced. I was in very a bad mood that afternoon.

Then she described how she recovered from her frustration. Her friends in the United States were not intimate enough that she could face them in her miserable condition. Her parents were so far away that they could not give her immediate comfort. Meanwhile, she did not want to make her parents worry about her. At this time, religion became the handy help.

I read Streams in the Desert. I learned that everything is useful. Everything, either good or bad, is from God's will. Its outcome must be useful to you. So I can bear pain, setback, or failure more easily. I even consider they are necessary in my life.

Then she told me that although she changed the decoration of her room after that test, she left a particular religious poster in the same place on purpose. That poster was very significant in the process of recovery from her frustration.

2. MAGIC POWER

Unlike religious objects, an object could be endowed with a supernatural or magic power by a singular person. This object has the power only for the person who assigns the meaning to it or who believe the power of the object. A medical student (DM11) was distressed. He said: "Medical students were pressed by the education system. They need to study very hard." He followed the steps but was skeptical about it. On the other hand, he was ambivalent about the materialistic and realistic attitudes toward people in this society. He suffered and looked for something to help him leap out of this realistic world. For him, only music and religion can "wash out the dirt." He was interested in spiritual and mystical things. He had a special object: a pigeon feather.

This pigeon possesses supernatural power. It is not scared of people. It can answer your call and come to you. It was stolen twice but flew back to our house. One day a feather dropped. I picked it up and my brother made it into a pen. It is unbelievable that it is still like a new one after more than ten years.

Once he said that anything that could be figured out by human beings was nothing. Psychologists discussed sex, life, and death, but human beings had an unknown future. He liked to read Wonders in the World and ghost stories. And this pigeon feather was the concrete example of the existence of supernatural power.

An interviewee (DF19) cherished two tee shirts and brought them to the United States.

A tee shirt has the design of boats, another with a whale. I like any design which can let me associate with freedom. . . . They are comfortable. . . . I like to wear those tee shirts when I play volley ball in college. Once I wear it I feel that I am superhumanly brave and have a good performance. I can reach the very difficult ball. It's an accumulated experience. Every time I wear them I have good performance. [19]

G. EXTENSIONS OF THE SELF

Although achievement, experiences, and social exchange are related to the self, in this category I refer to two kinds of meanings of objects.

1. A PART OR A METAPHOR OF THE SELF

The first kind referred to object meanings in which students reported as part or a metaphor of the self, such as “there is my odor in it,” “it’s my style.”

Theoretically, books are a medium for acquiring knowledge. It is the knowledge which is desirable. One student (DM26) did say “Once I finish reading a book, I donate it to the library if I know I would not reread it again.” But another (DM12) said “It is hard to imagine that people would sell their books.” For those people who cherish books, the meanings of books are very complex and go beyond their role as the means to an end. It has to do with how people acquire books and how they use books. Before reading a book, just buying a book already reflects a person’s taste.

I am willing to spend money to buy books, but I don’t buy books carelessly. All my books were chosen under carefully consideration. I don’t buy books only because they are best-sellers. . . . There is my name on it. . . . They were mine and my treasure. (DM9)

It is irreplaceable also because

there is my remarks, my “breath,” and the special smell of my bookshelves in it. . . . People can borrow my books but they must return them to me. Of course, they can say: “I am sorry that I lost it. I buy a new one for you.” But the new one is not *my book* any longer. (DF21)

Another (DM12) reported that “I like books. If someone marked on my books, I would feel very sorry and angry, especially for those books with my notes and my ‘heart and blood’.” The attachment to books was echoed by another student (DF19).

No. They are irreplaceable. If people don’t return books to me, I would go to their houses and fight with them. One time, my nephew--he was only a few months old--folded my book. At that moment, I cried. I did not care about anything. I cried.

Objects could express the qualities of the self. “The paper-cutting shows that I am very patient.” (DF2) Usually objects could express some dimensions of the self. So they need several objects to express or represent different aspects of their selves.

Diaries express that I am a sensitive person and my role of being a father. Students’ photos represent my relationship with my students. . . . Sports equipments represent the spirit of athletes. . . . The decoration of my house represents my involvement in and commitment to my home. (DM25)

However, other interviewees said that it was impossible to represent the self by objects because the self was too complex or they did not know their own selves. “I am not sure what kind of person I am.” (DM38) “I am too complex. Nothing can. . . . I can’t answer your question. I feel I am very tired these days. I can’t see through myself.” (DF10) “An object is unchanging. A human being is alive. Nothing can replace me or represent me.” (DF24)

The arrangement of objects and the maintenance of the room could express the qualities of the self as well.

From my room you can tell that I am not a tidy, cautious, and orderly person. I am careless. I don’t make plans. (DM4)

My room is not feminine. It’s more neutral. My clothes are the same. People say they are beautiful, but they are like boy’s clothes. (DF22)

My room is never a monotonous place where you don’t want to stay. The yellow light. Warm feelings. It shows that I am not like most engineering majors. I am not cold. (DM37)

Two other interviewees (DM27, DM9) cherished a painting and a violin respectively, because these objects represented that they had another side of life beside doing natural sciences.

Other objects did not express the qualities of the self directly, but functioned as a metaphor of the self.

Magnifier. I like to get down to rock bottom. I like to speculate about other people’s thoughts and to observe people’s responses to events. (DM20)

My watch. It's a very good watch, but it never works. I have a very high expectation for myself, but on the other hand I never work hard. I believe if I work hard, there is nothing that I can't achieve. (DM23)

In the above section, I described a singular object or an arrangement of objects as an expression or a representation of the self. Now I would like to show how objects as a whole functioned as an extension of the self for a particular person.

An interviewee (DF30) described her cherished objects.

The violin is a part of my body. It's my hand. It's my friend. . . . When I feel sad, I play it. It comforts me. . . . You need to be very sensitive in order to play violin. In addition to technique, the humane cultivation is also necessary. . . . I thought about selling it before I left. But I had played it for such a long time. There are even my fingerprints on it. . . . Now I am thinking of buying a new one. Once I play it, it will become mine.

Sailboat represents easiness, without constraints. It's like my personality. I don't like to be constrained.

A car. I like to speed my car. . . . I like to drive in desolate area.

My kite. I like to see it fly in the sky freely without bondage. I don't like to be constrained.

She also mentioned her "toys," such as a skateboard, skate, stationery, and bicycle. In her room in New York, she hung two posters on the wall. One was a painting by a famous impressionist. The other was a painting about a famous novel. She explained:

I am not an artist, but I have the temperament of artist. . . . I have the tragic personality of an artist. [She related this to the painting]
I like the novel and I like fishing. I like the sea too. It can relieve my pain of not seeing the sea. The sea is mystic. You can think about a lot of things looking at the sea.

When asked if there was anything which could express her self. She replied:

Horse. I am like a horse. I am agile and energetic.

Jeep. It's solid. I like to undertake an exploratory trip.

My stationery. It is strange, unique, and with good quality and multiple functions.

My kite. I like to see it fly in the sky freely without bondage. I don't like to be constrained.

This is an overview of her object experiences. In order to make sense of this, I will describe why she came to the United States for study and what her thoughts and concerns were.

She was brought up in a very wealthy family. She learned English and piano playing when she was very young. There was nothing to be worried about. Her friends told her that she did not live a real life. She was a privileged child. She received a good education and training in art appreciation. She had many things that other people could not expect to have. She had a piano, a violin, a car, and a toy sailboat. She had traveled to many different countries. Her friends joked that she was “solving a jigsaw puzzle of a world map.” She was very well protected. Her mother even canceled her business appointment and stayed at home to “watch” and listen to our interview for the first interview in Taiwan. Although she accepted all these advantages, she did not appreciate her family.

It seems to me that my classmates have very warm families, but I never have this kind of feeling. . . . I never look at my family closely. . . . I see through the vanity of life. I see through my relatives. The family corporation. . . . I want to leave them.

She did not display photographs of her family in the United States as many other interviewees did. She had her own reasons.

People say that I don’t cherish old relations. Actually I am the person who most cherishes old relations. Although they display photographs, it does not mean anything. There is a kind of person who keeps feelings in the bottom of her heart.

I was surprised that she said that “before I came here, I didn’t feel that people were born equal.” She also said that she preferred dogs to people sometimes. “They all said that I treated a dog better than a human being. Dogs are more lovely. Dogs don’t have bad ideas. They always follow you.” She also liked to whistle a different tune. “Whenever I oppose him [her father], I am happy. I like to see other people be angry.” She knew that “the person that I love most is myself.” And she doubted “whether I have the ability to love people.” She justified that “I am still young.”

She was self-confident. "Because of my personality I don't consider things difficult. Once I do it, I believe I can accomplish it. Even when I was preparing for the national entrance examination, I still travelled around." She also thought she was superior to and was not understood by other people.

I am very sensitive. . . [but] it's painful. . . . I was very sensitive to a subtle change of weather or temperature. . . . I can't stand a little bit of discord. It's painful for me to hear that. . . . I hate to hear people sing. If they sing out of tune, I hit them. Sometimes you are moved by beautiful music. You hope that people can share it with you. But they don't feel it at all. . . . You are disappointed. . . . You feel that very few people know your thoughts and feelings. . . . Sometimes I wish I were an ordinary person. No. I can't say that I am an extraordinary person. But I would rather not be such a sensitive person. It's painful. If you don't have feelings, you may be happier. But I am not willing to be that kind of person either. . . . (In addition to hearing, to what are you sensitive?) I am less sensitive to vision. I am myopic. But I am very good at differentiating colors. I can even differentiate many different kinds of white. I have a good sense of smell too. Anyway, I am sensitive to everything.

Because she felt that she was different and was not understood, I asked her why she came to the United States for study since so many other people did the same thing.

But I came here for different reasons. (In what ways?) They came here for study or work. I came here to travel, to see different environments. (Some people just travel too.) Yes. But I came here to pursue my own interest.

She did not articulate the nature of her own interest.

It seems to me that she lived in her own inner world without questioning her own self and the social reality. She had a lot of fantasies.

I would rather be a cloud drifting in the sky. . . . I like to see it [kite] fly in the sky freely without bondage. . . . I would like to be a sailor if I were a boy. . . . I would like to attend the floating university for half a year. . . . My grandmother told me she wanted to buy a house for me, but I would rather have a boat. . . . I have the tragic personality of an artist. If I disregarded my family, I might have become a painter in Paris. . . . I may run an antique shop someday. . . . I am interested in religion, life and death. I am challenging God. . . . Sometimes I feel it's enough to live for twenty years. I have experienced everything.

All these passages echoed what she said before that she did not live in the present, in reality. It is in this context that we can acquire a clearer understanding of her object experiences. Being brought up in a privileged family, she had the advantage of receiving formal education, learning English, playing music instruments, and travelling in different

countries. Just because she received a high education, she could talk about philosophical ideas and criticize materialistic life in the society. She did not have work experiences. Her thoughts and critique were abstract and not anchored in social reality. She was self-centered and fantasized herself as a lonely and superior person.

Music instruments reflected her interest in music. All her objects also reinforced her ideas that she was a sensitive and unique person. Her kite, sailboat, skateboard, and other toys fostered her imagination of roving in the sea or flying in the sky. All these objects reflected that she could enjoy her life without worry and care in the world.

2. EMBODIMENT OF THE SELF

Object meanings can represent or express the “core” self. Personal interest, memory, or achievement may touch only a slice of a person's life experience; the meanings of an object described below constitute a very important part of a person's life. Object experiences in this category are close to the process described by Rubinstein (1989) as an embodiment in which the boundaries between self and object are blurred.

A woman (PF13) cherished a stuffed cat:

A cat is very personal; it has its own self. A cat can find joy in its own way. It has a strong self-consciousness. . . . I can talk to her [the stuffed cat]; she can talk to me too. We have practiced conversation for so many years. In the past, when we talked to each other, I should think about what she would say or what I should say on behalf of her. Now I do not need to think. We can talk to each other very fluently. . . . She is like my child and myself too. It is difficult to say that kind of feeling. It has been a long time that we depend on each other. I feel she is alive Sometimes my mother tried to hide MM [name of the cat] but I did not let her do so. When I studied in high school my mother bought many other stuffed animals for me and asked me to exchange with MM. She suggested me to wrap up MM and keep her in the cabinet because she was going to be broken. I refused. I received all the stuffed animals and they all became MM's pets.

This stuffed cat was inseparable from her. She kept the stuffed cat on her bed under a quilt. People could not see the cat, but she would show the cat to her close friends. Other friends might not see the stuffed cat, but most of them knew that she liked cats and said that she was like a cat. She was happy about this. The cat was her good companion. They

shared a lot of experiences, feelings, and ideals. She transferred her feelings to the cat: "When I first arrived, I was sorry for MM. I should not have brought her here. She was so lonely." She projected her own dreams onto the cat: "MM went to a ballet class." The cat also played a significant role in her social world. Her family or friends sent gifts, such as a calendar with pictures of cats, to MM instead of her. MM also appeared constantly in her conversation with her friends. Once, when she brought grapes home, her boyfriend jokingly remarked that a grape was bigger than MM's ears. One time, I showed her the operation of the Macintosh computer. She said: "MM doesn't like the mouse." Here, MM could refer to herself or her stuffed cat, and mouse could refer to a device of computer or the mouse as an animal. It showed that she and the stuffed cat were so much part of each other. The boundary between them was vague. Since this stuffed cat constituted such a salient role in her life and was alive to her, would it supersede the importance of real people? One year after my interview she told me a story:

In Taiwan, if I left home for a long period of time I carried MM with me. This summer I went back to Taiwan from New York. Of course I carried her [MM] with me. My boyfriend saw me off at the airport. He asked me if I could leave her to him. I was hesitant. We argued. Finally, he won. I took her out of my luggage.

This time the stuffed cat became her boyfriend's transitional object to cope with their separation.

There is one important theme in the meaning of her stuffed cat--anthropomorphism. Here we mean that people project human traits onto inanimate objects and sometimes pets (Wallendorf, Belk, & Heisley, 1988). Not only did she project her own personality and feelings, like self-consciousness and loneliness, onto the stuffed cat, the stuffed cat also served as a replacement of her desired but unattained aspect of life, like ballet dancing. In addition to the meaning of projection, the stuffed cat could also affect her. The example that MM did not like the mouse shows that she incorporated traits of the stuffed cat back to herself.

She also anthropomorphized birds that she raised.

I could watch birds fly in my house and let them climb on my shoulders all day. I found that every bird was different. Each had its own personality. . . . I treated them as human beings. I talked to them as if they were my children. My mother said that I was neurotic. . . . Originally I raised DoDo and JiJi [both were male]. NiNi joined in later. NiNi was a girl. NiNi got married with DoDo and infuriated JiJi to death. I really mean it. Later NiNi and DoDo had two children: Maria and Eugene. One day Eugene was frightened by the reflection of himself in the mirror in our tiny rest room. He rushed out from the second floor to the third floor and then flew away through an open window. . . . I watched and coaxed him for the whole afternoon till it was dark. . . . NiNi quarrels with Maria very frequently. DoDo [the only male] is very complacent. You boys are bad.

Another man (PM6) mentioned notebooks as his cherished objects. When I interviewed him, we moved from one sofa to another closer to the window because it was getting dark. He still carried that notebook with him. A notebook was with him all the time.

I bought this notebook in a Christian bookstore. There is a quotation from the Bible or other scriptures on the top of each page and a religious essay in the beginning of each month. . . . I write down my schedules and plans on it. I also keep notes while I am watching television or just walking in the street about my feelings and thoughts. . . . Sometimes I read my old notebooks. My stupidity and temper in the past make me reflective on myself.

Those notebooks had the meanings of the Bible, a notebook, and a diary at the same time. He carried a notebook all the time, wrote down his plans, feelings and thinking, and reflected on them. It organized his life, expressed his feelings, enabled self-reflection, and reinforced his religious beliefs.

Object meanings do not reside in the object nor in a person's head *per se*. They involve continuous transactions between persons and objects situated in a particular social/environmental context. Without looking at object meanings within a specific grouping system, object meanings could be unlimited. They could refer to when and how objects are acquired, the kinds of object, the location of objects, the usage of objects, and consequences of object experiences, and so forth. Therefore, it is impossible to develop a singular categorical system which could deal with all the different dimensions of meanings exhaustively.

In the existing literature, different categorical systems of object meanings have been discussed, such as the kinds of objects (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Hansen & Altman, 1976; Myers, 1985; Sherman & Newman, 1977-78), the acquisition of possessions (Rochberg-Halton, 1986), reasons for cherishing special objects (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981), media of object meaning experiences (Oury, 1987), functions of possessions to person-environment fit (Redondo, Payton, & Wapner, 1984), and a person's engagements with objects (Rubinstein, 1989). In this chapter, I use the content of object experiences as a basic structure to organize object meanings. Of course, it is not *the* only one. However, it is because these dimensions are most relevant to the way people endow meanings to their lives. When interviewees described their major concerns or future plans, they talked about social relationships, a better career, the understanding of people and the world, self-fulfillment, or religious beliefs. Object experiences are better understood in the context of these meanings of life. The meaning structure which I develop in this dissertation is artificial. It exists only for its analytic purpose. Each category is not an independent entity which can be pieced together into the whole in the end of analysis. Rather, object meanings, social relations, past experiences, future expectations, the physical environment, and cultural contexts are intertwined.

In this chapter I proposed seven dimensions of object meanings--instrumental, deepening experiences, manifestations of achievement, extensions of memory, enhancing social exchange, religious or spiritual, and extensions of the self. Under each category, I then discussed how an object mediate in the object experience. An object could be a *tool* of an action or interaction (e.g., a telephone), a social or cultural *symbol* (e.g., a family photo or an ID card), a *medium* of an expression or experience (e.g., a musical instrument or a diary), a *product* of personal endeavor (e.g., a paper cutting), or an *object* of an experience (e.g., a stuffed animal or food). Basically, the description was focused on an individual

object. However, I tried to discuss a person's possessions as a whole in the end of each category in order to comprehend the meaning structure in its context of a person's life experiences. In addition, although I used certain objects as illustrations of each category of meaning structure, the meaning of a particular object is not necessarily exhausted by that category. It is also important to note that object meanings are not static. The content and depth of meaning may change in different situations.

In Chapter VII I will deal with changes of object meanings with a focus on changes in relation to the environmental transition and the process of adapting to a new environment. Objects which students left behind, objects which facilitates activities in the new environment, and objects for maintaining personal, social, environmental, and cultural continuity will be discussed.

CHAPTER IV

A TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL SYSTEM OF OBJECT MEANINGS

A. THE TEMPORAL DIMENSION OF OBJECT MEANINGS

The meaning of an object intrinsically involves temporal qualities. Object meanings undergo change over time. People find object meanings in the temporal character of human existence because human beings are fundamentally temporal (Heidegger, 1962). "[T]he 'meaning' of the past work is defined in terms of the questions put to it from the present . . . [and] the questions we ask are ordered by the way we project ourselves in understanding into the future" (Palmer, 1969, p. 182). And a person's past memories, present experiences, and future dreams are inextricably linked to the objects that comprise his or her environment (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; see also Werner, Altman, & Oxley, 1985).

Dealing with changes of object meanings over time will be the topic of Chapter VII. In this chapter I will focus on the way people locate object meanings in a temporal system (past-present-future continuum). Although a person's past, present, and future are usually interwoven, in the following discussion I try to distinguish the different temporal foci of object experiences in the temporal system. For instance, in some cases of interacting with objects, a person concentrates on her/his present activity, and her/his past and future are in the background. In other cases, a person explicitly examines her/his past in relation to the present. This temporal focus of object meanings does not reside in the object nor in the person. Rather it is realized in the person-object transaction in a particular social/environmental context.

1. IMMERSING ONESELF IN THE PAST

Objects can remind people of their personal or shared past. Interviewees reported that they were immersed in the world of their past while interacting with objects. And their present and future faded into the background during those experiences. For example, one day before leaving for the United States, a woman (DF1) was packing her luggage. She went through her photographs and letters. She was so attracted by them that she had not really “packed” anything for the rest of the night.

[Through photographs] you see what you looked like in the past. It’s fun and lovely. Photographs let you recollect bits and pieces of your past life. Sometimes you were just locked in the memory, and for very long. . . . I looked through all the letters I had one by one. Suddenly it was already dawn.

2. TO EXPRESS THE PAST INCOMPLETE PROCESS

Objects could be significant because they expressed an incomplete process which was blocked in the past (Oury, 1987). An interviewee (DF22) mentioned a stuffed bear.

I began to like a stuffed animal when my students gave a stuffed bear to me. They were so smart. Even myself did not know that I would like a stuffed animal before. It never appeared to me in my childhood. Now I found that I like stuffed animal a lot. But I only knew this until my students gave it to me.

She did not have this stuffed bear in the United States. Her friend took that stuffed bear because of her coming here to study. One day when she went to West Point, she saw another stuffed bear. She liked it a lot. She bought it for her landlord’s daughter. As a result, she kept it for herself because she really liked it.

It’s soft and cute. But I can’t talk to it. I just like it intuitively. You can’t ask it to do anything. I will take it with me when I go back to Taiwan.

However, she did not mention it by the next interview.

It’s not meaningful to me anymore. Now I have many friends with whom to talk. I don’t need it. Maybe I bought it only to compensate my loss of not possessing any stuffed animal in the childhood.

I guess that she did not really like a stuffed animal. Once her loss was compensated, the incomplete process was ended. Another interviewee had a similar

experience. When I interviewed him the third time, he wore long hair. He said that he was prohibited to wear long hair when he was in Taiwan. He just wanted to try it to see how he would feel. And he said that he did not have a special feeling. He would not do it again. To have one experience was enough.

3. CONCENTRATING ON PRESENT ACTIVITY

While interacting with objects, a person may concentrate on his or her present activity and the object is significant only because it fulfills a person's present needs.

Only when I am using it [a computer], is it important. If I don't use it, it is nothing. (DM9)

4. MAINTAINING PERSONAL CONTINUITY

"People look back. . . to acquire a sense of self and of identity" (Tuan, 1977, pp. 186-187). The past is not just a place to escape from the present situation. Rather it allows a person to trace the formation of her/his present situation, to maintain her/his personal continuity, and to acquire a sense of self. To strengthen our sense of self the past needs to be rescued and made accessible. As mentioned before (Chapter III), objects can function as tangible manifestation of people's past fleeting moments in their lives. Two interviewees who deliberately kept things ranging from bookmarks, name plates, homework, transcripts, letters, to photographs described how the past was important to their self identities.

Your present depends on your past. You are not born as this. Your present is the outcome of the accumulation of your past endeavor and struggles. How could you throw away all your old stuff? That kind of person is hardhearted, terrible, and too practical. Of course it is important to grasp your present and future. But your past is also important. Without past, you don't have roots. Is that right? (DM12)

It is unhealthy not to look at one's past. People will be crazy if they only think about their future. They would be too tense. . . . The present reality may swallow a person. It makes you forget who you are. Forget what kind of person you were and what life you had in your past. You are just busy and busy. You forget all

your self-expectation. Sometimes looking at your old stuff, you would feel better. (DM38)

In addition to maintaining personal historical continuity, students tried to transplant the relationship of their bodies to their physical environments into their new environments. Students not only brought the “old stuff” but made effort to replicate its location in the new immediate environment. One student (PM1) brought his girlfriend’s photographs and kept them in the “same” places as he did in Taiwan. Those photographs let him feel that his girlfriend was still close to him. In addition, even his habitual body-environment relations could be maintained.

5. CREATING DISCONTINUITY

In some cases, people made efforts to maintain their personal continuity. In other cases, they tried to create discontinuity by declaring a disconnection with their (partial) past or by announcing a new beginning in their lives. Some interviewees left personal belongings in Taiwan to anticipate a new life in the United States or to leave the old environment behind. Other interviewees re-decorated their rooms, displayed an inspirational motto, or used a new diary to mark a change of their lives.

6. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

The meaning of the past cannot be seen solely in terms of itself (Palmer, 1969). Our thinking of our past has less to do with how recent or distant our past events are than the way they contrast with the events or feelings of our present circumstances (Davis, 1979, p.12). So the past is not a dead existence. Rather it is a historical memory which gives present life vitality. Many students mentioned objects which highlighted the contrast between their past experiences and present conditions. The contrast might give them joy, comfort, encouragement, or pain.

a. Learning from the past and enriching an understanding of the self and the world

Since a person's past experiences are not of equal importance, these experiences depend on their relevance to her/his present concerns. "The past is most characteristically invoked for the lessons it teaches" (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 46). An interviewee (DF6) was teaching in a middle high school before she came to the United States. In order to understand her students better she read her diaries to learn from her past.

I think about what I was doing when I was a child. What were my responses to the homework? Did I ever give up a course because it was difficult? When students make troubles in my class, I recollect if I or my classmates did the same things before. I would read my diaries for these reasons.

Another student (PM6) approached his past from an intellectual standpoint. Through reading his diaries, he enriched his conception of the world and had a deeper understanding of people and a deeper sense of self.

The diaries are the record of a period of quite ignorant days. From reading these diaries I can understand other children much more. Now I do not intend to impose my own thinking on them because I was just as ignorant then as they are now.

Other cases show that the past makes a person be more self-reflective. When people are aware of changes of their lives through the contrast between their past and present, they can have a deeper understanding of their selves.

Everybody knows I like to look at my photographs. Because photographs let me recollect my past life. What was once sad seems to have become fun. Things that used to be warm and sweet have faded gradually. It is thrilling when you notice this. You wonder how come such a deep feeling could fade. How could it be possible that I am an indifferent person? Or you recollect your beautiful and sweet past, you think about your youth years. You feel the youth departs you farther away. You are deeply touched and moved. (DF21)

When I look at those gifts, I think about the past occasions. Nothing to worry about and care for. Such a happy time. I miss it very much. . . . I feel a little bit sad. How can you let your life be more and more miserable? You can't. I smiled so easily. The smile was so brilliant. How come I have so many worries and they become more and more through years. (DF10)

b. Reassessing and having a deeper understanding of the past

A person's past is not an objective reality. Its significance depends on its relevance to a person's present concerns. In addition, it gains new meaning in relation to new experiences. So a person's past is not only being selected but also being re-interpreted. One woman (PF10) talked about the food cooked by herself which recreated the experience of being so close to her mother and she had a new interpretation of their relationship.

I lived with my family all my life, but I was always busy at pursuing my own interests. I studied, prepared for the national examination, attended the student clubs, spent time with my friends. . . . Actually I did not spend much time with my family. . . . Once I am married, I will be a *guest* when I go back to my home. . . . In the United States, I cook sometimes. I am surprised that the food tastes so similar to what was cooked by my mother. I feel that I am very close to her. I miss her very much.

Actually she did not "learn" how to cook from her mother. But the reality that the way she and her mother did the cooking were so similar was astonishing to her. She realized that they were so much part of each other's life. In addition, being conscious of the reality that she would not be able to live with her family for a long period of time again gave her an opportunity to step out of herself to think about her relationship with her family. She said that "I used to have a lot of conflicts with my mother. Now I realized that it was only because my mother had a different way of expressing her love." Of course, reassessing her past was not just an end in itself. It also influenced her present and future relationship with her mother and her family. The longer she stayed in the United States the more she missed her family. She was no longer hesitant to express her feelings and to say that she loved them. And to her, the food was a tangible and vivid proof of her connection with her mother.

c. Nostalgic for the past

“In yesterday we find what we miss today. And yesterday is a time for which we have no responsibility and when no one can answer back” (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 49). A woman (PF9) cherished her photographs and diaries.

When I talk about the good old days, my husband would remind me that I actually had a lot of complaints at that time also. That is the contradiction in me. People are always like this. I missed my past when I was teaching. And now I miss the time when I was teaching. I lived with my parents at that time. They took care of everything for me. Basically it was very comfortable and I made a lot of money. But I was bullied by my students at school. The life was routine without any development. Actually there were pros and cons. I know I will be the same when I recollect my life here in the future.

d. Release from the present to the past

The past offers alternatives to an unacceptable present. Even if today is rewarding and the past no golden age, the immersion in one's past can alleviate present stress (Lowenthal, 1985). Objects can open a door from which people enter into their past and retreat from the pressure and responsibility of the present.

It satisfies myself. It satisfies my desires. For instance, you want to think about your past, you tell yourself you have nothing to do today, you don't want to study, you don't want to watch TV, I want to think about that friend now, that object will satisfy you. (DF19)

Mementos. For instance, the poems my grandfather left to us, or letters, photographs, cards. The memories. When you rest, you can look at them and think about the past. You can be relaxed. You always forget something terrible. You think about the beautiful things. You think about when you went out with girls. (DM5)

e. The past as an intruder to the present

In order to ease the loneliness or sorrow, a person might watch television to let his/her attention be absorbed by the episode of the television program. A person could also jump out of his/her present and immerse him/herself in the past by reading a letter or looking at a photograph. But an object might force a person to face and reflect on her/his

naked reality as well. The past connected with the object could make the present situation more explicit. And the contrast between the past and the present might be unbearable. One woman (PF10) brought her favorite music cassettes but she tried not to use them. She described her experience of listening to Chinese music:

I brought some cassettes of Chinese music that I liked. As Chinese poems, the music is very Chinese and traditional. . . . I am adapted to this environment [in the United States] pretty well. I have some friends without deep relationships. At least, I usually don't feel lonely. But when I listen to the Chinese music I miss the past very much. I strongly feel that I am different from other students. I think about my being a Chinese, my present situation, and the time ahead that I must spend here. I am afraid of touching that kind of feeling. I don't know how to describe the feeling. Maybe I am afraid of making my nostalgic feeling more serious. I guess that there is a contradiction in my heart. Usually I feel that I live very well, but while I am listening to Chinese music I find that actually I am very lonely. I don't want to touch this feeling.

Chinese music was a partial condensation of Chinese culture for her. It could easily arouse in people the image of an ideal life style characteristic of the ancient Chinese--a peaceful, friendly, contented, and undisturbed way of life. She did not belong to American culture and was always a foreign student. Her family and friends were so far away. The noise and crowding in New York reinforced her feeling of loneliness. But she was busy at schoolwork and other activities so that she did not think about this problem. When she listened to Chinese music, however, it brought out in her consciousness the recognition that she was actually not integrated into this society. This nostalgic feeling was not constructive for her life. Therefore, she tried not to listen to Chinese music.

The materiality of the object makes a difference here. We cannot close our ears as we can our eyes. Hearing has the connotation of passivity that seeing does not (Tuan, 1974, pp.8-9). Although traditional Chinese poems transmitted a meaning similar to Chinese music for her, poems were not so overwhelming. She explained:

The music is lingering along your ears. It continuously triggers your nostalgic feeling. You cannot close your ears. You cannot control. But while I am reading Chinese poems, I can easily turn to other pages according to my current feeling.

Another student (DF19) had an American exchange language tutor in Taiwan. She recorded some of their conversations and brought those tapes to the United States. But she would not listen to them. The contrast between her past and present that those tapes recreated was too overwhelming to her.

I brought some tapes of the conversation with my American friend but I didn't listen to them. I dare not do so. I know it would be scaring if I listened to it. I don't want to do it. I just brought them here. [laughed] You will have the illusion of the mix of past and present time. It lets you be absent-minded. You will not know where you are. [laughed] The feeling about the sediment of time is horrible. (What would it be?) It will make you think about yourself at that time, the environment, and your relationship with that environment. You will contrast them with your present self and environment and then make an extension to your future. You need to pay a high price for the contrast. The price is to think clearly and painfully. (Why don't you like it?) It's OK if you do it sometimes. You can't stand it for too many times. I don't want to think about that now. Maybe I will not be so scared of talking to Americans after I listen to these tapes. (How is it relevant?) I was open and aggressive at that time. I was confident. I thought there would not be any problems here. Maybe I should mend my way by just talking to you without listening to those tapes. [laughed]

Her real experience in the United States was not the same as she expected.

