

Doctoral Sojourn Experiences of Adapted Physical Education Students from Asian Countries

Takahiro Sato

Kent State University (USA)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain Asian international doctoral students' sojourn experiences into Adapted Physical Education (APE) programs at two universities. The participants were six doctoral students from Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. This case study was conceptualized within sojourner theory (Siu, 1952). The data sources were a demographic questionnaire and face-to-face interviews conducted during the participants' doctoral studies. The emergent themes were (a) research challenges; (b) academic, social, and hierarchical relationships with doctoral advisors; (c) burnout; and (d) situation-specific anxiety. To better support international doctoral students, this study encourages academic departments, administrators, faculty, and all doctoral students to learn to view themselves as playing various roles including academic advisors, teachers, and graduate students.

Keywords: Asian International Students, Doctoral Education, Academic and Social Experiences, Sojourn, Educational Research

Colleges and universities in the United States (U.S.) are now more culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse than ever before. Currently, international students make up 17% of all U.S. Graduate

students, with more than half studying engineering, science, business, and education (The Council of Graduate Education, 2014). The National Center for Education Statistics (2015) reported that there were 170,100 doctoral students enrolled in American colleges and universities. Although the number of doctoral programs enrolling U.S. citizens declined 4% in the years 2007–2012, at the same time, international doctoral student enrollment increased nearly 8% (Institute for International Education [IIE], 2014). International students constitute a valuable source of diversity on U.S. campuses. The top three countries of origin (India, China, and South Korea) constituted approximately 50% of all international students enrolled in U.S. higher education (IIE, 2014). International doctoral students from countries outside of the U.S. are an important constituency for research Institutes for Higher Education (IHE) in America due to the added globalization they bring to the academy (Tan, 1994).

According to Kallio (1995), universities need to help international students solve the transition issues and concerns (language challenges and cultural adjustments) to graduate education. Kirsch (2014) found that more than 60% of American colleges and universities recruit international students (e.g., study abroad agents, web advertisement, marketing campaign, or social media). However, many of these students face difficulty in their academic and social transition (e.g., learning frustration, lack of motivation for academic success, or academic shock in lecture and research) (Wan, 2001).

LITERATURE REVIEW

International Influence in Adapted Physical Education in Asia

Adapted Physical Education (APE) is defined as the umbrella term that encompasses exercise, physical education, recreation, dance, sport, fitness, and rehabilitation for individuals with various impairments and disabilities across the lifespan (Porretta, Nesbitt, & Labanowich, 1993; Sherrill, 1998). There are several Asian countries that have received influences of teaching strategies (inclusive physical education and assessments) related to adapted physical education for students with disabilities from scholars from the American colleges and universities. For example, *Adapted Physical Activity, Recreation and Sport: Crossdisciplinary and Lifespan* (Sherrill, 1998) has been translated into Chinese, and likewise the book *Early Movement*

Experiences and Development (Winnick, 1995) has been translated into Japanese and now widely used for elementary special education teachers in these countries (Kobayashi, Nagamatsu, Shichikida, & Miyahara, 2000). As a result, Asian educators have been inspired to promote the concepts of interdisciplinary and cross disciplinary theory and practice, which relate to the life span physical activity of individual with psychomotor limitations (Kobayashi et al., 2000).

Sojourn Experiences of International Students

There are several research studies that have explored the sojourn experience of Asian international graduate students in the US (e.g., Kitano & Daniel, 1990; Sato & Hodge, 2009; 2013; 2015; Uba, 1994; Wan, 2001; Ye, 2005). Many Asian international students at American colleges and universities encounter difficulty when attempting to acculturate and adjust to their environment (Sato & Hodge, 2009; Uba, 1994). They come from cultures with have different values than highly individualistic societies like the U.S., and they may experience more psychological, academic, and social conflict when compromising their traditional roles versus a new cultural norm as sojourners (Sam & Eide, 1991). When an individual's environment is not matched with personality, there is a cultural distance or detachment (Sam & Eide, 1991). Sojourners tend to establish social bonds with peers from their native countries and cultures (e.g., Asian international students who mostly seek out and establish relationships with other Asian peers while studying abroad in the US) (Sato & Hodge, 2009; 2013; Uba, 1994). These social bonds permit the sojourners to establish meaningful and supportive relationships with co-nationals who likely have familiarity with similar adjustment difficulties and share similar cultural values and beliefs (Sato & Hodge, 2013). These bonds serve an uplifting function "whereby psychological security, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging are provided, and anxiety, feelings of powerlessness, and social stresses are reduced" (Church, 1982, p. 551).

Sato and Hodge (2009; 2013; 2015) revealed that The Japanese students interpreted their experiences at the university as outsiders who were socially and culturally alienated and alone. Positioned as academic sojourners, they came to believe that White peers had different views about their interactional experiences. They felt

unwelcomed and marginalized. These findings are consistent with past results where Asian international students' language differences, lack of familiarity with the host country's customs and culture, different types of academic demands from their home countries, and negative social relationships with White peers led them to feel isolated and marginalized (Choi, 2006; Lin & Yi, 1997; Samuel, 2004; Sato & Hodge, 2009).

