

Chinglish

By  
LU CAO

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Jack Stenner, CHAIR  
Katerie Gladdys, MEMBER  
Celeste Roberge, MEMBER

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To Gongyu Wang,  
Who has always been supporting me.

To all participating Chinese students,  
Who inspired me and helped me to do this work.

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Abstract of Project in Lieu of Thesis Presented to  
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Chinglish

By

Lu Cao  
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This abstract is a brief description of my artwork *Chinglish* - an audio and video installation. “Chinglish” is used here to describe awkward living situations of Chinese students who study in United States. The work is exhibited in a slightly darkened room with white walls. In the center of this room, there are four monitors separately sitting on four white pedestals. The pedestals are aligned and put together, forming a “wall.” The “wall” blends in with the room because of the color, shape and surface, subtly separating the space and still appearing neutral. In each pedestal, there’s a computer, which cannot be seen by visitors. On top of each pedestal, there’s a speaker with the monitor. On the four monitors, four different videos are played and through the four speakers, four different voices are heard.

A piece of plexi-glass stands in the middle of the top surface of each pedestal, dividing the top of the pedestal into two sides. On one side is the monitor and on the other is a pair of headphones. The plexi-glass reminds people of meeting environments, including customs, embassies, or even prisons. The sound on each speaker is a pre-recorded and edited speaking voice of a Chinese student in the U.S. There are four different voices for four videos, which means there are four different students speaking

in the videos. Each voice is played through both the headphones and the speaker at the same time; the sound from the headphones is identical with the sound from the speaker. The speaking is mostly in Chinese. The content of the voices consists mainly of experiences of these Chinese students coming to the U.S, including their feelings about life in U.S. and thoughts about Americans. The voices are full of pauses and variations of tones, both of which correspond to different kinds of emotions.

Each video is composed of a black background with white subtitles. The subtitles of each video are English translations of the Chinese speaking voice. Complicated and varied voices are paired with simple subtitles.

Visitors may stand on two sides of these pedestals, according to their native languages. People who can understand Chinese, including Chinese students, can stand on the side with headphones, so they can concentrate on listening to one voice. Others who can understand English but not Chinese can stand on the side of monitors. Those who watch the subtitles will listen to four voices from four speakers at the same time. Although some will pay most of their attention to the screen reading the words, it is hard to ignore the voices in the air. People will be face-to-face and see each other if some of them stand on one side and others stand on the other. In this way, the work embodies the concept of fractured communications that typifies our globalized condition. *Chinglish* explores real experiences and internal feelings of a group of Chinese students in the U.S. Through the exploration, *Chinglish* tries to seek essential questions in the fractured communication between cultures and ideologies. Through the process of questioning, perhaps more equal and substantial conversations can foster a deeper mutual understanding between people from different cultures.

## CHAPTER 1 Ambition

### **The metaphor and introduction**

Chinglish means Chinese English, which normally indicates clumsy spoken or written English used by Chinese people. The term is used – by both English speakers and by Chinese people themselves – in order to criticize the way a Chinese person speaks or writes in English. In my opinion, this word is a perfect metaphor for the experience of Chinese students in America – while they are abroad, these students study and work in an awkward way, just as they speak and write English, and I am one of them.

Before we come to the United States, our general impression is that it's the freest land in the world. However, once we spend a few years here, we realize – mostly without exception – that it isn't strictly true. Upon arriving in America, we find we don't enjoy a feeling of freedom at all. Instead, we feel a sense of limitation and even repression. This sense of limitation agitates us. Part of the purpose of this statement – and of the installation it introduces – is to elaborate on those things that we feel limit us.

I've read widely on this subject – articles and books written by people who claim to be experts – but again and again I find that these people don't sound to me like experts at all. Very often they attribute the situation of a Chinese student to a general discussion of differences in language, environment, and culture. These “experts” claim that the intention of their writings is to help—to provide a set of solutions—but I believe that in fact they have a different audience in mind. This discourse – very often one-sided, perfunctory, full of judgment, lacking persuasion – is better suited to an audience who isn't in the middle of the struggle. Rather this work of the “experts” appeals to

those who are interested – based on my experience—in Chinese students working in America – people who wish to study abroad, perhaps, or people in China who have some interest in this group of students. Because the experience of studying abroad is a valued one, these writings draw the attention of a broader public – sometimes readers are curious about the exploits of this group of students – and so the readership of these “experts” ends up being quite different from those who they purport to try and help.

On Chinese expatriate student online bulletin boards and forums, and also at school gatherings and at parties, these students discuss their experiences, but to my mind their discussions remain on the surface. A student will discuss something that happened to her in the course of a day, for example, without getting into a deeper discussion of why it happened. This superficial way of representing events could lead a student to continually maneuver around the deeper issue.

As I began to think about these superficial means of expression and its ramifications, my interactions with this group of Chinese students – my own group – began to change. I began to talk with people in this group about their experiences, and I recorded these conversations. I wanted to get at the deeper thoughts and emotions and the actual experiences of this group. This installation, *Chinglish*, is the product of my ideas, informed by these discussions, and the voices of the people I talked with have become the voice of the piece. I intend to give the viewer access to the genuine thoughts and emotions of this group – to give them access to the true voices of members of this group.

## Important issues

### Disconnection

One of the most important issues of the group is the issue of disconnection. I live in an extremely small world—sometimes even a world of just myself. I disconnect myself and I feel disconnected from the outside world. How can this be true? Most people that I communicate with in my daily life are Americans. In most cases, in these communications, I become aware of some messages that are conveyed to me non-verbally. These American people with whom I speak have some shared inner notions, and the notions include their intimate connection with the topic, visceral experience or sentimental resonance. As they begin to talk with the shared notions, my communication with them changes. I find I can't understand them, or sometimes I can understand the messages – the story they tell – but I cannot feel it in the same way they can.

The communications I have with American people that are clearer for me – more productive – are those that are based on objective knowledge or verbal description, without the need of any shared notions. At times, when I speak with an American, sometimes the notions we have about things oppose one another or are even irrelevant to one other. This feels like a fractured form of communication. Although the person with whom I might be speaking isn't intending to do so, our particular kind of fractured communication feels dehumanizing to me – I feel instrumentalized, reduced to a machine that inputs, outputs, processes and transmits information. At the same time, I feel that my communication with Chinese people who actually live in China decreases—or even stops—because of the distance between us, or because of a dissimilarity of experiences. For a Chinese person who is so used to being closely attached to our

culture, it seems that the price we have to pay for pursuing independence from our original culture is a kind of homelessness, and it feels like a form of exile. The Chinese students detached from both American and Chinese culture cannot build connections to either culture – cannot join either culture—and therefore these students become a group of exiled and disconnected people.

### **Identification**

Another issue is identification. The “environment, language and culture” talked about by the “experts” in relation to this topic are directly related to a political and a cultural identification. We left Chinese society to pursue some level of independence from it. The pursuit brought with it two additional issues. The first is a kind of paradox. In the new society—American society—how are we going to pursue independence from America itself? Should we leave this society as well? Another further issue is a loss of independence. In American society, we may have independence from Chinese society, but we don’t have independence from American society. In other words, just as we detach ourselves from our old society, we attach ourselves to the new society. In his essay *Exile and Creativity* (1984), Vilem Flusser warned of the dangers of doing this, claiming that “the expelled must be creative if he does not want to go to the dogs.” (Flusser, 1984). He refers to habit (the habit of getting used to thinking from within another society) as a kind of “mud bath” and claims “the discovery that we are not trees challenges the expelled to struggle constantly against the seduction pleasures of the mud bath.” (Flusser, 1984)

In almost every situation of our lives, we naturally have two options—the Chinese or the American—no matter if one is aware that this is the natural order. If so, the identification is confined to nationalities, China or America. In American society, there is

an ethnic group defined as Chinese. However, this definition of ethnicity is defined within American society. We—Chinese students in America—strictly speaking, have not integrated into the society yet. For the ambivalence of identification, we are gradually breaking up into two groups, or perhaps into two-and-a-half groups. People of one group choose to be American, even if they are still considered Chinese ethnics or first-generation Chinese. People of the other group choose to go back to China—and to be Chinese—once again. Others who choose neither side become marginalized and their connection with both societies becomes less and less.

One phenomenon caused by constantly evolving division of identification is the uproarious debate about “going back” or “staying (in America)” happening in a lot of Bulletin Board Services (BBS) frequented by members of the Chinese student community. The split in identities consolidates the rigid division based on nationalities.

Although disconnection and the ambivalence of identification are two clear traits of the collective, the symptoms of individual members of the collective are diverse.

### **Inequity**

Inequity—coexisting with disconnection and the ambivalence of identification—is the most disturbing issue of the three. First, because of bumbling attempts at speaking or writing English, and because of unfamiliarity on the part of both parties with respect to culture and society, Chinese students become a socially vulnerable group. Second, there are inequities existent within the framework of the American systems in which we work. One example of this inequity has to do with contribution within the academy: although we may make contributions equal to those of American students, Chinese students very often don't receive the same kind of recognition – or any recognition – for these contributions. We simply don't get equal treatment, on so many levels, and we

see that very clearly as a group: this sense of inequity is pervasive in the Chinese student community. This inequity isn't based in language difference alone: it could also be attributed to incompatibilities with American culture and with its various systems – the academy, for example, or the American economic system.

In American society – very often a society of spectacle – values such as practicality, modesty, and strong work ethic are not generally viewed in the same way as they are viewed by the Chinese. This difference is one of many that impacts Chinese students studying in America. These students may have their own inherent cultural disadvantages with respect to personality – timidity, for example – and they may cleave stubbornly to self-defeating notions – they may, for example, feel a sense of unworthiness, a sense that they don't have the qualifications to compete for equity in the U.S.