I was not so strong as I imagined that I would not miss home. I thought it's easy. You just make yourself busy. But I found I am not such a strong person. I still have inertia. I know what to do to broaden my social network. But I am reluctant to do it. . . . I am hesitant to say hello to foreigners [non-Chinese]. . . . I still stay in the Chinese community. . . because I feel more comfortable. In Taiwan I told myself I should not do this. But I cannot help. Sometimes I give myself excuse that it takes time. But time goes fast. This semester is almost over.

She realized the discrepancy between her expectations and reality. One had to do with how many steps she would like to try to force herself to face present difficulties. Another had to do with her misconception of her life in the United States. Her good relationship with her American friend in Taiwan gave her "a misconception that it's very easy to make American friends. I was too naive. You can't expect that every American is friendly to you." But to expose the naked truth was just too painful. Life needed to go on.

When she left Taiwan, she already knew that their intimate relationship would be over. When they met next time, it would be an entirely different situation. She went to see her friend in California on Christmas. At the end of that trip, she had exhausted her topics

of conversation. She had nothing to say to her friend. She also found that they did not really understand each other. She felt it might be the time to say good-bye. She was upset. Her friend sent a letter to her after she came back to New York. The letter correctly pointed out some of the problems that she faced. Although she knew they would not fully understand each other due to cultural differences and language problems, she realized that she might just expect too much from their relationship.

The contrast between her present situation--missing home and the difficulty of making new American friends--and the confidence, aggressiveness, and naivete expressed in the conversation tapes could only make her weakness in the present explicit. It was not constructive, unless she was willing to experience a deep rupture in her life. To face oneself fully is always painful. Her avoidance of listening to the tapes could be an escape, but it is also a protection allowing life to go on more easily and comfortably.

7. SITUATING ONESELF IN A SOCIAL/CULTURAL HISTORY

Objects might not only bring a person's history to the fore but situate it in a social and historical tradition. For instance, Chinese music (mentioned above) could trigger in the person a nostalgic feeling about Chinese tradition. The following example shows that objects connected different cultures and eras.

There is a poem written by Keats about inscriptions on Greek urns. When I saw Greek urns in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I thought about that poem. Although I had read that poem many times, I had never had such a deep feeling. I really felt the subtle connections among the Greek era, the time when Keats wrote that poem, and the present while I read it. I was very impressed. . . . Finally I realized that what I read before was alive. It's not just to be memorized for a test. (DF21)

8. OBJECTS AS PROJECTIONS INTO THE FUTURE

There are objects which act as "role models" (Rochberg-Halton, 1986), that is to reveal goals and values, and to serve as a means to realize those aims. A music major

(DF32) put a piano recital poster on her wall. "I know I can play piano as well as she [the pianist on the poster] does, maybe even better. The poster is above my piano. I face it every morning. I use it to arouse and to encourage myself." One M.B.A. student (PM2) mentioned two special objects -- a brief case and his suits. He used them very often for presentations in school or for interviews with private companies. These objects represented his idealized image of being a successful businessman in the future.

9. THE PAST AND THE PRESENT ARE THE CONSTITUENTS OF THE PROCESS REQUIRED TO ACHIEVE FUTURE GOALS

People might cherish objects related to their past because they are inseparable from their endeavors to achieve future goals. A film major (DM20) cherished the films shot by himself.

... I believe I can regain most of objects that I bought. But I cannot re-shoot the movie. I spent so much energy to do it. That is the only thing I have. If I don't even have the film, I can't say what I have done. It has to do with the characteristic of the medium of communication. I don't care about words because I can write them again. If it is a photograph, I keep the negative. But the film counts only when you show it. ... It is a proof. It proves that I have spent a lot of energy and have accomplished a lot of things in this period of time. Without it, I don't have any other proof. I don't care if the transcript was burned. I remember what I have learned. (You don't need to prove to yourself.) That's right. But it is not a proof to other people unless it is a really good stuff and it is going to be shown in the public or in a competition. Otherwise, I would not show it to other people. So, to whom I am going to prove? To myself? Maybe. In the long run, I will keep every film that I shoot. They are the record of the development of my life. ... It is not to prove to myself. Because I don't need a real thing to prove to myself. I know myself. But it is not good enough to be shown to people. Maybe it will acquire a special meaning when I have all my films as a whole in the future. Maybe twenty years later, my student movie will mean. ...

Another student (DM27) who was also enthusiastic about his future academic career cherished many objects, including his high school uniform, high school bag, college diploma, student ID, experimental data. Every time I asked him about his major concerns and future plans, he was so excited. He loved to talk about his future. "Now it's the time I strengthen myself. I hope one day I can run my own laboratory. That is my aim. Every

time I talk about this I am so enthusiastic [laughed]." So his daily activities and feelings were basically organized around this. However, what was the place of his favorite objects in this context?

High school uniform and bag: I like my high school. I like that stage of my life. No matter that I am changing and I will be changing, my self was established at that time. I had a lot of good friends. I was very happy. I kept my high school uniform and bag. I will show them to my son. That's the high school that I went to.

Current student ID card: I like to see my student ID very much. It's like you belong to a place. You get a sense of security. I love my school. I am happy that I am a member of it. With this ID I can walk in every block on the campus and nobody would stop me.

Experimental data: No matter where I go I will carry them with me. Knowledge is one thing. You can learn it from papers in the journal. But experimental technique belongs to yourself. Everyone has his own secret technique of doing an experiment.

He also projected his future with all these objects around.

I will frame all my diplomas from kindergarten to college and all the citations and awards I have, and hang them on the wall in my study. I hope I will have my own study either in my house or in my office. Of course, that includes my diploma of doctoral degree and my future IDs. I'll use them to decorate my study. It [his study] will represent my whole self. I'll be very happy to see them in my study.

All these objects--high school uniform, awards, diplomas, and ID card--participated in his effort of moving toward his future career. He was still very optimistic about his future and he appreciated every step he had taken.

Another interviewee (DF18) mentioned transcripts as very important to her future but in a different sense.

Transcripts are very important to me. I know my grades were very low. But I can work hard while I am still young. I can reverse my inferior condition. In the future, I will tell my children the way I have gone through. Although once I fell down, after all I stand up again. . . . Maybe I have an inferiority complex, but I have strong self-esteem too. . . . [Without objects] I would be speaking without evidence.

The significance of her past depended upon her assessment of herself and her projections into her future. As long as she was confident and optimistic about her future, her transcripts would be important to her as testimony to her efforts to turn her life around.

These three examples clearly illustrate the temporal qualities of object meanings. Object meanings involve more than the temporal present. In addition, meanings change as time progresses and sometimes depend on the uncertain future. Transcripts reflected her low achievement when she was in her past. However, they became significant from a retrospective point of view in her present context. The high school uniform and bag had been, was, and would be significant based on his own projection into his successful future. The meaning of films was uncertain. It would change depending upon the person's future career.

In conclusion, this section shows how students located temporal significance in their object experiences. The past, present, and future were usually intertwined. It was the matter that which aspect was in the figure or ground. Many theorists propose that people tried to recapture their past whenever they feel that the world is changing too rapidly, they cannot control their present situations, and they are not sure about their future. Interviewees did say that "the past is more real and the future is obscure and unreal." Some did escape to their past from the difficult present. However, this is only one aspect of the meanings of one's past. As shown in this section, people learned and acquired confidence from past experiences. The past was the basis of a person's self-identity. The effort put in the past contributed to their future goals. Another interesting point is that an object might be important only from a retrospective perspective in the future.

B. THE SPATIAL CONTEXT OF OBJECTS

Rochberg-Halton (1986) indicated that object meanings are not limited to the individual object itself but also include the spatial context in which the objects is placed. He compared locations of special objects for different age groups. He found that "approximately half the special objects of children of ages eight to fourteen are located in their own bedrooms. The importance of the bedroom then continuously declines into

adulthood. . . and then becomes more important in old age” (p. 159). In a project of “homeyness,” McCracken (1987) described some spatial properties of homeyness, such as the redundancy of arrangement and embracing property of a “memory wall” or “book wall.” I also described the display of objects as a way of social communication in Chapter III. In this section I will discuss where interviewees kept their personal objects. As personalization, I can only deal with the spatial context of objects for interviewees in the United States because of the accessibility of visiting their homes.

1. ACTIVE OR PASSIVE INTERACTION WITH OBJECTS

Active or passive interaction with objects has to do with the accessibility of objects. Usually you reach an object in a drawer when you want it. However, an object on the wall may constantly impinge on you unexpectedly. For instance, an interviewee (DF19) kept photographs in her drawer in Taiwan. However, she kept them on the top of her desk in New York. Since her friends were not around and it was difficult to see each other she felt that she had to put them in an “attracting” place. She sat by her desk every day and could see those photographs easily. Another interviewee (DF14) appreciated her parents’ support so that she could study abroad. She asked her family to send her a family photo and kept it on her television set. She said that she kept it in an “outstanding” place so that it could stimulate her spontaneously. So these photographs were not just a comfort while people were depressed or lonely. Rather, they actively reminded a person of his/her feeling or aspiration. Another similar group of objects was a self-written motto. Its being out there constantly reminded the person what s/he had to do. Other people tried to hide objects because they did not want to see them even accidentally. Here are two extreme examples of dealing with photographs spatially. One student (PF11) changed her photographs on display every day so that she could look through all her photographs every day. Another

student (DF24) tried to avoid the sad feelings her photographs might bring by hiding the photographs in her luggage in the closet.

Another issue is to protect the object. An interviewee (DF3) kept her stuffed animal in a plastic bag in a drawer to keep it clean. However, she still played with it every night before she went to bed. Others kept stuffed animals on their bed because that was “the place where they belonged.” A friend of mine kept two pictures of her family in her card case so that she could see them whenever she was using student ID card or credit card. But an interviewee said she would not do that. Her photographs were so precious that she would not carry with her lest she would risk losing them.

2. THE DISPLAY AND SOCIAL MESSAGES

In the section on “objects as a medium of social communication” in the last chapter, I discussed extensively the relationship between the display of objects, what, and how many messages the interviewees intended to reveal. Here I will give only a brief statement. Some interviewees showed their objects because objects could easily initiate social conversations and present one’s self-identity to others. For the same reasons, they tried to hide other personal objects to keep their personal privacy.

3. CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE OF SPACE

One object on display could be a target of a person’s attention. However, the abundance, repetition, or redundancy of objects could create a certain atmosphere, an embracing environment (McCracken, 1987), or attuned space (Benswanger, 1979). Objects are not just independent, isolated objects. Rather, the presence of objects can “light up” or “color” the place and give it a certain mood or feeling tone. An interviewee (DF3) displayed Christmas cards that she received to make her room more “lively.” DF19 liked to visit SoHo in New York. She acquired some free postcards and booklets. She displayed

them in her room. "They are beautiful. It's better to display than just collect them. Everybody who visits me can appreciate them. They make my living space as a small gallery." DF1 displayed a huge amount of photographs and greeting cards to make her room full of joy. Another interviewee (DM25) had his children's letters and drawings (sent from Taiwan to New York) all over in his room.

It's meaningless if I put them in a drawer. They are for being watched. They are very cute. I like to think about my children's characters from those drawings. I can easily appreciate their drawings because I am their companion in their growing up. . . . Through these letters and drawings I can enjoy the feeling of missing. I can see the process of their growing up.

In addition to these real objects on display, interviewees talked about imagined objects in the future. A man (DM27) imagined that he would put all his diploma, citations, and awards on the wall of his study. Another man (DM5) would like to have and display maps of all the fifty states of the United States in his room.

Personalization will be discussed in more detail in Chapter VI. Meanings and consequences of personalization as well as factors of facilitating or discouraging personalization, such as self-identity, sense of control, anticipated length of residence, as well as social learning and pressure, are major issues to be discussed.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL CONTINUITY

Replicating decorating practices and modifying the design of home as well as keeping old furniture, photos, or visual art to bring their memories with them are different ways to maintain continuity mentioned in the literature. In this study, interviewees did buy objects in the same style or keep objects in similar locations to maintain environmental continuity. This will be the topic in Chapter VII.

CHAPTER V

GOING ABROAD

In this longitudinal study I had contact with students from one half to one and half years. I interviewed students before and after they came to the United States to study. Therefore the previous chapters about meaning structure, temporal and spatial aspect of object meanings refer to the interviewees' general experiences. It does not necessarily apply to the critical period of environmental transition particularly. However, in chapters to follow I will discuss the reasons students studied abroad and object meanings for them in the adaptive process in the new environment.

A. CONTEXT

Before I discuss the interviewees' reasons for studying abroad, I will use statistical information to lay out the context of Chinese students studying in the United States. Since statistics of 1989 are not available, I am using statistics from 1985 to 1988. There is no reason that 1989 would be a special year in terms of Chinese students studying abroad. The following statistics are based on two sources. One is Educational statistics of the Republic of China published by Ministry of Education. The other is Background of Chinese students from Taiwan admitted to U.S. universities published by Foundation for Scholarly Exchange. The numbers that I am going to show will be the average instead of the exact numbers.

About seven thousand students from Taiwan go abroad to study each year. Among these students, 60% are male and 40% are female. Ninety percent are in their twenties. Eighty percent study abroad for a master's degree, 10% for a doctoral degree, and 10% for a bachelor degree. Thirty-five percent study engineering, 15% business, 12% humanities,

8% natural sciences, 6% social sciences, and 4% medicine. Among all these students, 90% come to the United States to study.

Several reasons contribute to the trend of studying in the United States. The first reason is because of the United States' open education policy. Secondly, English is a compulsory course in middle high school, high school, and college in Taiwan. So students with higher educations in Taiwan have a certain amount of understanding of English. The third reason has to do with the same education system in both countries. Now we can see what interviewees said about their reasons for studying in the United States.

B. REASONS FOR COMING TO THE UNITED STATES FOR ADVANCED STUDY

Students might come to the United States with or without any articulated plan. Reasons for coming might be active or passive. The following items were the reasons identified in the study.

1. PARENTS' EXPECTATIONS

There is a Chinese saying: "Learning is the noblest of human pursuits." Since ancient times, intellectuals have been respected by the public. To receive a higher education is not only for the student's good but also to glorify one's forebears. So parents "[had] imparted the idea [of going abroad] on me since I was very young," (DM23) "provided me with a very good environment without any worries and cares to study," (DM5) "sent me to a private elementary school⁷. Many classmates went abroad to study at that time." (DM27) and "asked me to learn English when I was a child. So I am very used to speaking

⁷The wealthy like to send their children to a private school to get "better" education.

English.” (DF30) So going abroad to study fulfilled both interviewees’ and their parents’ responsibility. For the parents, supporting their children’s higher education, and by the way, glorifying their ancestors were their responsibility. For the interviewees, studying abroad and getting an advanced degree fulfilled their responsibility to satisfy their parents’ expectations. For one interviewee (DM38), going abroad to study was not just a personal aspiration. His parents were proud of having a son studying at an Ivy League college.

It was a regrettable thing for my parents that nobody went abroad for study in the whole extended family. So they expected me to do that. . . . They were getting older. So they forced me to go abroad as soon as possible. . . . I did not mind. To fulfil their wish was more important. . . . They felt that only Ivy League were good universities. It did not harm. So I came to the Columbia University.

As described above, studying abroad was not just an individual thing. Rather, it was often significant for the whole extended family. For instance, an interviewee (DM5) said that he was relatively outstanding in his clan. His grandfather taught him Chinese poems and calligraphy, and had a great expectation on him. He said: When I finish my study, I will bring my diploma to his tomb to report to him.”

2. SEEKING A ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP OR ACCOMPANYING ONE’S SPOUSE

Although no interviewee reported that they came to the United States to look for a lover, I heard many cases from my friends. Most interviewees in this study were single and many did not have a boy/girl friend before they came here. I am not sure if seeking a lover was one of their reasons for coming here, even if not a major one. However, one woman initiated the topic of romantic love in the first interview. (DF17) She had worked for a couple of years. She knew that I was single too and tried to tease me. For instance she would say that we could go shopping together. If we bought a dozen of pens she kept half and I kept another half dozen. When I asked her what could not be purchased by money, she mentioned romantic love. When asked what she would like to have, she

replied that she was too embarrassed to say. I guessed that she thought about a boyfriend or a husband. And the thing that she lost and no longer had was the fantasy of Cinderella.

Among the five interviewees who were married, one came here alone. Two spouses came here to study. The remaining two spouses just accompanied the interviewees here. One applied for a school and was accepted right away. Another woman in the pilot study was teaching in Taiwan. She came here to study only for her boyfriend's sake because they did not want to be separated.

3. A STEPPING-STONE TO COMPLETE IMMIGRATION

People tried to migrate to the United States because of its high quality of life, freedom, and political stability. Being a student is a stepping-stone to immigration. An interviewee (DM11) described his plan very frankly: "Get a degree. Get a medical licence. Get a Greencard."

Some parents encouraged their children to come to the United States to study for political reasons. They would like to see their children live in a safe place. If their children stayed in the United States, they were provided a place to escape. Their thinking had to do with the political tensions between Taiwan and mainland China. Many of the older generation fled from the communist mainland to Taiwan around 1949. The communists never gave up the possibility of using military force to invade Taiwan. Some people in Taiwan tried to find a second home in case that the communists occupied Taiwan.

My father thought that the politics of Taiwan had no future. He was speaking about this everyday. It was influential to me. (DF3)

The politics are not stable. It's like Hong Kong. (DM11)

4. TO LEAVE THE HOME ENVIRONMENT

Some interviewees came to the United States not only because of the attractive aspects of the United States, such as the quality of education and the environment, but also

the less attractive aspects of the home environment including the political situation (mentioned above) and environmental problems in Taiwan, as well as, in some cases, the troublesome relationship between the interviewees and their families.

The spiritual, cultural, and physical environment are terrible in Taipei. . . . Some new cultural groups [for creation of new art work] became social groups [for meeting new friends]. . . . It's difficult to breathe in Taipei. . . . I was often awakened by a strange odor. . . . City bus drivers were crazy. (PM3)

People indulge in a wanton life. Not only can't I influence anyone, but I see my friends follow that kind of life. Everybody is speculating on the stock exchange or real estate. I feel helpless. I want to leave the society temporarily to protect myself from immorality. (DM25)

Since going abroad to study was a socially desirable thing, it was a good and natural way of leaving one's family without hurting them.

My relationship with my family was 'in the bottom of a valley' when I was a sophomore. I had serious arguments with my boyfriend when I was a senior. I was completely discouraged. I wanted to leave that environment. Of course I knew escape was not the only solution. But I could not find a better solution. For instance, I could leave Taipei to go to another place to work, but it still needed a 'family revolution.' Getting married might be another idea. . . . But I was still young. I didn't want to lock myself into another set of shackles. . . . Anyway, going abroad was a better solution. (DF21)

5. PEER PRESSURE

Many students found that many of their classmates and relatives had gone abroad for study. They felt they were inferior if they did not follow.

Everybody went abroad for study. Neighbors, relatives, and friends. (DF31)

6. TO EARN SOCIAL RESPECT

People liked to say: "Buddhist monks who come from afar are always better at reciting scriptures." This means that persons who come from distant lands are always better than the local talent. If you had ever "drunk Western ink," [stay in a Western country] you would have a better social position. In general, having a Western degree was

better than a local degree in terms of getting a job, a higher salary and having a higher social status.

Degree is important in our society. If you can get a master's or doctoral degree in another country, people will respect you. It's kind of vanity. (DM9)

You are adored right after you mention the name of the university you are going to study. (DM37)

7. TO AVOID MAKING CHOICES

Instead of reflecting on one's current life, some interviewees passively chose the socially desirable role.

I found that I could do nothing after I graduated. It seemed to me that going abroad was the only choice. I am not the kind of person with a high ambition and ideal. It's only because I don't have other choices. (DF3)

If you go abroad to study, you don't need to worry about finding a job. (DF30)

8. SEEKING A LIFE TRANSITION--A BETTER CAREER

Some interviewees who had worked for a couple of years tried to find a life transition by going abroad for advanced study because they could not foresee any progress in their future, they were bored with routine work, or they felt they did not have enough knowledge for the work they were doing.

I was teaching English in a supplementary school. It's easy to explain the grammar. I sometimes corrected their wrong sentences but I could not tell them why. More and more they asked me questions, I felt my knowledge was really not enough. (DF1)

After you had been teaching for a long time, you lost the feeling of excitement. You felt you needed to learn new things. If I continued to teach, I had only output without any new input. I wanted the feeling of getting input. It made me feel I was still progressing. Otherwise, I felt life was stagnant. (DF6)

I was working in a trading company. There was a lot of constraint on what I could work on because I did not have enough training on international business. . . . [If I study in the United States] I can work independently. It provides me for more alternatives of my career. (DF14)

9. TO LEARN ENGLISH

English is one of the most popular languages in the world. If you are in a trading business or want to acquire contemporary knowledge, a good grasp of English is essential.

English is very important for doing business. (DM15)

If I can't teach humanity in a college [in Taiwan], at least I can teach English in a supplementary school [after I finish my studies in the United States]. (DF19)

10. TO BROADEN LIFE EXPERIENCES

"To travel ten thousands miles is better than to read ten thousands books." Experiencing personally is the best way to learn a foreign culture. Many interviewees mentioned they wanted to learn the art, literature, social and political systems of different countries; and this was part of reasons why they came to New York which is one of the cultural, business, and information centers in the world. "I would like to learn how other people in the world think, do, and live." (DM37) "I applied for only the universities in the Northeast. You can contact real American culture there." (DF2) Some interviewees perceived studying abroad as a turning point of their lives or a preparation for their professional careers, others just wanted to experience a different world. "Studying will not determine my life. I don't need to teach English even if I have a master's degree on English. . . . My life will not depend on the master's degree. I go abroad to widen my experience and knowledge. It sounds superficial. But that's my aim." (DF21)

11. TO ACQUIRE ADVANCED ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE--AN ADVANCED DEGREE

There is a slang expression: "Come Come Come, Come to the National Taiwan University [the best university in Taiwan]. Go Go Go, Go to the United States." This describes that studying in the United States is a goal which students in Taiwan wish to pursue. Based on the same reason, many professors in graduate schools in Taiwan hold an

advanced degree from the United States. Some of the interviewees also said they would rather go abroad “to learn the first hand knowledge.” (DF6)

I worked as an assistant in the Neuroscience Laboratory, Sinica Academy. From the working experience I realized what I am interested in. I have known a lot of techniques, but I don't have enough knowledge. . . . I want to acquire knowledge, not knowledge of life, but real knowledge. . . . I feel I am going to the United States for study, not to experience life. (DF24)

I worked in a law firm. I found there was not any company that had established a good information system. (DF33)

I am interested in teaching. You can't teach in a college without having a doctoral degree. (DF34)

Although I did not interview people who had the opportunity but did not intend to go abroad for study, we can still gather some hints about public attitudes toward studying abroad based on the interviews and statistical data. Many interviewees felt they did not need to explain why they went abroad for study, because “it was a matter of course;” (DM20) “that's life;” (DM11) “everybody follows this route;” (DF3) “it's a social trend. You have to.” (DF2) Others said: “I may regret after I go abroad. But there is not any doubt that I would feel regretful in my entire life if I do not go.” (DM25) If students had the capability of pursuing advanced knowledge and their parents or themselves could afford it financially, going abroad for study is a desirable thing.

The social value system and parents' expectations and supports provided the context for interviewees to study abroad. Almost all interviewees did not get financial aid and were supported by their families. For some interviewees, it was a natural thing and they did not need to do much effort in terms of psychological effort and practical work. All they had to do was take TOFEL and GRE examinations and apply for schools. But even these efforts could be helped by institutions. Many interviewees learned how to take examinations by attending private supplementary schools where I contacted half of my interviewees. After they had taken examinations, they could asked the private institution to

apply for schools for them, if they were willing to pay the fee (about three hundreds dollars), from acquiring materials, picking up schools, writing statements, and typing. So if you had money, everything could be taken care of. Going abroad to study was not a big deal. Other interviewees went through a process of negotiation between personal intentionality, emergent incidents, making money, or persuading their parents.

Among the forty students whom I interviewed, only five parents did not offer support because they were more concerned with their children's marriage or career. Or they felt that girls were not supposed to get an advanced education. And one parent started to change her attitude after her relatives and friends made her be proud of her daughter. The following are the four cases.

My mother is typical. She places more importance on her son compared to her daughter. . . . When I am at home, I spend most of my time reading without doing housework. My mother considers that a girl is not supposed to be like this. . . . Furthermore, she is worried that it would be difficult for me to find a person to marry if I get an advanced degree. (DF22)

My mother did not agree with me in the beginning. She was concerned that once I went abroad I would not come back again. They [his parents] expected me to be married as soon as possible. No matter how old you were, if you were not married they felt they had not fulfilled their responsibility. On the other hand, once you went abroad they could not see you. There were also many cases that foreign students stayed in the United States permanently. They could not play with their grandchildren. Now they know they cannot stop me. They are more open. (DM28)

In the beginning, they [her parents] resisted. They worried about me [a girl] being alone in a foreign country. They accepted once it became a reality. (DF17)

I studied Chinese in college. My parents were open. But they, like other traditional parents, thought that you could not have a good career in this. So they neither disagree with nor encourage me. Then I worked for a publisher. They were worried about my economic situation but still let me go. When I planned to study theater abroad I needed a lot of skills of persuasion to let them know that I was independent, I could handle difficult situations by myself, and they did not need to worry about me. Anyway, I took advantage of their empathy. (laugh) (DF19)

My mother opposed me originally. She felt that girls did not need so much education. In addition, we are not a wealthy family. . . . She had many relatives and friends. People were emulative. Although she did not say, she hoped I could strive to excel for her. She had worked hard for so long. (DF14)

So far I have discussed the different reasons that prompted interviewees to come to the United States for advanced study in an analytic stance and the larger contexts in terms of the educational system. We do not have an idea how an individual achieved her/his aim. What is the process a person has gone through? In the following, I would like to give three examples. One person came to the United States for the sake of his parents' expectations but he would rather stay in Taiwan and work. One interviewee went through a process of negotiation between intentions, chances, and practical reality. Another decided to come here ten years ago. Then many things happened and impeded his plan but never defeated his determination to come to the United States. The following are excerpts of these three interviewees.

(Could you tell me the reasons why you are going to the United States for study?) My father has imparted the idea on me since I was very young. He considers that to receive education is the most honorable thing in the world. He doesn't care how much money you make, but he wants you to receive as much education as you can. The second reason is the influence of the social environment. It's difficult to find a job here. Some of my classmates are studying in the graduate schools, some have gone abroad already, of course, I followed. It's simple. I think everybody is like me. . . . (Could you tell me anything which is meaningful to you?) To get an M.B.A. degree is the most meaningful thing to my parents. . . . I don't think a degree is so valuable. If my parents had not pushed me so hard, I would not decide to go to the United States. I am the only boy in my family. My parents would give me a certain amount of money. I can invest the money in some enterprises. In addition, it's easy to find a job for one thousand dollars a month in Taiwan. So why an M.B.A. degree? (DM23)

I worked for a publisher after I graduated from college. One day I received my first payment for a translation work [from English to Chinese]. A friend of mine suggested me spend the money on which I got the money. I took TOFEL courses. Since I had taken the courses, I took TOFEL exam. Then I was thinking about studying abroad. . . . I am always interested in theater. However, it is not easy to find a job in this area. My parents don't support me either. Once I considered studying mass communication. I was struggling and talking with my friends for two months. Finally, I decided to choose the major--theater--which I am really interested in. Since you need to spend so much time and money on it, why should you compromise your interest? . . . When I planned to study theater abroad I needed a lot of skills of persuasion to let [my parents] know that I was independent; I could handle difficult situations by myself; and they did not need to worry about me. Anyway, I took advantage of their empathy. (DF19)

(Could you tell me the reasons why you are going to the United States for study?) I had this idea when I was a sophomore. I had a surgery before, I thought I didn't need to serve in the army. So I planned to go abroad right after I graduated. I

would like to learn literature, art, and social systems of other countries. Later, I found out that I still need to go to the army. I also passed the entrance exam of the graduate school. I didn't have strong motivation to study in the graduate program. But my girlfriend got a teaching assistant position in the program, so I decided to study in order to stay with her. We got married after I finished my study. Then I went to the army. We had a baby, . . . then another baby. I couldn't leave my babies behind. But this time I cannot postpone anymore. You need double effort to achieve your aim when you are older. My little daughter is five years old already. She has developed her own personality. . . . In addition, I have taught for seven years. I feel it is a turning point. So I made the decision. . . . Then a friend of mine borrowed thirty thousand dollars from me and did not return. So I worked hard for another year to make money. . . . I said to myself that I was going abroad next year every year, this is the first time I say that I am going abroad *this* year. I want to put aside my job and become a full-time student. Of course, I still worry about my children. But I comfort myself by thinking that it may be better for them without living under their father's shadow. (DM25)

C. PLANNING TO LEAVE

Going abroad involved leaving an old environment (physical environment, family, friends, culture, etc.) and facing a new environment. Interviewees were going abroad for different reasons and expectations. As a consequence, feelings about leaving were also different. Generally speaking, leaving an old environment might cause pain due to separation from the familiar. And facing a new and partly unknown environment might cause anxiety and excitement.

Some interviewees were excited: "I was very happy when I received I-20s⁸. I told everybody. I was accepted by six universities among the eight that I applied"; (DF30) "I feel very excited that I am going to experience it in person;" (DM8) "I cannot wait to go there. I have been living without aim for a long time." (DF13)

Some were sad or depressed: "I felt very bad. Oh! A lot of pressure. I had a good and stable job in Taiwan. Going abroad meant that you discarded a good environment and immersed yourself in an unknown environment. You did not know if you would succeed

⁸I-20 is a document issued by U. S. Department of Justice. It is a certificate of eligibility for nonimmigrant (F-1) student status.

or fail;" (DF6) "I am very depressed because the program I am going to study in is not the one I am interested in;" (DM11) "The day before I left, I felt very sad. I was looking at my room where I was familiar and stayed for everyday. I could not believe that I was leaving it." (DF3)

Some were nervous because they were worried about "how to transfer airplanes," (DF3) "how to get along with my advisor," (DM9) "how to communicate with faculty," "how to handle schoolwork," (DF13) "where to live," "the safety and AIDS issues in New York City," (DF22, DM20) and "nobody is going to see me at the airport;" "I would be lonely and helpless in the United States. . . . I heard that there was no furniture in the dormitory. I have never bought such a big thing. Every time I went shopping, my mother accompanied me." (DF34)

However, most interviewees had mixed and ambivalent feelings about leaving at the same time.