What's interesting, the Asian students' experiences were similar to those voiced by Black students on majority White campuses who felt like "uninvited guests in a strange land" (Lewis, Ginsberg, Davis, & Smith, 2004, pp. 242–243). Troubling also the Asian students experienced racism and intimidation. For example, Asian students were physically assaulted on campus by a White male. Plausibly, racism contributed to this assault, which was physically and psychologically intimidating (Samuel, 2004).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND PURPOSE

The study draws on the theory of an academic sojourner (Siu, 1952; Spurling, 2006). Ward and Kennedy (1999) define that the term is used to describe international students who visit new or strange places to receive academic knowledge, and achieve their academic goals and objectives. In 1952, Siu conceptualized the *sojourner* as an immigrant who "clings to the academic and social experiences of his [or her] own backgrounds" and psychologically works to "assimilate and organize himself or herself as a graduate student in the country of his sojourn" (Spurling, 2006, p. 34). The sojourner might spend a short time, several years, or a lifetime in this new country without being assimilated (Siu, 1952). For example, an international doctoral student might temporarily succumb to a sojourner's posture in an effort to experience the culture, communication skills, language, and habits over one semester, a year or longer (Sato & Hodge, 2009). Dey and Hurtado (2000) argue that not only are academic sojourners transformed by their college experiences, they also transform the culture of the host institution. Contrasting this argument, research indicates that academic sojourners rarely experience full assimilation. Instead they are often positioned as outsiders and marginalized, and their sojourn is typified by a pattern of accommodation, isolation, and

non-assimilation (Sato & Hodge, 2009; Spurling, 2006). Gordon (1964) explained that acculturation stress presents in immigrants who struggle to adjust to the dominant culture; they tend to lose their own personal identifies to become Americanized. This is considered a dangerous behavior, like painting other colors over their own colors.

Although the authors support the concept of the sojourner, we have critical points of departure from Siu (1952). For instance his use of phrases such as “another deviant type” (p. 34) and male hegemonic language in describing sojourners contrasts with our preferred language as critical theorists. We view all students as sojourners, given that the term *sojourn* means “a brief stay; stay that is not permanent” (Barnhart & Barnhart, 1990, p. 1988). In that sense, Asian doctoral students are academic sojourners, since they are at their respective colleges and universities for only a temporary period (Sato & Hodge, 2009). The academic sojourner's adjustment has been described as a transitional journey to greater cultural understanding and self-awareness (Church, 1982). From his review, Church (1982) concluded that increased "self-reliance and self-awareness become a more consistent sojourn outcome than do changes in more value-laden, culture-based ideologies and norms, at least as perceived by the sojourners themselves" (p. 558). In that sense, the concept of the academic sojourner with a particular focus on academic and social experiences to assimilation was deemed suitable for this current study of Asian doctoral students' sojourn experiences at research institutions.

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain Asian international doctoral students' sojourn experiences into APE graduate programs. The following research question guided the study: How do Asian international doctoral students perceive academic and social sojourner experiences during APE graduate studies?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study used a case study design (Yin, 2003) unique in its focus on students' experiences transitioning into doctoral programs. Qualitative studies typically focus in depth on small samples, even single cases, sampled purposefully (Patton, 2002). The purpose of the case study method is to better understand complex educational and/or

social phenomena while retaining the meaningful particularities of real-life circumstances (Yin, 2003).

Research Sites

Two flagship research institutions, College Town University (CTU) and Mid-America University (MAU; pseudonyms), were the sites for this study. These sites were determined by the selection of Asian international students within Adapted Physical Education (APE) doctoral programs. The rationale for selection of programs was to have participants from comparable universities in the same geographical region. Specific to APE, several Asian countries (e.g. China, Japan, and South Korea) have received academic and pedagogy influences related to teaching physical activities and sports for individuals with disabilities from scholars in and beyond America (Kobayashi et al., 2000). However, the number of APE graduate programs in Asian countries is still sparse. Therefore, a number of doctoral students from various Asian countries consistently enroll in APE degree programs at research institutions in America (Kobayashi et al., 2000). At the time of the study, only four universities had APE graduate programs. Of these, only 2 universities had Asian international doctoral students in their APE programs.

Participant Nomination and Selection

In accordance with Yin's (2003) guidelines, the participant nomination process was used in screening and selecting participants. This process involved via e-mail to faculty and graduate students of APE programs seek nominations of Asian international doctoral students enrolled in these programs. In total seven Asian international students were nominated, and 6 (3 female, 3 male) agreed to participate. The participants were (pseudonyms) Sang-Chul, Kyung-Hee, Mi-Ran, Satoshi, Yu-Sheng, and Xiao. The mean age was 33 years, with a range of 30–36 years. They were native to three Asian countries (i.e., Japan, $n = 1$; South Korea, $n = 3$; and Taiwan, $n = 2$), with diverse educational backgrounds, ethnicities, personalities, cultures, and languages. They had earned a bachelor's degree in physical education, biomechanics, social welfare, or sport psychology in their native countries. Later, they earned master's degrees in APE, biomechanics, or sport psychology from universities in the United

States ($n = 2$), Canada ($n = 1$), or their native countries ($n = 3$). Their length of stay in the United States ranged between 1 and 6 years at the time of this study. Three participants (Kyung-Hee, Yu-Sheng, and Mi-Ran) were funded in their doctoral programs either by their college or department (i.e., held a graduate assistant position). At the onset of the study, the participants were all doctoral students in APE programs at two research institutions in the United States.

Data Sources

Demographic questionnaire. A demographic questionnaire was used to collect descriptive quantifiable data from participants. This questionnaire was designed to measure how well doctoral students were prepared to be future scholars in APE. It consists of two components: (a) questions to determine respondents' goals and motives for enrolling in a doctoral program; (b) questions about the graduate sojourn transition and student academic progress.

