

Running Head: U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

A Qualitative Study of U.S. TV Shows Success in China

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U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

Abstract

The purpose of this study was two-fold: to identify the influence that U.S. TV shows may bring to China's young generation and to study young Chinese audiences' understanding of U.S. and its culture through watching American television programs on video websites. On the ground of the Gerbner's cultivation theory and Hofstede's dimensional model of national culture, researcher used grounded theory to organize and category interviews' data. The results of this study are three. First finding indicated that young Chinese audience had specific purposes to watch U.S. television programs. Second finding illustrated that young Chinese viewers struggled with understanding American and its culture. The last finding revealed that all participants seemed to have a cognitive barrier during their watching process. These finding provide television and communication researchers with valuable and latest information from young audience, as well as their practical implications.

Key words: cultivation theory; grounded theory; young Chinese audience; U.S. television programs

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

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U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgments.....	ii
Chapter:	
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Literature Review.....	11
a. Differences between U.S. culture and Chinese culture.....	11
i. U.S. Culture.....	12
ii. Chinese Culture.....	14
iii. Differences between Two Cultures.....	16
b. Hofstede's Dimensional Model of National Culture.....	19
c. Cultivation Theory.....	23
3. Methods.....	28
a. Ethical consideration.....	28
b. Participant.....	28
c. Design and procedures.....	29
d. Analysis.....	32
4. Results and Discussion.....	35
5. Discussion.....	64
a. Conclusion.....	64
b. Limitation and further research.....	72
6. References.....	76
a. Appendix A.....	92
b. Appendix B.....	93
c. Appendix C.....	94
d. Appendix D.....	95
e. Appendix E.....	96

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

Chapter 1: Introduction

China is playing an increasingly important role in the world today. Despite its strong and rich 5,000-year history, traditional Chinese culture is encountering an unheralded level of change. Such changes have been introduced by modern technology and the influence of Western cultures like the United States. From the 1980s, with the development of modern communication techniques and intercultural exchange, the foreign films and TV programs started to appear on China's media. After 2,000, American TV shows poured into the Chinese market and also became more crucial and powerful for Chinese audiences, and many university students and white collar workers became fans of American TV shows (Lv, 2009; Zhou, 2011).

It is extremely easy to find comments on popular websites, newspapers, and magazines that discuss American TV shows, which reinforce their popularity and penetration into the Chinese culture (Xinhua Net, 2014). There are at least 20,400,000 results on Google, if searching “美剧” (American TV shows). And many newspapers reported an American TV boom in China, such as Qilu Evening News (2009) who prepared a whole page to analyze and discuss the essence of American programming. China Youth Daily (2013) analyzed the advantages of U.S. Television and listed several popular American TV series in China, such as *Prison Break*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Friends*, *Ugly Betty*, *Lost*, *Two Broken Girls*, and *The Big Bang Theory*, to name a few. Also there are some reports which have demonstrated the increasing interest that Chinese citizens have in American TV shows and U.S. culture, based primarily on the volume of social media communication (Nandu Weekly, 2008).

Clearly there is evidence to support the idea that American TV shows are becoming an increasing part of the Chinese life, especially for people age 15 to 35. According to Value Partner's survey (2010), almost half of the young Chinese audience has quit watching television currently, and turned their attention to the Internet. The others who still watch TV have also cut their viewing period. They spend only 30 minutes on traditional television. This is much lower than online video and Internet

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

consumption, which is between one hour and two and half hours per day. Eighty-four percent of interviewees admitted that video streaming and downloading are the most popular ways to watch TV programs (Li Yan, 2010). This survey result displayed that young Chinese people are a Digital Generation, and the feature of this generation is that they spend much more time on Internet than on traditional media.

If you had chance to go down the many boutique-lined streets in the big cities of China, you would easily notice that many American young TV idols appeared in windows of stores. Or if you search “绯闻女孩造型” (Gossip Girl Style), many fashion websites have a substation to discuss the styles in the U.S shows, such as Yoka, Elle China, and PClady. For example, Blake Lively is becoming a fashion icon for young Chinese audiences by these fashion websites, even though she is not currently acting in a TV series or movie. The T-shirts Shelton wears in the *Big Bang Theory* is a heated topic in many Chinese popular websites, such as Douban, Baidu, Taobao. A search for “Sheldon T-shirt” in Baidu will bring 361,000 results in just one shopping website, and when searching “The Big Bang Theory, T-shirts” the number increases to 2,040,000. More evidences of this shift come from the increased use of translation teams, development of Internet as well as PSP software attributing much effort to promote this fashion. Millions of young Chinese citizens now spend their time consuming much of their entertainment online (Chu, 2010). The survey result from 9SoSo (2011) website proved Chu’s perspective that 27% of participants from universities love watching U.S. television shows, and 39% like watching them. Sixty-two percent of participants said they have habits to follow American TV series every week.

After 2005, China’s domestic video websites expanded rapidly, and this industry became very competitive. Each video website was making plans and searching for methods to attract a greater audience share, especially for the young generation because this group of people likes to watch videos online (Chu, 2010). Faced with keen competition, video websites began to take a different tact; they adjusted their program list to fit the online audience’s preferences. For example, they purchased the copyright of U.S. TV series and reality shows, such as *American Idol*, *Talent*, *Next American Top Model*, to attract young people. But different websites aired various U.S shows, such as Youku

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

which had exclusive rights to *Black Sails*, *Dracula*, and *the Walking Dead*. Sohu had *SNL*, *Shameless*, *The Big Bang Theory* and *Mod City* to compete with other video websites. As of 2012, Sohu, which is one of the most popular websites, purchased at least 30 American TV series to meet Internet users' needs (Chunyang Zhu, 2013). Above all, American Television has been pervasive in China's market currently and it has crucial impact to young Chinese audiences.

This phenomenon really provokes the interest of related researchers for two primary reasons. First, the development of the Internet encourages American television fashion in China. And according to *32nd China Internet Development Statistic Report* (2013), the size of China's net citizens was 0.591 billion, compared to 2012, the number has increased 26.56 million. The report stated that more than one third of Chinese form habits of using the Internet. Among the aggregate numbers, the video netizens have increased to 0.389 billion. Going with the tide of development, Chinese video websites have a strong interest in American TV series to attract young or highly educated audiences as they realize that increasing numbers of young people are changing their viewing habits. Particularly, young audiences have abandoned local stations, turning their interests to American programming (Yang Jingru, 2011).

Second, American television brought current western culture to the Chinese people, and became a window for Young Chineseesters to learn about U.S.. Young Chinese people do not like their parent's generation, and they indicate strong fascination with western culture (Yang Jingru, 2011).

As we all know, China is facing a cultural transition period, which is allowing the young generation more opportunity than their parents to get in touch with western culture. Meanwhile, they also have higher acceptability and education background than their parent's generation so that they can easily understand western culture. Their strong curiosity of foreign culture is becoming the motivating force for them to gain further insight into other cultures (Yang Jingru, 2011). On the other hand, their parent's generation encourages their children to not restrict themselves to traditional Chinese culture, and to find more access to know modern western culture. The average annual

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

number of overseas students can illustrate parent's intention. In 2012, there were as many as 399,600 Chinese students studying abroad. This statistical result also pointed out that the United States of America was the first choice for Chinese students, followed by Great Britain, Canada and Australia (China Education Statistic, 2013). All of these countries are representatives of modern western culture. Good economy status of the Chinese family ensures they can provide enough economic support for children to study abroad as well. Though many students have the chance to study abroad, the rest of the people still draw on media to gain insight into western culture. Gao Feng (2007) concluded three ways in which American cultural values influence Chinese youth, and one of them is by means of Internet culture and transmission. On account of this current phenomenon, Chinese intercultural researchers are eager to explore the influence and implantation of American television within young Chinese viewers (Jue Jinxia. 2007, Yuanfang Chen ;Yongkang Hao, 2008. He Guoping, Xian Yaoyao, 2007).