I am excited and scared. I am excited that I am going to start a new process of learning. I am scared that I may not be able to adapt to the new environment. (DM15)

It sways to and fro. Sometimes excited, sometimes nervous, sometimes no feeling at all. . . . I am worried because I have economic pressure. Beside this, I am not sure about my ability on my major, my ability of taking care of myself and of living alone. . . . I am excited because it is a turning point. It is a beginning of a new life. . . . I am affirmative about my ability. But I wondered if I can achieve this by using English. . . . I am afraid that I don't have original ideas. I cannot digest the readings. (DF19)

CHAPTER VI

PROCESSES OF ADAPTING TO A NEW ENVIRONMENT

Many environmental psychologists (Altman & Rogoff, 1987; Stokols & Shumaker, 1981; Wapner, Kaplan, & Cohen, 1973; Wapner, 1981, 1987) hold a holistic and contextual perspective on transactions between people and environment. They have proposed the person-in-environment as the unit of analysis. The person-in-environment system "operates in dynamic equilibrium directed toward long- and short-term goals; a disturbance in one part of the person-in-environment system affects other parts and the transactional system as a whole" (Wapner, 1981, p. 224). For foreign students, studying abroad not only represents a subjective life stage⁹, (Stokols & Shumaker, 1982) but also results in an environmental change and a new self-world relationship.

In the foreign student literature, the concept of culture shock (Oberg, 1960) has been emphasized by many researchers. It implies an unpleasant stress induced by the removal or distortion of familiar communication cues. Different problems, such as language (Smalley, 1963) and loss of status (Byrnes, 1966; Higbee, 1969) have been emphasized. Relevant to the concept of culture shock are questions concerning temporal patterns of adjustment. The U-curve (Lysgaard, 1955) and W-curve (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963) have been proposed as models which describe the process of adjustment. The U-curve depicts the initial optimism in the sojourn, a decline of adjustment shortly after

⁹Subjective life stages are defined as spatially and temporally bounded phases of a person's life that are associated with particular goals and plans (Stokols & Shumaker, 1982).

the entry, and afterward, a recovery. The W-curve proposes that the foreign student undergoes a second similar adjustment stage on returning home.

In most studies retrospective or cross-sectional data were used. For instance, in Lysgaard's (1955) study, exchange scholars and students were interviewed after they went back to their home country. Interviewees were classified into three groups according to the length of stay in the host country. They were asked about their experiences and satisfactions in the host country. The U-curve was suggested to describe the sequence of adjustment during a sojourn. In this study, time was treated as an objective and homogeneous entity instead of the experienced time. People's future expectations might have an effect on their present concerns and activities. For instance, the fifth month for students who planned to stay in the host country for half a year or for students who planned to pursue a doctoral degree might have a very different meaning. It seems to me that the concept of the U- or the W-curve represents an idealized hypothesis regarding the process of adaptation. It trivializes complex individual, social, and cultural experiences. Not every foreign student goes through the same process. Some students do not begin their sojourn with optimism. Some students never solve their adjustment problems. Students' expectations to return to their home country or stay in the host country affect how they relate to the new environment. Events happening in the home country may also influence their experiences. A more complex and dynamic concept regarding the process of adjustment is needed. In addition, the physical environment is excluded in most of the literature. Many environmental psychology studies have shown that living in urban or rural environments, in a dormitory or an apartment, or in a single or double room influences the resident's daily activities and social interactions (e.g., Baum & Davis, 1980; Frank, 1980; Wohlwill & Kohn, 1973). I will therefore review the literature on environmental relocation.

Wohlwill's adaptation level model (Wohlwill & Kohn, 1973) assumes that the judgment and evaluation of stimuli is a function of the adaptation level formed in the earlier environment. Experiences of migrants coming from rural and metropolitan areas to a medium-sized city were studied. In this model, the environment is not a place in which people live but sources of stimuli.

Hormuth (1990) proposes that the self is a part of an ecological system, seen as a conjunction of other people, environments, and objects. Using a multi-method, multi-study approach, he takes relocation as a research paradigm to study the meaning of the physical environment in relation to self-concept change. His ecological model of relating the self-concept to the physical and social environment has contributed to the literature of environmental psychology. However, it seems to me that his empirical research only includes more variables in his analysis without really understanding a phenomenon holistically. The wholeness of a person's experiences is lost in the statistical analysis. Variables are often interpreted without connections to the context.

Wapner's organismic-developmental approach (Wapner, 1981, 1987) considers the person-in-environment as the unit of analysis. He emphasizes that people continuously organize and endow their environments with significance. However, his empirical research is still not as rich and complex as his conceptualization. Stokols and his colleagues' contextual model (Stokols, 1987; Stokols & Shumaker, 1982; Stokols, Shumaker & Martinez, 1983) is based on the concepts of person-environment fit and comparison level. They emphasize the multi-dimensional and cross-situational determinants of congruence and the comparative appraisal of previous, present, and anticipated residential situations. They confine their analysis to the fit of persons and the environment and overlook the possibility of the emergence of new goals as a result of transactions between the person and the new environment as well as the retrospective construction of one's past to fit the present situation to maintain continuous identity in a changing situation (Jones, 1980).

In this chapter, I will describe some cases of different types of self-world relationships in the new environment first, and then discuss changes from one self-world relationship to another. Then the role of the physical environment and social life in students' experiences will be depicted.

A. SELF-WORLD RELATIONSHIP

Environmental transition results in a change of person-environment relationship. Being in a new environment, people have different ways of relating themselves to their life world. The strangeness of the new environment can cause alienation, provide information, or contribute to a self-reflection. A person may hold his/her pre-conceptions and be indifferent to the new environment, or constantly incorporate the new environmental experiences to his/her self-concept. I do not judge what is good or bad, mature or immature. What I am concerned here is the degree of their self-world transactions. The following cases represent different types of self-world relationship. Some are engaged in this new environment. Some are alienated with this new environment. They are chosen because their experiences represent a range of different relationships.

1. DEPRESSED

As was true of many people in Taiwan, DM11 had the idea of studying abroad when he was still very young. "Non-native Taiwanese¹⁰ have stronger intentions to go abroad." Going abroad meant "getting an advanced degree, . . . getting a professional licence, immigrating." "Getting a professional licence, so that you have a place to retreat. Our government fled from the mainland to Taiwan. Who knows that we would not retreat

¹⁰Non-native Taiwanese refer to people who came from mainland China in 1949 as well as their offsprings.

to somewhere else again?" He was pushed along by prevailing social trends. He came to the United States for study because he was disappointed in his country and an advanced degree was desirable.

Going abroad, however, was not isolated from his other experiences. It seems to me that the social structure was so overwhelming that he could not extricate himself from it. He felt so impotent.

It is out of luck to be a Chinese. . . . I don't think that there is anyone who is interested in studying. You study till you wear a pair of glasses, till you are very old, till you don't have income, till you are psycho, till you don't have a boyfriend or girlfriend. Who likes to study? . . . There is no inborn interest. People don't have choice of their profession. . . . Young generations are distressed, anxious, and indecisive. . . . Medical students feel unbalanced. They have more hardship on studying. . . . College students are squeezed by the education system. . . . People are too realistic. We are affected by the society."

In Taiwan, a primary and high school education are basically the stepping-stones to a college education. Students study hard in order to pass the national entrance examination. Medical schools are especially competitive because entering a good medical school guarantees a high social status and income in the future. Many parents have very high expectations of their children to become a doctor. I guess DM11 is one of the victims of the educational system. They spend their youth studying without many opportunities to develop their other potentials and to enjoy other activities. And they might not be interested in medicine. It seems to me that he was pressed to follow the steps set by his parents and society but he felt that he was not successful in this process (studying in a mediocre medical school in Taiwan, being rejected by many colleges in the United States, and realizing that many people made a fortune without an advanced degree). He was skeptical about his reasons for doing this. He was upset because he did not have the ability to change the system. And he needed to participate in the system in order to survive. Nonetheless, he accepted some of the prevalent social values mentioned earlier, such as the positive value on making money. I felt that he was very enthusiastic asking me about the possibility of studying business administration during the first interview.

When I first interviewed DM11 in Taiwan, he was studying for the American professional licence examination. He said: "The licence is only a piece of paper. . . . It's pitiful. People set traps and let you head to the dead-end alley." So he kept following the steps set by society and his parents, but he did not enjoy doing it and could not find a way to evade the trap.

When he just graduated from college, he applied for, but was not accepted, by any schools in the United States. He stayed in Taiwan for a year. Then, he was accepted only by an university which was his lowest priority. In addition, the program did not match his interests. So he was depressed before he left. I interviewed him twice in the United States. His situation did not get better. He was even more depressed. By the third interview (March, 1990), he said: "I was desperate last time. Now I am even more desperate. Do you remember what Mark Twain said: 'Life is just a burden.'"

The program in which he was enrolled was not a degree program. Instead, it was a certificate program. Most of the time, he worked in the hospital, but "nobody cares if you work or not." "They take advantage of you. You work for them without salary. In addition, you pay tuition. At least, you need to learn something. But time is too short." On the one hand, he was upset. He felt that he was used and defrauded. On the other hand, he tried to justify and make sense of his situation. "We take advantage of each other. Without their I-20, I don't have the opportunity to come here. I have learned something and travelled in many places."

If he did not learn much professional knowledge, did he enjoy learning the new culture?

I had a bad impression of New York. After I came here, my impression is still very bad. It's dirty and chaotic. It's dangerous. The ethnic relationships are too complicated. . . . A Chinese restaurant owner was killed in Long Island yesterday. . . . I rarely go out at night. When I went to my classmate's house at night, I was trembling with fear. . . . On the Chinese Moon Festival Eve, AT&T company designed a program of free calling to Taiwan. I went to that place but was cheated by them. . . . Hispanic businessmen are not honest. They like to defraud

customers. . . . People are more polite. It is good to hear polite words, although they are only pretentious.”

When he first arrived, he talked to foreigners (non-Chinese) out of curiosity. Later he felt it was not necessary to do that.

Although he was not involved in the new society, his relations with other Chinese were not satisfactory either. In the first and second interviews, he said that friendships between males were based on self interest. They just took advantage of one another. Only romantic love was sincere. But he did not even trust romantic love by the third interview. The following excerpt gives us a clue of his distrust of romantic love. He shared a room with a Chinese student.

When he first arrived in New York, he had no place to live. So I let him share the room because he is my girlfriend's brother. But I was too stupid. I think about myself too little. I sacrifice my privacy. . . . I did not move out because I was lazy and it was cold. But later I found that he betrayed me. I could not stand it anymore. So I decided to move out.”

I do not know what happened between them. But we can speculate that this incident reinforced his belief that people only took advantage of each other. He tried to do good for other people, but he was the victim.

He was struggling mentally to solve the contradiction. He kept doing what he asserted as meaningless. He studied hard for the licence examination but he did not believe in the value of the licence. He envied the person who “does a bad thing and takes advantage of other people without any guilt. And the victim is not even aware of it.” But he was not successful in becoming this kind of person. He still helped others not for his own self interest. He told me that I was taking advantage of him, but he still agreed to be interviewed three times. He said that researchers were self-interested. They interviewed people because they wanted to write a paper or get a degree. But he felt that the interview was meaningless to the interviewee.

He distrusted people because all people were selfish. His experiences of being “betrayed” by his roommate and being used by the program in which he studied were the obvious proof for him. He threw away his address book.

I don't want to contact them or I am indifferent when they contact me. There may be people with good personality. But how do you know that? They may be pretended. Moreover, even the good personality will turn bad someday. . . . I'm independent. I don't want to take advantage of other people too. So I don't need friends.

He shied himself away from other people by asserting that all human beings were selfish. He then close the door of learning by not interacting with other people. He looked at the world through similar lens and resisted a change of his self-concept. Instead of opening his mind to explore and observe the new environment, he let his preconceptions dominate his perceptions and feelings about the new environment. He was disappointed by Taiwan but he felt that the United States was not a paradise either. New York was dangerous. Americans were polite but pretentious. They spoke a lot but most of their conversations were nonsense. Hispanic businessmen were not honest. All these experiences stood out and occupied his thoughts. Other interviewees were impressed by the skyscrapers, art museums, concerts, and different cultures. But DM11 did not mention these issues during his interview. He said that life was meaningless and he was only counting days. But he continued doing things without enjoying them as a consequence of social pressure. All these incidents showed the discrepancy between what he thought he believed and what he truly believed. If he truly believed that human beings were born selfish, he would not be hurt by being taken advantage of. If he truly believed that life was meaningless, he would not study nor be upset by studying for the license examination.

Once he said that he was caught in a “dirty society.” In this world where people were only interested in making money, he suffered and looked for something to help him leap out of this realistic world. For him, only music and religion can “wash out the dirt.” By playing the keyboard or guitar he could sublimate himself from profane reality

temporarily. He was also interested in spiritual and mystical things. He had a special object: a pigeon feather.

This pigeon possesses supernatural power. It is not scared of people. It can answer your call and come to you. It was stolen twice but flew back to our house. One day a feather dropped. I picked it up and my brother made it into a pen. It is unbelievable that it is still like a new one after more than ten years.

He said that anything that could be figured out by human beings was nothing. Psychologists discussed sex, life, and death, but human beings had an unknown future. He liked to read Wonders in the World and ghost stories. And this pigeon feather was the concrete example of the existence of the supernatural power.

He did not bring anything to the United States. When I asked him in Taiwan if he would bring the pigeon feather with him, he laughed and said that I was too idealistic and unrealistic. He was depressed before he left Taiwan because he did not like the program into which he was accepted. The future for him was unpredictable. In any case, he still needed to come since it was the desirable thing for society and for his parents. Someday, he might stay in the United States permanently. But he did not know how long he would stay the first time. Coming here was like a pilot survey. So he did not bring many personal possessions. As I know in the period of his stay, he was in a very low mood. He knew he would be going back very soon. Music was not part of his life here. But he went to church more frequently. Since the United States is a more religious country than Taiwan, he had much more access to churches. He borrowed religious books from public libraries. Religion, however, did not help him transcend the profane reality much. When I interviewed him the third time (March, 1990), he was going to return to Taiwan soon. He said he might come back to the United States someday, but only if he was wealthy, because only the wealthy could live here comfortably. Religion and music might lift him up to a pure and imaginative world temporarily. But he still devoted himself to the project set by society. It seems to me that he might still have thought that he would be free from reality if he was rich enough someday.

2. INDIFFERENT

DM23 came to the United States for study to satisfy his parents' expectations. For him, life just moved without devotion, excitement, and prospect. In order to understand his self identity, knowing how he was brought up is essential.

We are very intimate. We are all family oriented. We have dinner at home almost every night. People are seldom absent. My father is very strict with us. He doesn't like that we participate in extra-curricular activities, whether it is good or bad. He doesn't encourage you to do it. So we spend huge amount of time at home. Family means a lot to us.

Even in the days before he left, he avoided having a farewell dinner with his friends because "my father told me that I should avoid attending any kinds of activities except studying. I listen to him." So he stayed at home even "doing nothing." "My parents are happy if we are studying. At least, they don't need to worry about you doing something bad if they can see you at home." Although he did not like to study, he did not disagree with his father that studying was a good thing. He was not as depressed as DM11. He behaved like a "good" kid in front of his father. Because he needed to stay at home most of the time, ironically, going to school became the only opportunity for him to do things that he was not permitted to do or he liked to do. In college, he skipped many classes to see movies or hang out in the street. He smoked but not at home. Studying was his only responsibility, but he did not enjoy studying and he felt a little guilty for not fulfilling his responsibility. He did not rebel because he did not have a better proposal with which to argue with his father. So on the one hand, he sacrificed his own interests to make his parents happy. On the other hand, he did this only superficially without committing himself to this project. The continuous doing things for the sake of other people influenced his attitudes toward life. He learned to carry out a task in a perfunctory manner without commitment and devotion. Since it was not his own choice, he could shift the responsibility away.

He came to the United States for study to continue to fulfil his parents' expectations, although he would rather have stayed in Taiwan to find a job.

My father has imparted the idea [of studying abroad] on me since I was very young. He considers that to receive education is the most honorable thing in the world. He doesn't care how much money you make, but he wants you to receive as much education as you can. . . . To get an M.B.A. degree is the most meaningful thing to my parents. . . . I don't think a degree is so valuable. If my parents had not pushed me so hard, I would not decide to go to the United States. I am the only boy in my family. My parents would give me a certain amount of money. I can invest the money in some enterprises. In addition, it's easy to find a job for one thousand dollars a month in Taiwan. So why an M.B.A. degree?

He studied in a mediocre college with full financial support from his parents. To get passing grades in his classes was not too difficult for him. He still skipped classes because "classes are either too difficult to follow or too simple that nothing is new to me." Anyway, "it's wasting time even to stay in the classroom." He studied for just one week before examinations. He spent time watching television, chatting with his roommates, and drinking. Life was easy and comfortable--nothing to be worried about. "I am not concerned with my schoolwork. At most, I think about my parents. But nothing I can do for them. . . . It's freer here. I can smoke and drink wine. Nobody stops me."

He came to the United States without a self-reflective plan, since a degree was meaningful only to his parents, not to himself. By attributing decisions of coming here to study to his parents, he could shy away from his responsibility. Before he came to the United States he told me that this would be his last opportunity to be a student. Since he did not study hard in college, he would grasp the last chance. However, he did not. To pass all the courses and get a degree was good enough. He did not need to study hard. Life was easy. Now he could control his life without being watched by his parents, but he did not take advantage of this opportunity to pursue his own interests. He only enjoyed cooking, smoking, drinking, gambling, and watching television. He knew only a few Chinese.

I don't want to know more people. It's not necessary. I am a student. I don't want to make social relations so complex. . . . I speak Chinese with my

roommates. . . . If I have questions, I ask Chinese classmates. . . . American are egotistic. They are not polite to you. . . . I don't have many opportunities to speak English.

He said that he did not make a long term plan because there were too many unpredictable variables. Although he had a very high self expectation, he never tried hard to achieve it. He had a protective attitude toward himself. When other people were superior to him, he excused himself by saying he was not trying.

I know I can excel them. I am self-confident. . . . Although I am not top in my class, I feel that high grades mean nothing. I would not be inferior to them, if I study hard. But usually I don't try.

So he maintained his self-confidence by not trying to do so. He said he did not gain anything by studying in the United States because what was taught here was only at the college level and he had only a very limited improvement in English.

His self-confidence and self-expectation were reflected in his attitude towards objects. He said that other people could live with coarse tea and plain rice. But for him, quality of life meant a wealthy life. He dreamed that he would have an imported car and a good house in a good location in the future. "If you lived in a very nice house, nobody would say that you are poor. If you drove an imported car, nobody would say that you are incompetent." He also said that he cherished nothing because nothing that he had was expensive. And he would not cherish an object because it was given by his friend. He would cherish it only if it was really "good."

He had a high self-expectation but he did not work hard. He told me the following story. Once he took a psychological test. He was asked what kind of cup (or glass; we use the same word in Chinese) he would like to see in a wooden house. Some people mentioned a wooden cup or a mug. He answered a crystal glass, although he felt it was incompatible with the wooden house. He explained that the crystal glass was beautiful but fragile. His watch had the same representation as the crystal glass as well. "It's a very good watch, but it never works."

3. ESCAPE

PM14 studied social science in college, worked in a private company for one year, and then, prepared to come to the United States for another year. Originally, his short term goal was to get a master's degree, to get married, and then, to study in a doctoral program. His long term goal was teaching or working for the government in Taiwan. One semester after he had studied here, he was not so confident. To finish his study for the master's degree was difficult, let alone a doctoral degree.

When PM14 first arrived, his emotions were not stable. He missed his family and girlfriend, and confronted problems in daily life. He did not have much social life in the United States.

The students go their own way after classes. I imagined that the United States is an individualistic country. People care about only their own business. But the situation is much worse than I could imagine.

He has problems of handling his schoolwork.

Sometimes I do not understand the lecture and I have problems of representation. I am sad. I feel that I have talent without having an opportunity to show it. I am not so superficial as people know me. The faculty do not understand me.

He cherished photographs of his family and girl friend, Chinese medicine, Chinese comic dialogue tapes, and tapes recorded by his parents and girl friend:

I spent more than two hundred dollars for telephoning during my first month here. So I thought that I could send tapes to my family and my girl friend instead of calling them. I am excited to hear their voices. When I have pressure from schoolwork or when I am lonely, looking at the photographs or listening to the tapes can reduce the pressure and make me feel more comfortable.

He spent much time watching television, listening to Chinese dialogue tapes, and reading Chinese newspapers and magazines. When he had no classes, he stayed at home. He described his experience of reading Chinese newspapers: "It is a 'high class' enjoyment. I am totally relaxed. I seek pleasure to my heart's context." He spent a lot of time watching television too. Sometimes he could keep watching for six or eight hours a

day. Actually, he felt he could not stop himself watching television, so he gave his television set to his friend.

In summary, he did not have an articulated plan for his future one semester after his arrival. He was not competent in academic work and social interactions. He did not actively explore new, different experiences in New York. The lack of clarity about his future and the difficulty of adapting to the new environment made him stay in the world of the past. Lowenthal (1985) indicates that returning to the past is an escape from the weight and woes of the present. The objects surrounding him provided a refuge for him to withdraw. He denied the outside individualistic, unfamiliar, and challenging world. In the “psychological niche” (Ziller, Rorer, Combs, & Lewis, 1983) that he created, he was understood and loved by other people, he could express his thoughts well, he was more competent and confident, and he could behave without a distortion of his self. He could achieve a degree of personal control, however, the niche limited adaptability to the environment that he must enter eventually.

4. ALIENATED

DM12 had a master's degree in engineering in Taiwan. He came to the United States (in a Ph.D. program) to acquire academic knowledge, to broaden life experiences, and to improve his English. He was upset when he learned that it was very difficult to get any financial support from school.

I came here with a lot of expectations. But when I realize that even many candidates in my program can't get any financial aid, I ask myself why did I come here? I am not sure how long I can survive. Why am I doing this? Why should I work so hard?

Since tuition was very high, he wanted to take full advantage of it. He took many difficult courses. He spent most of his time studying and doing homework. In addition, he wanted to save every penny he had. Therefore, he did not participate in any cultural or sports activities. He brought table-tennis, tennis, and badminton rackets, but he did not have time

to play. School and home were the only places with which he was familiar. He felt alienated from society and the larger physical environment.

It's like seeing a movie. It's not quite real. It's like seeing a movie when I walk in the street. . . . New York is only so-so. Buildings are very tall. They are different from the pictures in the books, just tall. Sometimes I feel it's strange that cloud is below the building. Sometimes I feel actually buildings are not tall. . . . I do not actually live in New York. I only live in my own small nest. . . . How can there be impression of New York? Only the subway, that's it. . . . I am disconnected to the society. For instance, I feel that the election is irrelevant to me. It's only news. You don't feel that you have any connection to it. . . . I don't feel that I am studying in a foreign country. . . . I should take advantage of resources in New York. I believe the life will be colorful then. But I need to survive, and then I can take care of other things.

Money was the biggest issue for him. He was embarrassed to ask his parents for more money since he was married. He just spent all his time studying in order to get a chance to work in the school computer laboratory. He sacrificed many other things. He lived in a living room and sacrificed privacy in order to save money. He used cheap blankets as curtains to delimit his area. Of course, he could hear the sound of the television or his roommates' conversations in the other part of the living room. His roommates pushed aside the curtain a few times to see what we were doing. Even fruit juice was a luxury for him. "Basically I drink fruit punch. Only after dinner, I drink a small cup of fruit juice to satisfy my heart's content." Running a computer used to be one of the most enjoyable activities for him. Now he only played with his computer when it was necessary because the pressures of schoolwork and budgetary problems preoccupied him. Since he took "honored" courses which were very demanding, he became very nervous during the tests. The separation from his wife (who studied in Washington, D.C.) created added stresses for him. When he missed her, he sent her an E-mail. If she called him, he felt that he saved money.

In Taiwan, he bought a book if he felt it was a good book. He felt it was an achievement, although he did not read all the books. He liked books. "If someone marked on my books, I would feel very sorry and angry, especially for those books with my notes

and my 'heart and blood.'" But he could no longer enjoy buying books in the United States.

He called himself a garbage collector.

I kept report cards, drawings, course schedules, toys, and letters. I kept almost everything. . . . Through objects, I can have a vivid image of my past. When I am getting older, I have a lot of memories to recollect. But my wife doesn't have. I can tell stories to her at that time.

He did not bring his "garbage" to the United States. Anyway, he was still collecting "new garbage" in the new environment. He printed and kept most of the E-mail that he received. Thinking about his past was relaxing for him. "Other people might go to see a movie for relaxation. I would like to do it if I have income. But old stuff is still important. You can't see movies all the time." He also said if he could finish a dream without interruption, he would feel very relaxed when he woke up. And the image of his past experiences was the best material for his dreams.

5. TRAVELLER

PM4 studied architecture in college, worked in an architectural company for two years, and then came to the United States to study urban design.

The masters program in urban design is a one year program. He thought that he would go back to Taiwan once he finished his studies, so he packed his luggage as simply as possible. Making sure that all the documents and certificates were complete, and arriving in New York safely with enough money were the only important things for him.

He had three special objects--books, a camera, and a pen. He bought architecture and art books which he liked but could not find in Taiwan. He brought a camera to the United States, but it was too heavy and inconvenient. He also felt that it was unsafe to use the camera in the streets in New York. So he bought another compact camera which could be put in a pocket. A pen which he did not have was another special object. He found the

pen he liked in Taiwan but it was very expensive. He planed to buy it for himself as a graduation gift.

He liked classical music and some popupar music, so he selected a few music tapes to bring here. When he first arrived, he listened to the music tapes that he brought here very often. Later he tended to listen to the radio to know more about music in the United States. He went out to see what happened in the city frequently. He said when he went out he would not wear a walkman. To live in his own world and to block out the outside "noise" in the street was not what he wanted to do.

He did not bring any pictures of his family. But his family sent their pictures to him and he sent his to them too. When he received the letters and pictures from his family, he felt good and warm.

He had some friends--both Chinese and non-Chinese--but without deep relationships. He wanted to make more friends with non-Chinese to learn their ways of thinking or solving problems. But the establishment of friendship needed time. For him, there was no difference to make a friend with a Chinese or non-Chinese. He disagreed with some Chinese students' attitude. They found that New York was very colorful and interesting, and filled with different people, so they were reluctant to talk to other Chinese. His basic attitude was to see, to learn, and not to resist. And he enjoyed socializing with people who had different thoughts.

For PM4, obtaining new academic knowledge and exploring new experiences were both important reasons for coming to the United States. Going abroad was not just a means to getting a good job but itself was a good experience worth pursuing. Since studying in the United States was temporary, he made use of every moment of time. He spent time observing people and the environment as well as participating in various activities. On vacation, he went to Boston, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania. His basic attitude was to open his mind, to learn, and to explore. His special objects--books, a

camera, and a pen--were all new objects. Books could give him new knowledge, and a compact camera helped him mark his new precious experience. He brought his favorite music tapes but now tended to find out what was new music in the United States. His refusal to wear a walkman while walking in the street reflected the same attitude of opening the mind. And he wanted to establish new relationships with all kinds of people and opposed the idea of not interacting with other Chinese students intentionally.

6. LIBERATED

Like DM23, DF21 had strict parents as well. Her daily activities were restricted by her mother. And her situation was even worse.

My mother has an authoritarian character. . . . She was hysterical when she was angry. She would say anything. . . . She gave me a lot of unhappy memories. . . . I was only a child then. I don't know why she gave me such a severe punishment. . . . I remember when I was eight to twelve, I looked at my family with cold eyes. For instance, while they were sitting in the living room, I would sit very far away watching them as if I was not a member of the family; I was an outsider. . . . I don't feel this is my home. She even refused to give me a key of our house. I studied in a night school. Sometimes I came back at eleven o'clock and she already fell asleep. But she would rather get up to open the door for me instead of giving the key to me. . . . I was not allowed to close my door while I was sleeping. . . .

For her, going abroad was a good choice for leaving her family without hurting them.

My relationship with my family was 'in the bottom of a valley' when I was a sophomore. I had serious arguments with my boyfriend when I was a senior. I was completely discouraged. I wanted to leave that environment. Of course I knew escape was not the only solution. But I could not find a better solution. For instance, I could leave Taipei to go to another place to work, but it still needed a 'family revolution.' Getting married might be another idea. . . . But I was still young. I didn't want to lock myself into another set of shackles. . . . Anyway, going abroad was a better solution.

I could feel the tension between her and her mother. Many times I asked her about her experiences in New York but she could not help switching the topic to her mother. And her mood was not filled with appreciation but with anger. Unlike DM23 who came to the United States to satisfy his parents' expectations, going abroad to study for her was a

way to escape her dominant mother, to pursue her own interests. She knew much better what she was heading for. When I first called her in New York, I could feel her excitement from her voice. "I love New York so much. I enjoy visiting museums. I have been to the Metropolitan Museum of Art three times." In the first interview she said:

I reviewed the subway map and memorized all the stations in advance of my trip, and then walked around with my knapsack and sunglasses. If I lost my way, I asked police or security guard in the building. . . . When I first went to the city [Manhattan], I was so excited that my body was trembling. So many skyscrapers. Finally, I was in the world famous city. I could expect my future. . . . I live in Flushing. I am a student. I can have a very peaceful life. But when I need excitement, I can reach it very easily. There are different ethnic peoples, I can learn a lot. There is growth everyday. . . . There is a poem written by Keats about inscriptions on Greek urns. When I saw Greek urns in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I thought about that poem. Although I had read that poem many times, I had never had such a deep feeling. I really felt the subtle connections among the Greek era, the time when Keats wrote that poem, and the present while I read it. I was very impressed. . . . Finally I realized that what I read before was alive. It's not just to be memorized for a test. . . . Some friends of mine don't like SoHo. They like the life on the Fifth Avenue. For me, SoHo is more Bohemian. I see creativity and vitality of life there.

Of course, her experiences had both positive and negative sides. It was difficult for her, as a foreign student, to study English literature. She liked to explore new places but she was hesitant to go out at night because of safety concerns. New York was exciting but it did not have the peace of a natural landscape. She missed Taiwan--the cityscape, food, and friends.

I would not go out at night unless someone accompanies me. . . . It's totally different from what it was in Taiwan. In Taiwan, the other half day of life just begins at dusk. But in New York, I feel I should go home at sunset.

Most Chinese students study accounting or computer science. It's laborious to study the humanities here. You need to be familiar with their language and culture. I used to be very aggressive in the class. Now I am timid. . . . Another reason may be that I am the only foreign student in class. I have much concern. I would like to speak only when I am well prepared.

It's lonely here. But loneliness is a state of mind. I won't be sad for that. . . . I would look at photographs of my friends and tell them my feelings and experiences.

Since she was free from the constraints of her mother and she was enjoying the excitement of New York, she changed her plan. In order to be able to make a better living

in the United States in the future, she transferred to an M.B.A. program during the second semester.

I persisted that I should go back to Taiwan before I left. Now I feel that staying here is a possible choice. . . . I am struggling if I should transfer to another program. First, it's laborious to study English. Second, the prospect is not good for an English major. . . . It's free here. I hate to be controlled. The opportunity of contacting art and culture in New York reinforces my decision of staying here. . . . Since I decided to stay here for a longer time, I should study something more practical. You can still learn literature in your spare time.

Not only did she enjoy the cultural and social environments, but she enjoyed having her own space. This was the first time she could arrange her room based on her own will.

I share a study and a living room with my sister [in Taiwan]. Actually we each can have one's own room. But my mother feels that sisters should live together. It's no use arguing with her. . . . I hate fluorescent light. Every time I think about this I still feel angry. We used a bulb in our room. One day when I came home, I found that bulb was replaced by fluorescent light. I was so angry. My mother didn't even notice us. Her explanation was to save energy. But at least she should tell us. We didn't have privacy when we were young. We couldn't close our door while we were sleeping. My mother said we should let the air circulate. . . . Sometimes I closed my door but she would come in without knocking on the door. . . . My mother is interested in Chinese painting. You can see her *masterpieces* everywhere in our house. [sigh!] I like the poster of Lou Da-Yo [a rock singer], but I would not post it. It's incongruous to put the poster on one wall when there is a Chinese painting on the other wall. . . . I only put some postcards in front of my desk, such as beautiful women, handsome men, or sports cars. . . . I used to wander a lot because there was pressure at home. Now I like to go home to stay in my room. I even come home when there is only two hours free between two classes. I feel this is a place belonged to me. . . . I have my own space. It's just like what I imagined. You see. An oilpaper umbrella, poems, photographs. . . . It's a small gallery.