The Face-to-Face Interviews. The focused interviews (Yin, 2003) were conducted by the researcher using a two-phase approach (i.e., reflecting and responding). In the reflection phase, a 22-item interview schedule was sent to each participant a week before the interviews to permit them time to reflect on their doctoral program experiences (See 10 sample interview questions –Appendix A). The interview schedule was (a) constructed after a comprehensive literature review, (b) pilot tested with two Asian international students who were not involved in the principal study, and (c) revised for clarity and cultural relevancy. In the responding phase, the audiotaped face-to-face interviews were conducted with a conversational approach. Before data collection started, participants were alerted that they could respond to the demographic questionnaire and interview questions in either their native languages or English as second language for all six participants. All participants chose to be interviewed in English. The interviews lasted on average 60 to 90 min. Although not extensively used, telephone and e-mail follow-ups were helpful in seeking clarifications and additional explanations, as needed.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

A constant comparative method (Boeije, 2010) was used to interpret the data. The basic strategy of this analytical process is to constantly compare pieces of data. In this study, the researcher used four steps developed by Boeije (2010): a) comparison within a participant's single interview and demographic questionnaire responses, b) comparison between interviews and demographic questionnaire responses between the participants, c) comparison in pairs at the level of couple, and d) comparing couples. In step 1, the researcher and his graduate assistants conducted open coding on every passage of interviews. Reflections were studied to determine what exactly has been said and to code each passage adequately for each participant. In step 2, they conducted axial coding. In this study, interview questions were framed in sojourner theory. The researcher and graduate students compared fragments from different interviews, demographic questionnaire responses, and transcriptions of each category among participants. Then, they identified similar themes that have been given the same coding. In step 3, the comparison took place in pairs of peer debriefers (qualitative researchers in education) who examined for relationship issues between the coding of interviews and the demographic questionnaire responses. They discussed their agreement, similarities, differences, and perspectives relative to themes, subthemes, and the sojourner theoretical framework (see appendix B). In the last step (step 4), the comparison was the most complex of all. First, when the researcher found a theme from unique or multiple perspectives, he e-mailed the interview quotes to participants with a request to respond to the clarification or explanation. Secondly, the researchers later met to confirm the findings and to reach agreement about the constructed thematic categories, which were then refined into major recurring themes.

Trustworthiness was established through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Triangulation involved the use of multiple data sources, including data from the interview transcripts, demographic questionnaires, and doctoral programs of study. Member checking was used to reduce the impact of subjective bias (Patton, 2002). The researcher sent copies of the interview transcripts and themes that emerged to the participants by postal mail. Their

acknowledgment of the accuracy of the transcripts and of the researchers' interpretations of the data ensured that trustworthiness was established.

RESULTS

Four major interrelated and complex themes emerged from the data. They were: (a) *research challenges*; (b) *academic, social, and hierarchical relationships with doctoral advisors*; (c) *burnout*; and (d) *situation-specific anxiety*. These themes are discussed below in narrative form with quotes from participants.

Theme 1: Research Challenges

This theme captures that the participants had great expectations of improving their English proficiency and research competency. However, they found that it was difficult to pass the research method course series. Besides their coursework, participants were required to study how to write research proposals in English using research terminology and concepts. They also faced academic transition issues such as adaptation to professors' lecture styles and slow progression of English language proficiency. All six participants were required to take approximately 15 to 18 credit hours of research courses offered by the Department of Kinesiology: including single subject research, qualitative research, experimental analysis and design, statistic technique research, and a multivariate statistic course. For example, Sang-Chul explained that:

Before I came here, I was motivated to learn research method. I felt that I could become an independent researcher when I complete the doctoral study. Now, I am struggling to pass the statistic course series. Multivariate statistic course is the one I struggle most. My professor is helping my study. He tries to make a class as easy as possible, but it was difficult for me. He explains to me how to write a research proposal, but I still do not know how to do. I am anxious... I failed some exams and struggled to pass the course. I do not think I am confident enough to demonstrate my knowledge of research.

Sang-Chul mentioned that his limited English proficiency placed him in a challenging situation. He felt inadequate and incompetent due to the unfamiliar research terminology and content of the research methods courses. He also explained that he was unable to use English in authentic and meaningful ways when he attended lectures for his research methods courses, which were part of a series. When students missed or had a hard time understanding a certain concept, they struggle to pass the following courses in the series. If they receive a bad grade for the first class of statistics, they may have a hard time to achieve good grades in the following courses. Another participant, Yu-Sheng shared his academic experiences and concerns about the research. He felt that he needed to develop his self-confidence and competence to master various research methods and become a good researcher. He said that:

I believed that the most important thing of doctoral study was to become a research expert. However, there is knowledge required through this process. I felt pressure daily that I should be a research expert. My academic advisor wants me to discuss APE field, physical activities for people with disabilities. She (academic advisor) wants me to explain all research studies of fundamental motor skills and assessments including research methods and analysis. The professors always tell me that I have to know how to conduct research study independently. I feel academic pressure that I have to know everything.

Yu-Sheng felt anxiety, academic pressure, and constant concerns about providing himself as a good student to his research advisor. He said that “my academic advisor controls the environment of my academic life” and “I am afraid of demonstrating my research knowledge and skills when I write my dissertation. This will be another academic challenge.” Yu-Sheng was concerned that if any of his academic qualities are not deemed satisfactory, he may be dismissed from the APE doctoral program.