American TV Research in China

According to China Knowledge Net's statistics (CNKI), there are 1,411 results about American TV research, and 37,671 results about cross-culture. Before 2005, these related studies focused more on language and communication, and less on television and media. In his book, Miao Li (2005), the professor of China Media University, critically compared the similarity and interrelationship between American and Chinese TV series and pointed out previous scholars' deficiency in TV history of foreign countries and their present situations. Practically, he emphasized that the China TV industry should use the experience of U.S. for reference, especially for its art conception and form. Even the perspectives of the book provided a useful framework for later studies. It still lacked of current information and development of TV industry, because this book was written in 2004, but the initial stage of U.S. shows' peak in China was after 2005. The associate professor of China Media University, Guo Yanming (2010), made a comparative study about American TV series. He mentioned that there are some differences between China and U.S. TV, such as creative environment, principles of aesthetics, various types, and creative method. For example, the themes of U.S. television programs are multiple, such as common criminal drama, family drama, war drama, idol drama, but also includes

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

vampire, thrillers, ghosts and science drama which are hardly found on Chinese TV. The American principles of aesthetics are much more direct and stronger. It is easy to recognize that U.S television shows are filled with explicit topics or bloody scenes. Currently, more and more scholars prefer to deliberately study some specific TV shows. So later, single case study has appeared in the study field. Different from Miao Li and Guo Yanming's study focusing on the whole TV industry and difference, single case study research emphasized characteristics of each U.S. TV program. After 2005, Chinese researchers began to turn their attention to the case study method.

Many scholars have discussed *Prison Break*. Gao Huan (2010) thought it was the best example to reveal American culture and explain the success of the American TV industry. The popularity of American TV is a result of the established market. It is not only a viewing phenomenon, but it is also a phenomenon of culture. Zhou Weiyi (2009) concluded that some of the main reasons explaining *Prison Break's* success and liability for Chinese audiences were exquisite design, rigorous plots, masculine narrative style, heroism and authentic character. For example, masculine narrative style was different from China's television programs or even Japanese or Korean ones, so that they could attract Chinese audiences' attention, because *Prison Break* was not about normal family quarrels, separation of lovers, fairy tale of Cinderella, or inspiring stories which Chinese audiences are familiar with; Chinese audiences had their statements about Chinese television programs that "We can accurately guess the final result when we just watch the beginning of the show." (Bai Yan, 2011) However, *Prison Break* brought freshness to Chinese audiences; it is full of male symbols, such as violence, bloody scenes, and money, so it met male audience preference. Apparently, it was a thorough male TV play, but the proportion of female audiences was close to 52% (Xinhua Net, 2006). Female audiences impressed the characterization of Michael; he possessed high intelligence, courage and insight, and loyalty. Meanwhile, he was eager for family love and friendships, this was shorten the distance between female audience and this role. Besides normal perspectives, other scholars explored some new angles. Jing Penglin (2008) discussed the ideology of *24 Hours*, and he concluded that *24 Hours* intimately conveyed the complex of 911 and American value system. First, it timely met the needs of global

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

anti-terrorism after 911. Second, it successfully created an ideology of the United States of America, which is a heaven of human beings. U.S. became the embodiment of justice in the *24 Hours*. Strong nationalism, Americanism and patriotism were showed most incisive. He further stated the purpose of the 24 Hours was spreading American culture as internationalism, so that American culture could be promoted, popularized and advocated. Xiong Yi (2011) presented a transitivity research of voice-over language in the *Desperate Housewives*. This study calculated the frequency and distributive rules of each type of processes and the main participants. It stated that the narrator was talking to the audience directly to attract the audience to take part in the plot and illuminate the audience to think about the implication of the plot. This was one of the reasons why the voice-over in *Desperate Housewives* impressed audience.

Audience's Psychology in the Cross-Culture Communication

The American Television industry has taken more than half a century to form its complete and systematic mode, sophisticated broadcast system, and well-rounded evaluation system. Most of American TV does not air on China's television stations. But the Internet has given Chinese audiences more opportunity to decide what they want to watch. Through U.S. television series' two-way interactive process, television can influence audiences and at the same time audiences can also bring influences to television. Through narrowcast communication, the audiences' ratings and categorization of theme would influence the plot and broadcast; and at the same time, the plot and broadcast would also affect the audience's ratings. In other words, if the program is popular, video websites will keep purchasing the copyright for it. And if it is not popular, video websites will take it off. Liu Daxian (2007) pointed out that narrowcast communication emphasized audiences' reaction. Audiences' reactions change their choices. In China, though U.S. TV's narrowcast communication is still in the initial stage, Chinese audiences already enjoy controlling what they want to watch on new media.

During the communication process of U.S television series, cross-culture problems cannot be ignored. When foreign TV programs are imported, localization becomes the core step. Localization directly determines the outcome of whether these

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

imports are successful or not. For example, China Central Television (CCTV) imported American TV shows and reworked them to fit the traditional Chinese thinking mode and aesthetic. However, this kind of rework did not achieve good results. Chinese audiences constantly criticized the cutting of the story, translation and dubbing (Yancheng Evening News, 2010). Contrary to CCTV's failure, American Television series are well received through the Internet. Shu Yu (2009) stated her understanding in her study:

China's rapid economic rise and the enhancement of globalization laid the foundation for U.S television in cross cultural communication. American TV presents American heroism and idealism; both of these meet the requirement of young Chinese audiences, they advocate freedom, personality and personal interest. (p. 96)

Because of the current new media circumstances the audience's nature has undergone much change. It is easy to see this change in the American TV fans in China, audiences' choices are emphasized, and they prefer to follow personal preferences. So audiences become more diversified, spread out and become more individual (Wei Wenhua & Wang Yuan, 2008). Chinese audiences break away from the conventional figure "Couch Potato," and transform into "self controller." In other words, current audiences have more power on decision-making when they watch TV programs. Meanwhile, Zhang Muxia (2008) stated that, "Culture Discount" did not bring much influence to young Chinese audiences because they have high education background , which enable them to more easily cross cultural barrier than others. So the majority of American TV shows concentrate upon university students and white-collar workers. Yue Jinxia (2007) further explained, "Young Chinese audiences turned their interests from Korean TV to U.S. TV are based on psychological change. Their preferences are not addicted to tender expression, or family ethics anymore, they indulge themselves in dangerous and exciting plots and cogitating public ethics." (p. 70)

Many other researchers have identified successful trends pertaining to cross-cultural implantation, even though few studies have addressed how American TV programming has specifically influenced young Chinese audiences. Most of these studies

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

were applied data collection and their findings are similar to each other (Liu Daxian, 2007, Wen Weihua & Wang Yuan, 2008, Yue Jinxia, 2007). Most previous researchers mainly angled their studies toward theme, content and broadcast mode, not toward audience's feedback and understanding from U.S TV series. However, there is much evidence in the previous examples supporting that those audiences play serious roles in the new media era. According to preceding findings, audiences have more power to decide what they prefer to watch, so great importance has been continuously attached to audiences' feedback and understanding in this field of study. Dr. Li Liyin (2009) slightly filled this; she thought it was necessary to research into Chinese audiences to find their true feelings for watching American TV programs. In her study, focus group interview was utilized to collect data and she deeply discussed how American TV shows influence current university students' understanding and feelings. The result revealed Chinese university students' critical ability and aesthetic judgment for foreign culture, and it proved that young university students are good at adopting foreign culture. Li's study is similar to this study; both focus on young Chinese people and their feeling about and understanding of American TV series, but the research goals are varied and her target population is only university students. In this study, the target population includes both university students and other adults. As a whole, her research provided a good model and enough meaningful inspiration for this study.