When our values conflict those popular in American society, our values are always the ones overlooked, denied and even suppressed. We can feel our value is diminished as our values are undermined by the standards of this host society. Most of us do not know how to fight against inequity, or are otherwise unable to win equity. This feeling of inability from inside—and the implicit evaluation of inability from outside -- intensifies the inequity subjectively and objectively. Paradoxically, many of us left China to escape inequity engendered by class, background, social status, or even age. Many of us left so we wouldn't suffer from those kinds of inequity; ironically, we arrived here and suffer now from inequalities born out of another context.

It bears mentioning that this inequity is not only about immigration status; it doesn't pertain exclusively to issues of politics or legal rights. It also exists in many

areas that seem to have—or claim to have—no close connection with immigration status. It exists everywhere: in the academy; across many other professions; in social situations. Taking China's position in world economy and politics into consideration, it seems this inequity is deeply rooted in the history of the past one hundred years. We can have a glimpse of the product of these historical inequities if we avail ourselves of the true perspectives of Chinese students studying abroad, mainly in America.

### **The History of studying in America**

Yung Wing is considered to be the first Chinese citizen in history who studied abroad. According to Yung Wing (1909), we can see a link to the future – the future of Chinese students who now study abroad here. Born into a poor family, Yung Wing followed a missionary called Samuel Robbins Brown to America; eventually he began his studies at Yale University. After graduation, he went back to China and proposed a program to send Chinese children to the United States in order to educate them in something that is generally referred to in Chinese history as “advanced Western knowledge.” As one of the organizers of this program, which was later called the Chinese educational mission (Fig 1-1), Yung Wing led a group of more than 100 children to America (Fig 1-2).

Along with the group of children he sponsored, Yung Wing himself went to study in America during a time of what was called a self-strengthening movement in China. The self-strengthening movement was put into place in order to maintain the Qing government. Also, those who created the movement sought to save China from further declines: the country had recently suffered a string of defeats in the opium wars and a series of invasions by powerful Western countries. According to a commonly known saying – established in the 1800's, and still well-known today by the Chinese—the

principle of this self-strengthening movement was “Chinese learning for fundamental principles and Western learning for practical application” – and this is translated directly from that Chinese saying—which means learning Western science and technology while maintaining Chinese political system and ideology. Around 1909, the Boxer Indemnity Scholarship Program was founded. Between 1909 and 1911, the program organized and funded three groups of students to study in America during three separate periods of time. Some of those students returned to China and eventually became establishers of a series of modern academic disciplines.

Many piece of Chinese literature – both fiction and non-fiction – deal with these issues. In the 1920’s novel *Sinking*, Dafu Yu describes the depression of a Chinese student in Japan, his sadness about the weakness of his home country. In another novel, *Fortress Besieged*, written by Zhongshu Qian and published in 1940s, the author depicts the portraits of many Chinese intellectuals who studied abroad during 1920s and 1930s. Because of the war of resistance against Japan and the Chinese civil war, studying abroad was discontinued for many years. In the 1990s, a work of non-fiction entitled *Chinese Students Encounter America* (1996), written by Qian Ning, told stories of Chinese students in America during 1980s and 1990s. Xiangming Cheng’s sociology dissertation at Columbia University, entitled *Sojourners and Foreigners: Chinese Students’ Relationship-Building with Americans in U.S. Universities* (1994) was also written in 1990s.

The backgrounds and experiences of generations studying in America have similarities and dissimilarities. One general point of resemblance is that these people came to America to better develop their country or themselves. All sought advanced

knowledge, opportunities, or better living conditions. It's clear that for Chinese students then and now, studying abroad is driven by the idea that "man struggles upwards," which is an ancient Chinese proverb and a mainstream conviction held in contemporary China. In other words, these students came to America – and they continue to come— because of a lack of development in China.

### **Current Situation**

What is the current situation of these Chinese students? I count myself among them. For my part, I spent almost twenty years in the education system of modern China. We were taught that we were equals, and even though this wasn't always the case, that belief system was instilled in me. It is this belief system that caused me to attempt to escape several kinds of inequities in China – there is economic inequity there, and educational inequity, and social inequity. Upon arriving in America, I expected things to be different – I expected economic, educational, and social equity. However, I found that the systems in America contained more inequity in some ways, and I experienced other instances of inequity. I found this extremely disappointing. Culturally, and for centuries, Chinese people share a collective knowledge of inequity. Here in America, we hope for equity at least in areas that have nothing to do with immigration status, but inequities are everywhere, and they provoke extreme – and sometimes irrational – reactions.

As students in America, the inability to fight against the system in which we work makes us look extraordinarily polite, quiet and submissive. We hate that perception of submission. We also hate the idea of ceasing to fight in order to avoid further inequity provoked by fighting. Sometimes we hate other Chinese people because they are similar to us. We want to enjoy equity, want to be able to say "no" and to be a person

who can protect his or her rights and dignity. We envy Americans' pride and our pride makes us reject American TV, pop culture, food and language. We refuse to imitate Americans. This is not only about us: because of prevailing globalization, this conflict is happening in every corner of the world. When Hollywood, Facebook and McDonald's overwhelm society with their products and values, can we say no? Why should we say no? I think it is a difficult question even for Americans. And it's not only because the values of these companies – if you can call them values, since they are centered on profit—cannot represent American values. It's also about independence, freedom and dignity for everyone. Does anyone have the right or the ability to say no to anything that might challenge the values of the individual?

### **Personal Example**

The inequity exists in professional environments, including academia. I am in the American education system myself, and this system is definitely built for American students. Without the “common sense” foreknowledge of American history, culture and social life – without this context—I cannot produce critical or even valid opinions of American arts, including contemporary art. I can become familiar with the theories, but because I do not have intuitive access to related contexts and ideologies, I may not have the same passion for the art in question, and then I feel I cannot contribute an opinion of any value. I realize the intellectual authority and the inequity. I realize that perhaps someone may doubt about my professional capabilities. But my profession is Fine Art, not American Fine Art. Of course, it bears mentioning that these limitations would extend to the art of other nations as well: on a lot of topics in contemporary art, across a span of other nations, I notice that I am highly limited by this inequity; at any rate, I do not have any advantage. I am forced to view, and to be viewed, through a

Western lens. I am not viewed as competent in the so-called “contemporary art world”. My voice is so muted in comparison with American schoolmates, who were born into American culture and had an insider’s advantage when they learned American history. I feel that I am being compared with my American colleagues and questioned about my professional capability. To fight for the academic equity, to follow my passion, and to strive for the creativity and artistic power on the same level with American schoolmates, I decide to rediscover myself—my Chineseness. The dominant conviction of Chinese students is to come to America only for learning; the attitude of these students is “grin and bear it.” A rediscovery of Chineseness is truly a subversion of the dominant paradigm.

When I try to rediscover my “Chineseness”, two professors of Chinese ethnics asked the same serious question: ‘What is Chineseness?’ In order to answer this question, I started my research on works of art and biographies of Chinese artists who had lived for a time in America. I also read critiques about these artists, both in the Chinese art world and in the American art world; I will elaborate on this research in the third chapter. Although as I probed into this issue of “Chineseness” and I considered terms like “Eastern,” “Western” and post-colonialism, the core of my research centers around the status of the individual and the thoughts of a group – collective consciousness. “Chineseness” as an abstraction permeated through my process and informed my final artwork; I never directly pursued it in product or procedure, nor did I intentionally avoid it. The group’s Chineseness that I am discussing is essentially a “collectiveness”, which does not indicate a country or a culture, but instead a set of

shared notions, ideologies, and traits of character, many of which are possessed by so many Chinese students who study in America.

### **Reasons to do the work**

By investigating the disconnection, the ambivalent identification and the inequity the Chinese students are suffering, we can begin to understand any decisions we make to compromise, or to resist. What we decide to compromise, what we decide to resist, highlights our acceptance of different values. Disparate personalities and coping mechanisms are formed as we make these choices. The variety will provide inspiration for survival in a society with mainstream culture and values. The adoptions of different values also illuminate a debate between supposedly universal values – democracy, industrialization, and the ‘civilizing’ of nations that are referred to as ‘developing’—and Chinese characteristics. In individual life, especially in professional circumstances, I am concerned with our reconciliation with the society and the way we handle conflicts. All the behaviors, thoughts, feelings, whether conscious or not, about how we interpret and reconcile the conflicts elucidate our ideology. With the intention of depicting and outlining our ideology, I also endeavor to understand what Chinese is and what Universal is. In the progress of modernization, what do we abandon, what do we preserve, what do we accept and what do we reject? We are verifying our own society, Chinese society, at least the education in the communication.

As I work, another question arises: when researching the situation of Chinese students in America, who benefits? And for which side am I working? I think it is about both, about the communication between both sides, about attempting to resolve conflicts between dissociated cultures, systems, ideologies. In addition, we can ask that if there is any individual Chineseness remains after we immerse ourselves into

American society. If there is, how can our Chineseness be compatible with American society? This hidden Chineseness can be a reference points for a changing and developing Chinese society. As people who exhibit Chineseness, we pose another question: how tolerant can an American culture be? Can our ideology, survive, be recognized, be absorbed by either culture?