Theme 2: Academic, Social, and Hierarchical Relationships with Doctoral Advisors

All participants reported that doctoral advisors did not initiate help for students unless they asked for assistance from their advisors to address their academic issues and concerns. The participants believed that in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, their academic advisors frequently checked their academic progress, mental health, and social comfort throughout their programs of study. They felt that they were unable to develop positive social relationships with American professors. They expected professors to check their understanding of lectures, assignments, and tests.

Kyung-Hee felt that her academic advisor did not understand international students' language issues and concerns associated with doctoral study. She also mentioned a misunderstanding with her academic advisor.

I think my academic advisor understood my issues and concerns as being international students, but sometime, he (advisor) did not fully understand. We talked about English proficiency. He said that my English was ok, it was not a problem, but I did not think I am confident enough to conduct oral presentation in front of students and faculty during the dissertation proposal defense. I was frustrated and stressed so much. I was nervous always. I felt that my academic advisor and I only had academic relationships which made me more anxious. I do not think we developed good social relationships.

Kyung-Hee's academic advisor assumed that her speaking ability was good enough for presenting to other students and faculty. However, she was not confident presenting her dissertation proposal using English in front of them. She also said that writing dissertation was the most difficult task through her doctoral study. She appreciated that her academic advisor mentored her dissertation progress well and enhanced the quality of her dissertation, but she struggled to meet the academic advisor's expectation and image of the ideal student.

My academic advisor wanted me to write every day for my dissertation. One page. It is not easy, every day we have other things to do, sometime I did the last minute writing. Academic advisor said that “when you do last minute writing, I can tell.” Especially, when I do not have time, I am always completing tasks in the last minute and make mistakes. I try to meet his expectation, because I feel that without developing academic trusts between us, we will not be able to develop positive social relationships.

Another participant (Xiao) had a different research interests compared to the research foci of her academic advisor in the doctoral program.

I have research interests relative to kinesiology in Adapted Physical Activity (APA) (e.g., movement science of individuals with disabilities). I do not mind to study a research study in education (study of teaching students with disabilities in education) for my dissertation, but I would like to focus on studying APA fields rather than education. My background is biomechanics, so I would like to connect research ideas I learned from my master’s and doctoral programs. However, my academic advisor mentored me that I should focus on education. It seems that I had to write a dissertation my academic advisor was interested.

Xiao reported that the power in student-academic advisor relationships made her doctoral study more problematic. She was willing to conduct kinesiology-related research projects; however, her doctoral advisor’s educational philosophy and research method did not align with her research interests. Thus, she felt that her doctoral program did not align with her research interests.

Theme 3: Burnout

This theme captures the tension-laden interrelatedness of the participants’ academic and research agendas. They found it difficult to balance the demands of completing research studies while simultaneously seeking to perform well academically in their courses.

They had different levels of enthusiasm but commonly they all struggled to maintain a balance between academics and research. Besides their coursework, participants were also required to collect the pilot study data of dissertation (second year research project) or write research proposals of their dissertation. Three doctoral students (Kyung-Hee, Yu-Sheng, and Mi-Ran) spent a tremendous amount of time and effort to balance their assistantship duties and academic commitments. They felt that enrolling in courses and proceeding research studies might lower their overall grade point average (GPA). These participants were concerned that they might be placed on academic probation and lose their study eligibility due to violation of the academic immigration status rules. Three of the participants (Satoshi, Sang-Chul, and Xiao) dropped out from their doctoral programs at the end of the academic year. All participants believed that they should prioritize their research projects over classroom learning. One participant (Mi-Ran) and her academic advisor had different priorities of her doctoral studies. She expressed advisor's expectation of her doctoral work, but she struggled to respond to these expectations, because she had different priorities in completing tasks (academic coursework).

You know when you have advisor; he or she required high expectations. If I did not reach the expectations, his pressure is high. For example, writing research proposals should be my priority, if I did not take this task as my priority, advisor told me that "why did not you follow my guidance?" First 2 years, I never said NO. I could do thisso on, but time went through, I struggled a little, because I needed to spend more time for my course assignments. I had to teach 4 activity classes of my graduate assistantships and I took 3 courses, and I had to complete 2 research projects, so I was so frustrated. Every week, there were at least two assignment deadlines. Plus, I had to write the manuscript before I graduate. At the time, I had a meeting with my advisor every week. I had to show him something I made a progress every week. I said to him, I am doing my best. He wanted me to do more. It was tough and I am burnout.

Satoshi's reflections of his doctoral program were mostly about academic burnout and his negative relationship with his academic advisor. After he passed his comprehensive exam, Satoshi realized that he was burned out and stopped making progress in his doctoral program. Thus, he had a negative social relationship with his academic advisor lasting nine months.

We had ... very bad relationship with my academic advisor about 9 months. I lost my interest of my academic progress. I was burnout. I had hard time returning back in and catch the same pace it used to. He (academic advisor) told me that it was better for me to find new academic advisor. That period was very tough. From last September to this May, I could not finish my dissertation proposal of this summer and missed the deadline. I was trying to make it, I gave two drafts at that time. I tried to submit third draft. It was going to send my final drafts to all my committee members, but I could not finish before the deadline and my mistake was that I did not communicate with him. I could not finish on time, still working on it, but I was kind of scared that he would not like it. I postponed and delayed it. By the time, when I met him, it was too late (Satoshi, interview).

As a result, Satoshi missed submitting his third draft, which led to a negative social relationship with his academic advisor. However, he sent me the follow up e-mail message that he had now developed better time management skills for making progress on his dissertation.