Thus, the objective of this thesis is two-fold: to identify the influence that American TV shows may bring to China's young generation, and to study young Chinese audiences' understanding of U.S. and its culture. In order to effectively understand how young Chinese people perceive U.S. through television programs the cross-culture theories must be examined; thus is Chapter 2, the cross-culture theories will be discussed. The researcher explained the major differences between China and The U.S., Hofstede's analysis of national culture diversity and cultivation theory's influence to television audience. These literature reviews provided research background to the study. The purpose of the face-to-face interviews in this project was to collect young Chinese participants' thoughts on US TV shows in relation to their comprehension of U.S.. According to the current situation, the researcher used grounded theory (GT) to explore

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

participants' understanding and opinions about the US, formed through watching American TV shows.

Even though similar research objectives have been studied many times by other researchers, especially by Chinese researchers, most of these studies utilized existing theories to explain and analyze data to conclude findings. The present theories of television communication are cultivation theory, uses and gratification theory, mass communication theory, visual communication theory. When researchers move their attention to the objectives of studies relating to intercultural communication, the following theories are predominantly utilized: adaptation intercultural relationships, network theory, and intercultural transformation. In this case, the objectives and current position are different from previous studies and theories. The communication way of U.S. television programs in China is exceptional. Contrary to traditional television broadcasting, U.S television relies on Internet communication to be known intimately by Chinese audiences. Unlike traditional media, the Internet allows two-way communication; this gives users easy access, as well as the ability to control information exposure. (Amichai-Hamburger 2008; Kirat 2008; Ayish 2005). The Internet presents a challenge to traditional media, which has rigid and limited time schedules, whereas Internet provides users with flexibility. Zhang Yunruo (2002) stated, "the communication has changed since the advent of Internet. It is truth that basic principal of communication theories have not been changed till now, however, with the development of Internet communication, these theories and principals have displayed some new features, these theories also should be extended and developed. (p. 60)" Previous communication theory, when applied to television, does not include the Internet influence and audiences' preference. On the other side, Chinese culture and audiences have specific characteristics. Basic theories do not have highly individualized approaches and explanations, whereas, Chinese researchers have concentrated their studies on the analysis of content and success reasons for U.S television programs in China. Because the U.S. television boom in China has been so recent, related studies are few. Current findings and theories cannot sufficiently explain the influence of U.S. shows on young Chinese audiences. Hence, existing theories cannot adequately explain the current phenomenon in China.

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

There are three characteristics that require the researcher to apply grounded theory. The first reason is that the research should be interpretivist; second, the research is about complex social processes between human beings; the last reason is because there are no existing theories about the phenomena, or existing theories cannot explain the phenomena appropriately. According to these three requirements and the current situation, the research in this study has opened a new path in this field by using grounded theory method, which is a systematic methodology in the social sciences involving the discovery of theory through the analysis of data (Faggiolani, C. 2011; Martin & Turner 1986).

Different from other conventional research methods that involve collecting and analyzing data to test deductive theory, grounded theory builds a new theory from the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The researcher who uses grounded theory focuses on thinking, comparing, classifying, and conceptualizing data in order to uncover the results (Tian Lin, 2012). As mentioned before, current existing theories cannot explain young Chinese audience' understanding and feelings about the U.S. through U.S. TV accurately, so GT is a more valuable tool for this study enabling the researcher to find a way to investigate current and diverse phenomena, and it can offer a deeper understanding of how U.S. Television influences young Chinese audiences compared to other ways.

The following chapter will provide a literature review explaining the theories and investigations relating to this research. The literature review is a foundation to interpret the data results of the study. Chapter 3 illustrates the method chosen by the researcher to collect and analyze data. Chapter 4 will discuss the result of the analysis. Then Chapter 5 will list the limitations of the study, the implication of the results and possible directions for future study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Differences between U.S. Culture and Chinese Culture

Culture is the custodian of mankind, and the core of a country. Different countries have various cultures, and the diversities between China and U.S. are especially profound based on history, politics and social developments. Though globalization minimizes the difference among all countries, each nation still keeps its tradition handed down for generations. China is a typical representative of Eastern culture, and the United States of U.S. is a mixture of Western culture (Guo Yujie, 2012). In recent years, culture exchanges between China mainland and the U.S.A. are close, diverse and regular. The communication methods are not limited to literary works, interpersonal communication or commercial transaction; media plays a more important role in the intercultural communication between two countries. Hou Wei (2005) put forward that the process of media determines the results of cross-culture communication, meaning that choosing a suitable media would effectively spread different cultures. In addition, new media accelerates the flow of information exchange. This is true that new media, such as the Internet, provides more opportunities for each country to exchange their culture.

However, mistakes caused by misunderstanding and different cultural backgrounds are not unusual in cross-cultural communication. For example, China has a culture built on obligation, family and harmony, whereas the United States has a culture based on individuality, money and power (Yang Jingru, 2011). When these two cultures meet the cultural barrier is revealed, so that the increasing disturbance of comprehension and misunderstanding cannot be ignored. As mentioned before, China's young generation has formed a trend of following U.S. TV shows, especially in big cities (Nanfeng Chuang, 2013). In the cross-cultural communication process, cultural barriers and misunderstandings will appear and exist and, as a result, some individuals will feel uncomfortable when they cannot blend into a new culture. This kind of phenomenon occurs everywhere. For example, when Asian immigrants move to The United States, they cannot adapt to U.S. food and life style, so they prefer to live together to keep their

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

culture. This is why we find Chinatown, Koreatown or Japantown in many large U.S. cities.

However, cultural barriers are not as strong with the young Chinese audience. Young people do not feel an obvious contrast or cultural inadaptability because they have become familiar with the culture through American television; learning about the culture through TV gives them more confidence to adapt to the new culture. Fangyuan Chen and Yongkang Hao (2008) stated that young people were different from other groups of people in Chinese society; youngsters had much more enthusiasm for everything. At the same time, current young Chinese people have strong interests about western cultures. The result of Chen and Hao's research also proved that the more young Chinese people watch U.S. TV programs, the more easily they would accept U.S. culture. Furthermore, the influence of U.S. programs and Western culture upon Young Chinese people is certainly on the rise. The report of Nandu Chuang (2013) also mentioned that most young Chinese audiences have a high educational background; their degree of education leads them to much more easily accept other cultures like U.S. culture. Most people who have a high degree have studied English more than 14 years (in China, students started to learn English since 10 years old), they spend many years studying western culture, especially for U.S. culture because teachers and parents thought highly of English skills, so they encouraged young Chinese students to listen to VOA, CNN news or watch U.S. TV programs to practice their language skills. As time goes on, U.S. culture influenced these young people imperceptibly. Identically, young Chinese people are accustomed to U.S. culture. Meanwhile, with the development of the Internet and other high-tech means, young Chinese people have multiple opportunities to know and shape their own understandings of U.S. through U.S television programs. It is important to note that U.S. televisions' communication in China mainly relies on the Internet, not traditional TV channels. Internet has become the crucial communication tool for young people now, so U.S. Television's communication method has adapted to fit the current trend by using online video websites. In other words, television utilized a shortcut to come into young Chinese audiences' sights. It has become very convenient for the young Chinese generation to obtain access to U.S. culture. Because of this convenience, the young

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

Chinese generation seems to adapt well to U.S. culture, but the cross-cultural problems still cannot be ignored. In order to understand how the cross-cultural problem occurs in this intercultural communication, we should outline both U.S. and Chinese cultures.