### **Ultimate Goal**

Is there a way to exist beyond the divisions based on nationality? Within this new existence, a person could be modern, but also connected to our historical intrinsic values, not blindly adhering to Chineseness, not easily inclining to 'Americanness.' Her intent is not to pry, please, or vilify. She is not shallow hybrid. She has been through struggles and she is strong enough to withstand them. She has inherited virtues; she can preserve a belief in fairness and humanity. She can preserve her own aspirations for freedom and equity. She knows the historical correlations of the discrepancies, empathizes with any diverse sentiments on the discrepancies; she is able to transfer the power generated by the discrepancies, and she appreciates some ambitions – shared with both sides—in spite of those discrepancies. Despite these discrepancies, she chooses to be creative. To be creative brings her closer to the ambitions shared with the other side. She is tolerant and conscious, progressive and moderate. There are various embodiments of this person. She provides new options to all of us, and these new options enable us to negotiate with our society, to achieve independence in the world, a world that is shifting between the uniting and dividing of warring factions. On the way to seek this new existence, we are getting close to a genuine collective self, and we arouse concern for our current and future situations.



Figure 1- 1. Chinese Educational Mission, Yung Wing second from right.



Figure 1- 2. The children in Boxer Indemnity Scholarship Program.

## CHAPTER 2

### Construct the conversations

Influenced by an installation I worked on with Florida Research Ensemble, called *Murphy's Well Being* (2012) (Figure 2-1) -- in which interviews were part of the installation—I chose to have conversations with Chinese students intending to use their voices in this piece. My goal was to elicit genuine thoughts and emotions in these conversations. I found that some of the thoughts generated from these conversations were emotionally based, but other thoughts were quite detached.

#### **First phase of conversations**

I did some brief research before beginning, compiling and reading a list of books related to my topic, and after doing this, it turned out I had some expectations based on my reading. I focused on the behaviors of those members of the group who sought not to adapt to American expectations. I was personally familiar with the people with whom I spoke. All of them were studying, or had studied, in United States universities as graduate students – presently, or within the past few years. All of them had lived in America for three to six years.

In my first phase of conversations with members of this group – these were one-on-one interactions—I wanted to investigate related behaviors, opinions, emotions and even subconscious reactions – reactions or actions that were not pre-meditated on the part of these Chinese students.

The first phase of this work happened between May and September 2012. I was thinking about my reading as I conducted these conversations. According to the theory of culture shock (Oberg, 1960), students in this group have been through a honeymoon phase and a negotiation phase, and they are now in an adjustment phase or even a

mastery phase. This means that the non-adaptive behavior I found in this group was not provoked by excitement or anxiety from the unfamiliar environment in which they studied. It seemed that these behaviors were long-established, deeply rooted in the subconscious. It seemed that perhaps these behaviors might be permanent. And it is these non-adaptive behaviors that interested me most as I began to work on my piece.

### **Why sound?**

I recorded this first series of conversations, because I wanted to capture the sound of the voices in these exchanges. The participants did not want to be videotaped. I decided that, in fact, an audio recording would be adequate: these recordings seemed to highlight the students' vulnerability, their sense of self-protection, and the way they closely guarded their genuine internal sentiments. Before these recorded conversations, I collected my thoughts before our meetings, making notes about my acquaintance with the participants. I tried to recognize non-adaptive behaviors as we spoke, and I tried to draw them into conversation about these behaviors.

### **Obstacles**

Some obstacles were encountered in the first phase of conversations. These obstacles centered on issues of my own preconceived notions, the social relationships between myself and the participants, and the tendency of the subjects to "sugar coat" their feelings as we talked.

### **Preconceived notions**

My own preconceived notions, based largely on my research, resulted in some obstacles in this work. As I conducted the work, I found I tried more or less to verify the preconceptions triggered by the theories I had read, and I tended to lead the

participants as we spoke. The leading itself was the obstacle. Frequently, it confused the participants, and it seemed to prohibit them from revealing their honest feelings.

### **Social relationship between myself and participants**

Because my relationship to the participants is a social one, and not a therapeutic one, I found I encountered other obstacles as we talked. Because at times the participants tended to “sugar coat” their experiences or impressions, steering clear of discussions they might have found difficult or awkward, our conversations were at times superficial. In these instances, conversation could devolve from a penetrating and direct discussion to mere chitchat, which wasn’t useful for the project. In these situations, even though I had a need for further discussion, I found I could not talk further. If I found that I was asking what I wanted to know, but the participants were responding indirectly – talking around the topic, or directing the conversation elsewhere – I found I had to stop.

### **Beautification**

At the same time, there is the obstacle that the participants tend to beautify themselves during the conversations. An analogy is that when you point a camera lens at people who were originally just doing their own jobs, they will suddenly show unnatural and even weird facial expressions to make sure they look good in photos. This habit prevented me from achieving my primary goal. I could do nothing to change this habit. Because I became aware of this tendency toward “self-beautification,” and in order to force them to be honest, I became more focused on asking questions, to the point of missing the substance of their answers. The more I tried to direct the questioning, the more they replied with defensive answers and tried to avoid the

questions. After that, I tried to keep the questions open, but the consequence is that the conversations started to deviate from my original purpose.

### **Second phase of conversations**

Although the first phase of conversations was not effective and not used in the final artwork, some sample questions (Appendix A) are listed here to demonstrate the initial concept. As planned in the proposal, my next step was to organize the second phase of conversations. In order to prevent preconception on my part, I made a conscious effort to exclude these thoughts as I conducted the conversations. I was prepared instead to discover and accept different voices.

### **Prototype and Self-conversing**

The obstacles caused by social habits urged me to invent and test another structure for the conversations. I put myself in the role of participant. At that point, my consciousness about the structure of conversations transformed. I was thinking of reversing dynamics among subjects and objects or even merging the subjects with the objects, in order to alter the rigid binary disposition in normal conversations. Although I was not particularly looking for objectivity in the conversations, I realized that the method that I took – the way in which I'd decided to ask questions and inspect answers—was quite “objective”. The objectivity of the method, which is highly related with positivism, is what was distancing me from the participants' genuine feelings and my resonance with them.

In Yvonna Lincoln's and Egon Guba's book *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1985), they critique a positivist approach to interviews: “Positivism has produced research with human respondents that ignores their humanness, a fact that has not only ethical but also validity implications.” Qualitative analysis techniques are often employed in social

science research, including Xiangming Chen's book *Sojourners and Foreigners*, because it is recognized that strictly objective approaches are often not sufficient to uncover in-depth understandings of individuals.

To reveal their genuine feelings, I realized I needed to get close to the participants, myself. I am one of the Chinese students. It seemed necessary that I engage in a process of "self-conversing," to question how I am implicated in this process through my own non-adaptations. Self-conversing is a method that I invented for this work. It is a technique for participants to uncover questions on their own. In self-conversing, the participant is given a defined topic instead of a few questions. With this defined topic, the participant can record their thoughts at a time and in a space in which true thoughts and feelings can be released. In this case, the defined topic is non-adaptations in America, and the form of recording is via spoken voice. I was not aware of the source of inspiration to invent this method when I started the second phase of conversations, but when I looked back, I noticed that the invention might be credited to my readings of Xiangming Chen's *Sojourners and Foreigners* (1994) and some other works of literature, including Dafu Yu's *Sinking* (1921), Zhongshu Qian's *Fortress Besieged* (1947) and Danqing Chen's *Niu Yue Suo Ji* (2000). In Xiangming Che's *Sojourners and Foreigners*, she mentioned that she asked one of her schoolmates to interview her before she interviewed other Chinese students. Although this was just a transitional procedure for her to understand the Chinese students and herself and to better conduct her later interviews, I incorporated the ideas there as my own. Dafu Yu's *Sinking* is referred to as a lyric novel. A lyric novel is similar in style to a lyric poem, but it expresses direct personal feelings in the literary form of a novel. Zhongshu Qian's

*Fortress Besieged* is not a lyric novel, but it is written based on the author's own experiences and has obvious traits of autobiography. Danqing Chen's *Niu Yue Suo Ji* is an autobiography of an expatriate Chinese artist in America. The concept of self-conversing emerges from qualitative research, from literature, with my own thinking and feeling as catalysts among all these disparate sources.

When I engaged in self-conversing, the preconceptions became less important. Although I did not have a clear thread of talking, I felt that some deep-hearted sentiments were being released after having been repressed for a long time, and I found I had to speak them out loud. I had finally seized upon the participants' frame of mind. Without a clear thread, I could only follow the timeline to find feelings that I wanted to speak out loud, with the help of photos as reminders. In this self-conversing, I endeavored to express my thoughts with the same honesty I expected from any other participant. In this one-and-a-half-hour conversation, I noticed that I did speak out on substantial experiences and reflections related with non-adaptive behaviors. Then I edited the original audio recording into a 10-minute prototype (Appendix B). This prototype was later played to other participants as an example of the recordings they might generate. My own voice is included as one of the female voices in the final artwork. It means that I include myself as one of the participants. My own ideology, biases and emotions are directly integrated and exhibited in the artwork.

### **Why self-conversing?**

The technique of self-conversing provides many advantages. First, it reduces the negative effects associated with the previously discussed "social relationship" and "beautification". Second, normal conversation has its own defects for the artwork's context. A regular problem of communicating with Americans is that they hear your

words but they do not understand the connotations. This 'normal' mode of conversation brings a sense of fractured communication, which engenders misunderstanding and wishful thinking. Third, because of this incomplete communication, a sense of inner solitude, or a sense of repression, or some other particular sentiment, emerges, burgeoning with time, with isolation, and with a lack of resolution. Self-conversing brings the participants back to these burgeoning conditions, prompting the emergence of a genuine voice. Therefore, the mode of self-conversing and playing the recordings for others can reduce the fractured communication in conventional discourse.