Theme 4: Situation-Specific Anxiety

This theme captures the fact that all participants expected to develop social relationships or friendships with American doctoral students in this study. They were frustrated that they might not be able to meet their social goals and expectation of English fluency through their doctoral programs. Moreover, they had situation-specific anxiety which means they were reserved around people they did not know. The participants observed American students and realized that only these students interested in similar cultural backgrounds were dependable and friendly. Participants were hesitant

to speak to American students on campus, because of their experiences or social distance from American students. Yu-Sheng explained that:

I feel that I am an outsider often, because American students were talking about disability sport or adapted physical education in the U.S. They are talking about the American culture and physical education. I do not understand what American students talked about. I would like to involve in the conversation with American students more, but I am hesitant to ask for the clarification. The other thing is that I did not understand disability terms, educational laws and concepts, national and state standards of APE. I did not understand, because of history or culture. I feel outsider and I feel I am behind and I am anxious.

Yu-Sheng stated that he was hesitant to speak to American students, because he did not want to bother them and ask for academic support. In Asian culture, his behavior is called “*diffidence*” which involves inferring and thinking about the psychology of another person from a distance. Xiao was required to complete practicum experiences of teaching students with disabilities in physical education classes at local schools. In doing so, she felt isolated from other American doctoral students within the program.

I completed many practicum experience hours, but I felt some degrees of social isolation from other American doctoral students in this program. I had no chance to interact with them from APE program, so I only deal with Asian students from APE doctoral programs. For example, Mi-Ran and I have similar cultural backgrounds and we were required to complete field experiences at weekend recreation program of local schools. I was anxious that I could not be an insider of my practicum experiences. I felt that American students did not care about me. The positive thing was that I had an opportunity to socializing with Mi-Ran. I felt socially isolated or marginalized from them sometime. I and Mi-Ran joined in this program together. I felt really getting close to Mi-Ran.

Xiao could not socialize with American students, and she had a positive friendship with Mi-Ran who began to attend the doctoral program at the same year, because they helped each other in understanding the details of the doctoral program.

DISCUSSION

The themes that emerged from this study indicated that participants struggled to overcome sojourn challenges and stressors such as time demands and isolation (Sato & Hodge, 2009). They believed that their sojourn experiences to graduate school created academic shock, social isolation, and lack of adjustment to a new academic culture. Although they had difficulty adjusting to their doctoral programs, they attempted to cope with the sojourn transition, and new academic culture, and managed their reactions to academic and social transition stress.

This study found that the participants had difficulty passing research method courses. They told the researcher that these courses were a part of a series. When they missed or had a hard time to understand a certain concept they would struggle to pass the following courses in the series. Ekmekci, Hancock, and Swayze (2012) explain that one of the most difficult challenges for graduate students is to meaningfully connect what they learn in the research method courses to the rest of their research plan (e.g., dissertation). This study also found that they had a tendency toward neurotic perfectionism in the sense of unrealistic expectations of excellence and accomplishments in their doctoral programs (Nilsson, Butler, Shouse, & Joshi, 2008). They believed that enrolling in their academic related courses and conducting research projects should bring their research competency to independent scholars. Therefore, they experienced high levels of situational anxiety, which entails a consistent fear of failure (e.g., failing courses) rather than the need to achieve personal goals and objectives. Academic excellence is deeply rooted in Asian cultural belief in the benefits of education and hard work (Yan & Berliner, 2009). However, participants were less motivated and had low interests and engagement with research method courses (Ball & Palco, 2006). They experienced acculturative

stress, which presents as the disorientation that accompanies academic cross-cultural transition and sojourner experiences at research institutions (Lalayants, 2012). According to Sojourner theory (Siu, 1952), the academic sojourners situated themselves in the dominant culture of their academic programs mainly through English language learning and use, and student accommodation (e.g., attending classes, studying). However, linguistic differences created dilemmas in their efforts to meet academic expectations. Marson (2007) suggests that instructors who teach research method courses need to facilitate role-play-based lectures (dividing the class roster into groups of two) where each group mate or the instructor provides immediate feedback to other students. From this guidance, the students are able to see their errors right away and are given an opportunity to gain the correct answers which reduced the pressure to learn materials and allowed for working at their own pace. International students more easily acquire proper skills and knowledge in role-paly-based lectures.

This study found that participants had predominantly academic rather than social relationships with their academic advisors which helped increase academic success in their doctoral programs. In these relationships, academic advisors provide guidance and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of doctoral students (Rhodes, 2002). In contrast, social relationships serve to maintain and enhance self-esteem as well as provide acceptance and approval (Will, 1985). They felt emotionally accepted in their doctoral programs when their advisors were satisfied with the quality of work. However, they felt unable to construct meaningful relationships with academic advisors. It is important that relationships go beyond the mere mechanics of giving academic advice or making accommodation (Sato & Hodge, 2009). Students hoped that the professors would be willing to develop meaningful relationships (possibly becoming their friend or someone they can talk to), or that they would be able to consult with them outside of class (Tam, Heng, & Jiang, 2009). Pratt, Kelly, and Wong (1999) observe that effective professors in Asian countries (e.g., Japan, China, and South Korea) are described as having protective and caring relationships with students. Additionally, they sometimes fulfill the role of a parent, including guiding the intellectual, moral, and personal development of students (Tam et al., 2009). In another study, the doctoral students

experienced hierarchical power relationship with their doctoral advisor, where the students needed to align their research foci with their doctoral advisor's research interests and paradigm (Freire, 1970). They were uncomfortable and uncertain in this situation, but they yielded to assimilate to power and hierarchical structure to be successful.