U.S. Culture

For a long time, people described the United States of America as a Melting Pot because U.S. is composed of immigrants from many countries. Hence, U.S. culture differs from any other culture, but there is still a link between U.S. and the others. Most scholars like to call U.S. culture “mixed culture or multi-culture.” When immigrants came to U.S., their cultures were not absorbed completely, but rather, they were blended to create a unique U.S. culture.

First, it is a mixture of native and foreign culture. U.S. culture is largely thought of as “Western” and most of the culture is adapted from “European” culture. However, there are some influences from the Native American Indians, Africans brought to the U.S. as slaves, and more recent immigrants from Asia. Each culture influences the other, and at the same time is influenced by the other. U.S. culture flourishes by interacting with other cultures as it forms a unique U.S. culture. Although U.S. culture is defined as a multi-culture, in addition, the impacts of religion on U.S. culture are evident.

Second, U.S. culture has a combination of religious and secular characteristics. Religion has significantly influenced U.S. culture and society, and has shaped U.S.’s most distinctive traits, making it quite unique compared to other countries around the world. Most Americans have a religious belief, so after hundreds of years, religion has become firmly rooted in U.S. culture (Dong Xiaochuan, 2002). Religion defines people’s morality and behavior, inspires a sense of religious fervor, and gives them confidence (Daniel Bell, 1976). It can be found in many cultural examples. For instance, American people would feel guilt after doing something against God’s will. Gabriel, a character in *Desperate Housewives*, often asks the priest to hear her confessions. The difference is that religious culture deals with spiritual problems, whereas the secular culture deals with social problems, such as the difficulties between family and friends. Secular culture is based on daily life; it emphasizes the value of the individual, freedom and democracy,

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

and practicality. These two cultures, both religious and secular, represent the spiritual world and the material world for people in U.S.; both of them are important to U.S. culture. As a result of this kind of persistent cultural integration and collision, U.S. culture constantly renews its core values. U.S. sociologist, Robin. M. Williams, Jr. (1970) identified these core values in U.S. society. Which are achievement and success, individualism, activity and work, efficiency and practicality, science and rationality, progress, democracy, religiosity and education. Outside of U.S. scholars' research about U.S culture, Chinese scholars are also interested in U.S. culture because of its success and advancement. Zhangsheng Zhong (2000) explained more specifically about U.S. culture: individualism, attaching importance to personal value/looking down upon collective interest, and looking forward to creature comfort/Ignoring morals and responsibilities. In addition to these two scholars, many other sociologists identified a series of U.S.'s key features (Liancheng Duan, 1993. Lynd, R.S., & Lynd, H.M. 1929).

It is worthwhile to note that Individualism was mentioned many times in various studies, such as *The influence of individualism to American education* (Nianying Xu, 2010), *Contrastive study of Chinese collectivism and American individualism from the perspective of the cultural values* (Ping Wang, 2011). In Western culture, the value of the individual is special, but only in the U.S. culture does individualism reach its utmost importance, being admired as a basic value. The former President Herbert Hoover (1928) wrote a book to explain his understanding of individualism. In his *American Individualism*, he expressed that democracy came from individualism and flourished and developed based on individualism. Thus it can be seen that individualism conveys the concepts of freedom and equality.

Chinese Culture

Comprehensive knowledge of Chinese culture is necessary for this cross-culture study because of the obvious cultural gap between the United States of America and China. There has been a long history of Chinese culture since the Qin Dynasty and it has a far-reaching influence on other cultures. Voltaire (1995) mentioned in his book, *Essai Sur les Moeurs*, that the East is the cradle of art, and the East provides everything to the

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

West. China was one of the four civilized ancient countries of the world, and it is one of the best deputies of Eastern culture. For that reason, China's culture has formed a huge system and far-reaching implications. China's culture is influenced by its geographic position, mode of production, and social system. Specifically, China is located in a semi-enclosed continental region, rooted in the basis of agricultural society and the feudal system that lasted for two thousand years, which is extremely rare in the history of world. These characteristics affected and restricted each other, forming a stable social system. And this social system was influenced by traditional Chinese cultures.

China's traditional culture emphasized morality. The philosopher of the Northern Song Dynasty, Zhang Zai (Zheng Meng, n.d.), had a penetrating conclusion of Chinese culture. His philosophy was that we should treat the sky as our parents, the public as our brothers and sisters, and everything in the world as our friends. As humans, we must show respect for our elders and help the poor. Zhang Zai's concept brought forth the ethical characteristic of China's culture; it focused on human relations, standards of filial piety, and etiquette. China's culture has powerful vitality, especial in its assimilatory power. When other cultures tried to blend into China's culture, most of them were transformed. For example, Buddhism, rooted in India, Pakistan and Nepal, was not created by China. Going through Wei-Jing Dynasty, Sui Dynasty, and Tang Dynasty, Buddhism could not conquer China's scholar-bureaucrats. The consequence of Buddhism communication was that part of it became Chinese Buddhism (Zen), and the rest was melted into China's culture.

As time went by, China's culture constantly changed, but the essence of China's culture never shifted. In modern times, scholars have continued to study about China's culture. Dainian Zhang & Keli Fang (1994) summarized five main characteristics about Chinese culture: morality, relationship, self-improvement, containment, and harmony. These five dimensions have inner connection among others as they revolve around family and other groups. In other words, Chinese people advocate collectivism. For example, Chen (2006) illustrated that Chinese culture holds a holistic view of human communication, and people tend to submerge into the group or be collectively oriented in the endless and transforming process of social interaction. These conceptual

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

characteristics influence all kinds of aspects in life for the Chinese. Based on these studies, we can find that China's core values still influence modern people. However, with the reform and open-door policy carried out, Chinese culture and people face new challenges.

Differences between Two Cultures

Since McLuhan characterized today's world as a "global village," people have noticed frequent communication between cultures, and realized the importance of intercultural communication. However, cultural values differ among societies, but within a society they are remarkably stable over time (Hofstede, 2007). China and U.S.A. are the representatives of Eastern and Western culture; getting to know the differences between U.S. and Chinese cultures can accelerate people's intercultural communication in a smooth and effective way. Li Li & Feng Zhang (2011) listed seven primary divergences between Chinese and U.S. culture: ideas on marriage, reflection of praise, form of address, ethics, hierarchy, value, and conception of time. The diversity of marriage is evident; the divorce rate of U.S. marriages is much higher than China's. In the U.S.A., people generally accept a viewpoint that if a couple does not love each other, they should get a divorce. But in China, people have traditional morality and ethics. They have to consider the influence on other family members, especially children, so they prefer to stay in a loveless marriage.

In reflection of praise, the answers of Americans are totally opposite to those of the Chinese. When Americans hear other people praise them, "You are so clever," they happily respond, "Thank you!" However, Chinese people believe humility is the virtue of human beings, so they would say, "No, No, I am very clumsy." Americans may think this humble answer to be rude and impolite, while the Chinese would consider the American's response to be overconfident and lacking modesty.

In the matter of form of address, individuals in American countries use the first name, such as Tom, Lucy or Mary, to address others. But in China, people prefer to address other people respectfully by using "您" (pronounced Nin), which is the equivalent of a respectful form of "you."