Going abroad for study was a departure from her family for her. While she lifted her luggage to the counter at the airport, she already knew that she was going to face a new future. She had to take care of herself in the new environment. Her family, friends, and the familiar environment were left behind. Those objects she brought with her were the only things which accompanied her.

When I dragged my luggage at the airport, I knew all my friends will be gone. Beside this luggage, I am alone. . . . I am living without a companion here. The only thing that I have are these objects. Everything is important for me. I bought the desk and lamp myself. In the past, my mother made decisions. She never asked what we needed. I cherished all my possessions. This is the first time I design my own life according to my own will. No matter if it is good or bad.

As I expected, I saw the poster of a rock singer on her wall when I interviewed her in New York. I think this poster did not just reflect her interests but celebrated that her dream had come true. She was free. She could control her own life. In addition to the poster, she was surrounded by music cassettes, poems written by her boyfriend, Chinese traditional poems, tea sets, photographs, books, an oilpaper umbrella, and the stuffed Garfield. She treasured all her personal possessions.

7. LIBERATED

DM7 studied engineering in college. His parents encouraged him to go abroad to broaden his visions and find a refuge¹¹. Three-fourths of his elementary school classmates were in a foreign country. He felt that he lived in a small circle. People always talked about engineering. His vision was narrow. And he was timid and hesitating. Going abroad might also give him a chance to study a different profession. He said he regarded an additional value as important--to learn a new culture and way of life.

Unlike most students who talked a lot about their schoolwork and social relationships, he spoke about living strategies during the second and third interview in New York. Because his parents and relatives were not around, he was brighter and more confident. He was allowed to do whatever he wanted without worrying about people's opinions.

The everyday life circle was very narrow in Taiwan. I was more constrained. My parents are not here. So the heaven is high and the emperor is far away. I don't need to control my temper. I can do what I would like to do. Nobody will report to my parents what I am doing. I can offend whomever I want. In Taiwan I didn't want to give trouble to my parents. Here I am responsible to myself. My parents would not be worried about me. At least I don't see them worry about me.

¹¹As mentioned in the section of reasons of studying abroad, many people would like to stay in the United States. In case the Communists invaded Taiwan, they could have a place to escape.

My parents and relatives are not around. I need to be responsible only to myself. I can do things no matter what the consequences. I am not so timid. In Taiwan, I needed to be concerned about opinions of my parents, my relatives, and my friends. Here my opinion is most important. People's opinions are nothing for me. If I feel good I'll do it. I am more dissipated. I know how to solve problems. I don't need to appease people. Without the pressure from my parents, relatives, and friends, I can forge ahead regardless of the consequence.

He said many times that he could do whatever he would like to do in this new environment because of the absence of his parents and relatives. I pushed him to give me some examples. However, he mentioned that he was more aggressive, he did not control his temper, and he would not obey rules for everything. I still remember when we walked in the street after the second interview, he just walked very easily disregarding a red light and an on coming car.

We are a weak cultural group in the American society. If you follow rules for everything you will be miserably dead. Of course, there is no shortcut for studying. But while applying for a school. . . if you don't take a shortcut or give them pressure, nobody will take you seriously. For instance, you are looking for a housing. If you are not aggressive and don't give them pressure everyday, nobody will care about you. And you will never find a place to live.

Being in a new environment, you should be familiar with the environment and present yourself to people spontaneously. If people know you, it will be easy for you to do things. . . . When I first came I actively introduced myself to people. I presented myself as a friendly person. You should know who are your neighbors. You should establish connections to the supervisor and the influential gangster as well. Then you can be successful in whatever you do.

I tried to obey rules when I first came. But it's a road to death. OK! I smuggled the refrigerator. They say that I am daring. You have to do it this way in the American society. Nothing to be worried about. I used a box of a TV set to smuggle the refrigerator. Then I just carried my microwave with a paper cover through the front door.

Now I am more confident. If I say it's black it's black. If you don't agree with me it's your business. I was afraid of making mistakes in Taiwan. Now I am not. This is my attitude towards exams as well. In the worst situation, I can say that I am a foreign student. My English is very bad. I don't know what you are talking about.

His experiences might have to do with how he was disciplined in his family and schools. He played the role of a "good" student well when he was young. I guess he tried to maintain his role later but without total voluntariness. He consciously controlled his

temper in order not to give any trouble and pressure to his parents. Before I left his house for the first interview in Taiwan, his mother told me that her son stayed at home all the time and was dumb. She asked me to take care of him in New York. The image is still vivid to me because he was very tall and his mother treated him like a baby.

In addition to the freedom to act, he did not have much pressure from schoolwork. "I don't want to just study. I want to see more people and things. . . . I am confident. I know I can get the master's degree. If I can't survive, at least I can go back to Taiwan." He also learned strategies to deal with his schoolwork.

My grades were very bad last semester. Now I discard my past study method. I adopt the American method. I find that it's very easy to deal with professors. My classes were profession-oriented last semester. They are easiness-oriented this semester. I am honest. Even advanced students said that I am fooling around. All courses are basic. I needed to run programs for every course last semester. But I was not familiar the computer system. So I avoid taking that kind of course. I have only one course which needs running a program this semester. But never mind. I have connections to the teaching assistant. He told me not to be serious. Everything will be OK.

He explicitly stated that he would not invest any emotion in objects.

No object is meaningful. If something is missing, it may only cause inconvenience. I would not feel sad for it. You need to be mature. Don't take it too seriously. . . . You can't invest your feelings in too many things. If you are attached to things, you can't stop worrying. Only when you free yourself, can you deal with adversity. . . . I can't treat this room as my permanent nest. Maybe I'll move out next year. I can't invest my feelings in it. I can't spend much money to decorate it. I can only say that it is my space for survival. I am utilizing it. I am not here to cultivate an attachment to it. I make this very clear.

He was detached from objects and his immediate physical environment. Objects were instrumental. They were only a means for him to survive. He wanted to control objects without being constrained by them. He said that objects were not meaningful. Only mementos were irreplaceable, but he did not have any. Broken objects could be replaced by new ones. Human relationships were not replaceable. However, he also said that "If you miss somebody you would be constrained." Therefore, he would not be attached to people in order not to be constrained by social relationships.

The only irreplaceable object that he had was a talisman given by his uncle about twenty years ago.

My uncle is a fortune teller. I would not say that his prophecy will be accurate. However, it is a comforter. I keep it in my pocket whenever I go out. Now it has become a habit. If I forgot to take it with me, I would attribute my troubles to not carrying it. It has the power to calm me down. . . . If an object were with you for twenty years, would you throw it away? Twenty years. It's not an easy thing. Anyway, I have a feeling about it. It's like a friendship of twenty years. It's unbreakable.

Although he still carried the talisman with him in New York, it was not as important as it was in Taiwan.

I don't depend on it so much. In Taiwan, I was more passive and depended on it very much psychologically. My parents are not here. I only need to be responsible to myself. I don't need to concern my parents' feelings. Nothing to be scared of.

8. ENGAGED

For DM27, studying abroad for an advanced degree was a natural extension of college education. His parents sent him to a "private" primary school¹². Many of his classmates went abroad to study at that time. He had many relatives in the United States as well. He came here to study natural science in a doctoral program with a fellowship. He was very enthusiastic and excited about coming here and his future academic career. He was happy about my interviewing him in Taiwan.

Many friends ask me how I feel about going abroad for study, but there are not many people who are willing to sit down and listen to me. You ask me many detailed questions which stimulate my thinking and give me an opportunity to express myself. I want to talk to my mother about my feelings and thoughts. But she doesn't know how to ask me and I don't know how to tell her either.

He was attached to the program in which he was studying very much. "Although it can't compete with the Ivy League, it is moving upward. I am also happy that this is a new

¹²The wealthy like to send their children to a private school to get "better" education.

department. It has much financial support and has employed many good professors.” He went to the World Trade Center once. He was upset that he could not see his school from the top of the building. He got good results from the first experiment in his school’s laboratory. He was happy that he was praised by the faculty and he could identify his role in the whole project. He was nervous about his ability when he first arrived. After taking an examination he was more confident. During the second semester he took five courses as he did during first semester, but he felt it was easier because his reading ability and comprehension had improved. He felt that he had learned a lot and his vision was broadened. He was very confident about his situation.

He went to Chicago in Thanksgiving Day, Houston on Christmas Day, and Los Angeles during the winter recess. He enjoyed travelling around. But the more places he went, the more he liked New York. “There is a lot of things to see. You won’t be bored. Midtown, downtown, Rockefeller Center. I like the feelings of being in New York. I feel the latent power. It can stimulate and encourage you.”

Every time I asked him about his major concerns and future plans, he was so excited. He loved to talk about his future. “Now it’s the time I strengthen myself. I hope one day I can run my own laboratory. That is my aim. Every time I talk about this I am so enthusiastic [laughed].”

He cherished many objects. He treasured one of his own drawings. It represented his achievement in painting and expressed a different aspect of his life interests in addition to science. He liked to look at photographs. They reminded him of his past happy experiences. He displayed a photograph of himself and his mother because his family’s support made it possible for him to come here for study. He also cherished his high school uniform, high school bag, college diploma, student ID, and experimental data. He projected his future with all these objects around.

I will frame all my diplomas from kindergarten to college and all the citations and awards I have, and hang them on the wall in my study. . . . It [his study] will represent my whole self. I'll be very happy to see them in my study.

All these objects--high school uniform, awards, diplomas, and ID card--participated in his effort of moving toward his future career. He was still very optimistic about his future and he appreciated every step he had taken.

These examples represent different types of self-world relationships in a new environment. DM11 was depressed about what he had to do to be able to participate in a society. His experiences in the new environment only reinforced his preconception. DM23 came to the United States to attain a degree to satisfy his parents' expectations. He was indifferent both to course-work and the larger environment. Due to the separation from his wife and pessimism about getting financial aid, DM12 lived in a small world dealing with his course-work. He felt alienated from society. PM14 escaped from the new environment trying to retain his self-esteem in his familiar world. PM4 came to the United States with an open mind and was enthusiastic to see new things. DM7 and DF21 were liberated from the constraints of their families and took advantage of the new environment. DM27 was enthusiastic about his future career. The new environment supported his pursuits. These eight cases represent different ways of relating to a new environment. Other interviewees in this study might have similar experiences for different reasons or in different aspects of their lives. For instance, one might be engaged in course-work but alienated from social relationships. One might enjoy social life but be indifferent to schoolwork. Their self-world relationships might be changing based on accumulated experiences or due to external events. In the following section, I will describe two people experiencing drastic change from one state to another state of self-world relationships. Then I will report other examples with different processes of adapting to the new environment.

B. CHANGES OF SELF-WORLD RELATIONSHIP

A person's relation with his/her environment does not stay the same over time. It may change because of an emergent environmental impact, an improvement of social/environmental skills, or a realization of new goals through interacting with the new environment.

1. FROM ENGAGED TO DEPRESSED

DM36's parents strongly encouraged him to go abroad for study when he was young. He came to New York to study business administration. It was a shortcut to success. In addition, he wanted to see the world and learn new ideas so that it would be easier for him to make a fortune. Although he needed to spend a huge amount of money to study here, he said that he had never had any economic pressures. His parents gave him an amount of money which was many times what he needed for two years. Although he needed to spend two years for study, it would take less time to be promoted to a managerial position in the future.

He said that his hometown didn't mean anything to him. He was born in I-Lan, grew up in Hwa-Lien, studied in Tainan and Tai-Chung, and worked in Taipei. He was not attached to any place. In addition, his parents strongly encouraged him to study here and gave him full financial support. Going abroad was only a matter of course. Therefore, he left Taiwan without any feelings of burden and concerns.

He was very self-confident. When I asked him what he would like to have, he said: "Success, success, and success." When asked what he had, he answered that he had the personality to achieve success. That was his biggest asset. He was also very confident about his ability to adapt to a new environment, getting along with Americans, and speaking English. He heard about cultural shock but he felt that it would not apply to him.

He took five courses during the first semester. He took advantage of every minute and second. He was thinking about his assignments on the way to the subway station and reading the Wall Street Journal on the subway. Even in his dreams he was sometimes doing case analyses. On the weekend he went to see a movie to relax. He also spent time looking for a summer intern job. He told me that he was the only one who got the summer intern job at a famous international bank.

By the third interview (2/26/90), he was no longer so energetic. Instead, he looked tired. He started his description of experiences by saying that life had no joy. He felt that he could not pull himself together. He faltered about the causes of his feelings. But he expressed himself after I asked him about future plans and social relations.

If I knew my future plans I would not feel tired and spiritless and be unable to pull myself together. I had clear goals originally. Later the political situation in Taiwan and the American market changed drastically. My goals became very vague. Without a clear goal, I felt that I was torn apart. Now I am counting days. The goals of engineering majors are simpler. But our [M.B.A. majors'] surviving environment is closely connected to the economic cycle and political situation. When capital is moved out from Taiwan, of what use is your ambition? When you graduate, Taiwan may become an empty shell. The index of stock exchange [in Taiwan] incomprehensibly fell four hundred points today. The president election [which created anxiety for people in Taiwan]. . . People are migrating to other countries. Capital is moved out as well. What can we do when we are going back? The prospect for the American market is very bad. Where can I go? It bothers me and makes me low-spirited these days. . . . People are motivated by their goals. Now I only do what I have to do. . . . Without friends is another reason of my depression. I feel that life is monotonous without joy. When I am depressed, I can't even find a companion to see a movie. . . . You don't want to see Americans as different people, but they still treat you as a foreigner. You call your family but you always say that you are fine. You are embarrassed to express your feelings of depression. You call your friends but they can't help you.

During the first semester he was very self-confident and worked hard. Although he was ambivalent about whether he should go back to Taiwan or stay in the United States, he could foresee a prosperous career in the future. He knew his hard work would be paid back. He had the ambition to make a fortune. He would go anywhere he could make money.

It's a shame for an M.B.A. student to be unable to make money. It means you wasted your tuition. Your investment doesn't have return. Theory is empty talk.

Everybody can do it. It's not difficult. The real difficulty is how to make money. Teaching is to escape the reality. Life will be easy and happy for a teacher. The goal is very simple. You only need to study. Studying is not difficult. But it is not easy to make money.

Because of the "crash" of the stock exchange market and on-going political movements in Taiwan he felt that his future became uncertain. He was no longer sure that he could make a fortune once he went back to Taiwan. The recession in the American market and his feelings of being an outsider told him that the United States was not a paradise for Chinese M.B.A. students either. Without the promise of a certain and prosperous future, he wondered why he worked so hard. He still worked hard to fulfil his responsibility, but he was not enthusiastic psychologically.

The only objects that he cherished were cassettes of Chinese popular songs. He said that he liked to listen to western songs in Taiwan, but he had no desire to listen to them after he came here. He regretted that he did not bring many cassettes here, but he bought some in Chinatown. Those cassettes played an important role in helping him to vent his emotions and became more significant when he was depressed. Due to the loneliness in this new environment, something familiar and helpful to express his feelings and emotions seemed to be more indispensable. He played those Chinese songs during interviews. He could not wait to sing along with the music before I left his apartment for the third interview.

2. FROM ALIENATED TO ENGAGED

DF32 learned piano playing at six. After middle high school, she passed examinations for both high school and normal school. Her mother asked her to study in normal school because the school had a dormitory, and promised her that she could study

in a college after normal school¹³. While she was studying at the normal school, she met a student in a national art college. She felt that that student was very arrogant and looked down upon her. She thought that studying in a college was not a big thing and decided to go abroad directly instead of going to college first. She taught music in an elementary school for three years to avoid paying a fine¹⁴ and made some money as well. She was accepted by a music college in New York and planned to continue to study in a doctoral program and then go back to Taiwan to teach in university. She was happy that she had stepped forward to her future career but was reluctant to leave her family and familiar environment.

When she first came to New York, she lived in a house of her friend's mother. She missed home very much but she was prohibited from receiving and making any phone call. She was very upset. She decided to move to a dormitory before the check-in date. She cried almost every day in those days.

I cried every time when I missed home, especially when I first arrived. At that time, my roommate hadn't moved in. . . . I had only instant noodles to eat. I was afraid of going outside to buy food alone. . . . [My roommates] went to XX [a Chinese restaurant] every day. I didn't want to go with them because it was too expensive. They felt that I was not gregarious. Anyway, I was not adaptive.

She went on saying that she was dying from missing home.¹⁵ She never imagined that she would miss home so much.

I am dying of missing home. I want to cry every time when I miss home. . . . I still miss home very much. I am dying of missing home. I never thought that I would miss home so much. . . . I cried when I received the letter from my father.

¹³Normal school offers trainings for primary school teachers. It is free and provides a dormitory for every students. However, high school education is kind of preparation for college education.

¹⁴It is free to study in a normal school but it is compulsory to teach in elementary school after graduation for certain years. Or people can pay a fine instead of teaching.

¹⁵Her second interview was conducted on October 28, 1990.

I really miss home. . . . Sometimes I sit here and miss my family. While I am playing some sorrowful melody I miss home. . . . I just sit there and think. I feel that I am pitiful. I want to go home. I don't know what to do.

In Taiwan everything could be solved easily but she felt that it was very difficult to deal with problems by herself in New York. She said that she could not even communicate in English. She felt that she could not adapt to this new environment. And then, she cried in the midst of the interview. I thought the interview triggered her feelings of missing home. Not until the third interview did I know what had happened to her that caused her depression. Before I started to ask questions in the third interview she told me that she would not cry. Then she told me her story. She sent a tape of her performance to apply for this music school. She was accepted but she had to give an audition before school started. Since she was so depressed when she first came to New York, her emotional state disturbed her performance. She failed the audition. Although she was allowed to take courses, she had to pass another, and also the last, audition in the second semester in order to be a matriculated student in this school. This incident put tremendous pressure on her and affected her overall experiences. She bore the burden by herself. She did not even tell her parents. She practiced piano playing very hard every day. Passing the next audition occupied her mind. She did not want to go anywhere. She was depressed and put a lot of pressure on herself. It seems to me that she felt that she had problems in every aspect of her life: speaking English, making friends, schoolwork, and missing home.

I was afraid of talking with Americans. They spoke so fast that I could not understand them. Although now I can go to the post office and bank or go shopping alone, I am still scared. . . . Some Americans are very patient. Others talk to me and find that I don't understand. Then they say: "It's nothing." and stop talking to me. I am afraid of interacting with them. It is embarrassing. An American boy was very patient in the beginning and always encouraged me to talk. But I don't talk much when I am in a group, now he just says hello to me and then goes away. People's impressions of me are that I am shy. There is no hope.

No sooner had the teacher given us the assignment I started to be nervous till I turned in the homework. I was nervous for the whole week. But other students seemed to be very easy about their schoolwork. . . . The assignment is so simple. Americans need only five minutes to answer questions [She was angry and knocked on her desk.] but I spend a few days. . . . These assignments are simple, but I am suffering. . . . You can ask a teacher in Taiwan. Here you use your body

language and they still don't understand your points. Then they speak a lot of words that you don't understand. I am dying of anger. [She knocked on the desk again.] It is not fun. I often wonder if I can go through all the problems. I wonder.

I feel that there is nobody to whom I can talk and I do not have a phone.¹⁶

They [her roommates] restricted my behavior. I wanted to go to school earlier or come back home later, they were unhappy. They said since we lived together we should do things together. It seemed to me that I should get permission from them to do things. I was angry. I wouldn't argue with them. Therefore, I cried. . . . When I come back alone I have [a feeling of home]. But if we come back together I can't really relax. I care too much about their opinions on my behavior. I would be very cautious. If I am alone I can do whatever I like. I can turn on the radio and sing. . . . Life is already so hard at school, but after I come home I still need to be very wary. So I want to move out and live alone.

She cherished a drawing done by her boyfriend, letters sent by her family and her boyfriend, and photographs. She hung that drawing on the wall and displayed four photographs in a frame on her desk.

Sometimes I want to cry when I look at it [the drawing]. I think that I am very poor. All my friends are in Taiwan. I think about my boyfriend. He is poor too. [I put it there] so that I can look at it when I wake up. . . . In Taiwan I did not have motivation to look at that drawing at all. He called me every day. The situation is different here. He is so far away. I can only look at his photograph and this drawing.

I don't know. I just feel happy when I receive letters. They would tell me what happened in Taiwan and their daily lives. To receive letters is a joy in the midst of a boring life. . . . Now I feel that I miss him [her boyfriend] much more than I did in Taiwan. I write letters to him every week. This is the sixteenth.

[I brought] photographs of myself, my family, boyfriend, friends and students [to New York]. These four photographs [on display] are most important [two of herself, one family photo, and one of her boyfriend]. . . . If you put them in a drawer, you need to open the drawer when you want to look at them. If I carried them with me, I am afraid that they could be lost. They are very important for me. They could not be lost here. . . . When I moved in, the first thing I did was to display these photographs. But I might not miss home so much if I did not have them. I don't know.

¹⁶She did not have her telephone connected because the New York Telephone Company was on strike.

She displayed her photographs and the drawing before she gave the audition. She was not sure if she would feel better without these objects. Under such tremendous pressure she missed home and her boyfriend much more seriously than she expected. Although she did not tell them about her failure of the first audition, they were still the most important sources of comfort. Of course, objects could not give her happiness or pleasure considering the intensity of the pressures on her. However, she still expressed some of her feelings and emotions through interacting with her objects.

A Buddhist necklace and bracelet were also important to her. The year she came to the United States--year of snake--was not a good year for her. Her friend asked for the necklace and bracelet from a temple and gave them to her to protect her before she came here. She did not wear these before because she lived at home. Now she was in a strange environment. She wore them every time she went out. It was kind of a protection from unpredictable incidents.

Because of the failure of the audition, she began to lose her self-confidence. She used the phrases: "I wonder," "I don't know" many times. She was angry about herself. She knocked on her desk many times to express her emotions during the interview. She was nervous about her homework. Although she always got good comments, such as "excellent" and "very good," she thought that it was because the faculty was not honest about the quality of her work. She "knew" that her work was bad. She wondered if she could solve all her problems.

By the beginning of the third interview (Feb. 1990), she said that she had to tell me one thing. She passed the audition in January.

I am very happy after I passed this audition. [She laughed.] I am valid in name and in reasoning. I am a qualified student. I heard that it was very difficult to pass this audition. Only four people passed among the fifty. I am so happy.

She then told me why she was so depressed during the first semester and how passing the audition changed her total experiences.

I cried whenever I called my boyfriend last semester. He wondered why I was always crying. I didn't tell him why. I felt that it was useless to tell them [including her family]. It only made them worry and put a burden on them. So I bore the burden by myself. But even if I told them, I didn't think that it could alleviate the pressure. Instead, it only imposed burden on them. . . . Beside practicing piano playing and studying hard, there was no way to alleviate my pressure. But I often started to cry right after I entered the piano room. I cried for half of the time. I felt a lot of pressure especially when the teacher made comments about me. . . . Now I am a qualified student. I feel solid and happy, although I am still very busy. Last semester I would feel tired and pitiful to myself. I kept thinking of going home. I wrote to my boyfriend very frequently. Now I haven't written to him for two weeks. The last letter was the 37th. My parents called me at Christmas. I was still crying. They didn't know the reason. They thought that I could not adapt to this new environment. Now I never cry. I cried at least once a week last semester. I cried even when I heard a beautiful song or someone made fun of me. Now I won't. I was very emotional and pessimistic. I always thought about the bad side and let the sad feeling feed itself. Now I don't care if somebody doesn't want to talk to me. It was not me [last semester]. I cared that Americans were unfriendly or impatient. I blamed myself for my terrible English. Now I don't care. It's natural that I can't speak good English. It is not my native language. If you are impatient that's because you don't have culture. Now I know how to live happily. This is real me. I am more broad-minded. Everybody asked me if I was worried last semester. [I had] such a miserable face! People treated me to dinner every week this semester. And they are all Americans. It's strange. I was mute last semester. Now I speak more frequently.

Since she passed the audition her life world changed drastically. She had a totally different interpretation of herself and her surrounding incidents. She regained her self-confidence. Life was still busy but she felt solid and happy. The impatience and unfriendliness of people no longer upset her. Now it was she who was in charge. Not only her mood but also her look changed. She did not show a miserable face any more. Her inner happiness and confidence reflected outward to people. Now people spontaneously came to her to interact with her. As she said: "I was in hell last semester and in heaven this semester."

The significance of the personal objects in her life changed as well. When she first moved to the last dormitory, the first thing she did was to display her photographs. She had been in her new apartment for more than a month when I did the third interview. Her photographs were still in a bag. She was not motivated to display them. She said that she did not have time. She had not seen those photographs since she moved in. Schoolwork was more important. She was not in a hurry to display them.

These two examples illustrate the influence of unexpected incidents on students' experiences. However, most people's experiences were not so dramatic and did not change so drastically. The following examples will show how students learned to adapt to a new environment gradually.

3. GOING BACK TO TAIWAN

PM1 studied Arabic in college, then worked at the management department in an engineering company. The reason why he came to the United States to study was that:

I confronted problems sometimes, I would like to learn more. Actually, I did not have any other choice. Only the M.B.A. program did not ask for any special academic background. I could choose Middle-East studies, but my personality is not suitable to do research. I like interpersonal communication. Besides, it is easier to find a job with an M.B.A. degree.

He lived in a studio with another student in a dormitory:

I do not like this room. It is hollow. It is only a space for daily activities and sleeping. My room in Taiwan was warm, artistic, and tasteful. I decorated the room with an audio system, paintings and posters that I liked. (Why don't you decorate your room as you like?) It would cost a lot of money. I can not afford to do that. I live with another student. I do not have my own room. If I decorated this room as my room in Taiwan, I would feel guilty. It would be too fancy, hedonistic, and fallen. I think the situation will be improved after I find another place to live. I feel very uncomfortable living in this kind of space. . . . Sharing a room with another person is difficult too. In the first month I felt bad returning home. But I used to be attached to home very much. So I was forced to find a solution in that kind of situation. Now I go to the Library and stay at 'the familiar corner' for most nights. But I always go back just to look at my room and then go to the library. It is filled with English books on the fifth floor in the Library. In the place where I sit, to the left it is the stacks of books on Chinese studies, to the right it is the stacks of Arabic books. I feel very good sitting there. Students are inclined to sit near the books on their major. Theoretically, I am an M.B.A. student, but I do not choose the floor with business books. I feel that I belong to another part unconsciously.

Since business was not his major in college, he had a hard time at the beginning of the first semester.

I had a lot of pressure from schoolwork when I came here. In the first month I didn't even know what's the point of emphasis in the books. I didn't know how to read books and how to prepare for examinations. Everything went better when I

had experienced taking an exam. . . . Now I try to adjust myself slowly. In the beginning, I paid attention only to study. Now as long as I maintain some level of the quality of schoolwork, I should pay more attention to seeing shows, visiting museums, walking around on streets, and being involved in the surroundings. Some years later, you will not remember that you got A or A+ for one course, but you will remember the shows that you have seen.

He was unhappy during the first month. After he found a comfortable place in the library and was more familiar with schoolwork and the environment, he then had a clearer idea about his future.

The more familiar am I with the environment, the more I think about my future. I thought about the future in the past, but it was not substantial. As I know more about schoolwork, I think about the future more often. I think about how to make my dream come true. I do not just think but think with goals and ideas. I consider what I can contribute to Taiwan and whom I should contact.

In summary, PM1 came to the United States to pursue academic knowledge and new experiences, and he wanted to go back and give feedback to his country. He incorporated a past life style and old social relations to make his life comfortable.

His special objects helped him maintain social, cultural, and environmental continuity and made his hollow space less unbearable. After a day occupied with gaining new knowledge about business and interacting with different people in the new exterior environment, he needed to return home to drink tea, read Chinese books, and look at photographs to balance his feelings.

The M.B.A. program was a two year program. After he finished his degree he planed to go back to Taiwan. So his future and his past converged. When he made a plan for his future, he was thinking about his new relationship with his old environment. He paid attention to the economic news of Taiwan, contacted people in companies in Taiwan, considered what courses that he should take and what his contribution to Taiwan would be; he also thought about his future relationship with his girlfriend and family. His special objects formed the base which made him be able to search out new academic knowledge and new experiences.

4. NEGOTIATION BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE NEW

PF13 studied natural science in college, social science in graduate school, then, came to the United States to study social science in a doctoral program.

The reason that she came to the United States to study was: "Maybe my family was richer and more westernized, I knew that I would go to another country when I was a child. There was no reason." Here was her future goal after she finished her study: "I wish that I could work in an international institution or become a writer for a journal like National Geographic."

When she first arrived, everything was chaotic. She was nearly out of her mind. She should adapt to the new environment but she also desired to return to a past, familiar way of life. She just could not. She wanted to drink tea, but the tea pot and tea were like a sun-dial in the shade because she lived in a double room; Americans used tea-bags, they did not use a tea set; and she did not experience a peaceful and comfortable mood. She was lonely and she could not talk with her stuffed cat because of being in a double room. She felt sorry about the cat. She regretted bringing the cat and making it lonely too. Every morning, when she woke up, she called her friends in the United States. She kept the photographs of herself, the birds, and her friends on the wall. The poem and stone given by her friends were on her desk. Since her spoken English was not good, she felt that she was like an idiot who could not talk but laughed. She had no new American friends. So she pushed herself to socialize with other residents in the dormitory. She thought that they should become friends at least. She felt that she lived in a tortuous and twisted space, and could not stretch her body.

Then, her roommate moved out and she found an American boyfriend. He helped her a lot. Since her boyfriend was an American, he did not understand the feeling of going abroad and being a foreign student. He could not experience the impact of living in a foreign culture. But, on the other hand, he did not have the same pressure as she has, so

they were not both depressed. When she was lonely, her boyfriend would be beside her, holding her and telling her to be happy.

Gradually, she re-created a new order of life. She began to think about drinking tea again. She planned to buy another tea pot. She bought a new poster and stuck it to the wall. She also bought some new books. She went out with her boyfriend and put the photograph of herself with her boyfriend on the desk. She kept the photograph of herself but took down the photographs of her friends and the birds. She planned to ask her family to send some Chinese books to her, but she did not do that. She thought that her parents did not know how to select books for her and it was difficult to explain in the letter. She also thought that her ability in English would regress if she still read Chinese books. In addition, she had an American boyfriend so she should improve her English and try to learn more about the culture in this society.

In summary, PF13 came to the United States for study and would like to work in an international institution in this society. When she just arrived, she lived in a twisted world because of her inability to speak English well and her living situation. She struggled between returning to a past way of life and adapting to the new environment. Her stuffed cat, photographs, poem, and stone helped her to pass the difficult situation. Gradually she could grasp a new order of life. Photographs of her old friends were replaced by photos of her new boyfriend. Chinese books were replaced by English books. She began to buy things that she liked. She was constructing her own new world and the objects that she had represented her maintaining personal continuity and a negotiation of discontinuity.