On the opposite of the structure composed of questions and answers, the self-conversing and the playback are about speaking and hearing. They elevate speaking and hearing to a new level, offering enough time and space to reveal these burgeoning conditions. There is an old saying in Chinese: "People who put the bell on could take it off". In self-conversing, we approach the genuine self, empowering ourselves to release our true feelings. This ritualism is also embedded in my work *I spent 18 years to be able to drink coffee with you at Starbucks* (Figure 2-2) (2010), in which two Chinese students from different family classes read a popular article online called *I spent 18 years to be able to drink coffee with you at Starbucks* (Maitian, 2004) to each other.

## **Instructions**

Combined with content and technical instruction, my procedure for the conversation is as follows: I contact a participant on Skype, play the prototype of my self-conversing to the participant, ask him to read the instructional document about content and the instructional document about techniques, then ask him if he has any questions and provide some hints. Over the course of the following three weeks, I follow up, asking about a participant's progress each week.

Here are two excerpts from the instructional document:

“This recording is just for reference. You do not have to talk about similar topics with me. I want you to talk about problems that you encountered in America based on your own experiences, mainly in professional environments and academia. The experiences of conflicts with the system and culture are significant. Please talk about the situations that you feel unwilling to integrate and adapt and the situations that you feel willing to challenge and criticize. What you say does not have to be insightful, refined or valid. The key is to express, to speak out the confusions and struggles with the system, the culture and the whole environment. You can tell facts, specific events, thoughts, or even pure emotions.”

### **Editing**

After collecting the conversations, I edited the recordings as I did the prototype. Each participant has their own theme. Because I am in the same position with the participants, I can identify with their themes. I also have similar experiences with my participants. I can recognize the unique and genuine elements of their themes. Through this process, I was able to follow the flow of their conversation, although they did not always follow it themselves. In editing, I extract the essence of these conversations, focusing on the non-adaptations shared by most people. Some of these non-adaptations are difficult problems, which are generally encountered but not solved by most people in the group. During editing, I got rid of redundancies and kept what I hoped was a collective essence, which is what tightly connects the group members together. All the parts that I selected covered multiple aspects and conveyed diverse sentiments.

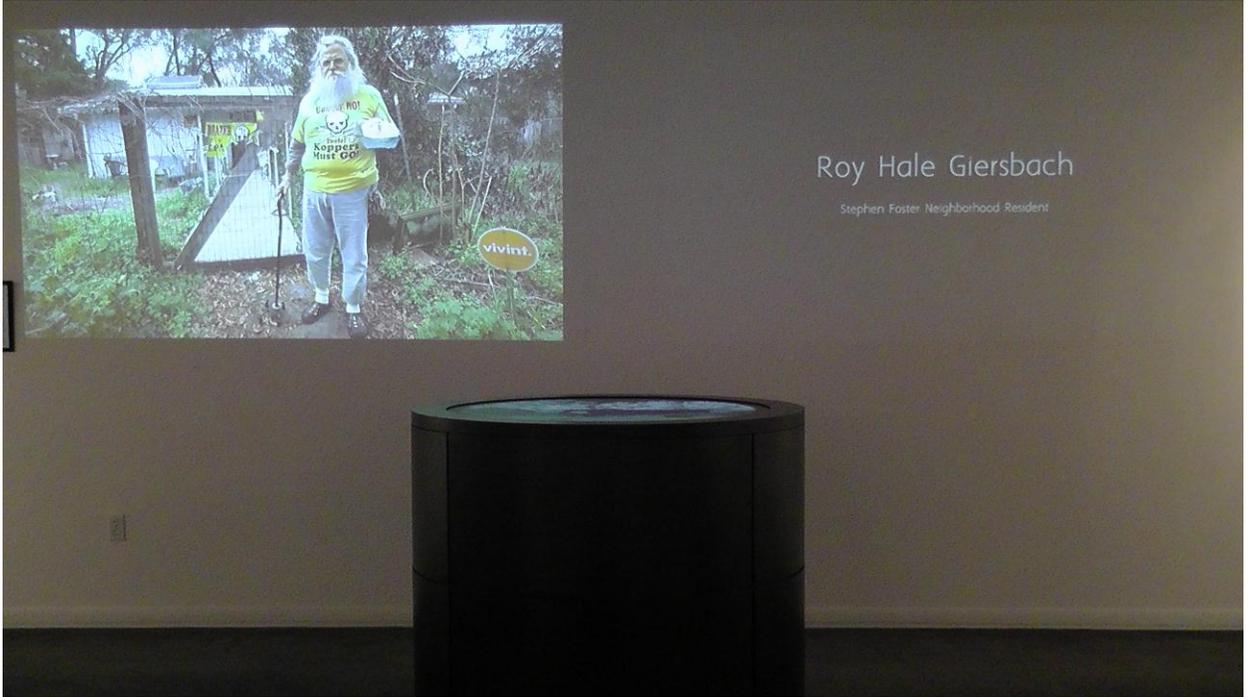


Figure 2-1. Florida Research Ensemble, Murphy's Well Being (2012).



Figure 2-2. I Spent Eighteen Years To Be Able To Drink Coffee With You At Starbucks (2010).

## CHAPTER 3 Installation

### **Chinese artists in America**

During the time in which I was organizing and conducting the conversations and collecting audio recordings, I was also exploring artistic references for my installation. I researched the work of some Chinese artists in America, like Guoqiang Cai (Art21, 2005) (Figure 3-1). Along with other work I researched, the work of Guoqiang Cai involves strong Chinese visual identifiers: Chinese characters, traditional Chinese material, and ancient Chinese symbols. It seems these identifiers are representative of a struggle with identification, even though the identifiers themselves may serve to mask the struggle.

In the conversations I was having, the participants had no desire to parade classical Chinese aesthetics, and neither did I. The Chinese artists referenced earlier commonly employ occasional incidents of self-advertising (using the aforementioned identifiers) in order to flaunt a sort of exoticism for the benefit of a Western audience. My conversations didn't resemble this at all. As I talked with the other participants, we employed for the most part techniques of communication we conceived of as Chinese, conducting ourselves in a practical and modest way. Our Chineseness, with respect to the way we revealed it in conversation, had no real parallel with decorative traditional Chinese visual language.

As I mentioned in the first chapter, American society—a society so devoted to spectacle—underrates and exploits Chinese students. Even though use of the decorative aspects of Chinese culture might have stimulated an American audience, I decided not to play with classic Chinese visual language to show “novelty” or “coolness”

or to satisfy “favored” aesthetics for a Western audience that might expect them. I decided not to contribute to the ideology that helped to create the inequity.

### **Two artists**

While I appreciated the work of the Chinese artists I studied, I am more encouraged by artists like Santiago Sierra and Jens Haaning. My personal feelings about Sierra’s work *Workers Who Cannot Be Paid, Remunerated to Remain Inside Cardboxes* is much stronger than my connection with Claire Bishop’s comments about the work. Bishop claimed that Sierra’s works disrupt the microtopia of galleries and institutions (2004). While I agree with this, when I first encountered Sierra’s work, my first thought was that if I were to be one of these workers, I would try to make some kind of noise to disclose my presence. In other words, despite the disruption referred to by Bishop, when I encountered Sierra’s work myself, I had a visceral reaction, and I found I had slipped into the position of one of the workers.

Two directions are frequently prescribed by Chinese activists and scholars for working with the Western lens, and I don’t agree with either of them. The first direction is to go to “folkloric” – to display an exotic Chineseness—in order to put forward the idea that Chinese aesthetics are very different from Western ones. The other is to shy away from learning about or adopting so-called Western values, theories, or aesthetics. Both directions give tacit consent to the power of the discourse. But several questions remain: Who defined Chineseness in the first place? And who defines the differences between Chineseness and a Western aesthetic? Who will claim ownership of Western values, theories and aesthetics?

The problem is that truth does not necessarily belong to those who claim to discover it or to those who otherwise possess it. The unilateral interpretation is a source

of the monopolization of culture, which is in itself a kind of hegemony. The idea of universality in relationship to interpretation contains a mandate to preset a pattern of thought: this idea dictates that all other interpretations should attach, or should be attached, to a single framework in order to be rewarded with the title 'universal.' This thinking pattern belies an ignorance of (or a desire to subvert) cultural resonance --- it denies, or it tries to deny, the power of localization.

Rather than allow my work to follow either of these two directions, my strategy is to let my own intuition and my devotion to the topic guide me with regard to aesthetic. Even though I do not intend to display Chineseness, neither do I intend to hunt down the Western lens and avoid it. All I have to guide me in my work is my sense of awareness about the Western lens.

I hope Chineseness, as an abstraction, will somehow permeate the process and inform the final work. I hope at the same time the authoritative Western lens will be suspended in some way. I hope to provoke in my audience the feelings and the reactions I had when I first encountered Sierra's work.

### **My installation**

Among the conflicts existent between Chinese students and American systems and culture, a prominent one is a discrepancy in manner in which each group communicates. Disparate methods of communication engender disparate reactions in conversations between members of these groups. In my case, the disparate approaches shaped my installation in space.

### **For Chinese**

For the Chinese students and for people who are familiar with them, when they listen to an intimate voice, they are able to grasp comprehensive meanings and feelings

that accompany that voice. Therefore, I feel that in some sense the act of conversation is ready-made for members of this group. I believe that Chinese visitors have the ability—as they listen to a particular conversation in the installation—and as they absorb the aural quality of the exchange – to visualize the conversation happening in a unique way, to imagine it happening. I've brought this idea to bear in my installation: As I have arranged the space, participants can walk to the “inside”, which is a narrower space, and they can put on a set of headphones and listen, or they can look at the “outside,” which is exposed to the room’s opening, and listen to another’s voice. As they listen to these voices, in many cases, they hear more than the voice of an individual speaker – they hear themselves speaking in those voices (Figure 3-5).