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

There is a difference in the conception of ethics between the two countries. Because of the influence of Confucianism, the Chinese culture advocates etiquette and standards of filial piety. The behaviors of Chinese people are restricted by social ethics. Contrary to China's traditional culture, U.S. culture is affected deeply by the Christian religion, so people lay emphasis on personal freedom and liberations. For example, the relationships in the U.S. between parent and child are based much less on duty. Many U.S. senior citizens live in the long-term care facilities, not live with their children. But in China, traditional culture teaches that everyone is under an obligation to his/her parents. If anyone goes against this duty, others may criticize him or her. So most Chinese senior people stay with either son or daughter.

The diversity of hierarchy exists as well. Based on Confucianism, Chinese traditional culture advocates the importance of social hierarchy. For example, when a lower level individual meets a superior officer, he or she should greet the other with respect. Chinese traditional culture also has a special communication norm: degrading self and praising others. However, U.S. culture conversely emphasizes equality; it considers everyone has equal rights in the society. Even children can call their parents by their first name at least in some households and situations; everyone can express their thoughts directly.

In the concept of time, China honors the past, respecting the experience and longevity of old teachers. All of these are related to the past. Chinese people believe that the past provides lessons for the future; however, U.S. people tend to live for the future, looking forward to what is ahead. In their opinion, the future is much more important than the present.

Similarly, Pan and colleagues (1994) also summarized six major differences between the culture of China and U.S. Among all differences, Francis Hsu (1981), a Western-trained Chinese scholar, stated a most prominent and comparative examination of Chinese and U.S. culture. He defined that the U.S. style of life is individual-centered and places a great deal of emphasis on self-reliance. In other words, if an individual is successful, his or her success is attributed to personal efforts or abilities. In contrast, Hsu

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

(1981) defined that the Chinese culture is situation-centered; the Chinese style of life is centered on relationships defined by Confucian doctrine, which emphasize fidelity and virtue, benevolent fathers and filial sons, submission to authority, women's chastity, and ancestor worship. Briefly, Chinese culture thinks highly of collectivism. In the light of this cultural background, every Chinese individual should contribute to a large group, such as family, company, government, or other organization. If individuals are successful, the success should belong to, and be shared with, other members of these large groups. For example, in the Olympic Games, when a Chinese player wins a gold medal, he or she would give credit to the cultivation of his/her mother country, not the instructor or personal efforts.

Other scholars have similar conceptions and conclusions about this significant cultural difference (e.g. Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, and Nishida 1996; Zhang et al. 1996). As a matter of fact, these cultural diversities appear everywhere. For example, it is easy to find cultural differences between two countries in movies and TV programs. In U.S. TV series, individualism and heroism are the most important roles. For instance, when talking about U.S. cultural images, Xiao Chunyan (2010) stated that U.S. heroes flared up at people. She explained that the individual's personality was exaggerated above board in the United States. When looking back at the history of the U.S.A, this country did not stop fighting for people's rights and freedoms. All heroes of U.S. expressed faith, justice and duty. In fact, heroism is a representative of their spirits. In light of the current mainstream American television, these stories emphasize that an individual should struggle by oneself. Unlike Americans, the Chinese tend not to value individuality, or even to avoid it, because Chinese behaviors are deeply rooted in the legacies left by the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551-479 BC) (O'Keefe, 1997). One concept of Confucius is that even an individual who can be described as a superior person must practice self-restraint. She/he should understand that she/he, as an individual, is not important. Actually, the role played by the individual in the group is very important. In other words, the view of oneself is based on a group, whether in family, organization, or government. For this reason, some scholars have described the Chinese culture as collectivism. Although China is a collectivist country, in fact, heroes could be found in

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

Chinese Television as well. But most of the hero images are Anti-Japan heroes, martial arts heroes, and ancient heroes. Contrary to American heroes, Chinese heroes in the television shows are described as “Fake, Great, Empty” people by audiences, they are not real human beings and short of personal emotions. These Chinese heroes are only concerned about their nation and the final victory; they can easily abandon their family, personal interests, and others to support something big.

The preceding discussion clearly states that China and the United States have different cultural values; the values are not interchangeable. Every value influences other culture, and at the same time it is influenced from the other cultural values (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, and Nishida 1996). The increasing development in modern communication has led to an increase in influence between the Chinese and U.S. cultures. As mentioned before, there are so many differences between China and the United States of America, including marriage, expression, ethics, hierarchy, and individual interests. During the cross-communication, China started to gradually digest modern U.S. culture, especially for the young generation who has such easy access to knowledge from around the world. Their understanding of U.S. is based on what they know and see, not just on the stereotypes from the old generation. Compared to their parents, they seem to accept U.S. culture easily (Li Ping, 2009). Meanwhile, traditional Chinese culture still plays its role among the young generation. Due to the intercultural conflict, the Young Chinese generation provokes the researcher's interests.

Hofstede's Dimensional Model of National Culture

Geert Hofstede carried out the biggest cultural value research in the world around 1980, and created a culture model about cross-culture study. The model provides scales from 0 to 100 for 76 countries for each dimension, and each country has a position on each scale or index, relative to other countries (Hofstede 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede 2005). Later, in Geert Hofstede's book (2003) *Culture's Consequences*, he pointed out the concept of Culture Dimension and stated that the diversity between different cultures exists and is rooted in the individual's mind, especially in Eastern and Western cultures. Further, Hofstede distinguished between cultures according to five dimensions: power

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance and long-/short-term orientation.

Power distance is defined as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, p.402) Individualism/Collectivism is the degree to which individuals are suppose to remain integrated into groups (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Masculinity/Femininity is described as the distribution of emotional roles between the genders (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Uncertainty avoidance is “the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations” (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, p.403). And finally, Long-term orientation/Short-term orientation expresses the value of long-term and short-term benefits of a nation (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). Of the five dimensions, two of these are relevant to this research; power distance and individualism/collectivism are relevant because of their influence to Chinese youth in media phenomena. As mentioned before, the target population of this study is Chinese youth who watch U.S. Television. According to survey results, these young Chinese people have higher educational backgrounds, so the Chinese traditional misconception of gender does not affect their thoughts. Hofstede’s cultural research was based on the employees in IBM, so he focused on commercial use of cultural diversity. The uncertainty avoidance pays attention to the stability of occupation, while long-term/short-term orientation is related to values of interest. These three dimensions do not have close connection with this research. Contrary to these dimensions, power distance and Individualism/Collectivism not only influence people in commercial areas, but also in other cultural fields.

Due to the diversity of two different cultures, individuals may produce different emotions. Then, such emotions may lead to various consequences or behaviors. In Psychology, one of the mentalities is curiosity. Curiosity can be defined as the recognition, pursuit, and intense desire to explore novel, challenging, and uncertain events (Kashdan & Silvia, 2009). Curiosity motivates people to act and think in new ways and to investigate, be immersed, and learn about whatever is the immediate, interesting target of their attention. The cultural diversity produces mystery that raises the

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

Chinese audiences' curiosity. For example, in most of the U.S. TV shows, they publicize an individual heroism, as in Superman, Arrow, or Revenge. This kind of series emphasizes personal importance, which is unusual to see in Chinese television and culture. In Revenge, the heroine's father died because of unjust treatment and circumvention. The heroine was different from other super heroes; she did not have super power. However, she used her wisdom and effort to take vengeance on each individual who did her father wrong. Every step of her revenge relied on her own personal effort. Chinese culture emphasizes the importance of a group and includes a famous philosophy of life to stick close to the golden mean. Namely, Chinese society does not encourage individuals to show off personal talents within the group; in contrast, the Chinese stress united harmony. Every individual should offer his or her own contribution to the whole group. This feature can be found in many Chinese television programs. For example, *Liang Jian* is one of the famous and popular television series in China. There are many characters in this story and each one is talented, but they have a common objective of service for their nation. During the story, they abandoned their personal interest to devote their heart and soul to China. When Chinese audiences realize that U.S. people can use their personal ability or capacity to save others or even the whole world, their inner desire and curiosity will be awakened. Meng Jian (2001) pointed out that in the light of the development of Western cultures; Chinese culture appeared to be in a weak position. Western countries' culture outputs are so successful, especially for the young generation.