5. TOWARDS SELF AND PRESENT ORIENTED

DM8 said that he had contact with western culture frequently and he liked to travel. He came to the United States not just to study but also to experience. The other reason was his feeling about Taiwan. He felt that Taiwanese did not have roots. They were always

colonized by other peoples¹⁷. So he did not have a feeling of belongingness. He said that if it were possible he would like to marry a foreign woman. Once he came to the United States he did not intend to go back. He wanted to disconnect with his past. He did not want to bring anything. He left a lot of his personal possessions behind--his stereo, records, and photographs.

He enjoyed meeting different people and cultures. But he was disappointed in social relations. He felt that clerks in shops were not friendly. Americans were friendly in appearance but disinterested in having a deep relationship with people. It was very difficult to be close to Americans. As time went by he was not so energetic about making friends with them. He did not study hard and his grades were not good. He, therefore, gave up the idea of continuing to study in a doctoral program.

He said that he was like a cloud. He was idle and unoccupied. He did not have a clear goal anymore. He was just like a cloud wandering to nowhere. He did not buy many things because it was difficult to dispose of them while moving. He regretted buying a computer because it was too big. He felt that he should have bought a portable one. The ideal was to travel around with only necessities. He did not decorate his room. I saw his books, luggage, and boxes scattered all over the floor. It was like a transient place.

He said that he was an introverted and future-oriented person in Taiwan. Now he cared about only the present. He no longer made long-term plans. He explained:

I was influenced by this society. Americans pay attention only to themselves. The important thing is that you feel good. Don't care about others. I cared about other people's opinions when I was in Taiwan. Now I do what I want to do. . . . I no longer make long-term plans. There are too many unpredictable factors. You can't guarantee the result by working hard. So why not grasp your present. If I want to see a movie I go to see it right away. I don't wait till I have leisure time. . . . Don't you feel that Americans care about only the present? I used to make plans. But I have too many failing experiences. The effect is accumulated. For instance, I was

¹⁷He meant Dutch, Japanese, and the "mainland Chinese."

very well prepared for applying to schools. But I was not accepted by schools as I expected. In American society, working hard doesn't guarantee that you can stay in your position. American business is pragmatic. They just fire you no matter how hard you work.

Now we can contrast these three students' experiences. PM1 came to the United States to pursue knowledge and experiences. Old objects helped him to balance his life. Once he became used to the new environment more, his future was clearer too. His future was anchored in his home country. He, thus, thought about what he could do after his return. PF13 had strong attachment to her family and country. However, she wanted to survive in the new setting too. Her adaptive process represented a negotiation between the old and the new. DM8 did not identify with his old environment. But experiences in the new setting only moved him toward present-orientation thereby losing connections to a larger social/physical environment.

These three cases illustrate processes of creating a new order of life in a new environment. Other interviewees also mentioned that their lives became much more comfortable once they learned how to study and realized their future goals. The following are two examples. An interviewee said that he could not relax and spent most of his time studying in the first semester. Once he learned how to deal with course-work, he felt solid and more comfortable about exploring the new social and physical environment.

In addition to studying, you broaden your vision, of course. But only in studying can I find myself. Other things are only relaxation. Studying is the premise. If I don't study well, I am not comfortable doing anything else. The pressure is not from outside but from self-request. . . . I wasted too much time on unnecessary readings last semester. I felt uncomfortable going out. I was a new student here. I didn't know the proper way to write a paper and prepare for an exam. So I did everything in the perfect way. I spent most of the time sitting by my desk. I might not learn a lot, but it's a comfort that I was studying. . . . There are a lot of readings this semester. But I don't feel the pressure. It's strange. I know how to spend my time. I have more leisure time. I go to concerts. I am also more active interacting with Americans to improve my English and our relationships. I feel solid. I am motivated to study. I am really learning new ideas. (DM5)

Another interviewee (DM9) also spent most of his time dealing with course-work during the first semester. He made a decision about his future during the winter recess. Once he was sure of his future, he was also more able to organize his life. Although he

still had a lot of work to do during the second semester, he was more relaxed psychologically. And he could spend his time more effectively.

[During the first semester] I am taking four courses. It's very heavy. The homework is unbelievably heavy. If you want to study extensively, you can only handle two courses. I am doing homework all the time without having time to read books. I can only read books relevant to homework. The pressure is overwhelming. . . . I go to bed around one or two o'clock and get up before ten o'clock. Except cooking, and watching TV by the way, shopping once a week, and doing laundry every other week, I spend all my time thinking or doing homework. So I feel very happy taking an English lesson in the International Center of New York every Wednesday afternoon, because I can do something different from a routine job. . . . I went to Stanford University during winter recess. I sat in some courses for two weeks. I felt that I was not suitable to study in a Ph.D. program. So I decided to find a job after I graduate in the masters program. I would learn as much as I can in these three semesters that I have. I feel very comfortable since this semester started. I have a clearer goal. Although it's busier, I feel easier. I feel more solid. Originally I planned to pursue a Ph.D. degree, I didn't know how to go through this long route. Now my goal is closer and easier to reach. I know how to do it. So life becomes easier. And I know how to transfer my stress. . . . I have read two series of Chinese Kung Fu novels [this semester]. It's strange. Unexpectedly, I have time to go to the local public library. I couldn't find time last semester. Now if I go out, I go to the library to read newspapers. It's strange. I don't know how I find this leisure time. I am very busy during both semesters. But I always have some leisure time this semester. If the movie [on TV] is good, I would watch it. I wouldn't do this last semester. I feel more relaxed. And things go more smoothly. . . . How could I participate any activities [last semester]? I couldn't even finish my readings. I was in a low mood. . . . I was doing homework all day last semester. I didn't know what I was doing. I felt that it was not meaningful. Of course, I had learned new knowledge. But the way I pursued knowledge was meaningless. I didn't know why I did that. I confined myself in my room without going out for a week. That's what I was doing. Although knowledge was useful, my life was absurd. Even if I could get a Ph.D. degree, I might become a weird person. . . . After I had an articulated goal, I felt much more comfortable.

In the above section, I discuss different basic types of self-world relationship and how a person moved between different kinds of relationships. However, these descriptions remain as a narrative. Now I would like to move the discussion to a more analytic level. There are some major underlined factors which influence a person's relatedness to his/her world. (1) Intentions. As described in Chapter V, interviewees came to the United States with different purposes, some were more articulated and some were unarticulated. Some interviewees came here to actively pursue academic knowledge or life experiences. Some interviewees came here with a more passive reason, such as leaving the

old environment or having no other choice. To acquire an advanced degree, to know different peoples and places, or to learn art and culture, as their major goal, influenced how they spent their time and the significance of a particular environment. To stay in the United States or to return to their own country in the future also affected how they related themselves to the world. (2) Social/physical environment. This environment includes the environment they left behind and the new environment they encountered. What kind of quality of social relationships (e.g., family and friends) and physical environment (e.g., home and city) they left behind, and how the new environment (e.g., cultural activities, environmental danger, school facilities, advisors, financial aid, the reception of foreign students by the host, relatives or old friends in New York) supported or constrained their actions and interactions were two major ones. (3) Social/environmental knowledge and skills. Their facility with language, communication, doing research, orientation, etc. would influence their relationship with the outside world. (4) These three aspects are not separate. Rather, they mutually affect one another over time. A person brought her/his goals or plans, articulated or unarticulated, to the new setting. Unlike the person-environment fit approach which treated the goal as stationary and emphasized the state of homeostasis, we found that a person's goal was evolving. Some students mentioned that they had a very good job in Taiwan. However, they felt that their lives were not moving. Going abroad was a way of broadening their life experiences and creating a life transition. People kept adjusting and developing their goals. Through interacting with the new environment, they not only critically examined their preconceptions of the new environment but also reflected on their plans and their roles in the environment. The new environment might support their projects and reinforce their goals. People might find that the new environment was not just a place to study but was a good place to pursue their future career and then changed their plans in order to open more possibilities for their future. A person's intention affected his/her motivation to learn more social/environmental skills. A person

might bring his/her old context to the new environment by the existence of old objects or a repetitive ritual. The encounter with the new environment might contribute to his/her new interpretation to his/her old social and physical environment. An environmental danger might discourage a person's intention. The social/environmental competence might reduce the alienation from other people or the unpredictability of environmental danger and reinforce a person's intention. Therefore, these three aspects and their transactions constituted a person's self-world relationship.

If we simplify the situation, we could place their relationships on a continuum from totally engaged to totally detached. We may postulate that a person with a strong intention to learn or explore new things, encountering a supportive social/physical environment, and with a high social/environmental competence would tend to be engaged with the new environment. On the other hand, a person without motivation, having difficulty in dealing with the separation from his/her old social relations, experiencing an environmental danger or a negative social incident, and without enough social/academic/environmental skills would tend to be more detached to the new environment. However, a person's self-world relationship depends on the *relative valence* of these aspects and their mutual *transactions*. I would discuss some of these aspects in more depth in the following sections.

C. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT--NEW YORK

If you were going to California, Massachusetts, or Wisconsin to study, people ask you which school at which you are going to study. If you were going to New York to study, people first ask you why you are going to New York. Influenced by the portrayals of New York in the mass media, people have an image of New York as a unique city due to its cultural richness but also for its notorious reputation of crime. I do not know how many students did not come to New York to study because they did not like the city. But among the interviewees who did choose to come, most considered the environment itself as

a very important factor in their decisions to come to New York. They might like its richness and variety of culture, access to information, or the convenience of its public transportation, but safety remained a major concern. Their feelings about New York had positive and negative aspects simultaneously. This is a typical example: "Murder, rape, drug, the heaven of crime. On the other hand, it represents prosperity and progress. It is the epitome of profane culture. An interesting place." (DF21)

Interviewees reported that they enjoyed "visiting museums," "going to concerts," "watching Broadway shows," "seeing art movies and plays," "the vitality of art worlds," "observing lives of different ethnic peoples," "convenience of shopping," and "window shopping." Some interviewees had more specific positive experiences.

The street performances in Washington Square and Village make me feel that it's worth coming here. (DM20)

I was surprised that the New York Public Library was like a museum. It's like a special museum for exhibition of books. And I could study in it. I was very impressed. (DM9)

To see the performance of masters in person is very important for music majors. The enlightenment from it may be more effective than repetitive practice. (DF6)

Two interviewees felt that the physical environment of New York had latent power and was inspirational.

There are a lot of things to see. You won't be bored. Midtown, downtown, Rockefeller Center. I like the feelings of being in New York. I feel the latent power. It stimulates and encourages you. (DM27)

Manhattan gives me a thought that I should study hard, work hard, and save money. Money is really important. I wish I could have a dinner in Rockefeller Center or Trump Tower. . . . I feel I should find a good job. At least I can afford to go to that kind of place sometimes. New York really shocks me in these two weeks. (DM9)

Most interviewees also reported many negative aspects of New York, such as the dirtiness of the environment, crowding, danger, the impoliteness of people, and traffic congestion.

It's terrible that you can see so many panhandlers in the street. It's dirty, air-polluted, and traffic-congested. It's like Taipei. It has all the problems of other cities, but only more seriously. (DF10)

People don't smile here. (DF14)

I see a lot of graffiti. I feel it is not a peaceful society. (DM15)

The fact that an ambulance has to make so much noise in order to pass the traffic shows that people are indifferent here. (DM25)

I am used to the spacious, quiet environment with blue sky in Seattle already. New York! My God! What an environment it is! (DF24)

I like the environment in the day time. But it is dangerous at night. (DM7)

Many interviewees were concerned about safety in New York, and some even had a very vivid description of it before their arrival.

My friend described it to me. She said people walking in the street with hostility. Everybody wants to walk over your body. You can't look around. You should pretend that you are an old New Yorker. You must show that you don't feel insecure. You can't reveal that you are lost, you are anxious. If there is a strange person approaching you, you should jump into the middle of the street immediately. . . . But anyway I feel safer in Taipei. In New York you use a different language, and you have different color of skin. It would be difficult to ask for help. (DF19)

I don't know if I can come back alive. (DM37)

Dirty, stinky, disorderly. Subway is horrible. You may be pushed down to the track. There are many murders and robbery. On the average, twenty cases each day. (DM5)

Interviewees' perceptions of New York did influence their exploration and navigation in the city. Interviewees reported that they were very cautious about where they were going, at what time of day, and by which route. They were more vigilant walking in the street. In Taiwan, they could easily take buses or ride a bicycle or motorcycle to different areas in the daytime and at night. They could be more independent. But in New York they, especially women, depended upon other people much more, even for just very simple things. Going to a movie or a concert at night became a very difficult task.

I cried every time when I missed home, especially when I first arrived. At that time, my roommate hadn't moved in. . . . I had instant noodles only. I was afraid of going outside to buy food alone. (DF32)

Most shops close at nine o'clock. So I stay at home most of the nights. Our landlord told us many times not to go out at night. We have a very high consciousness of danger. Protect yourself and be careful of strangers. Walk faster. Don't look around. Don't try to help her/him when a person falls down. These are told by people. I don't know it's true or not. I just follow these examples. Enter the car in which operator is in when you are taking the subway. Don't sit in the first or last car. (DM15)

It's New York. I almost dare not walk alone. . . . I have heard too much about New York. I dare not "try" to explore this environment. I dare not take the subway by myself, even in the daytime. No matter where I go, I try to find company. If I can't find someone, I give up. I want to go to Lincoln Center to see an opera, but I still can't find anybody to accompany me. . . . But I was a lone person in Taiwan. I used to do things alone. (DF6)

I rarely go out at night. When I went to my classmate's house at night, I was trembling with fear. (DM12)

I want to go to concerts. But when I know I must take the subway at night alone, I give up. (DF10)

My friends gave me some jewelry before I left. But I dare not wear it considering the possibility of being robbed. I keep it in a drawer. Sometimes I take it out and look at it. (DF34)

A woman (DF3) received pornographic calls several times. She said it was very disgusting. "He said: 'I have champagne. Let's spend Friday night together.'" When she first received the call, she was very frightened. She thought that the man might come to her apartment. She told her suite-mate. Her suite-mate said everybody received the same call. There was nothing to be worried about. Later, she bought an answering machine to screen telephone calls.

Since they could not do anything about the larger environment, some students wore a Buddhist rosary and necklace to get a sense of safety.

I never wore Buddhist necklace before because I felt very safe in Taiwan. Here I am afraid of doing things alone. Sometimes I need to buy things at night, or I come home after class at nine o'clock, you never know that something may happen. Once I wear the necklace, I feel safe. Although it's a psychological effect, it's very important for me.

As they stayed in the new environment for a certain period of time, their environmental skills might be improved. They could differentiate "safe" from "unsafe" areas. They knew where they could go at what period of time. They were also more

familiar with the transportation system. Some students might learn new academic skills and handle their schoolwork better so that they felt more comfortable and had more time to explore the new environment. On the other hand, the undesirable incidents which happened to them or other people in their immediate environment might influence their perceptions of this setting and discourage their motivation to interact with the environment. Some days after a student was raped on a campus I went to a dormitory to do my interview. Once I entered the building I saw posters about this rape everywhere--on the bulletin board, on the door, in the elevator, and on the hallway. I could imagine how this incident might have influenced this interviewee's feelings. She told me she was followed by a homeless person one night.

When you have seen many of those kinds of posters, you will perceive many people as bad people. You will be scared when someone is approaching you. One night a homeless person asked money from us. We didn't give money to him. He was aggressive and kept cursing. He followed us for a while. I was really frightened.

The attraction and danger of New York kept pulling and pushing people from its physical environment. An interviewee (DF19) said when she first came to New York she was frightened. She had heard too many things about crime in New York. She could not help imagining being robbed or attacked. In the first couple of days, she only went shopping and came home immediately. An American friend of hers in Taiwan called and comforted her. "She told me not to be afraid and nervous. We talked for one and half hours. I was touched. Later I felt it's not so terrible outside. If you tried, there were some friendly people as well." She started to explore this new environment, but with much effort. "When you plan to do something, you need to consider the time, day or night, what district, which route, and whether you have company. It is only a simple thing but it concerns you a lot." She was willing to do it because only after seeing a movie or play could she justify coming to New York. One day when she had lunch with her friend in a fast-food restaurant, her friend's bag was stolen.

A guy came to help us right away. He called the bank and asked my friend her banking account number. I thought he was nice. But my friend felt that there was something wrong. She said she forgot the number. Then that guy ran away. . . . It's really a shock for me. I withdrew immediately. I dare not go out alone again. I realized that I was not smart enough to know how to protect myself. If something didn't happen, it's only because I was lucky.

It took her a while to recover from the feelings of fright. Then, another incident happened. "We got off at the Union Square subway station. A guy spat on us, said dirty words about Chinese, and asked us for money. We walked away immediately." She withdrew again. But as time went by, she felt it was not correct to stay at home all the time. She came out again but she was much more cautiously. This example clearly showed the interaction between a person's intention, the physical environment, and her environmental skill. She was frightened and withdrew because of her preconception of the environmental danger when she first arrived. However, her friend's encouragement and her motivation to experience cultural activities pushed her to interact with the new environment. Then the emergent environmental incident discouraged her exploration. She reflected on her own goals and strategies. Then she kept participate in the new environment with a more sophisticated knowledge and skill.

The following case showed that the environmental danger was so drastic that it overshadowed a person's intention and skills. An interviewee (DM25) changed his study plans because of the threat from the surrounding environment. After having taught for seven years in Taiwan, he left his wife and children, came to the United States for study to give himself a break. But an incident that happened on his first night in New York changed his whole plan and daily life. We had several contacts in Taiwan. Because he did not know anyone in New York, I went to the airport to see him, and then we went to the dormitory to check in. It was Labor Day night. While I was making a phone call downstairs, I was mugged.

After you were mugged, my impressions of New York changed totally. I could *feel* the threat. . . . I planned to ease my life pace during the first semester. After this threatening incident I wanted to leave the city as soon as possible. So I took five courses. Although I withdrew from one course, that's because I really could

not handle it. . . . If it had not happened, I might have taken only two courses. I wanted to let myself take it easy. I was eager to explore this new environment. Later, I felt the environment was not worth exploring. Although I knew its treasure subconsciously, I tried to ignore it. Under such a threat, I could not think about that. . . . It affected me a lot psychologically. The distrust of people and the fear of the environment never occurred to me when I was in Taiwan. I didn't anticipate these feelings. I thought I was a mature individual. I had worked in society for a long time. I should be able to deal with any kind of environment. But it turned out differently. I felt helpless and insecure. What could I do if something happens? . . . [Two months later,] I felt "better" because I don't go out often. But those kind of feelings come back when I go out. If nothing happens, it's only because I am lucky.

This incident influenced the meaning of his room and personal objects for him. Instead of exploring the outside environment, he confined himself to his own room. Objects in his room became much more significant for him.

Books were the only thing that I wanted to bring with me. I did not even bring some objects that I liked, such as music cassettes, photographs, and video tapes, on purpose. I did not want to indulge myself too much. But the threat of New York and the pressure from schoolwork forced me to stay in my room. In addition, I did not have a telephone. [New York Telephone Company was on strike.] It aroused my emotions very much. So I was forced to seek a harbor for my emotions and spirit through objects. . . . I don't watch television often. The stereo is not turned on all the time. But its existence, its being there gives me a sense of security. You can reach it whenever you want it. Through the telephone [He had his telephone connected about a month after he arrived in New York.] I can reach my family. Through music I can cultivate my spirit. Theoretically, if you reach a certain level of attainment, you don't need all these material things. But I am not. . . .

In conclusion, New York is both exciting and dangerous. Some interviewees enjoyed the excitement very much and considered it the best place to study. An interviewee (DF1) felt that New York was like a treasure box. She enjoyed the music concerts, opera, ballet, and historic architecture. She could not imagine studying in a small town or suburb. "Being in New York was part of the reason for me to choose this college for study. I am a broad-minded person. If I went to Champaign, Illinois I would suffer and be depressed." So the interviewees learned from the environment and incorporated their environmental experiences (such as, a master's performance in a concert, the prosperity of the Fifth Avenue, or the creativity of artists in SoHo) into their self-concept. But in addition to the enjoyment of cultural and entertainment opportunities, people needed to make a more deliberate effort to live in the city. The experience of New York was demanding. "[It]

require[d] the conscious allocation of attention, energy and deliberation with regard to action in that setting” (Frank, Unseld & Wentworth, 1976, p. 35) People learned some strategies for dealing with the environment and social interactions, such as “be careful of strangers,” and “disregard the homeless people.” The new environment also influenced a person’s self-image in a negative way. Some interviewees, especially women, reported that they became a more dependent person. Their opportunities to explore and enjoy the environment, particularly at night, were partly dependent upon other people’s schedules and kindness. Some interviewees reported a sense of helplessness as well. The statement that “If nothing happens, it’s only because I am lucky.” shows that things were not under control. An incident could happen no matter how well they planned and prepared.

D. SOCIAL RELATIONS

The environmental transition for foreign students is critical. Not only do they encounter a different social, cultural, and physical environment, but also face distancing from existing social relationships in the old environment. The transition might affect students’ social lives in different ways. Students might grieve for the separation from their families and close friends, feel lonely, lose existing social support and face the pressure from dealing with everyday miscellaneous duties by themselves, enjoy meeting with new people, or feel free from the constraint of existing social pressures.

Many interviewees grieved for the loss of existing close social relations. The grief was signalled in some interviewees’ dreams.

The second day I lived in this dorm I had a dream that my sister and mother died. I was afraid that it’s telepathy. (DF10)

I dreamed about the death of my mother and one of my friends. (DF19)

One time I dreamed that our kitchen caught fire and my father was in hospital. I was awakened out of the astonishment. I called my parents immediately. (DF24)

I dreamed that my grandmother was dying. I was awakened from crying. (DM4)

I called my family on the Chinese Moon Festival. Nobody answered the phone. I tried next morning. There was still no answer. I dreamed that my father had a heart attack that night. He told me that he was very tired. . . . He wanted to sleep. I said to him: "You can't." . . . I still remember that I was crying in my dream. (DF6)

Missing families and close friends was also reflected in telephone bills. Some students said that they spent a few hundreds dollars on international telephone calls in the first or second month after they arrived here. Students felt that they were connected to people in Taiwan through telephone calls. They could not only exchange their experiences but also bring joy into their lives. However, telephone calls could bring sadness as well. One interviewee (DF3) said that "I am afraid of calling my parents. They always burst into tears talking to me. It's too painful. So I write to them more often. But I want to cry even looking at their letters."

Calling and sending letters and photographs were common ways for interviewees to communicate with their distanced others. Their feelings were to some extent soothed. However, their families or friends in Taiwan were sometimes like distant water which could not put out a nearby fire. It took a week for letters to cross the Pacific. People's emotions or problems probably changed in one week.

You can only feel your parents' support remotely. They can't give you substantial support. For instance, if I fail an exam, I feel very sad. I send a letter to them. When they receive the letter one week later, I might have recovered already. I might be in a very good mood again. Then they write to you to encourage you. It's not the right time. They can't comfort you in time. (DF6)

Through international calls, interviewees could have two-way communications. However, it was expensive. Although money was a concern, it was not a serious problem for most interviewees. They usually called their families once or twice a month. But it was still difficult to express and articulate their feelings in a short time.

You can't say that you are very upset to the extent of wishing to die as your opening conversation even when you are calling your best friend. You need to talk about weather first. Usually when you have not got into the important issue, five minutes already pass and you think about hanging the phone. You feel you can't express yourself to your heart's content. (DF6)

Most interviewees were also unwilling to tell their families about their problems. Being in a remote place and without the ability of direct intervention into the other's problem, people were more sensitive. A small problem could be perceived as very serious. The fact that an interviewee had a bad dream followed by the lack of an answer to her international call is an example. So interviewees either bore the burden by themselves (as DF32 mentioned above) or played down their difficulties.

Basically, I would like to bear my pain by myself. If I called my parents, I would play down my pain to "I don't feel good." I would not tell them that I have cried for three hours. They would be frightened. Of course, I want to share my experiences with them. I don't want to report only what is good while concealing what is unpleasant. I would feel better if I tell them my sad feelings. And I know that they would like to share my pain. However, I don't want them to be worried about me. (DF6)

I cover most descriptions about the safety in New York when I call or write to my parents. If I tell them the truth, they would be worried about me. Only when I tell my friends [in Taiwan], can I alleviate my pressure. (DF19)

Some interviewees wrote to their families more often instead of calling to save money. Some interviewees only made telephone calls to save time. As mentioned before, a woman (DF3) avoided calling her parents because the pain was unbearable. An interviewee (PF10) enjoyed calling because she could talk to all members of her family at the same time (They had a few telephone machines connected in their house in Taiwan.). Another interviewee (DM25) had different feelings about letters and telephone calls.

The meaning of letters is the feelings of the existence and safety of the others. Receiving letters from my children is a comfort of being a father, a feeling of happiness and well-being. You know that the person about whom you are concerned is also concerned about you. The verbal communication through telephone calls does not give such a deep meaning. In addition, Chinese are more conservative [to express their inner feelings verbally]. The happiness of making a telephone call is more transient and superficial. The feeling of reading a letter is very concrete, profound, lasting, and memorable. Calling passes immediately and becomes an empty memory. Letters deserve being kept. They are tangible. I treasure them. Calling is a strong pleasant sensation, an excitement. The feeling of reading a letter is not so strong but lasting. You can read it over and over again and have different feelings over time. A letter transmits not only information but also abundant feelings. Calling has instant effect.

Using objects was another way of dealing with the separation from interviewees' families and friends. They reported that they left photographs behind for their families, brought photographs and gifts from their families and friends to establish the presence of the absent others and to maintain the personal and social continuity. These issues will be discussed in Chapter VII. A few interviewees had the chance to go back home. This visit usually alleviated their worries and concerns of their families. They found that everybody was fine when they were not present.

The anticipation and reality of separation from a person's significant others became the focus of her/his concerns about their relationships. It also gave her/him an opportunity to interpret these relationships in a different perspective. As mentioned in Chapter IV, an interviewee (PF10) realized the closeness of her relationship with her family and expressed her feelings about them more actively because of the separation. A man (DM4) had an argument with his father when he studied in a college. Since he served in the army, visiting his family during the holidays brought him closer to his father. They had opportunities to exchange feelings and thoughts. He had more understanding of his father's situation and decided to help his father's enterprise.

I didn't get along with my father well when I was in college. He disliked that I didn't study hard and played too much. I had arguments with him often. Anyway, he was not satisfied with me. When I served in the army, I felt I was closer to him psychologically. I communicated with him many times. Originally, I was not interested in his enterprise. It's my selfish thinking. I felt that I could study what I liked and found a job by myself. He could forsake his enterprise. Later, I had more understanding of him. He started from scratch. He would be reluctant to forsake his enterprise because it's like his child. So I decided to study business instead of natural science. I want to improve my strength in running a business. He was getting older and not so healthy. I want to study and then acquire some working experiences so that I can help him and absorb his burden.

Another woman (DF6) worked in a different city from her parents in order to be more independent. She stayed with her parents for a few months before she came to the United States. This experience of living together and her anticipation of separation made her feel that she should spend more time with her parents as long as she could.

We did not live together most of the time. . . . Their health conditions were not like what I imagined. And I felt that they were very lonely. I found a job in Taipei because I knew they loved me. If I stayed in Tainan, I would not be independent. I would still be a child. Even though I am an adult, they still treat me like a child. Although I did not regret staying in Taipei because I learned a lot, I blamed myself. I am very important to them. Now I want to be with them as long as I can.

Although many interviewees said that they missed home very much, going abroad gave some other interviewees an opportunity to be free from the discipline and constraints from their parents. The two cases (DF19, DM7) described above are examples.

Other interviewees felt that they were free from the constraints of social pressure and competition.

I feel that I belong to a different racial group. I feel comfortable singing and dancing in the street because I belonged to a different ethnicity and culture. I don't need to compete with them. For instance, when I see a teenager driving a car to work, I feel fine. But I would compete with them if I were in Taiwan. Here, we are under different conditions. I feel very good. I don't need to be in a pressured environment. I become very unrestrained. (DM20)

The differences of cultural background may rule out the necessity of competition as the example mentioned above, but they may make a person stand out in a social group as well. An interviewee (DF24) felt her difference from others and gave herself pressure to behave well.

I don't let myself do what I please. When I first came, I couldn't even relax myself to sleep. Maybe I'll go to a movie next semester. . . . I feel that I am being watched. I am the only student from Taiwan. They are observing how well I perform.

As described in many other studies (e.g., Bourne, 1975), interviewees in this research stayed in a Chinese community. Although many students expressed their interest in making friends with Americans, they tried with different amounts of effort and many failed. This had to do with both sides of the relations--interviewees and Americans. For most Americans who had their own existing social community, their motivations to establish new relations were not as strong as foreign students'. Interviewees in this study also mentioned that language and cultural differences inhibited them from communicating with Americans.

Many students expressed their disappointment about the failure of not knowing more Americans deeply. One student (DM37) said that "I always want to participate in American students' circle. But I am not able to get involved in their community. It gives me a lot of pressure." For him, knowing Americans was an important goal for studying abroad. Not being able to participate in the American circle made no difference from watching the "Cosby Show" in Taiwan. He did not feel that he was living in the United States. Different strategies to get to know more Americans were used by interviewees, such as participating in the school's meal plan, living in an apartment with Americans, enrolling in an international organization, or participating in church activities. However, language and the lack of common topics were frequently mentioned as obstacles to getting to know each other. Most interviewees had at least seven to ten years of English education, but they were not familiar with its pragmatic usage. They had difficulty understanding or saying some cultural or subcultural expressions, particularly slang, idioms, humor, and metaphor, that were highly contextualized by American history, folk tales, or current events. The lack of competence in language not only hindered communications in a real situation but also weakened the person's self-evaluation. Some interviewees withdrew from interacting with American in order to avoid showing their deficiency.

If I speak English I can't speak very fluently after my own heart. I might use half of the time thinking about English. (DF6)

I feel that most Chinese students withdraw in a small Chinese community and dare not go out. Language. You feel self-abased if you can't express yourself well. Yes. People think that you're not intelligible. In addition, I feel that Americans are not patient. (DF14)

When I first came, I was aggressive. I talked to them whenever I had a chance. Later, I found that I had used out topics of conversation. I did not know what to say after 'How are you?' I participated in the meal plan in school. But I almost had my meal alone. There were existent groups. I felt uneasy joining them. Even if I joined I did not know what to say. I don't have to be concerned about this. However, a major purpose of coming here is to understand a different culture and people. . . . Language is a major problem. Sometimes you don't understand but you pretend that you understand. Anyway, you still don't know what to answer. But you can't say 'pardon, pardon' all the time. . . . They feel that you are dumb and stupid, they don't have the intention to talk to you. . . . In addition, there are

many part-time students in my program. They dress very formally. I don't know what to talk to them. . . . A semester has gone, I still stay in the Chinese community. But you feel you are dull once you stepped out of the Chinese community. Of course, there is no problem of communicating [in English]. But there is a long way to go to make American friends. You can only use straight sentences. If it is needed to add an exclamation mark, I just can't do it. I am still timid and restrained. (DM37)

Some interviewees perceived Americans as impatient and unwilling to help foreign students. Some felt that Americans considered personal privacy as very important so that it was difficult to have a deep relationship with them.