### **For other visitors**

For general visitors who don't understand Chinese, the edited recordings are presented in three aspects: the information carried in the language; the emotions in the tone; and the mood in the context of the topic. The information is transmitted through a written Chinese-to-English translation (Figure 3-6). The position of the group and the position of general Americans in daily context are transposed by the subtitles. In other words, the subtitles put Americans who are not familiar with Chinese into the position of Chinese students in America. The subtitles enable these visitors to experience the context and the sentiments vicariously. At the same time, the voice—which they do not really understand or which they might want to ignore—will hover in the air, with all its attendant connotations and emotion. Non-Chinese-speaking participants can hear the voices, but they do not have intuitive access to the voices. This scenario describes the everyday life of a Chinese student studying in an English-speaking country.

## **Body postures**

Because of the discrepancy in communication, there is no natural and direct way for citizens of the English-speaking host country to fully understand these Chinese students, but the installation is open to everyone, and there are different ways in which a visitor can interact with the installation. Visitors on the outside of the installation tend to maintain a distance to the screen in order to read the transcribed text, which has been subtitled in English. Visitors who interact more closely – moving inside of the installation—tend to casually lean against the podium and look beyond the glass. There are also some visitors who put their ears to the speakers. Some visitors will spend time reading the subtitles, and then go to the inside to listen to the voices. I think different body positions and postures reflect different approaches to the work, to the topic, and to the group. When the general visitors choose to approach the work by only watching the subtitles, they can form a wall of people (Figure 3-7). If you were to employ time-lapse photography in order to record a span of time in the installation, a striking and resonant image of the wall would be available. When a visitor puts her ear to the speaker, she is trying to get close to the sentiments of an individual, but first she must discern that individual from the voices of the group, which is not easy to do.

When a visitor stands on the inside of the installation, using a set of headphones in order to listen to a Chinese voice, he tries to understand us directly, not through the existent American system and culture. From these different approaches, there is a chance to see a diversity of Americans' approaches to Chinese students and to the awkward situations that may accompany attempts at communication. The disparate approaches of the English-speaking visitors reflect an evolution in the situation of the Chinese students; therefore the artwork is self-reflexive.

In order for a visitor to understand, he must understand more than just the meanings of individual words. He must also participate in and understand the process of transformation between word and fact. The distance of the body, which provides a parallel for the distance of the mind, illustrates discrepancies in communication. If on occasion the installation seems to orient the visitors to this discrepancy, it also keeps itself open to various interactions; visitors can be creative, and they can show attitudes of both body and mind that may lead to further mutual understanding.

Aside from allowing for this creativity, another reason not to put the subtitles and the headphones together is to block an American viewer's authority to mute the voices of the Chinese students. Visitors do not have the option to manipulate the sound in any way as they read subtitles; those who are reading subtitles have no access to headphones. Because this artwork seeks to change the common situation by not offering an option to ignore the group's collective voice, the artwork has been designed to preserve that collective voice.

### **The Wall**

In a sense the wall about which I speak is actually a series of walls, and my work plays with the distinction between metaphorical and physical walls. First off, there is the metaphorical wall comprised of American systems that our group finds impenetrable: rules, conventions, standards of work, etiquette, and language. These systems appear neutral and impartial, but in fact they lay the foundation for the inequity about which I speak. The perceptions of people among these different cultures as they try to communicate (or to avoid true communication) comprise another metaphorical wall. Rather than reveal or experience true feelings or thoughts, members of these disparate

groups choose sometimes to dissociate from them, and this in itself is a kind of wall, just as impenetrable.

In the work, the physical walls formed by the pedestals are also impenetrable; they stand in part to comment about the metaphorical barriers existent all around the piece. The plexi-glass in the installation resembles the dissociation: it is transparent – members of disparate groups can see one another through it – but this barrier cannot be penetrated. The groups cannot physically reach one another through it.

The visceral cues of the two metaphorical walls are the social habits and the language habits of the disparate groups. These are the things most identifiable to both groups. Both groups may think that these two things are what comprise the wall in its entirety. But in fact this is not the case: social and language habits serve as a marker for all the differences that make up the wall. The dissociation—and the makeshift communications that have to happen around the dissociation—causes an escalation in each, intensifying the dilemma of identification on the part of the Chinese students.

The design of the sculptural form and the installation in space parallels my own experiences. In coming to America, I felt most anxious about two places – the embassy (Figure 3-8) and customs (Figure 3-9), both of which have solid walls, boundaries and transparent glass. I passed through these two places so many times, always with trepidation. They always reminded me of prison, perhaps of a kind of mutual prison. All the subtle feelings of dissociation and suppression I felt became materialized in the memory of moving through these places.

### **Non-place**

The installation can be discussed in the context of Marc Auge's definition of "non-places" (1995). According to Auge (1995), "then a space which cannot be defined as

relational, or historical, or concerned with identity, will be a non-place". I think for general American visitors, the installation does look like a non-place, in the same way the embassy and customs building looks to us, the Chinese students in America. However, Auge also mentions that these non-places "... never exists in pure form; places reconstitute themselves in it; relations are restored and resumed in it." (1995) Here, what is restored and resumed is a reworking of "customs" at customs. Auge described the process of passing a non-place:

...non-place creates the shared identity of passengers...He is reminded, when necessary, that the contract exists...So the passenger accedes to his anonymity...In a way, the user of the non-place is always required to prove his innocence...Of course, the criteria of innocence are the established, official criteria of individual identity. (Auge, 1995)

Therefore, the "criteria" can be seen at non-places, just as "customs" can be seen at customs. The "criteria" and "customs" reveal the ideologies of both the American visitors to the installation and the Chinese students whose voices comprise the installation.

The experience with plexi-glass contributes to this revelation. When you look through the plexi-glass, you can see faces of people on the other side through it. Because the plexi-glass is not really transparent, you may also see yourself on the plexi-glass. As Auge says (1995), "The only face to be seen, the only voice to be heard...are his own: the face and voice of a solitude made all the more baffling by the fact that it echoes millions of others." When all faces are projected on the same surface, it draws your attention to the plexi-glass itself. Who made this transparent wall? Why make this transparent wall? The transparent wall is representative of the "contract" mentioned by Auge in his work.

The glass material selection and its relation to the concept can also be traced back to my previous work *Under Skylight* (2010). In *Under Skylight* (Figure 3-12), visitors enter a dark room with a mattress on the floor. If they lie on the mattress and look up, they will see a video projected on a piece of semi-reflective white sheet that was hung from the ceiling. In the video, images of a skylight are displayed with a monologue. In the monologue, I describe a feeling of disconnection. When we rely on an invisible separation to protect and to seclude ourselves from the world outside, we have a chance to escape a sense of disturbance and entanglement. Unfortunately, despite this we can become isolated; we can still experience the difficulty in attempting to speak out and be heard. In one voice of *Chinglish*, the complicated feeling about the possibility of disconnection – its attendant purity, solitude and repression—is mentioned again.

### **The Interaction and the Ambition**

Although dissociation confirms and leads to differences in modes of communication, the aligned subtitles and mélange of sounds offer an overall impression (Figure 3-10) that includes distinct individual impressions. The two groups of visitors divided by the dissociation will come to a same time, a same space, to the boundary of the communication; each group looks at the other, face-to-face (Figure 3-11). As they see the wall and the invisible separation, as they listen to the voices and detect the sentiments in the voices, they also see actual people on the other side. As this happens, a dialogue beyond language begins. The dialogue rebuilds the conceptual context, making the abstract concrete.

When the four voices are played through the four speaker grills embedded in the four aligned pedestals, not loudly, but clearly, we – the student group – are able to

speaking about what is really in our minds even under the confines of dissociation, which could be viewed in some respects as a method of seclusion. (Figure 3-13) In addition to this emphasis on seclusion, the artwork retains an incipient ambition: to look for a new existence, even in seclusion; to rebuild connection with a society that seeks to oppress us; to be liberated from an easy division away from the host country; to fight for a kind of equity.

We can only confront the dissociation when we see it clearly. The artwork is designed to make this possible as it brings forward the genuine and intricate sentiments of the group. This should be started with questioning our current situation. During the questioning, we voice ourselves and spontaneously expose the dissociation veiled by submission.

Finally, it bears mentioning that the sincere communication that rarely happens in daily life—whether between American and Chinese people or from one Chinese person to another—is finally happening.



Figure 3-1. Guoqiang Cai, Cry Dragon/Cry Wolf: The Ark of Genghis Khan (1996).



Figure 3-2. Santiago Sierra, Wall Enclosing a Space (2003).