The power distance dimension can be defined as "the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally." (Hofstede & Marieke de Mooij, p. 2010). In brief, power distance means that people accept the extent of unequal positions, power and other aspects in the society or organization. There are many examples that can explain the social and cultural differences brought on by power distance. It is crystal clear that the United States is low in power distance, but China is on the other side of the scale. As seen in *Prison Break*, people in low power distance countries will feel less discomfort when they deny their leaders, while people in high power distance countries will feel more discomfort and stress simultaneously. The best example is the fact that it is normal to find U.S. people

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

complaining about their president or government in websites, newspapers, radios or other media, and they do not believe that their leaders are always absolutely right. It is difficult to find the same situation in China because China is one of the most recognized communist societies in the world, and most Chinese people believe their leaders and support their government. Television is one of the mediums used to broadcast power distance to audiences in many countries. The following is an example from the U.S. TV show, *Prison Break*. Michael and his brother fight against the government, bravely stepping forward to strive for their rights and justice; they are not afraid of higher power and social class. When the audience watches it, they will internalize the information about low power distance. In contrast, most TV shows in China have been anti-war drama and costume drama until recently. In 2011, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People's Republic of China (2012) collectively approved 141 homegrown Television series. Among them, there were 20 costume dramas and 69 anti-war dramas; their proportions were, respectively, 14.18% and 48.94%. Under these two kinds of mainstream programming's influence and publicity, high power distance is reflected in many scenes and plots, as well as in the news. From here we can see that Chinese mainstream media advocates spreading the idea of high power distance. However, in recent years, Chinese people have more channels through which to make contact with other countries, such as television, travelling, study abroad or searching the Internet. The difference between high and low power distance may bring completely opposite ideas about U.S. and its culture.

Individualism/collectivism can be defined as “people looking after themselves and their immediate family only versus people belonging to in-groups that look after them in exchange for loyalty” (Hofstede, 2001). The concepts of individualism and collectivism refer to cultural distinctions (Hofstede, 1980). The constructs have since been applied to the individual and conceptualized as personality traits and, albeit, traits that are adaptable to situational demands (Triandis, 1995). Fundamental to the individualism perspective is a focus on autonomy, independence, and self-fulfillment (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). By contrast, collectivists define themselves in relation to a group. Researchers employed the conceptualization of collectivism

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

proposed by Realo and his colleagues (1997), who demonstrated the existence of at least three interrelated, yet clearly distinguishable, subtypes of collectivism focused on the relationships with family members (Familism), peers (Companionship), and society (Patriotism). Through research, Hofstede made a conclusion that the United States of U.S. is "the most individualist country in the world" (Hofstede 2003). Even though Hofstede's research does not include China directly, HongKong, Japan, and Taiwan's cultures are still similar to the culture of China. Eastern Asian cultures tend to be high in collectivism, and China, in particular, is based on a collectivist political system (Bond, 1988, 1994; Chance, 1991; Borthwick, 1992; Rhee, 1995).

Cultivation Theory

Television programs are holographic information media, which surpasses traditional print media (Chen Long, 2001). Television programs have their own characteristics, such as multiple modes of propagation, massive content, and fast communication speed. These characteristics lead to television programs attracting more audiences than other forms of media. Since the early twentieth century, effects of television have become increasingly important. Some researchers have started to search for representative examples in order to understand how individuals would be affected by watching television programs, and how culture is communicated through television programs. Neil Postman, in his book *The Disappearance of Childhood* (2004), considered that specific modes of media prefer some special content, so that it would shape whole features of the culture. When children spent many hours to watch specific content and mode from television programs, they would build their cognitive processes depending on what they saw and understood. Because of this, television has a serious cultivation effect on children. However, the cultivation effect does not only happen on children; it also affects adults. During China's social transformation period, television was not just an entertainment tool for individuals; in fact, it played a prominent role in the audience's cognitive world. Further, mass media, like television, produced a strong impression on China's contemporary youngsters (Xie Fei, 2011). According to Xie Fei's research, China's young generation has become media dependent because the young generation prefers to use television, Internet, and the newspaper to acquire information. The content

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

of mass media influences Young Chinese people, and the process can be explained by cultivation theory.

It looks like no theory has been as instrumental as cultivation theory to explain the long-term effects of television exposure (Gebner & Bross, 1976). Cultivation theorists claim that heavy television viewers become confused about objective reality and television reality over time; in other words, they are incapable of distinguishing between the real world and the virtual world. Researchers make a distinction between heavy viewers and light viewers because heavy viewers spend much more time watching television programs compared to light viewers. Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, and Shanahan (2002) stated, "Television is a centralized system of storytelling" (p.44). Storytelling seems to have a greater impact on the viewer when compared to other formats. In comparing heavy viewers with light viewers, cultivation theorists have found that heavy viewers are predicted to give "storytelling" answers to questions about objective reality and so they are "cultivated."

Cultivation theory is supported by empirical evidences across a wide range of topics, such as political orientation, idealistic marriage expectations, and sexism (Roberts & Bachen, 1981; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Signorielli, 1989). However, the theory has many heavy criticisms as well (e.g., Doob & Macdonald, 1979; Hirsch, 1980). There is a critical pitfall of cultivation research in that it lacks overt causality of cultivation effects (Rossmann & Brosius, 2004; Shrum et al., 1998; Williams, 2006). That is to say, the cultivation effect is not direct and other variables influence cultivation correlation, such as demographics, socioeconomics, personal experience, and attitudinal and viewing variables (Carveth & Alexander, 1985; Doob & MacDonald, 1979; Hawkins & Pingree, 1980; Hirsch, 1980; Hughes, 1980; Slater & Elliott, 1980; Weaver & Wakshlag, 1986). Meanwhile, the audience's affinity for the program also affects the feelings of what they choose to view (Rubin, 1984). In the absence of additional evidence, it is difficult to conclude that television exposure is the only influence on the attitudes of the viewers. It may change their attitude slightly, but it is not the only influence.

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

It should be mentioned that cultivation theory was primarily and widely utilized for violence research in the past. Violence culture is a part of the culture system, so cultivation theory could be extended to other cultural fields as well. Many intercultural researchers have turned their attention to cultivation theory; researchers are interested in the influence of mass media on social value, personal value and moral systems. Today is the age of information explosion. Mass media is like sun, air or water in people's normal lives. Actually, mass media could influence people everywhere. That is why cultivation theory became important in this area for the researchers. In China, lots of researchers started to use cultivation theory to focus on the influence of mass media, especially in television programs. Because researchers thought China's television industry has been in a new level, it mixed a variety of factors, but problems also appeared. Xie Fei (2011) stated that mass media, such as television, brought both positive and negative influence to China's youngsters. Under mass media, young people receive information easily; at the same time, they cannot distinguish between what is right or wrong based on their lack of social experience. It is truth that current television programs contain so many bad contents, such as violent, vulgar, implied or undesirable messages or details. For example, there is a famous and very popular television series in China, which is *Princess of China*. In this series, there is a plot that the princess tries to hang herself. However, some children tried to copy the plot to hang themselves after watching the series (China Net, 2012). These affairs reverberated and jarred the country, China's relevant departments also started to have concern over similar phenomenon and legislation was created to protect youngsters who may not have enough cognitive ability to make informed judgments. Therefore, mass mediums should realize the cultivation they may bring to youngsters and be conscious of their social responsibilities. Tan Yu (2010) listed a few variables affecting the consequence of cultivation process, gender, age, and education level. Specifically, the cultivation process easily influences the younger people; the older generation will feel a greater degree of cultural and psychical shock. Similarly, males receive cultivation much easier than females, and higher educated individuals will have lower pressure when they face cultivation than people of lower education. Lihong Hu (2012) mentioned that content of advertising had strong influence to youngsters; more than 80% of young audiences could sing product jingles. According to previous research,

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

cultivation theory may help us to explain why U.S. TV shows would bring so many influences to Chinese viewers' understanding of U.S. and how they form or reform the viewers' impressions. However, previous research cannot draw a full map about it currently.