Four students suffered from academic burnouts characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and the feeling of low personal accomplishment (Lin & Huang, 2014). This led to lower motivation to do required work (e.g., coursework and dissertation) and eventual dropout (Lin & Huang, 2014). Lin and Huang (2014) assert that life stress also affects doctoral students' experiences and that they feel vulnerable to psychological and physical health problems as well as psychological or emotional stress associated with academic difficulties, leading to burnout. This study found that the students and advisors had different prioritized expectations that caused uncertainty in their relationships. Mansson and Myers (2013) explained that as academic sojourners, when Asian students have uncertain or negative academic relationships with their academic advisors, these relationships involve relational conflicts, power inequalities, and performance expectations. According to Foss and Foss (2008), doctoral students experience three types of uncertainty and negativity about their own interaction with their doctoral advisors: *Self uncertainty* (interaction-based statements that describe individuals' inability to explain or predict their own behaviors); *Partner uncertainty* (interaction-based statements that describe individuals' inability to explain or predict their academic advisors' behaviors); and *relational uncertainty* (relational statements that describe individuals' doubts about the status and the future of the relationship). In this study, poor communication (self-uncertainty) is the first contributing factor to negative academic relationships between them and their academic advisors. More specifically, academic advisors seemed not to address with their students' language barriers, and focused more on the lack of students' interaction and communication (partner uncertainty). Low quality of work is the second result of negative academic relationships (relationship uncertainty) between the students and academic advisors. In sojourner theory, cross-cultural experiences often

increase international students' stress levels because of academic and social differences, and domestic and international cultural contexts (Gu & Day, 2013). The students began their studies in Asian countries (e.g., Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea), where they were a part of the ethnocultural majority, and they were unprepared to handle intercultural relationships with professors at research institutions in the US.

Culturally, participants had difficulty adjusting to American social norms (e.g., social and emotional distance from other American peers in the doctoral program). They felt uncomfortable and hesitant to communicate with the American peers, which was compounded by limited opportunity for interacting within their programs beyond class sessions or practicum experiences (Spurling, 2006). They felt that situation-specific anxiety directly and negatively affected their classroom or practicum experiences) (Woodrow, 2006). For example, Asian students wanted to share supportive relationships with other American students during practicum, because they highly valued team effort and collectivity (Lin & Yi, 1997). They also hoped to construct friendships close enough to evaluate their academic performance among each other, which deemed valuable (Wan, 2001). Wan (2001) reported that Asian students often experienced American students as unfriendly, marginalizing, or discriminating. Therefore, Asian students mostly sought out and communicate with Asian peers from their native countries (Church, 1982; Sato & Hodge, 2009; 2013). They experienced high levels of situational anxiety, which entails in consistent fear of failure (e.g., social distance from American students coupled with social challenges). In addition, cultural adjustment difficulty and challenges resulted from situational anxiety (Wilton & Constantine, 2003).

Sato and Hodge (2013) explained reasons why academic sojourners tend to establish social bonds with peers from their native countries and cultures. These social bonds permit the sojourner to establish meaningful and supportive relationships with co-nationals who likely have familiarity with similar adjustment difficulties and share similar cultural values and beliefs. They also share their pride and aspirations, hopes and dreams, prejudices, and dilemmas, and express their opinions about their host country (Siu, 1952). These bonds serve an uplifting function “whereby psychological security,

self-esteem, and a sense of belonging are provided, and situation-specific anxiety, feelings of powerlessness, and social stresses are reduced” (Church, 1982, p. 551). Church (1982) also argued that “restricting social interaction with host nationals to superficial encounters is self-defeating in the long run because it inhibits learning the language, values, and customs of the new culture and can reinforce a sense of alienation” (p. 552).

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The present study has some limitations. First as an insider, the researcher was able to glean a deeper understanding of the issues uncovered in the analysis. Conversely, his insider status potentially was a source of subjective bias (Choi, 2006). The researchers and peer debriefers countered this through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing to establish trustworthiness (Yin, 2003). Second, this study was limited to the views of international Asian students only. Including the voices of more participants such as those of the American students would have added to the perspective and overall completeness of the findings. In the future, researcher should address these issues. Third, because of logistical reasons, this study was unable to engage in a more prolonged process of interaction and interviews with participants. This may limit the depth of information gathered, and perhaps also the openness of participants in telling their stories. However, this does not impeach the truthfulness with which they spoke during their interviews, the participants’ agreement with the transcribed data, or the researchers’ interpretations as determined through member checks and follow-up e-mail correspondence with them.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The doctoral students in this study struggled to overcome challenges related to their studies, stressors, barriers, and isolation. They offered several recommendations and highlighted that what may help support their academic and social sojourn experiences.

First, faculty members involved in research method courses in the department should adopt a role of a facilitator or resource rather

than lecturer or grader. Faculty also are encouraged to receive multidimensional teaching approach training (e.g., case studies, role playing, simulations, experiential exercises, blackboard discussions, terminology games, non-graded quizzes , and cross-word puzzle) to help them better understand doctoral students' unique academic challenges and concerns (Lalayants, 2012). Effective teaching of research method will become more critical in the context of the growing importance of APE fields.

Second, university faculty and administrators need to become more aware of the growing enrollment of diverse students on research institution campuses and become more sensitive to the needs of these academic and social sojourners (Sato & Hodge, 2009). In collaboration with offices of international students and offices of equity and diversity, academic units need to sponsor mandatory workshops on cultural, social and academic adjustment and seminars to address issues concerning international students' academic and social experiences, discrimination and marginalization, diversity, and internationalism. It is also important to institutionalize a commitment to student diversity (including internationalism), and universities should include in the promotion and tenure process an evaluation of faculty activities associated with promoting such diversity (Hodge & Wiggins, 2010).