You can chat or have a drink with them. But it is very difficult to understand them and become their good friends. Americans are not willing to accept foreigners. They don't want to spend time with you. They are hosts. You are guests. So they need to spend time and energy to lead you to see things. They don't want to do it because they have their peer groups already. They also racially discriminate. In Taiwan, if I met foreigners who didn't speak Chinese well I was always patient and tried to understand what they needed. But Americans here start to knit their brows and are impatient when they find that I can't speak English well. (DM4)

I came to see this apartment before I moved in. I felt that they didn't want anybody to move in so that they could have a larger space. They told me that this apartment was very poor and they were burglarized a week ago. I knew what they meant. Anyway I still moved in because I was exhausted in finding a place to live. . . . We hardly have any interaction. I stay in my room most of the time. We only say hello when we meet each other. (DM4)

Some interviewees felt comfortable talking to Americans one to one. However, if they were with a group of Americans they did not have chance to talk. If there was another Chinese in this group they felt embarrassed to speak English.

If I went to a bar with an American I have many opportunities to practice my English. If I went there with some Americans I can only sit there and listen. They use a lot of slang which I can't understand. If they saw girls they would talk with girls. I can hardly have a chance to say a word. (DM4)

I participate in some activities arranged by the International Center of New York. Most participants are not Chinese. So you are bolder to speak. You know that you don't speak well but you don't feel embarrassed. Most tutors are patient. So it is good to participate in these activities but do not go there with company. You are hesitant to speak in front of other Chinese because you feel there is latent competition. (DF14)

Environmental psychologists suggest that proximity and homogeneity of residents affects friendship and neighboring patterns (Freedman, 1975; Gans, 1968; Lynch, 1981; Michelson, 1976; Zimring, 1981). Friendship could be facilitated by an environment

which provides opportunities for people to naturally contact each other in the course of their daily activities (Bechtel, 1977). The living environment and school were two places where interviewees spent most of their time. However, many interviewees reported that their classmates just passed by without any chance to sit down and talk.

Classmates rush in and rush out. Call them? It's impossible. (DF14)

I don't have the opportunity to break through to know more American friends. My classmates always rush in and rush out. And I have totally different classmates from what I had last semester. So I need to recognize new friends again. People disappear right after classes. (DF6)

Most interviewees lived in a house or a dormitory with other Chinese students. So they spoke Chinese with the Chinese landlord and Chinese roommates. If there were other Chinese classmates they would discuss course-work together. In New York, there were Chinese restaurants, stores, travel agencies, and clinics. They could read Chinese newspapers and books. If they liked, they could live pretty comfortably without speaking much English. One interviewee (DF31) said that she did not recommend that other students come to New York to study. There were too many Chinese in New York so she did not have opportunities to speak English. She said that she could not resist going to Chinese stores. Another interviewee (DM15) shared a house with other Chinese students. He said that he was concerned about Americans' privacy so he did not chat with them. However, their living room became "the community center" for Chinese students.

In conclusion, many factors contributed to the formation of the Chinese community, such as language and cultural differences, the Chinese student's motivation, and the Americans' attitude towards foreign students. Firstly, they might see their American classmates only once a week. Based on this brief encounter, it was difficult for them to have a deep relationship. Secondly, due to cultural differences Americans might be unwilling to reveal personal things. Thirdly, interviewees felt it was difficult to express their feelings or thoughts in English. Fourthly, even if they could communicate in English

they lacked common topics. Lastly, even if they thought about some topics they did not know if that topic was appropriate.

Some interviewees attained intimate relationships with their friends in the United States. A woman met with her friends in the same dormitory every day.

Actually my favorite things are my friends. Nothing can compete with friendship. When I am happy, I like to share my happiness with my friends. When feeling sad, you really need friends. When I am happy, I make cakes and ask them all to come to share with me. When I am sad, I ask for their shoulders to lean on. . . . We miss home together, miss Chinese food together. (DF1)

Other people might have friends but without close relationships.

Here people can only take care of themselves. They may be sympathetic to you, but they have their own problems. So they can only say "how are you doing today?" If you say "not good," they, at most, listen to you for a couple of minutes. They can't play an important role in your life. They can't support you psychologically. . . . You can only feel your parents' support remotely. They can't give you substantial support. (DF6)

Some interviewees were even very depressed about their social relationships. A woman (DF10) was upset about her relationships with her roommate, Americans, and Chinese students. She was supposed to give a musical performance as part of a trio and she needed to practice with other students. But one student just disregarded her existence.

We should discuss to reach a consensus. But he doesn't care about me. He just talks to the other pianist and then we start to play. He doesn't talk to me. He doesn't like me. I don't like him either. He doesn't have the patience to listen to me. Actually he doesn't play so well. Why is he so arrogant?

She missed her friends in Taiwan because their relationships were more sincere. She had the same attitude towards interacting with people here. She felt, however, that people were different. She tried to get along with them reluctantly. She felt sad because she did not present her true self and she knew that their relationships would not be deep.

My friends in Taiwan are more considerate. We have known each other for many years. People are different here. I don't know if it is because of the environment or the uniqueness of this group of people whom I know. . . . I had pre-conception that friends should help each other. But they were just selfish. You couldn't impose your own attitude upon them. . . . Gradually, I know how to get along with them. But I feel sad because I know they are not my real friends.

She shared a studio with another Asian student. She was nice to her roommate but her roommate was indifferent. She felt that she was hurt. During the second semester she was seriously ill. It made her more depressed.

I want to move out. I am very upset. Too many things happened. I want to leave this place. . . . We get along with each other pretty well. But I feel the blood running cold recently. I want to change my roommate. When I first moved in, she was hostile, defensive, and acrimonious. I yielded to her. I am the kind of person who doesn't know how to pay one back in her own coin. When she was sick, I took care of her. But when I am sick. . . . I don't mean that she should behave the same with me. We have lived together for a certain period of time. I still don't see the human touch and care from her. I thought that I could influence her. Actually it is very difficult. It doesn't mean that we have trouble getting along with each other. But her attitude hurts me. It makes me feel extremely discouraged and upset. I thought if you are nice to other people, they will be nice to you as well. But people just don't know this principle. It hurts me. Gradually, I became more indifferent. I don't want to be this kind of person. If I stay here longer I will be like her. I would be very uncomfortable to be like that. I don't want to be influenced by her too much.

Her disappointment with social relationships and her illness made her life difficult. She felt that she wanted to cry. Why was this route so difficult to go through? She could hardly endure. Being physically ill made her mind fragile. She wanted to go home. When she was upset, she kept a diary. However, if she was really down, she could hardly write a word. She sometimes cried. She listened to the Chinese tapes given by her friends or called her family or friends in Taiwan. Sometimes she took a walk. One time she was so sick that she could not even walk. She was hungry and had nothing to eat. She recalled that she was so well supported and protected in Taiwan. She was frustrated about her situation and had her hair cut later. She described her feelings while looking at gifts.

When I look at those gifts, I think about past occasions. Nothing to worry about and care for. Such a happy time. I miss it very much. . . . I feel a little bit sad. How can you let your life be more and more miserable? You can't. I smiled so easily. The smile was so brilliant. How come I have so many worries and they become more and more through years. [10]

Another woman (PF11) was very disappointed about social relationships among Chinese in New York. She described many people as selfish, individualistic, and liking to judge other people's behavior. She lived with other Chinese students in a house.

In Taiwan I felt people were very harmonious. I am very disappointed here. I have seen many unbelievable things. People are very selfish. I feel that we are all foreigners so that we should help each other. But it is the opposite. People are very self-protective. They see self-interest as the most important thing. In the Chinese students circle they like to gossip and make critical comments on other's behavior. I hate these things. I feel that people are no longer honest and sincere. . . . Some people look gentle and graceful but are unwilling to sacrifice even a single hair for the sake of others. . . . People who live here are all Chinese students. I can't avoid hearing some gossip. So I stay in my room most of the time. It may influence our relationships. Sometimes I wonder whether I should attend their activities to make public relations. But I don't because I feel that studying is more important. . . . Sometimes I feel very lonely. I feel that I am isolated by other residents. I say hello to them and receive no answer. When I was ill, they did not even say a word. I thought about moving out but I believe I am a good person. I hope they will understand me.

In contrast to her social relations in Taiwan her present experiences seemed to be more unbearable.

I never knew how to fight when I was young. I only know that my mother always leaves the worst thing to herself. She never thinks about buying things for herself. My elder sister is fond of me. She always gives the good thing to me.

So she missed home because life was difficult. She missed the beautiful things that she had in the past. Her favorite objects in New York included Buddhist scriptures, a rosary, photographs, and music tapes. Buddhist scriptures gave her peace of mind and comfort. She also reflected on her own present condition.

The world in Buddhist scriptures is very deep. Buddha teaches us to look at our life from the end of it. Pleasure and pain is only a passing process. . . . No one is perfect. You need to learn to forgive, to tolerate, to cultivate your moral character, to abandon self-centered thinking, and to appreciate other people. Every time I read Buddhist scriptures I am in a peaceful mood. . . . I would like to maintain a harmonious relationship with my classmates. I don't see them as opponents. Only if we teach each other what we know can we learn.

She told me that she would strongly recommend that other foreign students coming to the United States bring photographs. She regretted that she only brought five photographs. Later her family and friends sent another twenty photographs to her. She showed me her photographs. One photograph was sent by her students in Taiwan. She was a teaching assistant before she came to the United States. She said they were like brothers and sisters. They got together and took this picture for her. She put her photographs on her desk without frames and changed them every day because photographs

rolled up when exposed to the dry weather. She took them down and pressed them, then, put other photographs on display. She enjoyed looking at them every day. When she was homesick she looked at photographs and felt more comfortable.

She loved music. She had received more than sixty music tapes from her family.

I love music. I had many music records in Taiwan. My family recorded many music tapes and sent them to me without my request. The music was selected as flute series, wind and string instrument series, etc. by my family. They knew what music I liked. [I listen to these music tapes] often. Very, very, very often.

She could buy those classic music tapes in New York easily. But the tapes her family sent to her exceeded the monetary value. In addition to these tapes, even some food, clothes, and a quilt were sent by her family. When she needed something she just made a phone call. Her family members liked to do things for her. They enjoyed giving and receiving. These objects were the carriers of their continuous love.

She grew up in a warm social environment. She cared about other people. She thought that other people would be nice to her too. She was not accustomed to the social relationships in the new environment. She was isolated. Through interaction with photographs of her old relationships, music tapes, and other objects sent from her beloved, she not only communicated with her old environment but also constructed a world where she could get comfort away from the cold and indifferent social environment. Moreover, these objects, such as the photograph of her students taken for her and music tapes recorded by her family, certainly served the function of reassuring to herself that she was a lovable person.

There is some commonality between these two women. Both of them was brought up in a family with a lot of care, love, and protection. Love and reciprocity were their principles of interaction with other people. Unlike most other men who had at least had two years of experiences serving in the army, they did not have any working experiences in society. Although PF11 worked as a teaching assistant in a college, the social structure in the college was more like a family than society. They carried these preconceptions with

them and expected that foreign students would be just like their friends in Taiwan. When they first encountered the reality they were shocked and upset, and did not know what to do. PF11 disliked people's selfishness, self-protection, and interest in gossips. She tried to get away with them and felt alienated. She then justified her staying in her room by the importance of studying. She read Buddhist scriptures and got comfort from them. She just waited that someday people would understand her because she believed that she was a good person. DF10 interacted with other students based on her past principles when she first came to the United States. She even thought that she could influence them. However, she failed. Then she tried to *distort* herself in order to get along with people, but with reluctance. This was a learning process for her, although a perfect society should be filled with love and sincerity.

E. LIVING ENVIRONMENT

Before we examine feelings about home for interviewees in the United States, it is helpful to know the meanings of home for them. During the first interview in Taiwan, I asked them what home meant to them. Basically they considered home:

(a) a functional space where they had "equipment," could "eat," "watch TV," "sleep," and felt physically comfortable;

(b) a social place where they lived together with their family members, were taken care of, were supported, shared their happiness and sadness, poured out their heart, totally expressed themselves without reservation;

(c) a personal space where they relaxed, felt free, did anything they wanted, did not have to be concerned about manners, secured their secrets and personal lives;

(d) a "harbor of refuge" from the outside world, "a fortress," "a base to backup," a place where they returned;

(e) a place that "draws you back," to be constrained, a burden.

Most interviewees expressed their feelings of home positively. In the meanwhile, some interviewees had ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, home was a place of care, protection, comfort, and freedom, while on the other the home constrained them. For instance, some mentioned that they were hesitant to make decisions because they thought about their families, they were required to stay at home to have dinner with their families, they could not stay outside overnight, and they were not independent because everything was taken care of. A man (DM37) said that only women would miss home; men did not. He often felt that he had nothing to do at home. That was home. Going home was a kind of obligation for him. Another interviewee (DM40) said that home was a burden to him.

Home is a burden. Without home, nobody cares about you and you don't need to care about others either. . . . My mother wants to enjoy her own life. We respect each other and do not interfere with each other. She doesn't have to cook and to clean the house and we don't have to stay at home all the time.

A married man (DM39) reported that home meant something different to him after he got married.

Before I was married home was a refuge. Now I am the supporter. I stand in the foremost line. Home is still a warm place. But when you have pressure outside you can no longer cry on your mother's shoulder, instead you share or discuss your feelings with your wife.

In the United States interviewees either lived in a dormitory or shared a house or an apartment with other people. Usually their rooms were the only space that belonged to them. Did they have a feeling of home? How did they personalize their rooms? It is obvious that the major difference of their living spaces in the United States from those in Taiwan was the lack of family members. Not only could they not share their feelings with their families, they could not even find a human being to talk to after they went back home.

If I treat it [his room] as a thing, it is luxurious. . . . But all this equipment can't compensate my loss. In Taiwan, the feeling of going home was pleasant because I was going back to a place where we mutually expected each other. Here, I just come back to a space where I can rest and continue to work. Nothing to expect and nobody waits for me. I can strongly feel the difference. (DM25)

I don't miss home. But I think if I were at home there would be someone to talk to me. I am not used to being alone. (DM27)

It isn't like a home. Nobody takes care of you. You don't have food to eat when you return home. (DM8)

Some interviewees carefully preserved the word "home" to refer to the home they had in Taiwan. They felt that it was an abuse to use "home" to describe the space where they lived in the United States.

NO! [I don't have a feeling of home.] It is not a place. I cannot describe that kind of feeling. It is a place where you stay temporarily. It's like a hotel. When I write a letter to my friend, I said that I came back. . . . I don't want to say that I come back "home." It is awkward to use that word. (DF19)

Of course, I don't have the feeling of home. How could it be possible? [My friend] always asks me what I am doing at home. I always tell her what I am doing in my room. The whole atmosphere is not like a home. It's only a temporary space for living. So I don't have feeling about it. It's strange to use the word--home. (DM35)

Lack of privacy was a common feeling for interviewees who lived in a living room. One student (DF24) mentioned that "I didn't have my own territory at all. It's too open. I felt sad. Everybody walking through the room." For interviewees who shared a room with other students, their activities were constantly constrained and intruded upon.

By sharing a room with another person, I am always disturbed. I can't stand that he is making a phone call or watching television at midnight. It's inconvenient. (DM35)

There is no privacy. We interrupt each other. I have to wear earphones when I watch TV or listen to the music. (DF10)

When I come back alone I have [a feeling of home]. But if we come back together I can't really relax. I care about their opinions on my behavior too much. I would be very careful. If I am alone I can do whatever I like. I can turn on the radio and sing. Life is already so hard at school, but after I come home I still need to be very wary. So I want to move out and live alone. (DF32)

An interviewee (DM4) could not relax in his own room in a two-bedroom apartment.

I am not relaxed when I am at home. I didn't buy a television set because of the concern about disturbing my roommates. I don't have the feeling of home. It's only a place where I can sleep.

Although the room where interviewees lived in the United States was only a temporary place to stay, some tried to make it warm and comfortable.

This is the question that I am waiting for. I like to decorate my room. The picture frames, curtain, bed sheets, and carpet are so cheap. I couldn't help buying them. Even if I would live here for only one and a half years, I would like to make it a comfortable place. I like it a lot. I even sent a photograph of my room to my friend in Taiwan to show off. I said that my room was as luxurious as a palace. (DF6)

In order to illustrate the significance of the living environment, experiences of interviewees who lived in two or three different places during this study would give us a good perspective. Five examples are worth mentioning. One person moved from a shared room to a living room, then to a single room. Two moved from a living room to a single room. One moved from a bedroom to another bedroom in the same apartment. Another moved from a single room to another single room in a different apartment. These examples clearly show changes of their experiences after moving to a new place. However, one thing to keep in mind is that the person who did move tended to be the person who was not satisfied with his or her current residence.

DF32 lived in a shared room in a dormitory when she first came to New York. She complained about the difficulty of sharing a room with other people.

They [her roommates] restricted my behavior. If I wanted to go to school earlier or come back home later, they were unhappy. They said since we lived together we should do things together. It seemed to me that I should get permission from them to do things. I was angry. . . . Life is already so hard at school, but after I come home I still need to be very wary. So I want to move out and live alone.

In the second semester, she moved to another dormitory. She slept in a bedroom with her friend but she used the living room as her own study. She compared these two places.

This room is darker but I have more privacy. The former room was like a dormitory. This room is like a private residence. My schedule does not depend on others anymore. The bad thing about living with them was that I needed to bear many things, but the good thing was that you had company especially when you first came.

In the third semester, she moved to a rented apartment and had her own room. Although she felt relatively comfortable in the second residence, she still shared the bedroom with another person. Her study was still in the passage to the bedroom. In the

third residence, she lived with the landlady in the same apartment. Male friends were not welcome to stay in the apartment for long. However, she had her own room. Nobody would enter her room without her permission. She was more satisfied. The tremendous increase in her personalization in her room gives us a hint of her feelings about her living space. I saw twelve posters of cats on her door. In addition to her photographs, three other posters and dry flowers were on display.

DM37 shared a two-bedroom apartment with two other Chinese. He lived in the living room only because he was an easy-going person. He took the room left. Although he used a bookshelf as partition, his room was still exposed to “the public.”

Everybody can see and hear what you are doing. There is no privacy. There are doors of their rooms. So you need to knock on the door before you enter their rooms. They can hide personal things before opening the door. Here they just walk in without signal. Everything is exposed. . . . It seems to me that this room belongs to everybody. Basically, I like guests. However, I don't like interruptions while studying or writing a letter.

His roommates perceived his room as the “living room.” “A few days ago, they had nothing to do. So they came to my room and chatted till five o'clock in the morning. I couldn't sleep at all.” While I was doing the interview, one of his roommates interrupted our conversation a few times. And his room became “the China Town” of their school. They had a party almost every week.

He wanted to put a curtain on the entrance to his room but he was concerned about affecting their relationships. If he had done that, his roommates might have felt that he was unsympathetic to them and feel insulted. This could create a chasm between them. So he was waiting for a day when he could put on the curtain more naturally and then announce that this room belonged to him.

In the third interview (his second semester), I saw a curtain on the entrance to his room. The day he had waited for so long finally came when the school came to replace window frames. They planned to discard the window shade. He kept it and used it for his door. Although the shade could not block the sound, he said that he felt much more

comfortable with the shade. He no longer felt that there was somebody behind him. Even if there was nobody in the apartment, he still liked to have something to block his door while he was working or studying. With this shade he felt safer to do his work in his room.

In the second semester, even the pattern of social interactions between him and his roommates had totally changed.

We took the same courses last semester. We did everything, such as chatting or participating in social activities together. The situation has totally changed this semester. It is quiet when I wake up. I see nobody at meal time. Everybody stays in his own room studying or watching television. Now we don't see each other often. We just say hello when we meet. The topic of conversation has been used up. Nothing new to talk about.

This change was partly due to their figuring out their future goals. Among them, one planned to continue his study in a doctoral program, one would like to find a job in the United States after graduation, and he planned to study in another masters program. So each pursued his own goal in different directions. On the other hand, the shade surely influenced his feelings and might have sent a message to his roommates that his room was not public space any more.

When I interviewed him for the fourth time (at the end of his second year), he had already moved to a bedroom in the same apartment. Having his own private space, he could "expose my true color completely." He had more motivation to decorate it. He felt that the previous space was only a transient one. Everything was only temporary. He had a different conception of time. Now a place to stay for one year became worth investing his energy and feelings. His favorite objects were plants and fish. However, I did not see them during the previous three interviews. At this time, small plants were everywhere. They were on the windowsill, desk, TV set, and cabinet. He also raised two shrimps in a big bowl. He explained that these reflected his mood. When he first came, he was too busy to learn to adapt to this new environment. Now that he had no problem with course-work, he became himself. Another reason was related to his girlfriend. He said that since

he knew his girlfriend he began to buy plants to add fun to their lives. He taught her how to develop plants. Now his girlfriend also enjoyed taking care of plants. His girlfriend visited him frequently. So his room became her space too. Her dolls were displayed in his room. I remembered when I asked him about cherished objects during the first interview, he said that only women were attached to objects, not to mention stuffed animals. But he now cherished a stuffed animal given by his girlfriend.

DF24 shared a one-bedroom apartment with her friend. In the beginning, they slept in the same bedroom. Later her friend requested her own room. Therefore, she lived in the living room. She felt sad because “the space is totally open and I don’t have my own territory. People walk to and fro.” Then she used a sofa to set the boundary of her room. She did not know why her relationship with her friend changed. Now her friend was only a “roommate” for her.

She moved to a dormitory because she had a remote relationship with her roommate and the apartment was too far away from her school. She said that she did not have any complaints about her new room. She had her own space and good neighbors. Her working schedules and social activities changed after she moved to this dormitory. She slept on the floor during the last semester. She felt unsecured because her room was “public.” She visited her relatives during the winter recess. Her grandmother wondered why she always covered her head while sleeping. Then she realized that because she used to sleep in the living room (on the ground) she covered her head while people were walking by. She said that she recovered being a “normal” person after she moved to the dormitory. Her social activities changed as well.

She was nervous during the first semester. She studied very hard. She isolated herself in her own apartment. She did not even look at display windows when she walked home from the subway station. Now she was much more sociable. She sometimes cooked and shared dinners with other Chinese students in the same dormitory. They also

spent time chatting. She slept on the bed and had her own private room so she slept more. And she did not study as hard as she did during the first semester. This might also be due to her confidence and learned strategies of dealing with her course-work.

DM39 had a stomachache on the airplane. Then he was sick in the first winter because of the cold weather. He felt that he was unlucky. He studied hard and understood the material. However, the results of his examinations were always not good. He did not know why. He attributed it to his bad luck. He said that even the telephone bill were wrong. His roommate told him that previous residents in his room had health problems too. He felt fearful. One year later, he had the chance to move to another room in the same apartment to change his "feng-shui." After his move, things became better. He took less courses. He had the highest midterm grades for two courses. His health condition was much improved. Whether the physical condition of his new room resulted in these changes, he did not want to investigate. How he felt was more important.

DF19 lived in an apartment with her landlord's family. She never called her room "home." She described that her apartment was "old, dirty, oily, stinky, dark, and small." She said that there was a strange odor in the apartment. The hallway was dark. She did not have any place to go except her own room. There was a sofa left by her landlord in her room. She asked the landlord if she could get rid of it but was refused. She said that that sofa always bothered her. It was so filthy that she would not sit on it. She only piled things on it. If she could get rid of it, then she would make this space as she liked. There was not enough space in the closet. The presence of her luggage reinforced her feelings that this was a transient space. She felt that she could pack her luggage and leave any time. One night her landlord's mother told her that the landlord and his wife had a fight. If she were at home she could be a mediator. She hated these things. Then she decided to move out.

She moved to another apartment. She shared a three-bedroom apartment with two other students. I could tell her different feelings just by her voice.

Although this room is smaller, it's clean and comfortable. Although it's very cold in the winter and very hot in the summer, I still feel comfortable. It is because I have a sense of belonging. I have the right to do things, to decorate.

She explained that social relations might be important. In the old residence, she felt that she was a guest. The living room, kitchen, and bathroom did not belong to her. The presence of the landlord's sofa was another evidence of her sense of lacking control. However, in the new residence, she shared the apartment with two other students. She felt that they were equal. She had the right to discuss rules with them. She could use the kitchen or bathroom as long as she liked. Her sense of freedom and control was crucial for her feeling of home. She was happy living in this place. She was no longer constrained in her own room. When nobody was around, she liked to stay in the living room or kitchen as she did in Taiwan. Now her room was facing the street. When she had pressure, she liked to open the window and watch cars and people go by. This was what she liked to do in Taiwan too. This example clearly shows that the social aspect and physical aspect of her experiences were intertwined. The layout of these two places were similar. But she was much freer to use the "public" space in the new residence. Although the new room was smaller, colder (and hotter), and noisier, she could disregard it. The sense of belongingness was the result and the constructive part of her making sense of living in this new place.

F. PERSONALIZATIONS IN THE LIVING SPACE

Personalization refers to marking a person's environment to convey messages of one's social and personal identity and to regulate social communications (Becker, 1977; Brown, 1987; Hansen & Altman, 1976; Kron, 1983). The display of objects with personal significance, the arrangement of furniture, and the maintenance of the room are

different ways of personalizing. And most residents use more than one way. Some interviewees said that the first important thing they did when they moved into a new place in the United States¹⁸ was to display their photographs or favorite books. Personalizing was a continuous process. Students constantly added or deleted objects, or changed the arrangement of furniture in relation to their self-concept change or other experiences or activities, such as travelling or attending a performance. However, I found that interviewees basically added things between the second and third interviews if they lived in the same places. They rarely removed things on display. It was common for them to add photographs, greeting cards, maps, or posters. For instance, I have observed that the photographs on display tripled in three months for (DF1), and (DM25) constantly put his children's letters and drawings on his wall. But to remove objects needed much more psychological effort. One reason might be that people have inertia. If there was nothing wrong, they would not take down the objects that were already on the wall or desk. The other reason might be that removing objects meant to negate intentions or feelings you had when you displayed those objects. An interviewee (DM27) removed a photograph of himself with his girlfriend because they did not have that kind of intimate relationship anymore. Another student (PF11) changed her photographs on display every day. She enjoyed looking at every photograph. Another woman (DF6) constantly changed the decorations of her room. The change of decorations gave her a fresh feeling but the theme of her decorations did not change. Some photographs, posters or postcards were replaced by the same kinds. For instance a card with a musical instrument design was replaced by another one. A religious sticker was replaced by another religious card. I could still see the same objects which resisted removal, although they were in a different location. A

¹⁸Because I did not have opportunities to visit most interviewees' homes in Taiwan I will discuss their personalizations in the United States only.

family photo, a picture of herself during a piano recital, and a religious poster represented a clear continuity through the changes.

In the following section I will discuss factors of facilitating or discouraging personalization and its consequences. These factors include self-identity, sense of control, anticipated length of residence, and social learning and pressure.

1. SELF-IDENTITY

Many researchers have indicated that personalization reflects a person's self-identity (Cooper, 1974; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Duncan, 1982). Of course there were some interviewees who considered their rooms as only a temporary space to stay, would not spend money to decorate it, and felt detached to it. On the other hand, some interviewees in this study reported that their rooms and personal objects reflected their selves.

[My room] is tidy. I like to open the curtains so that it is bright and I have a broader field of vision. It represents my personality of pureness and brightness. (DF31)

You can tell that I am not a tidy, cautious, and orderly person by looking at my room. I am careless. I don't make plans. (DM4)

My room is never a monotonous place where you don't want to stay. The yellow light. Warm feelings. It shows that I am not like most engineering majors. I am not cold. (DM37)

Other interviewees also mentioned that some of their objects on display conveyed messages of who they were, such as dolls, posters, calendars, books, and maps. This is described clearly in Chapter III.

Personalization could reflect a person's self. But people often selectively express what they wanted to show of themselves to the public or to significant others. Different people had different intentions regarding self-presentation. Whether they lived in a single room or a shared room also made a difference. Although family photos were common objects on display, an interviewee (DM38) who lived in a living room would not do that

because he considered a family photo a private thing. On the other hand, a person who was not clear about her/his self did not know how to personalize her/his room to reflect self-identity. An interviewee said that he did not know who he was, why he came to the United States to study. So he was not sure that anything could represent himself.

2. SENSE OF CONTROL

Control refers to changing the actual properties of the physical settings or the behaviors of others. Personalization itself represents part of the process of growth of one's general sense of mastery and control (Becker, 1977). To the contrary, a person's sense of control which is affected by other people or environmental constraints also influences the possibility of personalizing.

a) Sharing a room with other people or living in a living room. As mentioned in the above section, students who lived in a shared room or a living room felt that they did not have control of space and social interactions. They felt that they lived in a "public" space being observed and disturbed by other people. The lack of feelings of belongingness weakened their intentions of personalizing.

b) Environmental constraints. Regulations set by landlords or housing offices, the available space, and the materials of walls might constrain personalizations. Some interviewees said that they were not supposed to put anything--a nail or a poster, on the wall. An interviewee (DF14) was attracted by the "memory wall" or "postcard wall" of American families. However, she did not do that because she used to stick some postcards on her wall in her first residence but she could not take them down when she moved out. A man (DM8) lived in a room with a very small closet. His luggage and suitcases were spread on the floor. It reinforced his feelings that this was only a transient place.

c) The presence of other people's objects. McCollum (1990) indicated that the first step for women to possess a new dwelling was a ritual of cleaning which had the quality of

an exorcism. By sweeping the vestiges of other presences the new occupants could begin to claim ownership and to find their way around. The existence of others' objects not only occupied a physical space but also weakened the occupant's sense of control. An interviewee (DF14) said that she did not like her room. Her friend kept two mattresses in her room. She put these two big objects behind her desk. She complained to me that they were very ugly. These two mattresses occupied a large space in her room. They also constrained the possibility of the rearrangement of her room and discouraged her in her efforts to devote herself to making her room more attractive and comfortable. Another interviewee (DF19) lived with a sofa in her room that her landlord refused to move out. That sofa always bothered her. She said that she would never call this room her "home." Although her lack of feeling of home was related to many other factors, such as her relationship with her landlord, the light, the view outside her window, and the lack of a living room, the presence of this sofa also contributed greatly to her detachment to her room.

3. ANTICIPATED LENGTH OF RESIDENCE

Some interviewees explained why they did not decorate their rooms much. They said that they would not spend money and energy on decorations because they expected to move soon. However, there was not an objective standard to judge whether a certain period of time was short or long. It was a subjective judgment. And the judgment was related to other issues, such as the physical and social features of and their satisfactions with the room. These factors were mutually influenced as well.

An interviewee (DF6) said that she would do her best to make her room a comfortable place to live even if she stayed in this room for only a short period of time. She also said that life was very short and you should try your best to make it a meaningful life.

4. SOCIAL LEARNING AND PRESSURE

People learn the appropriateness and skills of personalization from the social environment. Interviewees mentioned that they displayed Christmas cards or family photos because others did so. A woman (DF1) said she was longing to receive letters or greeting cards because of being alone in a foreign country. She learned the idea of displaying Christmas cards from Americans. So she displayed her cards on her bookshelf. They represented social connections and gave her room a holiday spirit.

Sharing a room with another student in a dormitory, an interviewee (PM1) felt constrained to decorate his room at his will. This room was so different from the room where he lived in Taiwan.

I don't like this room. It is hollow. It is only a space for daily activities and sleeping. My classmates came here a few days ago. They were all very surprised. They felt that this room is totally different from what I had in Taiwan. Their intuition was that I must have repressed myself seriously so that made the environment like this. My room in Taiwan was warm, artistic, and tasteful. I decorated that room with an audio system, painting and posters that I liked. (Why don't you decorate your room as you like?) It would cost a lot of money. I can't afford to do that. I live with another student. I don't have my own room. If I decorated this room as my room in Taiwan, I would feel guilty. It would be too hedonistic and fallen. I think the situation will be improved after I find my own place to live. I feel very uncomfortable living in this kind of space. To live well is very important for me. I don't mean materialistic and luxury facilities. But the meaning of life is composed of the pieces of enjoyable life.