This thesis will research how U.S. TV programming has specifically influenced young Chinese audiences' understanding of the United States in order to identify Chinese recognition of U.S. and its culture. The intercultural theories are very important to this study; the researcher will explain both Chinese traditional culture and U.S. culture, and further distinguish the difference between them. This step requires the researcher to fully understand the two cultures, with their backgrounds and features, in order to build a solid foundation for the study. After examining the five dimensions of Hofstede's dimensional model of national culture, the researcher determined that two of them would have a strong correlation to the purpose of this study: power distance and individualism/collectivism. According to the cultural diversities, these two dimensions can also help the researcher to explain why these participants would form their specific understandings and opinions after watching U.S. television programs. Later, cultivation theory will further explain how television programs cultivate the audiences' understanding and shape their value system, which can help the researcher discover which aspects of the U.S. television shows would bring strong influences to the young Chinese audience.

In summary, this literature review provides ideas for the researcher to identify research questions, conduct the initial exploratory interviews, and to analyze further data after interviews. It has been observed that U.S. TV has a strong influence on the young Chinese generation, and it affects their understanding of United States and its culture. These observations lead to the following research questions:

RQ1: How does U.S. TV influence young Chinese audiences and their opinions about their culture as well as the culture of the U.S.?

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

RQ2: How do young Chinese audiences describe the culture of the U.S. and what, if any, influence does U.S. TV consumption have on their perceptions?

Chapter 3: Method

The research questions of this study will be addressed through face-to-face interviews and grounded theory analysis. This chapter will include the following: the required Institutional Review Board (IRB) process, the process of data collection, and a justification for utilizing grounded theory as a method for analyzing the data. Each of these subjects will be presented in the following independent sections.

Ethical consideration

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Southern Utah University in fall 2012. A total of thirty participants were enrolled using IRB approved consent forms (see Appendix A) before taking part in this study. The consent forms described all information about this study, such as the objective of the study, the researcher's information, interview time and their rights. Before each interview, the researcher informed study participants about the interview process and the respective steps involved, ensured that they understood their participation was voluntary so that they could withdraw from the interview and study at any time if they felt uncomfortable. None of the participants withdrew from the interview and study. Based on respect for participants' privacy, the researcher promised to keep their anonymity so that all interview data would be de-identified in the study. The researcher would use participants' descriptions to represent their real identities when quoting participants' opinions, such as their job title, age or gender. This was noted in the written consent as well.

Participant

Following a research protocol approved by the Institutional Review Board, participants for this study were randomly collected from QQ. QQ offers free text messaging, video and voice chat for desktop devices. It is a global communications suite similar to Skype, but it is more popular for Chinese people. According to Tencent reports (2010), the number of QQ users has increased to seven hundred million. Based on the popularity of QQ among Chinese, it is the best way for the researcher to recruit participants. John W. Creswell (1994) explained the importance of choosing the

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

appropriate sample for the qualitative study; he said that the qualitative research selected purposefully participants or site to help the researcher to understand the research question. In order to get effective results, the sample should be selected carefully and targeted. QQ provided a feasible way, a selection box, to choose the participant's location, sex, age and other pertinent information. The selection box ensured that all participants who engaged in the study fit the requirements. The participant's age range was from 18 to 30. Age 30 was chosen as the cap because this study focused on input of young Young Chinese adults. Age eighteen was chosen as the minimum- to ensure that participants have responsibility for their answers according to IRB's requirements. Forty-nine people were contacted via QQ to request participation in this study; however, only 30 agreed to an interview. Eleven individuals said 'no' (Six said she/he was too busy to join this study, four individuals said they did not watch U.S. TV shows, and the other one gave no reason for saying 'no'), and the other eight did not respond. Of the 30 participants, 11 are male and 19 are female. Recruiting flyers (see Appendix B) were sent to participants via QQ, and informed consent was obtained. Before each interview-the participant signed an informed consent and sent it back to the researcher via QQ. All participants watched or continued to watch U.S. TV shows, and their average viewing time was at least 12 hours per week. They were free to discuss any opinions about U.S. television.

Design and procedures

The particular emphasis of this study was placed on understanding young Chinese audiences' experience, comprehension and views about U.S. TV programs. Commonly used data collection strategies in cross-cultural research include qualitative approaches and quantitative surveys, such as public polls, surveys, focus group interviews and etc (Yongchen Gao, 2006, Jing Shi, 2006 & Yinli Zhou, 2010.) Because the emphasis of each study is different; researchers would like to choose specific and appropriate methods for various studies. Meanwhile, the methods used in qualitative research are considered to be most suitable in providing a deeper comprehension of social problems and phenomena compared to other quantitative data (Threlfall, 1999).

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

In light of the realistic conditions and purpose of this study, interview and grounded theory approach were utilized for the data collection and interpretation in this study. But because of the geographical problem in the study, online face-to-face interviews were found to be a more feasible method to collect data and messages from participants who lived in China for this study, since the researcher was in the United States of America during the study process. In light of the situation, the software QQ made it possible to have interviews with participants who lived in China. Sony IC recorder was utilized to record conversations during interviewing. Individual in-depth interviews can provide a more effective tool and create a comfortable environment to let participants speak more frankly (Anastas, 1988). In addition, individual interviews encourage participants to present their personal thoughts and to respond with more attentiveness to the research questions. They also allow the interviewer to observe participants' non-verbal feedback (Sokolow, 1985). Open-ended and semi-structured questions would not limit participants' opinions. The researcher developed an interview guide listed in Table 1 in which the questions were more focused (see as Appendix C). Each interview was about 20 minutes and the researcher scheduled each interview according to participants' free time.

Before the formal interview, the researcher would introduce the purpose and process of the study. This step would make sure all participants understood this study thoroughly and their responses were credible and effective. During the interview, participants were asked at least nine open-ended or semi-structured questions of their personal opinions about U.S. and its culture through U.S. television. Each participant was free to express his or her understanding and opinions about U.S. television programs. The researcher did not give any intimation or further leading questions to influence the participants' answer. Fielding (1994) denoted that some of the strengths of semi-structured interviews are that they allow the researcher to ask questions in the same way each time, while allowing for flexibility in the sequence of questions and the depth of exploration. Also, the open-ended questions of the interview offer enough space for participants to express their true opinions about U.S. TV shows and how they understand U.S. and its culture through TV shows. In essence, interviews allow access to the content

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

which researchers are interested in, including informants' attitudes and experiences (Morgan & Spanish, 1984).

Thirty interviews were scheduled in a month according to participants' requirements, so initial data collection occurred over a time period of this month. Due to participants' nationality, all original language used in this study was Chinese. Using their first language was the best way for them to express their real feelings and understandings about U.S television programs and it also decreased their anxiety during the interview. Then the researcher had to translate all conversations from Chinese to English. The researcher then spent another two weeks to transcribe each of the interviews from the recorder. There were a total of 96 transcribed pages. In the study, the researcher only quoted some iconic quotations to identify different points of view. If a few participants had similar opinions, the researcher would use one quotation or statement to represent them all.