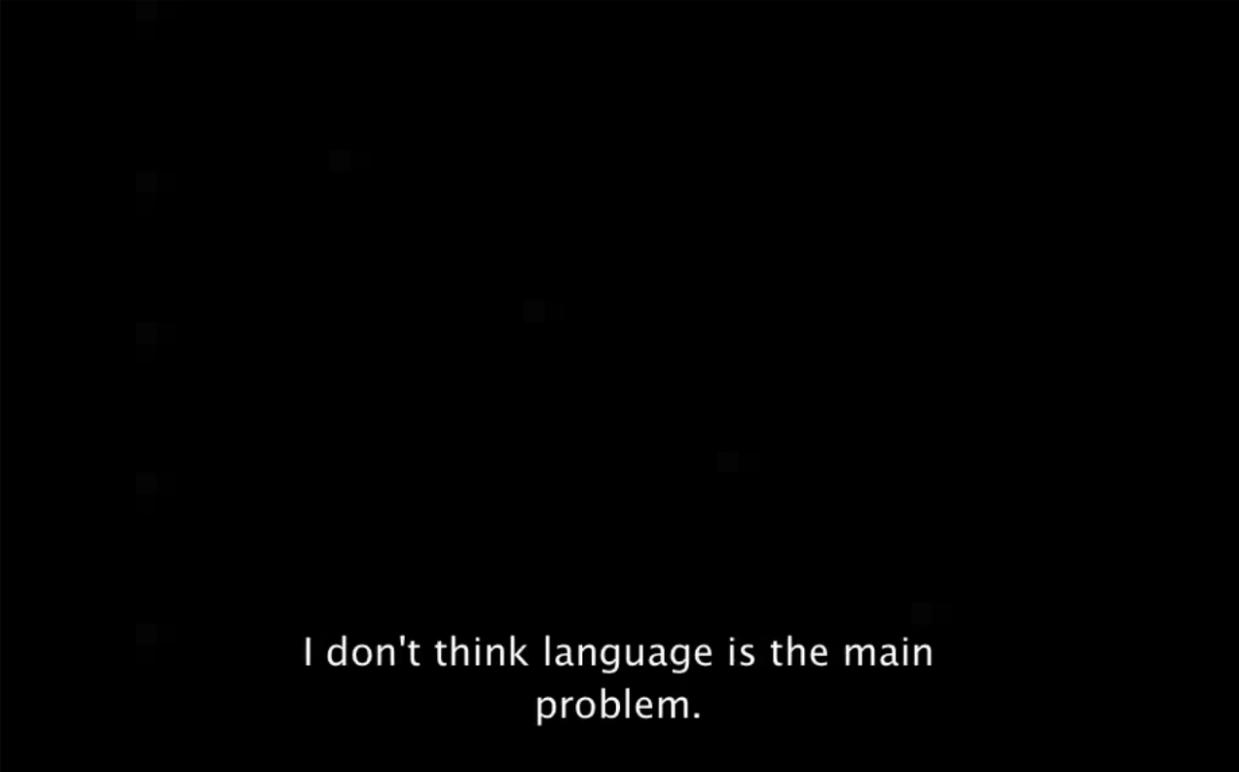
Figure 3-3. Santiago Sierra, *Workers Who Cannot Be Paid, Remunerated to Remain Inside Cardboard Boxes* (2000).



Figure 3-4. Jens Hanning, Turkish Jokes (1994)



Figure 3-5. A Chinese student interacts with *Chinglish*.



I don't think language is the main  
problem.

Figure 3-6. Subtitle of a voice of *Chinglish*.



Figure 3-7. The human wall formed by people watching the subtitles.



Figure 3-8. Transparent?



Figure 3-9. American Embassy in China.



Figure 3-10. American airport customs.



Figure 3-11. The whole installation of *Chinglish*.



Figure 3-12. Visitors interact with *Chinglish*.



Figure 3-13. Under Skylight video image (2010)



Figure 3-14. Speakers, pedestals and subtitles of *Chinglish*.

CHAPTER 4  
Not going to the dogs, and everything else

**About the writing**

**The presence of me**

As I mentioned, I included my own voice into the final incarnation of artwork, and I have acknowledged my integration into the group of Chinese students in America. I am forthcoming about my complicity in the work and I believe this strengthens the end result rather than weakening it. In my writings, the 'we' I speak of is this group of Chinese students studying in America. In most cases, I believe that our views are different from those in other groups with relationship to my work, although there could be moments during which I think others could relate to the perspective of the group. Although we – this group of students—might be taken as a culture where everyone in it is on a continuum of in-between, to build on the idea of this culture is not my ultimate goal. I feel that to attempt to solidify a subculture is to foster the passive culture of disconnection, and I don't seek to do this. Instead, my intention is to rebuild the connections to both societies and to the world.

**Manifesto**

Although the writing is not exhibited with the artwork, it should serve as a manifesto. My next step is to transcribe the voices into texts and to organize the texts with the manifesto for future publication.

**Grander view**

**Chineseness**

This project should be taken as part of a big quest for Chineseness for contemporary China. It fits into an idea of a big quest because it discovers genuine

sentiments of Chinese people, who are not directly manipulated by the strong political control of Chinese government. As part of the big quest for contemporary China, this concept of Chineseness is sought by many Chinese expatriates, so Chineseness is a site to be navigated within this work. For the Chinese students in America, it could be that rebuilding a connection with Chinese society is more difficult than connecting with American society. It might be easier for us to hand over our responsibilities and rights to the dominant framework of American society. But I feel our struggles of yesterday are not meant for a surrender today.

Rebuilding a connection with Chinese society would allow us an opportunity to confront those in power with respect to academic and artistic and social discourse. Because this rebuilding is not necessarily an act of restoring an old connection, we should be able to find some way to have our Chineseness work for us, rather than having it work for the authority in Chinese society. With this rediscovered Chineseness, we should be able to challenge the extent of American systems.

### **Not only Chineseness**

Certainly this work is meant to be specific to the Chinese students in America, but I believe the discussion extends to the plights of other societies, especially when the ideology of “the expelled” conflicts with the ideology of “the native” and “those who expel” (Flusser, 1984). In these conflicts, discrepancies are not necessarily the problem. The problem is that the framework of one side is in power, and that this framework is utilized as a general approach to understand the other side, or to force the other side to assimilate. Furthermore, the conflicts are not only related to nations, they are also related to multiple and overlapping sources of power, discussed here as new medievalism. Even under situations not about nations, the discussion in the work and in

this written piece could still be valuable, although people involved in the situations may not have similar feelings to those of the original group.

### **Not going to the dogs**

#### **Hybrid**

Earlier, I mentioned the concept of creativity as an aspect of my ambition for the project. I also mentioned the concept of hybridization in the first chapter as a shallow strategy for living in-between cultures. The shallow hybrid I mentioned is not included in the concepts of heterogeneous contribution, cultural resonance and localization. There are some kinds of hybrid in localization, but the hybrid in localization is not shallow because it helps us to understand the discrepancies. The shallow hybrid attempts to mystify the discrepancies and it tries to squeeze a kind of creativity out of these myths: it's a sense of being creative for its own sake. Whether the hybrid is shallow or not really depends on the motivation of that person who seeks to be creative. When someone tries to squeeze creativity out of the creation of a myth, they are not in fact creative, because creating a myth is not creative. For example, by using the folkloric, some shallow hybrid serves for the purpose of glossing over otherness, but the "creativity", which is actually a myth, will distract people from the real purpose.

#### **Self-discovery**

As I continue in this work, I continue on a quest of self-discovery. So do the other participants. They open my mind and I feel myself getting closer to them, and somehow closer to myself. I feel more mindful of our shared situation. Some of the participants viewed our conversations as a chance for self-reflection. Some summarized their experiences and drew conclusions. Some found problems. Others confirmed their beliefs. It seems that they all learned something new about themselves. The most

important thing I learned is to let go of any pre-conceived notions and to get ready to open to unexpected voices. One of American viewers of the piece told me that he felt angry at first, but then he felt relieved after he heard all the voices. It is interesting to me, because I have similar feelings myself. When I started the project, I was full of confusion about the topic. I felt I had too many accusatory viewpoints. At the project's end, however, I could see a bigger picture, a draft of a map. The map shows some correlations between what I was criticizing and myself. My expectations helped me create the work as I put myself in the position of a recipient of the work. Along with my audience, I can get access to these new thoughts and perceptions through the work.

### **Not going to the dogs**

Through making this work, I started to figure out what makes us “go to the dogs,” and how it might happen. This demystification process helps me to find my potential power. By rebuilding connections, by seeing through the deception of identification division, I can intervene in the inequity, and I can finally approach my own freedom.

APPENDIX A  
Sample Questions for Conversations of first phase

What part of your US life that you feel most not adapted to? Why? How do you deal with it?

(Dependant on the previous answer) Can you talk about it, show a photo of it or even do it with me?

How do you spend most of your time? How do you feel during the time? Can you show me why?

Have you ever seen your homeland or people from your homeland in your dream? Can you describe it, show a photo or draw it?

Is there anything that you normally did when you were on your homeland but not now? Why? (Dependant on the answer) Can we do this together and can you show me why while we are doing this?