We met in a park. Before we entered the dormitory he warned me not to be surprised at his bare room. Since this was the first time we saw each other, I guessed that he was concerned that I might judge him based on his decoration and maintenance of his room. He felt that his room was very boring. However, he felt that he was a humanistic person who liked art and people. He wanted me to know that the room did not reflect his personality directly. So on the one hand, he was concerned about opinions of his roommate or other students in the dormitory so that he would not decorate his room at his will. He might think that the public held the opinion that students should study hard and

their lives should be simple. Since he lived so close to other students and he did not have control over access to his room (double room), he tried to conform to the public image of a foreign student. But that was also contradictory to his life style. On the other hand, he would not like to be a student who only studied without other interests. So he was afraid that I judged him as that kind of boring student by the first sight of his room.

In this section I discussed factors which influenced personalization. There is one thing that needs to be kept in mind. These factors and personalization are mutually influenced and they are connected to many other experiences and social and environmental conditions. Personalization reflects and reinforces a person's self-identity. A person's perception of her/his own identity also influences the personalization. The anticipated length of residence affects personalization. Personalization also contributes to feelings of home and the intention to stay. A sense of control makes personalization more probable. Personalization is also a way of controlling.

CHAPTER VII
CHANGES OF OBJECT MEANINGS--
WITH A FOCUS ON CHANGES IN THE CONTEXT OF
ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSITIONS

Object meanings are realized in the process of transactions between the person and the object in a particular social and environmental context. So an object has an effect on this system of transactions. On the other hand, these transactions may have an effect on the person's thoughts, feelings, or concept of the self, and the meaning of an object. In some sense, the system and object meanings are continuously evolving. Objects contribute to the process of a person's development. Changes in a person, such as graduation, getting married, having a baby, or job promotion, as well as changes in larger social and cultural conditions may also influence object meanings. In addition, functional objects may become a sign of past experiences. An object which survives for a long period of time may acquire a meaning as symbol of self. A self-made object could be a good gift to friends. The possibility is endlessly extendable. In this chapter, I will focus on changes of object meanings in the context of environmental transitions.

As discussed in Chapter V, students came to the United States for study with different reasons and plans at different levels of articulation. Basically, their reasons for coming included parents' expectations, peer pressure, leaving the home environment, acquiring new knowledge and experiences, as well as looking for a life transition. So for some students, "relocation may represent an opportunity to begin a new life in a new setting; to disassociate with one's past" (Shumaker & Conti, 1985, p. 250). In the meanwhile, for some other students, leaving an old environment might cause grief and anxiety from the separation from the familiar, and facing a new and partly unknown environment.

Environmental relocation of all kinds, whether displacement of low income families, job relocation, or going to college from high school, may result in a disruption in one's on-going daily routines, social relationships, as well as an alteration of environmental orientation and person-object relations. Much evidence shows that people try to maintain continuity when they move from one residence to another, whether they are voluntarily or forcibly relocated. Replicating decorating practices and modifying the design of home (Lawrence, 1982; Gauvain, Altman & Fahim, 1983) as well as keeping old furniture, photos, or visual art to bring their memories with them (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981) represent the efforts most frequently mentioned to maintain continuity in relation to the environment.

Continuity can imply different aspects of meaning for people, such as personal, social, cultural, and physical (or environmental) aspects, although they are often mixed. People in different phases of the life cycle or situations, with different plans, emphasize different aspects of continuity.

To maintain continuity does not necessarily imply "a rigid refusal to alter practice or structure" or an indifference to current activities and social relationships, but rather suggest "development and growth within a coherent historical context" (Jacobi & Stokols, 1983, p. 162). Thus, the objects people carry from one place to another may provide them for a sense of continuity, allow them to make the new setting more familiar and give it an enduring quality and identity (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Jacobi & Stokols, 1983; Shumaker & Conti, 1985), and function as an anchor point from which people can organize and explore the new environment (Kaplan, Wapner & Cohen, 1976; Redondo, Payton & Wapner, 1984). The section to follow will discuss changes of object meanings for Chinese students in the United States.

A. OBJECTS LEFT BEHIND

For some students, if it were possible, they would bring all their possessions and even their families or friends here. But this is not always the case. Some interviewees left some objects behind on purpose. Generally speaking, there were four reasons for them to do this.

1. ANTICIPATION OF A NEW LIFE

Some interviewees had an image of foreign student which involved studying hard and having a simple life. They anticipated a life change in the new environment. A man (DM25) said that he did not bring some of his favorite objects to the United States on purpose in order to give himself a challenge.

Books were the only thing that I wanted to bring with me. I did not even bring some objects that I liked, such as music cassettes, photographs, and video tapes on purpose. I did not want to indulge myself too much.

Another interviewee (DF19) mentioned books written by Chang Aileen (a famous Chinese writer) as cherished objects. However, she did not bring those books to the United States.

I thought it's backward if I still read her novels in the United States. So I didn't bring them here. I should learn western things and then read Chinese books after I go back [to Taiwan].

She had ambivalent feelings about not bringing those books after she came to the United States. On the one hand, she wanted to explore new things. If she had had those books at hand she could have been indulged in reading them. On the other hand, the new world could not touch her heart as those novels.

Sometimes I want to spoil myself. I am familiar with her work so I can walk into her world easily while reading her novels. I know where I can get satisfaction by her world at what page. Although I am impressed by Greek tragedy the feeling is not so strong because of the obstacle of language. You are distanced with the work. Language is a problem.

She had a desire to read those novels when she was tired of studying. She felt that they could help her vent her emotions and give her some inspiration. She believed that she would have new feelings about them in this different situation.

2. TO AVOID INDULGING IN ONE'S PAST

An object may connect a person to her/his past. It gives a person comfort or lessons. Nevertheless, if a person is attached to it too much, it may hinder her/him from devoting her/his energy to the present task. An interviewee (DF19) did not bring some mementos to the United States. She felt that those mementos belonged to her past. She wanted to "seal them in a box."

The volume of the past is foldable. When I want to think about the past and acquire meanings from the past, I blow it up. Now I shrink it by leaving it behind in Taiwan. I don't want to let it occupy too much space. "Blow up" means that I recall many people. What was I doing at that time? What was the person who gave this gift to me doing? How did we know each other? What was I thinking at that time? While you are thinking about these things, you are spending your time. You can't devote yourself to your present life. It is a burden if you look at it at this angle. Actually I didn't give myself time for consideration before I came here. I must have brought them here if I had given myself time.

This suggests that she had an ambivalent feeling about these mementos. Actually, she wished that she had brought them to the United States. When she was sad or had nothing to do she would like to see them. She was willing to risk being caught by them. She was prepared.

3. TO LEAVE THE OLD ENVIRONMENT BEHIND

An interviewee (DM8) who did not identify with Taiwan said that once he came to the United States he did not want to go back. He would like to disconnect himself with his past. If it were possible he did not want to bring anything here. He left many of his personal belongings behind and reported not having any cherished objects in the United States. Every object was for temporary use. He perceived himself as a cloud without

home and destination. Another student (DM5) left his address book behind. He said that he had a strange idea that he should have a new beginning in the United States. He was thinking about staying in the United States for ten years without going back to Taiwan. And he would not contact any friends in Taiwan. Later, he felt insecure. Suppose that he would return to Taiwan someday. He would need friends. Anyway, there was his own culture. He felt that he should go back some day.

4. TO SYMBOLIZE A HOME TO RETURN

One interviewee (PF9) mentioned that she would not bring all her precious objects here. If she did that, it meant that she would never go back to Taiwan again. For her, coming here for study was a temporary thing. The permanent home was in her country. Those objects left behind at her home represented the place waiting for her to return.

5. OBJECTS FOR PEOPLE LEFT BEHIND

Separation affected both interviewees and their families and friends. They brought photographs or gifts which were connected to their families and friends to the new environment. Correspondingly, they left some objects behind with their families and friends. One interviewee (PF11) talked about the objects she left behind:

I have the habit of wearing a necklace. Just before I came to the United States, my mother gave me a necklace as my birthday present. I brought it here and wear it everyday. . . . I used to wear three necklaces alternately in Taiwan. I left them with my mother and sisters on purpose. I also left some pictures of myself with them.

The birthday-present necklace that she brought here as well as the necklaces and photographs that she left behind established the presence of one's significant other both for her and for her family respectively.

Other interviewees did not bring certain objects because they did not foresee a function for the objects or they had a misconception of their lives in the new environment. A woman (DF32) thought that students would wear simple dresses at school. She did not bring 90 % of her “beautiful” dresses. Actually, she was wrong. And she was called “the mainland girl” because of her clothes. One year later, she went back to Taiwan and carried two pieces of luggage with her clothes with her. A man (DM15) came here to study with his wife. They brought only two wedding photographs and they regretted not bringing more.

This apartment becomes the gathering place for Chinese students. Almost everybody asks to see our wedding pictures. Only two photographs can't satisfy their heart's content. Actually I have many other beautiful pictures. They can know more about us through photographs.

In Chapter II, I indicated different factors affecting the selection of objects. Some interviewees did leave objects behind against their wills. A student (DM9) missed his violin. He spent most of his time studying. He said that violin playing was a very good way of balancing his life. Even if he only played one or two hours each week, he believed that it would alleviate the pressures on him. A few months after he came to the United States, his friend visited him from Taiwan and brought his violin. He felt good. At least he could find something to do when he was bored. Another student (DM27) did not bring a drawing done by himself. He missed it. It was his favorite drawing. He framed it and hung it on the wall in Taiwan.

I have a strong feeling about it. It's like photographs. But you just press a button to take a picture. So this drawing belongs to me even more. . . . The room belongs to me. Of course, I want to decorate it with things that belong to me.

A semester later his mother came to the United States and carried this drawing with her. He was happy to see it again and hung it on the wall again. He suddenly felt as if this drawing was done by him a long time ago. He didn't feel this way in Taiwan. I guessed that he had a fresh eye for seeing this drawing because of their “separation.” It reminded

me of another interviewee's experience. She visited her parents on holiday and suddenly felt that her parents were old.

B. INSTRUMENTAL OBJECTS WHICH FACILITATE ACTIVITIES IN THE NEW ENVIRONMENT

Interviewees came to the United States with purposes, whether these were vaguely (e.g., having a new experience) or precisely formulated (e.g., getting a degree in a particular program). These purposes were realized through action or interaction. Some instrumental objects served the function of facilitating activities. Dictionaries, including Chinese, Chinese-English, and English-Chinese dictionaries, were frequently mentioned to facilitate learning new knowledge or social communication. Books about Chinese culture written in English and books about American culture written in Chinese were also common objects to help interviewees to exchange ideas and thoughts with Americans. A radio and television set were tools to learn English and American culture. Some interviewees--business, biology, or architecture majors--mentioned that they brought documents of Chinese business companies, experimental data, and slides of Chinese architecture respectively to the United States for their course-work.

One interviewee (PM3) mentioned a new camera as a special object. He used this camera to record his new experiences in the new environment.

I like photography. I brought a Nikon camera with a zoom. It is very expensive and heavy. I felt that it was unsafe to use it in the streets in New York. I bought a new small one. Henceforth, I had a new relation with the camera. Before I carried a camera with me only when I intended to take pictures. But now, I carry the camera with me whenever I go out. I grasp more good opportunities and do more satisfactory photographic work.

In addition to the camera, students took photographs, kept concert posters and maps to reify and reinforce their experiences. They also sent these objects to their families and friends to share experiences with them.

C. OBJECTS FOR PROTECTION

For Chinese students, in addition to preventing one's organic system from having difficulties with the food and water in a new environment, security is another issue when adapting to the new environment. Some interviewees brought goddess pictures or Buddhist scriptures and wore a Buddhist rosary or necklace in the United States to "turn bad luck into good fortune," even if they were not Buddhists. Another reason was that New York was perceived as a very dangerous city. Here is one example.

I never wore a Buddhist necklace because I felt very safe in Taiwan. Here I am afraid of doing things alone. Sometimes I need to buy things at night, or I come home at nine o'clock, you never know if something may happen. Once I wear the necklace, I feel safe. Although it's a psychological effect, it's very important for me. . . . My safety is consigned to this Goddess picture. . . . I watch it when I am in a bad mood, feel alone, miss home, or fail an exam. It comforts me. I believe someone is blessing me. I feel someone is beside me. It doesn't mean that it has a real magic power. I sort of believe Buddhism, the picture proves its truth. It reminds me that someone is blessing me. (DF3)

In many cases those rosaries, necklaces, or pictures were given by their parents or friends. I guessed that their parents and friends were sometimes more concerned about interviewees' life conditions in the new environment. However, they could not help interviewees substantially. They bought or asked for these religious objects in a temple and gave them to the interviewees. These objects could not only "turn bad luck into good fortune" but also become a carrier of their care and wishes.

D. OBJECTS TO MAINTAIN PERSONAL HISTORICAL CONTINUITY

"People look back . . . to acquire a sense of self and of identity. . . . To strengthen our sense of self the past needs to be rescued and made accessible" (Tuan, 1977, pp. 186-187). Especially during such a dramatic environmental transition, students needed to define themselves. Objects representing bits and pieces of their past helped them to maintain their personal historical continuity. Diaries, photographs, music tapes, and stuffed animals were brought to the new environment to connect with one's past

experiences, present conditions, and future expectations. One student (DF6) brought a diary written recently because it described her feelings and expectations during the whole process of preparing for examinations and applying for schools. She constantly reviewed this diary and reflected on herself. While she confronted problems she also read this diary to see how she found solutions in similar situations in the past.

E. OBJECTS TO BRIDGE THE OLD AND THE NEW PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

In addition to maintaining personal historical continuity, students tried to maintain their person-physical environment relationship. So a photograph was not just brought to the new environment, students replicated its location in their rooms. A newly bought tea set reinforced a student's continuity with his past by its physical similarity to the old one.

"Extreme variations in the physical environment experienced by a person may indeed threaten the self-identity of the individual. [To avoid threatening people's sense of self, they can] incorporate into the new setting those features of the old setting which reflect and support the place-identity characteristics of those residents" (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983, pp. 66-67). For interviewees, the old environment was often incorporated into the new environment through the presence of old objects. These objects made the environmental change less drastic so that students could maintain their personal continuity, act in the new environment more easily and comfortably, and concentrate their attention on a few key issues.

The rice and water that I brought to the United States from my country is an example from my own experience. Being in a foreign country, students encounter not only a new social and cultural environment but also a different natural environment. For Chinese, the major issue of acclimating oneself to a new natural environment is to prevent one's organic system from disagreeing with the food and water in a new environment.

Blending the rice and water brought from the old environment with the rice and water which belonged to the new setting in my first meal was a ritual with multiple meanings for me. It gave me the feeling of being cared for and confidence about the new environment. Then, the home country was not only in my imagination or dreams but also inside my body. Two interviewees brought a small parcel of earth to the United States. The earth symbolized their motherland. It connected the old with the new physical environment.

A tea set was another object for environmental continuity mentioned by a student (PM1):

I had one tea set in Tainan [a city in Taiwan], I bought another set when I studied in Taipei. I did not bring one here because it was too big. I was also afraid of breaking it. I thought that I could buy a new one in the United States. After I arrived here, I spent a lot of time looking for a tea set similar to the sets that I used in Taiwan.

Drinking tea was important for this student. It was a comfort and an environmental experience as well. When he encountered a new environment he found a tea set similar to his old one to bring out his past environmental experience. The tea set was not just transitional. It also represented continuity. Every time he encountered a new environment he bought a similar tea set.

The rice and water and a tea set function as a bridge between the old environment and the new environment. A pillow was also mentioned by an interviewee. It provided the student with physical continuity. One student mentioned that she intended to bring all her "old stuff" in order not to be topsy-tervy when encountering a "totally" new environment. When she wore her old clothes, put her old stationery, an old cassette player and an old cup on the desk, as well as displayed some old photographs on the wall, she felt that everything was going to be on track.

Students not only brought the "old stuff" but made effort to replicate its location in the new immediate environment. Two students (PM1, PM3) brought their girl friends' photographs and kept them in the same places as they did in Taiwan.

I put this one in front of my desk so that I can see it very easily. Actually I don't look at it on purpose, but I often see it abruptly. The other one is on my night table. . . . I kept them in the same places in Taiwan as I do now. (PM3)

Those photographs let them feel that their girl friends were still close to them. In addition, even their habitual body-environment relations could be maintained.

F. OBJECTS AS THE PRESENCE OF THE ABSENT OTHERS

In environment relocation, some may encounter a new, possibly challenging, environment. For students who leave home and go to another country for study, the environmental transition is critical. Not only do they encounter a different social, cultural, climatic, and architectural environment, but also face the problem of the "distancing of the existing social support and nurture produced by families and close friends" (Fisher, Murray & Frazer, 1985, p. 181).

People used objects to deal with the separation from their significant others. Some students mentioned that they "grieved" while looking at photographs of their parents. Their feelings were similar to the grief for a lost home for the West Enders. Fried (1972) had a good description:

Their grief for a lost home seems to be one form of maintaining continuity on the basis of memories. While it prevents a more wholehearted adjustment to their altered lives, such adjustments would imply forsaking the remaining fragments of a continuity which was central to their conceptions of themselves and of the world. (p. 240)

1. TRANSITIONAL OBJECTS

For many interviewees, this was the first time that they were separated from their families and at such a long distance. We can imagine the impact on both interviewees and their families. For their parents, the best thing they could do was to help interviewees settle down in the new setting. Three parents did for this reason. They took care of luggage, helped their children transfer airplanes, went shopping, and arranged the room to make

sure that everything was settled in this new setting. since they could not be around to take care of their child, to experience their child's living space and the larger environment in person gave them a concrete idea when imagining the interviewee's life in the United States. This could alleviate their worry. The follow excerpt provides one example.

My parents accompanied me to the United States. They stayed here for ten days. They spent three days travelling in Canada and the other seven days shopping for me and helping me to settle down. This is the reason why they insisted on coming here with me. They wanted to see me settle down in the dormitory in person. After they went back to Taiwan they could imagine my life more concretely. (DF6)

In the last section, I mentioned that students brought objects to maintain their life context. In above cases, it was people who helped them in the transitional process. However, their parents could stay for a very short period of time. Longer separation was inevitable. Transitional objects were used to deal with the separation.

According to Winnicott (1971), a transitional object is the first not-me possession. It is out there but also created by the child. It links inner and outer, illusion and reality. It evokes a feeling of reunion with the caring mother. The hallmark of the transitional objects is its soothing function. It loses meaning when the transitional phenomenon is diffused into the cultural world. Most research following his theory was done on children. Whether adults use transitional objects to deal with separation from their significant others in a similar way is not clear. In the following, I will illustrate a woman's experience of using a transitional object.

A woman (DF3) came to the United States the same year with her brother. Her brother arrived in California in July. She came to New York in the end of August because she had already found a place to live in a dormitory. Her parents accompanied her to the United States.

They came here with me not for sightseeing. Rather it's because 1). They knew it was not safe in New York, they would like to see me settle down. 2). They could meet with my brother in California. 3). I am a careless person. They were worried about me flying alone.

So her whole family spent five days together in the Southern California.

This [stuffed whale] is my favorite. I play with it everyday before I go to bed. I like it. It is so cute. We [her family] went to Sea World and saw the whale and dolphin shows. We saw stuffed animals in shops. I liked stuffed whales. My brother liked stuffed dolphins. My mother noticed that we were watching, so she bought one for each of us. I like it very much. I think about the experience of sharing with my family at Sea World. (Would there be any difference without it?) I never thought about it. It is impossible [without it]. Going abroad is an important thing for me, my brother, and my parents. That's the time we shared with each other. Next time when we meet again might be one year later. We had to buy it at that situation. It is so cute. Later I found out that every time I see the stuffed whale I recollect the experience when we were at Sea World.

The above excerpt was taken from the interview conducted about one and a half months after her arrival in New York. In order to know the significance of this stuffed whale, we need to know her relationship with her family and her situation at that time. Because she came to New York immediately before classes began, she missed almost all the orientation activities (e.g., shopping, opening a bank account, sightseeing) arranged by the Chinese Student Association. She did not have much chance to know other Chinese students. Most of her friends were in Taiwan or in other states in the United States. She missed her family, of course. "I am hesitant to call my parents. I would feel very sorrowful if I call them because they were nearly crying talking to me. It's painful. So I write to them. But I am nearly crying when I receive their letters too."

So in the first month in New York, she was not used to the reality of being in a strange environment. "I often dream that I still sleep in my own room [in Taiwan]." She needed something to soothe her sad feelings resulting from the abrupt separation from her family. When she played with the stuffed whale, she was communicating with her family in her own imaginary world. Many other interviewees used photographs to establish the presence of their absent significant others and to soothe their feelings. But for her, photographs were unbearable.

We took pictures in California, but they [her parents] took all the films back to Taiwan. (Do you ask them to send you photographs?) I don't want to see the pictures. I will be very sad. I cried even only reading their letters, I don't want to push myself into such a miserable situation. (But you play with the stuffed whale.) That is different. It is not a real person. . . . I don't want to see those pictures because they will let me think about the Sea World. Although we were travelling,

we knew that we were going to be separated from each other. It's travelling, but the feeling was bitter. Really bitter. I will think about that scene. (How photographs are different from the stuffed whale?) When I look at the stuffed whale, there's a buffer between this whale and the real people. But you feel that photographs and letter are naked. [When I look at the stuffed whale,] I will think about a cute whale first, and then recollect that I was very happy at Sea World. That's different. When you see a picture, you see four people in it--my parents, my brother, and me. You will think about your sad experiences. (Do you have other pictures of your parents?) Yes, but I don't look at them, or I will cry.

It is interesting that both the stuffed whale and photographs reminded her of the experiences at Sea World, but one is happy, the other sad. It seems to me that people have the ability to single out different meanings in a complex experience. Their intentions interacting with the quality of the object result in the object experience. Her experience was echoed by another woman's experience. This woman (DF24) also missed home very much. "I cried at my first night in New York. My eyes were red. I cried for a week because my family were not around." One time she dreamed that her mother called her from Taiwan. Her mother told her that her house caught fire and her father was in a hospital. She was awakened and worried. She kept studying when she missed home. She mentioned two important objects which were not present. One was a small leather jacket, the other was a scarf.

I thought I put them in my luggage. I was so angry and remorseful when I found out that they were not here. How could I forget to bring such *important* things? . . . The leather jacket belonged to my father. The scarf belonged to my mother. I borrowed them from my parents, and then I wore them in the winter all the time. It's already a couple of years. In the winter, no matter where I went, you saw the leather jacket and the scarf. I am very used to them. But I don't have them this winter. My parents said they already sent the jacket and scarf to me. (How would you feel with the jacket and scarf?) I would feel very warm with them on my body. I feel they are accompanying me, they are supporter.

She brought photographs with her. But her feelings about photographs were different from those of the jacket and scarf.

I brought all the photographs from childhood till now but I don't look at them because I am afraid that I would feel very sad. So I keep them in a luggage in my closet. (Why?) You miss home. It will let me feel bad. I should contact more happy things. . . . I know that I am lazy. I know I will not take out my luggage from closet and then take photographs from the luggage. So I keep them in a place where I will never touch them. Am I smart? . . . [Looking at photographs] You

will be sad because you think about people in Taiwan. You think about things in Taiwan. You think about why you are here, why you came here.

Her feelings about photographs were totally different from hers in Taiwan. In Taiwan, photographs let her forget her present situation and reminded her of her past happy time.

I keep all my photographs. When I am in a bad mood, I look at my photographs. I feel happy. I throw myself to another space, so I feel happy. I think about what I looked like and when I took that photographs. Then I forget [my present situation]. Maybe you are looking for a substitute to let you forget your present situation. . . . Let the photograph lead me. Primary school. Middle high school. Anyway I think about my appearance at that time. Your mood is different every time you look at photographs. You will discover your own funny appearance you did not know before.

It is interesting that the same photographs could make her happy or sad in different situations. This shows that a person's past is not just an objective fact. How one perceives one's past based on the present condition is more relevant. In her ordinary routine life photographs brought her from the present to her past happy moments. However, under a tremendous pressure from her course-work and the separation from her family the "happy moments" only made her present more unbearable. She tried to avoid these kinds of sad feelings. Instead, she received her comfort from other sources, such as telephone calls, letters, the jacket and a cat, and concentrated on studying.

There is another similar case. The jacket and scarf were supporters for this person, but photographs made her sad. How were they different?

. . . No. Photographs are not supporters. They make me feel sad. They are different. (In what way?) Photographs tell stories. Every photograph has a story. (Don't the jacket and scarf have a story?) No story. My parents gave them to me. They had accompanied me for so many years. How come there is a story. (They may have a story of your growing up.) No. It's different. Something happened, that's why you took that picture. So you will recall that period of time. It's different. (You may also recall people and your past when you wear the jacket or scarf.) No. I don't. I am used to them. I don't think. But photographs are related to a lot of events, where you have been.

She said that she did not want to look at any photographs, but she did have a photograph on her desk. That photograph was sent by her friend.

It shows two dolls looking at an apple. I kept it on my desk. She [her friend] is so cute. I wish she could come to New York. My teacher sent a photograph to me also. But I do not keep it on my desk. I don't want to look at the photograph of the past. (But you keep this one on your desk.) There are no people. You would not have sad feelings triggered by the scenery.

By comparing these two women's experiences, we see some commonality. They may not be true for all people, but they can be hypotheses for further clarification. Both women were in a situation of being separated from their family and friends. Both used certain objects to soothe their feelings and some other objects would make them feel bad. The stuffed whale was given by one woman's mother when the whole family shared time together. The jacket and scarf were given by the other woman's parents. All three objects involved body contact. They were soft and warm. The stuffed whale was "cute." The photograph of two dolls with an apple was "cute" too. There were no people in this photograph. But a photograph with people in it was "naked." We may conclude that there was a distance between a stuffed animal (or clothes) and real people. The cuteness and/or softness of a stuffed animal, clothes, or photograph of dolls caught a person's attraction and created a buffer to prevent the person from forming a direct connection with her family or friends. But photographs of one's parents transmitted very direct and vivid information. If one looked at photographs, one would be trapped in the sad situation of the contrast between one's past happy experience and being alone in the present.

About eight months after the first woman's arrival in New York, I did the third interview. Until the interview was over, she did not mention the stuffed whale at all. So I raised a question about it. She said that she forgot its existence. The stuffed whale was in a drawer and she had not played with it for a while. So even though I asked her about her favorite objects many times, she still did not mention it. At the second interview she was eager to show the stuffed whale to me when she mentioned it. And she played with it during the interview. By the third interview, when asked about how this happened, she thought for a while and could not give me an answer. Later, she said that the stuffed whale might be replaced by the doll with a smiling face.

We had four dolls with four kinds of facial expressions--happy, angry, sad, and joyful--in Taiwan. My mother sent it [the one with a smiling face] to me because there was some space left in the box [of clothes and books] that she sent to me. I like it a lot.

She kept the doll on her desk and enjoyed watching it. But she was not sure whether there was a real connection between the appearance of the doll and the loss of the meaning of the stuffed whale or not. But the fading of the transitional object experience could be a result of her acceptance and being accustomed to the separation from her parents. In the third interview, she said:

Now I call my parents every two weeks. I am used to it. When I first arrived I was not used to being so far away from my parents. Now I don't have such a strong feeling. I feel that I am going back soon.

Now we can compare her experiences with what Winnicott described for a child. There are some similarities. Firstly, the major function of this object was to sooth her feeling about the separation from her parents. Secondly, this object was given by her mother, although, she controlled it. Thirdly, this object was soft and warm. She could touch it, hug it, and play with it. Finally, it "lost" its meaning when the "transitional phenomenon" disappeared.

2. OBJECTS OF CONNECTIONS TO THE ABSENT OTHERS

Many interviewees used objects to established the presence of the absent others. An interviewee (DF14) not only missed her family but also had a deeper appreciation for them. She asked her family to take and send a family photo to her. She kept it in a place where she could see it easily every day.

When I first came here I missed home very much. I asked my family to take a family photo and send it to me. I keep it in an outstanding place [on the top of the TV set]. It encourages me. My family has done a lot for me. I should be responsible for them. . . . Not until I came here did I realize that they are really very nice to me. Sometimes I am depressed. I tell myself that I should be concerned about their feelings. What did I tell them before I came here? This photograph is a reminder. I feel thankful to my family. I wish that I could finish my study and go back to make money as soon as possible.

A man (DM25) left his wife and two children to go to the United States to study. This separation affected all of his experiences. Most of his significant objects were connected to his family.

[The influence of the separation from my family on my emotions] is so enormous that I can't approach it from any angle. The simplest way to describe it is that I am totally unaccustomed to it. The meaning of a person's existence is giving and taking--sharing with your intimate others. It's lost after I came here. The order of my life is totally disturbed. My spirit is lost.

He kept a family photo on the wall in front of his desk because "it is the place closest to his desk. I spent most time here."

My feeling about the family photo is very abstract. I can't say that I feel close to them because of this photo. It's impossible. . . . I feel that it should be there. Since I can't bring them here, I feel that it should be there. . . . Its meaning is too enormous. It almost means everything. I don't need to find any reasons because any reasons are not enough to explain its existence. (When do you look at it?) You should ask me that when I don't look at it. I don't stare at it, of course. I use my heart to feel it. I am watching it all the time, maybe except my sleeping time. [Through this photo] I think about what they are doing now. I want to be beside them--either they come here or I go back. I feel that I am so cruel to leave them behind when I am depressed. . . . When I am tired, looking at the photo is kind of rest. It gives my eyes a fixed point. It's encouraging. I should study hard and achieve something and then go back. The negative side is that it sometimes makes me feel very sad. Actually I don't need to suffer here. The feelings depend on my current mood. . . . On the one hand, its meaning is so big that I can't explain it point by point. On the other hand, it is nothing. It is already part of myself. My memory, care, and concern are not separable from it. The photo itself does not have. . .

He also put all his children's letters and drawings on his wall. Through these letters he could participate in the process of their growing up. He kept all his tickets to the concerts and playbills. He went back home in the winter holiday. He brought a used ticket to a show, two maps of New York, and a book about Phantom of the Opera for his wife. By these objects he could share his experiences with his wife. In addition, I guess that this was a way to expiate his guilt for not taking his family with him to the United States.

Another man (DM39) came to the United States with his wife. He felt alienated with American society.

I disregard the environmental change. I would not be involved in anything which is not my own business. . . . I am not a member of this society. I am only a

passenger. Nobody feels your existence. Two years later, nobody will notice your disappearance.

Because of his detachment with society, spending time with his wife at home became much more important to him. One day his wife went back to Taiwan.

I didn't answer a small portion of the test. I was so angry at myself that I couldn't calm down and study. By chance, my wife went back to Taiwan that day. I felt very bored. I looked at photographs. I couldn't call my wife because she was still on the airplane. I called my friends. Nobody was at home. I looked at photographs again. I then made a lot of paper airplanes. I did many boring things. . . . I couldn't concentrate myself on studying. So I forced myself to sleep. I couldn't fall asleep either. I went out and walked around. It's boring too. I dare not go to the dark places. I passed by a bar and a go-go club, I dare not go in. In this strange environment, I don't know where to entertain myself.