Third, all doctoral students should complete multiple early stress management workshops hosted by the office of international students, paying special attention to the stress management and prevention. Their stress may not be completely eliminated, but students may be prepared to manage such stress. Lin and Huang (2014) recommend that doctoral students should be encouraged to document their relationships between life stress and burnout and their coping responses through academic programs. Such knowledge could potentially be offered to university counseling services for designing burnout prevention intervention programs.

Fourth, during international graduate student orientations, offices of international students should include a session on strategies for communicating with American peers in academic major graduate courses. This session could address potential interactional and linguistic challenges in academic and everyday dichotomies (language of ideas and language of display) (Bunch, 2009). When international

students enroll in graduate courses, they need to choose either the language of ideas or the language of display for different audiences (e.g., professors, classmates, or academic staff). Such a session would be helpful for international students in developing linguistic resources, understanding professors' expectations about student presentations and discussions, seeking opportunities for classmates' peer support, and learning about equal opportunity for participation in presentations and group discussions (Bunch, 2009).

Fifth, research using different theoretical frameworks (e.g., assimilation theory) should be conducted to examine the extent of academic and social experiences of Asian international doctoral students in APE. Future research needs to examine cultural conflicts (e.g., stereotypes) that students must cope with during the assimilation and educational achievement process.

In conclusion, this study explored sojourner experiences that impact psychological health (e.g., burnout, anxiety, well-being, and self-esteem) and social difficulties (negative incidents with local people, language barriers) among the diverse and expanding numbers of international students living temporarily abroad. The better support Asian doctoral students, this study encourages academic departments, administrators, faculty, and all doctoral students to learn to view themselves as playing various roles as academic advisors, teachers, and graduate students. It is wise for doctoral programs and doctoral students to focus on the nuance of academic and social sojourn relationships right from the outset.

REFERENCES

- Ball, C. T., & Pelco, L. E. (2006). Teaching research methods to undergraduate psychology students using an active cooperative learning approach. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 17(2), 147-154.
- Barnhart, C. L., & Barnhart, R. K. (Eds.). (1990). *World book dictionary*. Chicago, IL: World Book.
- Boeije, H. R. (2010). *Analysis in qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Bunch, G. C. (2009). "Going up there": Challenges and opportunities for language minority students during a mainstream classroom speech event. *Linguistic and Education*, 20, 81-108.

- Choi, T. (2006). Asian international students' academic adjustments in a U.S. graduate school and Stanton-Salazar's framework. *Pacific Asian Education, 18*(2), 51-68.
- Church, A. T. (1982). Sojourner adjustment. *Psychological Bulletin, 91*(3), 540-572.
- Dey, E., & Hurtado, S. (2000). Students, colleges, and society. In P. G. Altbach, R. O. Berdahl, & P. J. Gumpert (Eds.), *American higher education in the twenty-first century* (pp. 298–322). Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Ekmekci, O., Hancock, A. B., Swayze, S. (2012). Teaching statistical research method to graduate students: Lessons learned from three different degree programs. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 24*(2), 272-279.
- Foss, K. A., & Foss, S. K. (2008). Accomplishing the mission: Creating a partnership with your advisor. In S. Morreale & P. A. Arneson (Eds.), *Getting the most from your graduate education in communication: A graduate students' handbook* (pp.59-70). Washington DC: National Communication Association.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Seabury Press.
- Gordon, M. (1964). *Assimilation in American life*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Gu, C., & Day, C. (2013). Challenges to teacher resilience: Conditions count. *British Educational Research Journal, 39*(1), 22-44.
- Hodge, S. R., & Wiggins, D. K. (2010). The African American experience in physical education and kinesiology: Plight, pitfalls, and possibilities. *Quest, 62*, 35-60.
- Institute for International Education. (2014). *Open-doors 2014 online: Report on international educational exchange*. New York: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.iie.org>
- Kallio, R. E. (1995). Factors influencing the college choice decisions of graduate students. *Research in Higher Education, 36*(1), 109-124.
- Kirsch, E. M. (2014). The use of agents in international student recruitment: International education professional's opinions. *Capstone Collection, 2635*.