APPENDIX B  
Prototype Recording

Prototype Self-conversing Audio Recording

APPENDIX C  
Transcripts of Recording A

The most difficult time is... ..when I have only 50\$ in my pocket. At that time, I also owed a schoolmate 600\$. I lived in that situation for 2 or 3 weeks. When the school started to pay me, it got better. Then I repaid the money to the schoolmate. Then paid the tuition. I dare not speak English. I also feel very anxious when I listen to English. When you listen to others, you have to make the response in time, whether you understand it or not. Listening to English makes me feel so anxious. When I get anxious, I can't organize my language well. I feel their (other Chinese students in America)... ..their experiences posted on the web are useless. They were just showing off, how easily they passed (the English exam). When I made long distance calls to my family... ..I cried when I talked to them because I felt so sad. I was thinking, "Why it has to be so hard?" If I were in China, I wouldn't worry about things like that. But I wasn't in China. Your job, and your development... ..totally depend on your language. I was thinking "...coming to a new place..." "...Language is really the biggest problem, and the 1<sup>st</sup> obstacle." When I registered the course, I was thinking of... taking the course as a chance... to do research with this teacher and be advised by him/her. First, this teacher is American. He/She speaks really fast. On class, it is usually like... He/She speaks in a different way from some other Americans. Some Americans will consider your speed of responding. They will speak slowly, clearly and in medium speed. But this one is not like that. He/She speaks whatever he/she thinks. Maybe he/she is really smart. Because he/she thinks fast, he/she speaks fast. When he/she has a thought, he/she speaks slowly at the beginning. When he/she suddenly has a lot of thoughts, he/she speaks them all at once. It won't give you time for response or reflection. I was so troubled

because I couldn't understand the lecture. I could follow at beginning, but I often suddenly got lost in the middle. I was always confused about the crucial words. Beyond that, he/she also likes to communicate with students. Other students have a lot of thoughts during these communications. Because he/she speaks fast, other students speak fast, too. My common situation is that... I understand the teacher's questions but not the students' answers. Or, I understand the students' questions but not the teacher's answers. This is a troublesome thing. I'd rather understand nothing. I will just give up then. The problem is, you don't know what you should do if you only understand half. You are completely lost. When you see the facial expressions of mutual appreciation between the teacher and other students, you feel so frustrated. I just feel... they are so devoted to the discussion... It's not that I don't want to be devoted or work hard. I just don't understand. It's not only language problem. This research area is not fit for me. At the time I was taking this course, I didn't gamble on this teacher. When I tried to get well connected to the teacher, I was also contacting another teacher. That teacher is a female. She is an American, a white American. She is also a professor. Through her website, I figured out that she is an extinguished professor. On the photo she looks very sunny. And she has many students in her group. She also has many publications every year. I took my courage to contact her. I said to her "I want you to be my advisor. Can I talk to you?" Then I talked with her and it went well. Although I was a little afraid of speaking English... but with this professor, I felt she listened to me patiently, although you are a foreigner, you can't speak English well, and you are just a shy new student. She smiles when she is listening to you. She will respond slowly. All that makes me feel good. I felt comfortable. Then I told her "I know something about you..." "I read papers

on your website.” “I also read your powerpoints when I did my previous research and it helped a lot.” Then the teacher smiled. I wasn’t sure if she told that I was flattering her. She said, “Students in my group are all good in English.” That implies that “I generally won’t have Chinese students in my group.” That also implies that my English is not good that I won’t have the advantages of writing papers and communicating with her. While I didn’t have other ways at that time. I had to cling on to a professor. So I quickly said “I know that you used to have a Chinese student from your website.” Then I said the name of the Chinese. She said “That’s long time ago.” Anyway, at last she said, “you can join my group.” She also said “If you don’t have funding, I can support you.” I felt so happy because this rarely happens. She barely knew me. She could provide me funding even when she barely knew me although I didn’t need her funding. I think she is really generous. She is also nice and considerate towards to students. So, although I also contacted another professor in the same research area, I decided to choose this female professor to be my advisor. I was lucky to choose this professor as my advisor. Actually, seeking a phd degree in America, no matter you are a foreigner or American, whether you can be a successful phd highly depends on your advisor. I was very lucky to choose a really good professor as my advisor. She is nice and well funded. She is considerate towards students. You simply jump from one environment to another, to find another set of game rules and use these rules to play well in this game. It suits people like me, who don’t have a special background... to fight for success. In China, many things will limit me. I will be limited by social networking. I will be influenced by bad factors, like corruption. I won’t stand the phemomena. I will feel bad. So, to talk about my real intention, although I had many difficulties in America, I will still try hard to stay. Yes,

after coming to America, immigration status is always a big issue. When you study in school, it is F1 (student visa). When you have a job, it is H1B (working visa). Once you have working visa, you want permanent residency. If you don't have green card (permanent residency), once you lose your job, you won't have legal immigration status. Then you can't legally stay in America. So, to ensure an inner security, you always have to work for the immigration status with all your might. Once you have F1 (student visa), you fight for H1B (working visa). Once you have H1B (working visa), you fight for green card (permanent residency). Once you have green card, you will think: "Maybe citizenship is even more secure." By the time you really get citizenship, you are old. When you look back on your life, in your whole life, you only struggle for a legal permanent living permission? You may feel it's not worthy. However, if you think about your next generation, that your children and grandchildren are legally Americans, maybe you'll feel it is worth the effort of us first generation. Americans are good at doing things following rules. It won't be like that if you go to some agency, the people there give you the look of bad attitude. Or, if you go to a financial office, or a government agency, to ask people there to do something for you, they will feel that you are begging for something. It won't be like that. They will just act as service people to treat you. No matter where I go, supermarket, hospital, or some other business places, they will always welcome you with smiles. They will greet you and ask how is your day. No matter if they pretend it, or they really mean it, it is always good that they smile at you and welcome you. When it is at the end of a day, when you feel tired, or sometimes even wronged and sad, it is a good thing to see someone smiling at you. When others smile at you, you'll instantly feel that while the world is pretty wonderful after all. If

relations between people can be like that, even if it is superficial, it makes you happy. If you take it easy, and forget all the annoyances, it is a pretty good living environment.

## APPENDIX D

### Transcripts of Recording B

Before I came to America, I usually heard that, Americans are more honest. However, we are all humans. Americans are not saints. They still have human nature. They still have some dishonest behaviors. Therefore, actually we are all humans. They are not so different because of a different system and environment. There are so many things that are just human nature. So, as Chinese, we can't expect America to be a pure environment and have a pure culture. Relatively, in most cases, people can strictly conform to the system and rules. Of course, we can't exclude exceptions. And also we can't disapprove most people because of these exceptions. Many Chinese don't like to show themselves (or their abilities/accomplishments) in professional environments. This is related with Chinese culture and traditions. "The outstand usually bear the brunt of attack." In China, if, having few qualifications, you act aggressively, and then it's very hard for you to get approval from people. But if you bring that opinion and attitude to professional environments in America, it will lead to the opposite result. For example, in the group I'm working in, half of the group members are Chinese, the other half are not Chinese. The jobs that Chinese do are more detailed, and more-"dry" tasks in others' eyes, like coding, or supporting other groups at their request. Because they'll find problems in the project and you have to fix them. Or they'll ask you to add some features and other trivial jobs. So, on every group meeting, when we report jobs we did, as who do all these things, we have very little to present. What should we say? How many lines of codes we wrote? Say that I find some bugs in this week and I fix them? Or say that I add some lines of codes by someone's request? These works are hard to present and hard to assess. But I feel that most Chinese are doing these works. While

our coworkers (not Chinese) are not doing these detailed jobs. They don't have to write codes all day long. They can just take our codes and run them to get some results. Or they can just change a few parameters to get some so-called "performance analysis". But, who can't do these jobs? If you give the work to any Chinese in my group, they all can do it. Even though they just do easy jobs like this, they can make more slides to present on meetings. For that reason, they have high visibility. The manager...well manager may know that they didn't do too much work. People on higher levels, like directors can hardly tell the workload, or how much effort you put into your works. They just see what you present. Although some people do easy jobs and thus spend shorter time, their work is more suitable for fancy presentations and thus receives more appreciation from people. So, actually, this is a working style that formed over time and ... and deep-rooted opinion about different kinds of jobs Maybe some Chinese... or I think most elder Chinese... they prefer to do practical and detailed works, and more-technical jobs. So, I feel that for younger Chinese who can speak better English, if they work under such circumstances, I think they should do some, not-so-detailed works. They should do works that can increase their visibility. I think it is mainly related to the educations... ..we've received since we were young. We have been told to be humble and cautious since we were kids. We were educated that "He who talks much errs much." Someone says that one important issue is language. I think not. In fact, many Chinese can speak good English in professional circumstances. They can communicate well with people from other countries. I don't think language is the main problem. I think the major issue is culture or personality, which leads to the situation that I talked about earlier. As Chinese, we feel reluctant to present our works. Or rather, if you do

something that are worth 100 points, but being humble and cautious or for similar reasons, you show to other people, only 75 or 80 through expression or presentation. But, those people from another Asian country, they will behave oppositely. If they feel that they finish 60% or 70% of a job, through their presentation, they give you the impression that they've done 80% or 90%. Sometimes, they even brag that they've done 110% or 120%. So, gradually, in professional environments, people, especially managers of mid or high level, they won't know details of your work. Normally, they see your works in the most direct ways: presentation, whether the presentation is textual report or oral talk/speech. If performance is measured in this way, they (some non-Chinese coworkers) can just take advantage of the situation. I don't think this is about language. It's about, to be honest, that if you are shameless enough to lie about works you haven't done, or things you don't know. We assume that they (some non-Chinese) can... ..they can work with honesty, integrity and respect, but the reality is usually not like our assumption. When you deal with this kind of coworkers, often you'll feel painful frustration. For many Chinese working in America, how to deal with the situation, or how to get used to the situation, is important, no matter for individuals, or for the development of Chinese community in professional environments. I often hear some complaints from many Chinese people. They complain that the American culture is different from Chinese, and the system is unreasonable, or how the culture is worse. I think these complaints are totally unnecessary because you are just a foreigner. You are just an immigrant. You come to a country of other people, who do you think you are to demand that their system and culture to comply with your opinions? Even if you stay in China, will the system suit you? In China, different cities have different systems and

cultures. Even if you stay in China, you still encounter conflicts (with the system) similar to those in US. In fact, anywhere in the world, between local residents and foreigners, there is always a barrier being set intentionally. Espeicall when resources are limited, and there are too many people for the limited resources, when doing the redistribution of the resources, there must be some unfairness in the system. So, I feel, from my experience at least, for people like us, who are even discriminated and treated unfairly in China, who can't enjoy freedom in China, I do feel good in America. I do feel that American culture is tolerant. If you don't have excessive requirements, if you don't want citizen rights in this country, I think that most people can live well in America. Of course, for those who can live well in China, those who have high status in Chinese society, they feel that they lose all their privileges after coming to America, they'll feel the fall in status and think America is not good. You feel the American system is incomplete and the culture is intolerant. But, for most Chinese, it won't be worse if you live in American culture and system. And I feel that's enough.