He kept his paper airplanes on his bookshelf. He said that "I want to show them to my wife. Look! This is what I was doing [when you were not here]." These paper airplanes symbolize a person's alienation in a strange environment. Why did he make *airplanes*? He explained that he liked the streamline shape of the airplane which was more beautiful than a ship. However, we can postulate that he might make paper airplanes because his wife was on the airplane at that time. He shot these paper airplanes and brought them back again. These activities brought his wife closer to him. He kept all these airplanes because they were signs of his love and appreciation of his wife. They showed how bored he was when his wife was not with him.

G. OBJECTS TO MAINTAIN CULTURAL CONTINUITY

Being in a foreign culture and among people from different countries, students may treasure the objects which belong to Chinese culture much more.

One man (PM1) described the meaning of Chinese books as a comforter: "I read these [Chinese] books not in order to get new knowledge but to soothe and comfort my feelings. Business books make me feel fatigued. They are not intimate to me. So I need to read Chinese books." Another interviewee (DF19) regretted not bringing her favorite

Chinese novels. Although she enjoyed reading new (English) books, they did not touch her heart as Chinese books did.

An interviewee (DF32) said that she had to read Chinese newspapers every day. When she first came, she thought that it was regressive to read Chinese newspapers in the United States. People suggested reading an article in the New York Times every day. But she was under a great pressure from schoolwork. She would feel satisfied if she could handle her course-work well. She went back to Taiwan during the first summer vacation. It was the first time that she saw a big protest in person. After she was back in the United States she described this incident to her friends. She was surprised that her friends knew as much detail as she did. Then she realized that she should read Chinese newspapers to keep up with what happened in Taiwan. She described reading newspapers as spiritual enrichment. She felt that she was disconnected with Taiwan for a year and she felt bad. Now Chinese newspapers became her cherished objects. In Taiwan, newspapers did not mean so much to her. Information and culture was there in the environment. You did not need to make an effort to reach it. You could watch television and people talked about major events in daily conversations. The situation was different in the United States. Chinese newspapers were the major sources of news about Taiwan. Another interviewee (PM14) also mentioned reading Chinese newspapers with great enjoyment.

Many other interviewees mentioned that they did not watch TV soap operas and listen to Chinese popular music in Taiwan. However, Chinese music tapes played an important role in their daily lives and they watched the weekend Chinese programs every week in the United States.

The following reasons may explain these experiences of enjoyment. The first reason has to do with familiarity. Chinese books and music represented a part of culture in which they were brought up. They could easily touch and have resonance with their feelings and thoughts. The second reason has to do with availability. In Taiwan, Chinese

books, newspapers, music tapes are everywhere. People could not even avoid encounters with them. However, being in a strange environment, things related to the home culture became scarce and precious. Thirdly, by reading Chinese books and newspapers they could acquire self competence and get away from the frustration of interacting with a strange language and culture.

Although Chinese books or music were significant for some students in maintaining their cultural continuity, others tried to avoid encountering some objects just because of the significance of these objects. The meaning of these objects was too overwhelming for students to bear. One woman (PF10) brought her favorite music cassettes but she tried not to use them. The contrast between the culture represented in the Chinese music and the reality of being lonely and detached only made her sad and uncomfortable. She would rather concentrate on more constructive things.

H. OBJECTS WHOSE MEANINGS HAVE FADED TEMPORARILY

While encountering a new environment, students cherished some new objects and used other objects to maintain personal continuity. As life went on, different new object meanings may emerge and some other object meanings may fade into the background. It does not mean that those meanings are diminished forever, rather they may come out again depending on their larger life experiences.

One student (PM4) cherished a new set of flutes for a short period of time. Later he preferred to focus his energy on other things.

I played flute every day in Taiwan. After I came here I found that the flutes in New York are better and cheaper, so I bought a whole set of flutes. When I just bought these flutes, I played for fifteen minutes everyday after coming back from school. Later I was not so excited. There were so many novel and interesting things outside. I felt that it was wasting time to sit down and play the flute. But I would feel very uncomfortable if I could not play it at all. I should be able to decide to play or not to play by myself.

Another interviewee (PM4) had a similar experience. He loved classical music. He brought some special cassettes. When he first arrived, he listened to the music very often. Later he tended to listen to the radio to know more about American music. The meaning of those music cassettes that he brought here faded into the background in his life.

Other students told me during the third or fourth interview that they became *themselves* again. For them, moving forward in the new environment was moving *backward*. In the beginning of their stay in the new environment, they were nervous and busy adapting to this new setting. They had to discard some of their interests and did not feel comfortable interacting with their favorite objects. As they learned more strategies of survival and performance, they were more comfortable arranging their lives as they wished. A student said that she lived in a tortuous and twisted space, and could not stretch her body when she just arrived. As time went by, she was re-creating a new order of life. She regain her habit of buying books that she liked. Tea sets regain its significance in this new setting. Another student was brought up with fish and plants. They were his favorite things. However, he did not have them because he was still learning to adapt, he lived in a living room, and he perceived everything as transient. Once he was used to this new environment, raising fish and plants naturally reemerged in his life.

CHAPTER VIII

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to explore and examine the integrating role of objects for people in everyday life. An empirical study was conducted to obtain qualitative information and to derive descriptive structural invariants of the experience of objects and changes of object meanings particularly in the process of adapting to a new environment. Thirty-five Chinese students were interviewed before they left Taiwan, as well as a few weeks and one semester after their arrival in New York. Based on these qualitative data, a meaning structure and the temporal/spatial dimensions of object meanings were proposed. The analysis was then focused on students' experiences in environmental transitions. The process of their relating and adapting to the new environment as well as issues about social relations and the physical environment were discussed. Finally, changes of object meanings for these students were described as in the context of environmental transitions.

In the following, I will discuss a model for describing the process of object meanings and then situate this research in the transactional paradigm and the existing literature on person-object relationships.

A. A MODEL FOR DESCRIBING THE PROCESS OF OBJECT MEANINGS

We are born into a meaningful world. Each everyday object in this world has its meanings which are socially and culturally defined. However, an individual can endow an object with personal meanings in this social/cultural context. This dissertation does not focus on the social/cultural history of objects (e.g., Appadurai, 1986; Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Sahlins, 1976). Rather, I mainly deal with the personal psychological

meanings of everyday objects. There are different relationships between a person and an object. If we put it on a continuum, indifference represents one pole and embodiment another pole. Of course, a person could simply accept the meaning of an object by its socially and culturally defined function. A chair is for sitting and a cup for drinking. No special knowledge or skill is required to use these objects. There is no personal “touch” placed on these objects. They are only a tool or a means to an end. At this pole, a person is concerned about his/her project without paying attention to an object. For instance, for the author, the typewriter at school is only a functional object. I do not attach any personal meaning to it except its function. The pen and a piece of paper on my desk can be replaced by others without making any difference to me so long as they function. The object’s location in a spatial context is not particularly important if I can reach it easily when I need it for my project. It is no longer significant if I discard my project. However, a purely functional object, such as a desk, could acquire psychological significance if it is given by my friend, if it belongs to a particular style, if it is personally made, or if it accompanies me while I am writing my dissertation.

On the other pole of this continuum of person-object relationships is that in which the person and object become one. It is difficult to draw a clear boundary between the person and the object. I will use an excerpt of a conversation to illustrate an interviewee’s object experiences. She had a stuffed cat called MM since her childhood. One day I asked her: “Why don’t you like Macintosh¹⁹?” She answered: “MM doesn’t like the mouse.” This was a spontaneous response. It was not her deliberate analogy. Rather, it was difficult to identify who was doing the talking: she or her stuffed cat. The unification of the person and the object is similar to that identified in an athlete’s experience called flow. “One rock climber remarks, ‘You are so involved in what you are doing you aren’t thinking

19 An Apple computer.

of yourself as separate from the immediate activity. . . . You don't see yourself as separate from what you are doing'" (quoted in Dreyfus, 1991, p. 66).

We are born into a socially and culturally meaningful world. Beyond this, we can endow an object with personal meaning in this context. There are different ways that people attach personal meanings to objects, from acquisition, association, perceiving, knowing, and making to self-presentation.

1. Acquisition. The psychological significance of an object could originate mainly from acquisition of it. A tee shirt or a mug given by a person's beloved becomes special because it signifies the love and concern of the gift giver. People often receive a gift on a special occasion, such as a birthday, Christmas, or graduation. Therefore, the meaning of the gift may be enriched. It may signify a rite of passage and an entrance into a new world. So a bicycle received as a graduation present is not just a functional object. It signifies that the child can explore the outside world without supervision by his/her parents.

An object handed down by a member of the older generation is also filled with meaning. It may remind a person of his/her ancestors and parents and symbolize family continuity.

The psychic energy devoted to the process of object acquisition could also make an object special. For instance, the books that I found in a used-bookstore in Boston where I spent a whole afternoon browsing for books from wall to wall have a special meaning for me. They are more precious than the new books which I bought in the bookstore on campus. Rewards or trophies are other objects whose significance is derived from the process of acquisition. For instance, a gold medal from a sports competition is a good tangible manifestation of a person's painstaking endeavor.

2. Association. An object could acquire personal meaning for a person because of its association with people, places, events, or ideas. An object could become unique because of its association with a personally memorable experience. For example, a woman was listening to music on a rainy day. She enjoyed it very much. She then attached the sound of rain to this music tape as if the sound was inherent in the tape. Therefore, the tape became unique and irreplaceable for her.

People often associate an object with an experience in which the object is a part. Although the object may be mass-produced, it then has new personal meaning, and it is distinctive from other objects. A person may associate a letter with her friends, a souvenir with a place, an invitation card with her wedding ceremony, and a motto with an idea. The association is not just cognitive--it may involve affect, emotions, or sensual experiences. The association is not passive or static. For instance, a family photo not only triggers a person's recollection of past experiences but also fosters in her an appreciation of her family, or provides encouragement to her to work for her future. One person was surprised by the similarity between the food cooked by herself and her mother. The food brought a feeling of intimacy to her. And she had a deeper understanding of their relationship through her interaction with the food.

Association is attached to an object through a temporal process. The temporal quality of an object could lead to a qualitative change of object meanings. A mug was purchased for functional reasons but becomes significant because it has survived for ten years. I possess other mugs having better quality and design. However, that mug is irreplaceable. This has something to do with habituation as well. For example, I cherish my pillow and blanket because I am so accustomed to them. An object could also take on magic power because a person performed well when s/he used it. Then s/he attributed a good performance to the object and it became a symbol of luck. An association with an object is not fixed. People may replace or accumulate new experiences in relation to this

object. A student brought his favorite music compact discs to the United States. During the first semester, these discs were comforts for him in his difficult situation. However, he avoided listening to those compact discs during the second semester because he had associated his new, painful experiences during the first semester with these objects, and those memories were undesirable for his present project.

The distance (temporal or spatial) from people or places may also enhance object meanings. Objects may establish the presence of absent others or places, provide social and environmental continuity, or foster a reinterpretation of the relationship with absent people and places.

The spatial context of the object is important too. A person may keep a family photo or a motto in an “focal” place which is in the field of her/his daily activities. No matter what her/his concerns are on a particular day, s/he is forced to face the object and associations with the object which are triggered and reinforced. However, when this object has been out there for a certain period of time, the person may become accustomed to it and the object then merges with the background environment. On the other hand, a person may keep an object in a suitcase in a closet if s/he wants to concentrate her/his attention on a particular project without being distracted by the associations which could be stimulated by the object.

The material nature of an object makes a difference in object experiences. Different objects may trigger the same associations but each may play a different role in a particular situation. As described earlier, both Chinese music and Chinese traditional poems refer to a kind of traditional Chinese way of life. However, they are concretized in a different material form. The music lingers in a person’s ears but a person can “control” a book by turning to different pages according to her/his current feelings.

3. Perceiving. Recognition occurs when a person interacts with an object and interprets it only as something s/he already knows. Perception, on the other hand, is an experience of learning through realizing the intrinsic qualities of an object (Dewey, 1934). Therefore, perception always occurs within a personal perspective, and the object has a meaning for this particular person. A stone may be just a natural object in the world. However, a person may endow it with personal meaning through perception. For instance, a woman cherished a stone not only because of association but also perception and imagination. One day one of her friends was strolling in a valley in the moonlight, picked up a stone, and sent it to her. This stone let the woman think about her friend and her friend's experience in the valley. In addition to association, she perceived the stone from her own perspective. She liked its smoothness and simplicity. It was not a glittering ornament. She also liked the hardness of the stone which represented the quality of persistence and unyieldingness.

Two points should be stressed here. 1) There are different ways of perceiving, such as from a scientific or an aesthetic perspective. 2) Perceiving is both a process of a cultivation of a person's self and a process of the revealing of the qualities of the object. We can use a musical instrument for illustration. A person may perceive a violin as a work of art based on its material and design. Another person may acquire knowledge about it and appropriate it by playing it. Through playing the musical instrument, not only does the person cultivate her/himself, but the nature of the instrument is also realized. The instrument could become a part of the "body" of the person and they could be "in tune" with one another. A person's attachment to an object varies. A violin may simply be only a recreational tool like her/his other sports equipment. An engineering major may cherish a violin as a part of her/himself. It may symbolize an important quality of the self in addition to her/his capability of doing an experiment.

4. Making. In the section on perception, I argue that people experience learning through realizing the intrinsic qualities of an object. In addition to perception, people also try to know an object by acquiring knowledge of it and its context. A person who cherishes a stuffed dolphin may study the life of the dolphin. A person who likes Van Gogh's painting may study his biography and the history of the Impressionism. Moreover, people make objects themselves. Therefore, these objects are not just objects for everyday use but also represent their own work. There is a continuum between these objects and the objects acquired through personal endeavor. But self-made objects are products in addition to signs of personal energy. In the process of making, the person's knowledge, labor, and imagination are objectified in the object, and the material nature of the object is realized. There are different levels of participation in the object in the process of making, ranging from assembling furniture, rearranging furniture at home, to designing and making furniture (using furniture as an example). The significance of the object depends upon how valuable or unique the person's skill or creativity is from a personal or social perspective and how well this object is made. The temporal dimension of object meanings is important too. A film major kept his films shot in his first semester. These films were not proofs of his endeavor in the present. Rather, their significance resided in his successful future.

5. Self-presentation. In previous sections, I explain how people endow an object with personal meanings by acquisition, association, perceiving, knowing, and making. Since we live in a social world, a person's identity construction is strengthened and enlarged by "social exchanges relating to the object, making it a possible topic or instrument to communication and exchange" (Boesch, 1991, p. 329). Some objects with socially shared qualities are likely to communicate the owner's self to others, such as family photos, Christmas cards, or books. Some need more explanation in order to reveal the owner's self, such as a pen given as a birthday present or a key ring that a person used in college.

People may want to reveal different parts of the self to different people in different situations. Therefore, the spatial position or display of objects depends upon the qualities of objects (to what extent this object transmits the person's self) and the social/physical environment (who is allowed to visit this environment and the relationship between this person and visitors). However, there are some objects whose major function involves the presentation of self to others. Their significance does not reside in the reflection of self by the intrinsic quality of the object itself. In another sense, we can say that people may use objects to present their desirable or false selves. Using conspicuous decor to compensate for one's failure of social mobility (Baudrillard, 1981) is an example. Other people use fake walkie-talkies or the cover of an encyclopedia to present an aspect of themselves that they don't have or that they desire to have. Gift-giving is another way of presenting the self (taste, values, or love) and endowing an object with personal meaning. A gift is meaningful to both the gift receiver and giver. A key ring or a mug in a store does not have personal significance. Once I have bought it as a gift, it has a special meaning to me. It carries my aesthetic values, appreciation of a social relationship, and my blessing with it.

B. A TRANSACTIONAL APPROACH ON PERSON-OBJECT RELATIONSHIPS

The transactional paradigm (Dewey & Bentley, 1949) has been advocated in psychology (Pronko & Herman, 1982) and in environmental psychology particularly (e.g., Altman, 1992; Altman & Rogoff, 1987; Altman, Werner, Oxley, & Haggard, 1987; Ittelson, 1973; Stokols, 1987; Stokols & Shumaker, 1981; Wapner, 1987; Wapner, Kaplan, & Cohen, 1976) within the past two decades. However, the discussion basically remains at the philosophical or theoretical level. To do empirical research from a transactional perspective is a difficult challenge. Altman and his colleagues (Altman, Werner, Oxley, & Haggard, 1987) stated that:

One can study only those aspects of environment and behavior phenomena that meet the requirements of the established interactional worldview and its associated methodologies and rules of evidence, neglecting those issues that cannot be studied within this framework. Or, one can explore less-well-understood philosophies, such as the transactional approach, and struggle as best one can to evolve strategies that will permit study of the phenomena we deem important. (p. 522)

Now I would like to review some major theories and empirical research on object meanings or environmental transitions in environmental psychology from the transactional perspective. Altman and his colleagues' studies (Hansen & Altman, 1976; Vinsel, Brown, Altman, & Foss, 1980) on personalization represent the interactional or correlational approach and a scientific work that uses scientific language that is detached from the life-world of the participants. These authors recorded the decorations of forty-one double occupancy rooms in a college dormitory in the second week of school and at the end of the autumn quarter. They found that decorations in the rooms of those students who subsequently dropped out of school showed less diversity and less commitment to the university setting. My interpretation of Altman *et al.*'s studies is that they consider objects reflecting attachment to students' hometown as a manifestation or reinforcement of their failure to adjust to the new setting. The problem with these studies is that they ignore the respondents' intentions and interpretations in the process of personalization. Their categories were based on the researchers' judgement on the kind of objects. This presupposed that there was a one-to-one relation between the kind and the meaning of objects. For instance, campus maps represented a student's commitment to the new setting and pictures of a student's hometown reflected loneliness and ties to home, regardless of whether these objects were displayed at the beginning or the end of a semester. This approach makes qualitative changes of object meanings impossible. It simplifies the complexity and changing nature of object meanings. The findings in the present study show clearly that objects reflecting attachment to a students' home country can be a place for withdrawal, a comforter, an anchor point in the search for new experiences, or a projection into their future depending upon the situation the student was in.

Hormuth (1990) acknowledges the problem of the simple correlational approach and tries to go beyond it by taking into account the ecological system of the self. He proposes that the self is a part of an ecological system, seen as a conjunction of other people, environments, and objects. Using a multi-method, multi-study approach, he takes relocation as a research paradigm to study the meaning of the physical environment in relation to self-concept change. His ecological model of relating the self-concept to the physical and social environment has contributed to the literature of environmental psychology. However, it seems to me that his empirical research does not transcend the traditional correlational approach. What he has done is simply introduce more variables into his analysis without really interpreting the phenomenon holistically. The wholeness of a person's experiences is lost in the statistical analysis. Variables are often interpreted without connection to the context. Statistical significance is identified but it is sometimes difficult to comprehend it conceptually. For instance, in one place, reading books is considered to be functional in changing oneself because it provides new experiences. In another place, books are considered most capable of providing continuity. Hormuth just lists the table of statistics without trying to explain differences in relation to contexts. He found that dissatisfied new residents tend to stay at home but they also spend more time in restaurants and bars as well. The author does not give a proper explanation. He is interested in the direction of attention of movers to a new environment: self versus outside environment. But I think this is not an either/or question. People not only explore a new environment but also constantly reflect on themselves at the same time.

Stokols and his colleagues (Stokols, 1978; Stokols, 1987; Stokols & Shumaker, 1982; Stokols, Shumaker & Martinez, 1983) criticize the adaptation model which focuses on people's attempts to "cope with" existing environmental condition and propose a contextual model which is based on the concepts of human-environment optimization, person-environment fit and comparison level. They emphasize the multi-dimensional and

cross-situational determinants of congruence, the comparative appraisal of previous, present, and anticipated residential situations, as well as a more planful and cyclical process of person-environment transaction. However, the person-environment fit model is mechanistic. They confine their analysis to the fit of persons and the environment and overlook the changing nature of a person's goals and the possibility of unpredictable outcomes. The relative importance of the goals or salient elements of life are dynamic. The change of one element may influence other elements. If one goal could not be fulfilled, the fulfillment of another goal would be more important in order to make sense of the life. The "fit" between a person and the environment is also not the ultimate goal of a person. Fit does not lead to the end of the process of person-environment transactions. In conclusion, Stokols and his colleagues leave out the possibility of the emergence of new goals as a result of transactions between the person and the new environment as well as the retrospective construction of one's past to fit the present situation to maintain continuous identity in a changing situation (Jones, 1980). Although the computation of the different fits between fixed goals and environmental opportunities with different weights is important, the dynamic process of making sense of the whole of life cannot be neglected.

Wapner's organismic-developmental approach (Wapner, Kaplan, & Cohen, 1973; Wapner, 1981, 1987) considers the person-in-environment as the unit of analysis. He emphasizes that people seek to make sense out of their surroundings and to define and locate themselves with respect to these surroundings. People continuously organize and endow their environments with significance, and assess their own places in the environment thus structured. However, he adopts a Wernerian theory of development. "If one system [person-in-environment] is more differentiated and hierarchically integrated than another, it is considered to be developmentally more advanced than the other. . . . If it is dedifferentiating and disintegrating, it is seen as regressing" (Wapner, 1987, p. 1444). I do not see that development necessarily implies differentiation. For instance, in the

person-object relation, development may imply appreciation of, attachment to, and identification with the object in which the distinction between the self and object are blurred. On the other hand, his empirical research is still not as rich and complex as his conceptualization. For example, in Wofsey, Rierdan, and Wapner's study (1979) on senior students who were leaving their college, they found that those with more articulated plans after graduation construed the base environment in which they were still located in a manner reflecting greater self-world distancing. They left the present environment psychologically before departing physically. It is their contribution that they take into account the intentionality of those senior students. However, their data collection and analysis do not reflect their holistic conceptualization of the person-in-environment system. How students make sense of their present situation in relation to their relations to the college in the past, the salience of the contribution of the college to their present and future, where they are going to execute their plans, and so on, need to be taken into account at the same time in the interpretation of the data.

Cultivation is the central concept of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's (1981) theory of object meanings. Cultivation involves both "to tend" and "to intend some aim." They criticize the structuralistic and semiotic theory of culture which reduce culture to a static symbol system. Rather, they try to rescue "a life to be lived in the flesh and blood" (p. 174). They see culture and nature on a continuum. Cultivation, for them, is the completion of nature. Therefore, when a person cultivates a habit of tending an object both the nature of that object and the nature of that person can be enhanced by the transaction. However, it seems to me that objects may also contribute to an alienation of the person to her/his world. Objects that trigger an undersirable memories or intrude into a person's present functioning are examples. Based on interviews of eighty-two families in the Chicago metropolitan area they develop a categorical system of object meaning and discuss the relationship between object relations and the development of the self. Although their

theory emphasizes the transaction between the person and the object, their data analysis seems to be separated from their rather transactional theory. After they describe the ten most frequently mentioned cherished objects and categories of object meanings, they discuss the age- and gender-related differences in the significance of objects based on the concept of action object and contemplation object. On the one hand, the definitions of action and contemplation objects are vague. For example, why is a radio an action object and a book a contemplation object? On the other hand, their distinction between action and contemplation objects using the criterion of object use through physical movement or reflection is rather reductionistic. It maintains the separation between mind and body, and neglects both the realization of the nature of the person and the object in the process of person-object transaction which they demonstrate in their theory.

This dissertation represents one attempt to utilize the transactional paradigm. It is transactional with respect to both the inquiry itself and the understanding of the subject matter. Dewey and Bentley (1949) noted that interactional inquiry has various objects named prior to the initiation of inquiry and the researcher is interested in the interaction of given objects. On the other hand, from the transactional perspective, existing descriptions of events are accepted only as tentative and preliminary and the research is a naming process. For this dissertation, I was interested in people's object experiences, particularly during the process of environmental transitions. However, no pre-defined variables were accepted for testing before the research. Also, I did not restrict my study only to those objects that elicit positive feelings and are currently valued.

Most existing literature has dealt only with a particular set of objects--a living room inventory (e.g., Amato, Costagliola, & Ragone, 1987; Bonnes, Giuliani, Amoni, & Bernard, 1987; Laumann & House, 1970), personalizations (e.g., Hansen & Altman, 1976), or transitional possessions (Myers, 1985). Oury (1987) was interested in both the objects that the respondents liked and feared. In addition to the limited number of objects

examined, some researchers only focused on the correlation between two sets of pre-defined variables. For instance, Sherman and Newman (1977-78) used a Life Satisfaction Index developed by others researchers. Although they found that there is a significant relationship between life satisfaction and cherished possessions, they did not explain how cherished possessions contribute to the positively adaptive process or vice versa.

Objects, in this dissertation, were not confined to those associated with positive feelings, on display, or currently valued. I included objects with both positive and “negative” meanings, objects with current significance, lost objects, objects people left behind in the old environment, and desirable objects. A meaning structure, as well as the temporal and the spatial aspects of object meanings, were identified from the data. Existing literature only enabled me to see the phenomenon from different perspectives. Categories drawn from existing literature were not imposed on the data. Rather, the understanding of the phenomenon involved a process of making sense between the parts and the whole of the phenomenon as well as between the data and existing literature. Therefore, this research was not confined to a system defined in advance of the inquiry. Rather, it was a procedure of developing the widening phases of knowledge and the broadening of the system (Dewey & Bentley, 1949).

According to Dewey and Bentley (1949), the interactional and transactional approaches also view subject matter differently. The interactional perspective views the world as a process involving simple forces operating between separate and unalterable particles. Space and time are treated as absolute and fixed. However, in research based on a transactional approach, no one constituent can be adequately specified apart from the specification of other constituents of the subject under study. Time is an inherent quality of the phenomenon.

Most literature on the meaning of personal objects consists mainly of snap-shot studies. Object meanings are described as static. Among those who dealt with changes in

object meanings, basically, retrospective or cross-sectional data were used. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) used cross-sectional data to compare object meanings among three generations. They dealt with differences among the generations in the aggregate, instead of examining changes in object meanings for a particular person as part of a developmental process. Myers (1985) and Oury (1987) studied the developmental process of object meanings based on retrospective data. Although some researchers are interested in environmental relocation, questionnaires or interviews were conducted only after people had moved (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Redondo, Payton, & Wapner, 1984; Sherman & Newman, 1977-78). Hansen and Altman (1976) conducted their research over time but they treated object meanings as fixed at different stages of a semester. However, due to the research design--a longitudinal in-depth interview and physical observation--employed in this dissertation and the interpretation of data from a hermeneutic perspective, I was able to understand the complexity and the changing nature of object meanings. A person's object experiences, social interaction, daily concerns, future plans, and physical environment were comprehended as constituents of her/his total experiences.

The human being is temporal and change is inherent in the nature of human phenomena. People always reinterpret their past, make sense of their present, and open themselves to possible futures. The significance of an object related to a person's past could be due to its contribution to enriching an understanding of the self and the present world, providing the maintenance of personal continuity, or helping a person to be released from the the weight and woes in the present. Its salience may also intrude into a person's present functioning. Object meanings are not confined to "the present." They are constantly changing and are undecided depending on possible futures. Three students cherished transcripts, diplomas, or films as a representation of achievement. However, their meanings are different in a temporal system. One student cherished her past transcripts because she had achieved her success regardless of past failure. The meaning of

those transcripts became transformed from her past to her present. The other student cherished his past, present, and future transcripts and diplomas because his past and present effort contributed to his expected successful future. The third student cherished his films from the retrospective angle of his future. They were not proofs of his achievement in the present. Rather their meanings were undecided depending on his future.

The material nature of objects is also an inseparable part of object experiences. Baudrillard (1981) considers object as signs and rightly places emphasis on "the system of objects." It is the relation between signs in the sign system which is important. He does not deny the existence of the concrete physical experiences of objects but these experiences do not play a role in his theory. Here we can compare different interpretations of the "redundancy" of objects by Baudrillard and McCracken. Baudrillard (1981) sees the overworking of signs of possession (such as a table covered with a table cloth which itself is protected by a plastic table cloth) as the expression of the cultural imperative of class. Comparatively, McCracken (1987) argues that redundancy is a way to create the feeling of homeyness. The abundance of pictures, hangings, and books, as well as the repetition of acts of encompassing (the ivy of the exterior wall, the exterior wall, the book wall, the memory wall, the furnishings, and the gathering of family members) create an embracing quality of the homey environment. Each of these two authors reveal an aspect of the truth of the phenomenon. The symbolic meanings of an object are, of course, very important. But the physical and concrete experiences of objects cannot be reduced to an arbitrary sign either. Winnicott (1971) indicates that a transitional object's not being the mother is as important as the fact that it stands for the mother. Searles (1960) also points out that an individual relates to the nonhuman environment both through its meaning for the individual and also through its physical reality (to the tree as being a tree).

The material nature of an object could be the "object" of an experience. For instance, a student paid attention to the design and texture of his baseball glove. He took it

apart and tried to imagine the maker's thinking and creativity. In the process of interacting with these objects both the nature and quality of the material as well as his ideas could be realized. An interviewee hugged, played with, and "tortured" her stuffed animal while answering my questions. The constant "cultivation" of a tea pot enriched its meanings as well as reinforced a person's feelings about and attachment to it. The material nature of an object also made a difference in its contribution to a person's coping with separation. As described in the experience of transitional objects, we found that transitional objects tended to be soft, warm, cute, and involved body contact. On the other hand, photographs of the absent other transmitted very direct and vivid information and evoked a sharp contrast between one's past happy moments and being alone in the present. A woman tried to maintain her relationship with her boyfriend and open the possibility of knowing other people at the same time. She wore her boyfriend's tee shirt and a necklace while she left her boyfriend's pictures behind. The reason was that the necklace and tee shirt did not convey a message to other people about her romantic relationship but her boyfriend's pictures were too obvious not to show that she had a boyfriend.

Since object meanings are derived from the transactions between the intrinsic qualities of objects and the person in a larger social/environmental context, a change of one part will change other parts of the totality. Meanings change as the person's life evolves. Objects can gain significance for individuals at points of change in their lives. Such changes could be situational (such as moving to a new place) or developmental (such as maturation), and they are often intertwined. Changes of object meanings can range from a replacement of one object with another object with a similar meaning to a change of relatedness in the person-object relationship. For instance, a cassette of popular music may be replaced by another one according to what is fashionable. The meaning of a photograph associated with a person's past may shift because s/he constantly reinterprets her/his past according to the present situation and future projections. Chinese books may become a

source of comfort rather than a source of knowledge for students in the United States. They may cherish English books having the same subject matter as their favorite Chinese books in Taiwan. Other students may establish a new relationship with objects because they have a love relationship or a new baby.

In conclusion, object meanings are realized in the transactions between a person and the object in a social, physical, and temporal context. Object meanings have different dimensions including instrumental, deepening experiences, manifestations of achievement, extensions of memory, enhancing social exchange, religious or spiritual, and extensions of the self. An object often has multiple meanings and its meanings may change according to situational or developmental changes in which the object may play an important role. Its meanings may emerge, expand, contract, and shift from one set of dimensions to other dimensions. Acquisition, association, perceiving, knowing, making, and self-presentation are different ways to endow an object with personal meanings and lead to changes of object meanings.

Although this dissertation focuses on person-object relationships, it may be applied to other research problems in environmental psychology, such as the meaning of home or place attachment. We can postulate that place attachment results from the transactions between a person and a place in a larger social and cultural context. A person may endow a place with personal meanings through acquiring, association, perceiving, knowing, making, or self-presentation as well. A place may be associated with positive or negative memories. The meaning of a place may not be constant. It may change over time according to the person's present situation, future projection, and her/his interpretation of the past. The present research could inform further inquiry about these areas in terms of both the research process and the interpretation of the subject matter.

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