- Kitano, H. H. L., & Damiels, R. (1990). *Asian- Americans: Emerging minorities*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice–Hall.
- Kobayashi, Y., Nagamatsu, H., Shichikida, A., & Miyahara, Y (2000) *Kodomo hantatsu to Undo Kyoiku*. Tokyo: Taishukan shoten.
- Lalayants, M. (2012). Overcoming graduate students’ negative perceptions of statistics. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 32, 356-375.
- Lewis, C., Ginsberg, R., Davis, T., & Smith, K. (2004). The experiences of African American PH.D students at a predominantly White Carnegie I-research institution. *College Student Journal*, 38(2), 231-245.
- Lin, S-H., & Huang, Y-C. (2014). Life stress and academic burnout. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 15(1), 77-90.
- Lin, J. G., & Yi, J.K. (1997). Asian international students’ adjustment: Issues and program suggestions. *College Student Journal*, 31(4), 473-479.
- Mansson, D. H., & Myers, S. A. (2013). Mentoring support and relational uncertainty in the advisor-advisee relationship. *NACADA Journal*, 33(1), 54-60.
- Marson, S. M. (2007). Three empirical strategies for teaching statistics. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 13(1), 1-12.
- Nilsson, J. E., Butler, J. Shouse, S., & Joshi, C. (2008). The relationship among perfectionism, acculturation, and stress in Asian international students. *Journal of College Counseling*, 11, 147-158.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Porretta, D. L., Nesbitt, J., & Labanowich, S. (1993). Terminology usage: A case for clarity. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 3, 95-103.
- Pratt, D. D., Kelly, M., & Wong, W. S. S. (1999). Chinese conceptions of “effective teaching” in Hog Kong: Towards culturally sensitive evaluation of teaching. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 18, 241-258.
- Rhodes, J. E. (2002). *Stand by me: The risk and rewards youth mentoring relationships*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Sam, D. L., & Eide, R. (1991). Survey of mental health of foreign students. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 32, 22- 30.
- Samuel, E. (2004). Racism in peer-group interactions: South Asian students' experiences in Canadian academe. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(4), 407-424.
- Sato, T., & Hodge, S. R. (2015). Japanese exchange students' academic and social struggles at an American university. *International Students*, 5(3), 208-227.
- Sato, T., & Hodge, S. R. (2013). Japanese students' academic and social experiences at a predominantly White university in the United States. *Journal of Multicultural Learning and Teaching*, 8(1), 93-114.
- Sato, T., & Hodge, S. R. (2009). Asian international doctoral students' experiences at two American universities: Assimilation, accommodation, and resistance. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 2(3), 136-148.
- Sherrill, C. (1998). *Adapted physical activity, recreation and sport: crossdisciplinary and lifespan (5th ed.)*. Debuque, IA: Brawn & Benchmark.
- Siu, P. C. P. (1952). The sojourner. *American Journal of Sociology*, 58, 34-44.
- Spurling, N. (2006). Exploring adjustment: The social situation of Chinese students in UK higher education. *Learning and Teaching in the Social Science*, 3(2), 95-117.
- Tam, K. Y., Heng, M. A. and Jiang, G. H. (2009). What undergraduate students in China say about their professors' teaching. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 14(2), 147-159.
- The Council of Graduate Education. (2014). *The Future Education is the future of the America: A call to action*. Retrieved from <http://www.cgsnet.org/resource-clearinghouse/111>
- Uba, L. (1994). *Asian – Americans: Personality patterns, identity, and mental health*. New York: Guilford.
- Wan, G. (2001). The learning experience of Chinese students in American universities: A cross-cultural perspective. *College Student Journal*, 12(1), 106-118.
- Ward, C. & Kennedy, A. (1999). The measurement of sociocultural adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 23, 659-677.

- Will, T.A. (1985). Supportive functions of interpersonal relationships. In S. Cohen & S. L. Syme (1985.). *Social support and health*. (pp.61-82). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Winnick, J. P. (1995). *Adapted physical education and sport*. (2nd ed.). Champaign IL., Human Kinetics.
- Woodrow, L. (2006). Anxiety and speaking English as a second language. *Regional Language Center Journal*, 37(3), 308-328.
- Yan, K., & Berliner, D. C. (2009). Chinese international students' academic stressors in the United States. *College Student Journal*, 43, 939-960.
- Ye, J. (2005). Acculturative stress and use of the Internet among East Asian international students in the United States. *Cyber Psychology & Behavior*, 8(2), 154–161.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Appendix A

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you describe your overall experiences when you first stepped onto the university campus and APE academic department that you currently attend?
2. Have you adjusted or adapted to this new environment at first year, second year, third year, and more? In what ways have you adjusted?
3. Do you feel as if you have “assimilated” into the culture and normal practices of people around you or become like the people around you at this APE doctoral program?
4. In what ways have you assimilated or become more like your White peers or others within your APE doctoral program?
5. What are your perspectives, as an Asian international doctoral student, on adjusting, assimilating, or adapting to graduate study within APE doctoral programs in America?
6. Can you describe your feelings about this academic environment and your experiences as an Asian international student?
7. Can you describe your experiences with faculty and staff in the university as a whole and also in your academic department in

particular?

8. What about your experiences with your academic advisor and other committee members?
9. Does your academic advisor understand your issues and concerns as an international doctoral student?
10. At what point did you as Asian doctoral students begin to feel like an insider (accepted within the dominant culture) or are you still an outsider (remain outside the dominant culture) in your APE doctoral program?

Appendix B

PEER DEBRIFING TRAINING PROTOCOL

Step1. Focuses on reviewing transcripts of interviews with the study's primary respondents in order to decipher the themes the researcher earlier identified as emerging within and across interviews

Procedure

1. We will break up into interracial pairings for review and discussion, convening later as a group of four.
2. The researcher's original list of themes will be compared with those emanating from the discussion.
3. After convening as a group of four, all peer debriefers will bring about the elimination of some themes, the surfacing others, and the modification of several themes.

Step2. Highlights the researcher's awareness of how cultural experiences of the researcher can influence the analytical process.

Procedure

1. We will break up into pairs except this time the two peer debriefers will form one group and other peer debriefers will form other.
2. Each group will discuss the data (interview transcripts, demographic questionnaire and program of study) and the researchers' draft analysis.

3. We will join together later to discuss our conclusion.

TAKAHIRO SATO, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in School of Teaching, Learning, & Curriculum Studies at Kent State University, Kent, OH. His scholarship and research focuses on multicultural physical education, inclusion in sport, and diversity in higher education. Email: tsato@kent.edu

Manuscript submitted: November 5, 2014

Manuscript Revised: January 4, 2015

Accepted for publication: March 5, 2016