## APPENDIX E

### Transcripts of Recording C

When I first get off the airplane and arrived at school, I felt the grass is so green, and the sky is so blue. Well, actually there's bamboo in United States. In front of our apartment building they piled up a big dirt hill. Then there were trucks with big shovels coming and going, from 7am in the morning to 7pm in the evening, incessantly. Away from homeland, away from those friends and family that you are truly familiar with, actually you are free from a kind of tie. Yes... the initial and pure status... that is...this procedure also gives me a feeling that when you come to this foreign country, escaping from your original cultural environment, there is a possibility that you can return to an initial, original and genuine status. So, a lot of academic things for them are totally sensible, or even great, but for me, that's not necessary the situation, because the birth background of these things is Americans' background, the 70s and 80s are American's 70s and 80s. An embarrassing thing that I frequently encountered is that when I tried to talk about something, only when I strongly emphasize and clearly indicate "the thing I am going to talk about happened in China", only at this time, I feel I was given the respect of listening. Because when I tried to talk about... One of my experiences is that I made a work that gets involved with Disney 60s cartoon and when I started to talk about the background, one of our professors suddenly interrupted and said, "There're so many things happened in 60s and you have to know that time." Well, then I... how to put it... I like cartoon, but I don't think cartoon only belongs to Americans, but for academia, on class, this is something that I cannot run away from and I cannot endure. It's like the noise outside of your window, when you try to sleep and when you try to do anything, there's always someone jumping out and say "You have to know this." "You

have to know our 60s.” “You have to know this. You have to know that.” When I really try to tell a real... even when I try to do my thesis, when I try to do a real story of Chinese, not a pure Chinese story, but a story about Chinese in America, someone even jumped out and asked me “what is China?” Then I feel in their culture, in this seemingly, seemingly what they call objective, seemingly scientific, seemingly fair, seemingly everything system and environment, I don’t have a way to speak my own voice. I feel that I can be repressed at anytime and everywhere. American culture is something tacitly approved. If you are talking about American culture, this makes me very, very angry and frustrated. However, I think, from some point of view, maybe, this is reasonable. Maybe, I’m only saying MAYBE. Maybe these people just want to know more, to know what they don’t know. While they are talking about something they know, they have such a confidence (or arrogance) that annoys me so much. It seems everything happening around what they know. Even the attempt to know what you know is for themselves, for themselves to know more. It’s not for you to talk, to speak what you want to say, the topic you want to talk about. This and the freedom claimed, by this nation, is not your freedom, is their freedom. So I have to say, I have to say these very very subtle things happened in the past 5 years, which I can’t explain but feel painful and repressed about. I have to speak them out, because I feel that I should have my own freedom - the freedom belongs to me. In the photo, she was standing in front of Golden Gate Bridge. Her whole body was covered in red color. At that time, she, one of my best friends, was going to graduate and going to another city. The wind on Golden Gate Bridge was so strong, and there’re so many people. So many Chinese were coming and going. We stood on the bridge and we were several feet apart. When I took

a photo of her, I felt the strong wind. Suddenly I felt that the wind could take her anywhere. She will go to any place that I won't go. Because we are here. We have to spend so much time here. We came to this country at our best age, so love and friendship are very important for us. When you are here, you feel so lonely. The loneliness is not about boredom. It's because of the unfamiliar culture. You have a very different background with people around you. No one can understand you. But because of our immigration problem, we have to choose those ...places that allow us to work legally. It is saying that you can not stay wherever you want to stay. If you want to maintain your legal status in this country, you have to go to a company that is willing to hire you. Then you are usually separated with your friends. Then you are usually on your own. We are staying in two utopias of two cultures, and we are living in neither of the dreams. We can have both America dream and China dream, and we can have nothing, no American dream, no China dream. That's our real life.

## APPENDIX F

### Transcripts of Recording D

Most discussion is only about technical issues. If you want to mix with them... it is very hard. When the communication is not about work, you can feel that they generally... ..have discrimination and prejudice. It's not hard to understand. Say, Chinese people in Americans' eyes, are like, Vietnamese or Malaysians in Chinese people's eyes. Although this may not be an appropriate analogy. You always feel that they are not on the same level with you. No matter discrimination or prejudice, it is in their bones. So, when you talk with them in daily life, between the lines, you just feel they think you are not as good as themselves. They just feel that you are here to work for them. Well, they think Chinese people steal intellectual properties and do not follow rules, and so on. Well, what makes you feel most offended is that.. They claim that it is a society of equality in America. They claim that there's no discrimination in this society. They claim that everyone is equal in this society. However, they discriminate against you internally. So, they become very hypocritical. They make the discrimination against you so subtle on the surface that you feel that they discriminate against you indirectly. "Someone from China frequently plagiarizes..." By allusive attacking, it seems that they are not directly accusing you, Well, actually... (They are accusing you.) So, Americans are generally arrogant. They still look down upon these immigrants, but, they are also aware that, Chinese or other immigrants are better at works than themselves. They are aware that we are taking away their jobs. But, they are not willing to admit. Sometimes, for venting, they talk about us with bias. Of course, things they talked about, like plagiarism, or commercial fraud, does exist. However, they still judge all Chinese people based on the deeds of just a few. They always attack you using these things. It's hard

for them to accept the reality, to admit (the real China or Chinese). They really despise you in their hearts. In America, sometime we talk about things we feel proud of. We chat with Americans about the development of China. Sometimes, their reactions are intense. They are not willing to admit the development you talked about. They think the achievements are made in some illicit way. That's...what makes you feel really disturbing in America. They won't recognize (the achievements of you or your country.) Their opinion about you is deep-rooted. Their perception of you doesn't improve with time. Well, in general, they discriminate against foreigners. We certainly argue with them sometimes. However, because of language problems, and we don't know how to play the "game", we use some facts to directly refute. For example, we talk about India. They quickly seize on that and turn the blame to you. They'll say "how can you say that?", "You can't say that without evidence." or "Are you discriminating against them?" It's they that judged you and the entire China without evidence. And yet it is also they that tell you "you can't say that without evidence". Well, it makes you feel...(sigh) Well, you will always have that kind of unpleasant experience with them. Of course, it is just occasional. Whenever we talk about this sensitive stuff, I'll just keep quiet to avoid argument. I don't feel argument is necessary. Well, I feel Americans... ..Americans are not aware of... They still think they are the best in the world. They look down upon others. They know (others are good). They think we take away their jobs. Sometimes, when we communicate with Americans, we feel that they are xenophobic. We feel they have discriminations. I occasionally ask myself: are we too sensitive about discrimination? It's too obvious that we don't have the same skin color and the same race. Even if something goes wrong a little bit, we tend to take it as discrimination. But if

you think it through, discrimination is not only in America. Even if we go back to China, if you are not from Beijing or Shanghai and you go there, If you are not from big cities and you go there, they are also xenophobic. There's another issue for Chinese in America. It's called the problem of "integrating oneself into American society". First, I don't think I have intergrated well into American society. Second, I don't think I have the need to integrate well into American society. For me, it's really unnecessary to share same interests with Americans just for pleasing them. If you like football, I like football or something like that. I feel that's totally unnecessary. Well, for me, the people that I really communicate with are still Chinese. I just go to work. I have to do some necessary communications while I go to work. After work, I rarely hang out with Americans. It's like, a bunch of Chinese, coming from China to America, and forms a small community. The social circle is small, and just in America. You adapt to the environment and know how to survive. That's enough. You don't need the soft knowledge about them. You don't have to learn their culture. You don't have to know their history. You don't have to have same interests with them. If you happen to have same interests with them, it's fine. But you don't have to intentionally integrate well into their society. To be honest, I don't think we are alike. We are different races. I really don't think I have to intentionally do same things with them to integrate well. So, I don't think I have to integrate into this society. My social circle is just the small Chinese group. I just have to survive here. I just think it's totally unnecessary (to integrate well). Well, sometimes I think... If you don't want to integrate into the society, and you don't want to learn their cultures to mix with them, then, why do you come to America? To get the same life quality, it's easier in America than in China. You don't have to make so much effort as in China. And also, in

America, it's more likely to get the fruit of your labors. Sometimes I think (it is a deal.) Think about this: Americans are not fools, are they? They let you come to America to get your degree and to work. They know you are useful to them. We want to stay here because the life quality is better here. I think it's just a deal. Americans are really calculating. If you think in their calculated way: If you can't work for them for so many years, to make contributions, then you are not what they need. If they don't need you so much, then you should go back to China. So, it is a deal, isn't it? I think if you figure this out, it's just okay. If the stock of the company is going down a little bit, or if a project in your team fails, you always feel so much anxiety. Sometimes I have contradicting feelings. On one side, I don't want to communicate with Americans. For me, socializing with Americans really is not even worth the effort. On the other side, I feel bored here.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lu Cao is graduating from University of Florida majoring in Art and Technology. She also has a master degree of computer science. Lu is from China. In the past three years, she has worked on multiple topics about contemporary China. She works with her expertise in science and passion for art. She is also a productive and creative writer in Chinese. Her email address is [loisbidepan@gmail.com](mailto:loisbidepan@gmail.com).