Some previous scholars also focused on this study area; their methods were restricted to surveys and interviews (Lin Xu, 2008; Hang Lv, 2009; Yu Meng, 2010). However, this research attempted to further study the influence of U.S. programming on the young Chinese audience, as well as their understanding of U.S. through this influence. As mentioned in Chapter 1, there is no existing theory which can explain the current phenomenon appropriately, so the researcher decided to use grounded theory as the methodology in this case. The use of grounded theory covered the requirements and brought more benefits compared to other methods.

Using grounded theory in analyzing data provided new insights and helped in understanding some unsolved social problems. The main purpose of the grounded theory was to create a theory which was "faithful to and illuminated the area under study" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.24). In other words, grounded theory was used to discover the perceptions and experiences of the participants, so that the researcher could extract and create new themes. Then the researcher could group these themes into categories, which related to the current phenomenon. Specifically, the researchers transcribed the data from the interviews and then divided it into different categories. The link between the subcategories of a category, and the relationship they form, results in the Paradigm Model. The Paradigm Model contains the phenomena that arise under current conditions,

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

the context relating to the phenomena, the interaction strategies utilized, and the consequences of the phenomena. The Paradigm Model provides a systematic method of understanding original data and relationships among related codes in complicated ways. The grounded theory approach adopts a set of techniques, which include open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

In the open coding process, the phenomena are named and grouped according to their traits. In fact, the open coding is a process of discovering the characteristics of concepts that were expressed by interviewees. With opening coding, the researcher was allowed to explore insights and ideas presented in each interview, and to identify concepts effectively after constantly comparing for similarities or differences. Then in axial coding; a further specific category is emerged according to the model. Ultimately, after the selective coding process, the consequences of the phenomena will be apparent.

After the interviewing process, a total of 30 participants' interviews were recorded. The researcher then transcribed all conversation content, and gathered all pertinent phrases to be used in the open coding stage.

Analysis

Each interview, in its entirety, was transcribed by the researcher. Next, transcripts were coded according to grounded theory. The process contained three stages of coding: open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The aim of open coding was to create initial categories by comparing data with data to find similarities (Charmaz, 2003), so the researcher could separate them into groups. Strauss & Corbin (1990) claimed these initial categories are simply a means of organizing the data to progress into the next stage of coding. And at the beginning of the coding procedures, all codes are at the same stage of importance and priority. These transcripts were read line by line and coded for concepts included in each group of data. Constant comparison was used to identify the differences and similarities between each of the phrases. The purpose of this step was to divide data into groups. For example, when new data was read, it was compared to preceding data to decide which code to assign or whether this new data was necessary. During this process, the researcher had to evaluate data and assign codes. In other related studies, multiple researchers are used to check and compare data again and

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

again to ensure the reliability of codes. In this study, based on the current situation and expense, only one researcher was used to categorize all data. In this case, the only way to increase the reliability of codes was to raise the number of comparisons. After doing this step again and again, 19 phrases were created and listed in Table 2 (Appendix D).

The next level of analysis was axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which re-evaluated the previous categories during the open coding stage. In fact, axial coding is an inductive step based on codes and their related properties. This stage was needed to reorganize previous open coding categories into more specific categories by discovering some traits shared by them. Once all the open coding categories were created, axial coding could be launched (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To facilitate this process, opening codes were separated according to their common traits. So the important thing in this process was to identify these common traits. The researcher did not categorize them based on personal concepts or understanding, all decision-making must be natural and rational. For example, "Confidence" was grouped into "Sense of Identity" initially, because the researcher considered it as participants' self-identity. The participants agreed with this characteristic, "I like their confident spirits, even though they have not had any experience before, they can still pretend that they have done it many times. That really impresses me." But later as the researcher compared it with other codes in "Sense of Identity", the researcher found that this code conveyed that participants appreciated this portrayal of independence, but they did not necessarily want to model it in their own lives. Most of them thought it was a specific feature of Americans which normal Chinese citizens do not possess, so later the researcher moved it to "Culture Diversity", which presents differences between China and U.S. mentioned by participants. Codes in these two axial coding categories are slightly confused sometimes, but the main principle of distinction is whether or not participants have subjective initiative to change or adjust their current attitudes and lifestyle or not. If participants generate ideas of admitting to and copying U.S. culture after watching TV shows, this code would be classified as "Sense of Identity". On the contrary, if participants only mentioned this code without showing any personal intention to follow, it would be placed into "Culture Diversity". Axial coding categories are listed in Table 2 (Appendix D).

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

The third stage was selective coding. Selective coding is the “process of integrating and refining the theory” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 143), which further reorganized the axial coding stage. Strauss & Corbin (1990) mentioned categories in this stage, which are integrated into a core concept that summarizes the overall findings of the study. After continually comparing and summarizing, the core categories emerged as the analysis continued. After examining the data and integrating previous coding, one finding that emerged was that Young Chinese viewers form contradictory depiction about U.S. culture through TV shows and programs. During three steps, the researcher sustained comparing each code and search connection between the data. It is crucial for the researcher to create a network to reveal the relationships among codes, subcategories and main categories.

All data obtained in this study was recorded and transcribed. Because all participants were Chinese, the original transcription was written in Chinese. Nonetheless, the coded words and any quotations mentioned in the study have been translated to English, and for importantly representative quotation and opinions, the researcher would ask participants to use simple and clear words to confirm their meaning to avoid misunderstanding. Each interview transcription was checked to ensure accuracy by participant and researcher after transcribing content.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

The aim of this study was to document how young Chinese viewers understand U.S. and its culture through watching TV shows by using a grounded theory methodology. Analysis and interpretation of findings were summarized to form five analytic categories. In this section, the researcher's focus was on the young Chinese viewers' understanding and discussion of U.S. and its culture. Figure 1 illustrates the system of the study analyzed and built by the researcher.

Social Problems

The social problem category depicts all realistic problems participants found in the Television programs. These include: marriage problems, gun/violence, drugs and alcohol, and horrible public order. It is important to note the young Chinese audience seems to pay close attention to marriage problems and their views on marriage and love are influenced by U.S. television, more or less.

Marriage Problem. The age range of the participants in this study is 18 to 30. People in this age range in China could not avoid one important matter, marriage, based on China's traditional culture and social usage. According to 6th Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation Survey of the China Census (2010), the average age for marriage in China is 26.7 for males and 24.95 for females. Most of the participants naturally mentioned the marriage problems in U.S. television shows and the connections between themselves and TV shows. For example, an office lady said, "U.S. couples tend to have unstable relationships. It is very different from Chinese tradition."

A university student expressed the following opinion: "When I heard of open dating in the shows, I was so surprised and felt unbelievable. It will never happen in my life; I insisted on single-minded style."

Other participants expressed similar views alluding to the fact that American love relationships differ from Chinese traditional views. Another 30-year-old woman further supplemented her opinions about marriage and love:

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

It looks like marriage is not a lasting promise when couples said it in the church. I feel American people do not care about marriage so much; they can easily get married and divorced. In fact, I think Americans cannot handle their relationships well. In *Drop Dead Diva*, Jane is always confused about who she really loves, her husband or that judge. In *Desperate Housewives* there are numerous affairs between these couples: Gabrielle and her yardman, Bree and her boyfriends. These shows planted the idea in my mind, that the love relationship in U.S. is a mess.

A small number of interviewees, who displayed a negative attitude toward marriage in the U.S. TV shows, suggested that U.S. TV might bring many improper influences to youth who choose to watch U.S. television. One participant said:

A one-night stand is a common occurrence in U.S. television, and it looks like American people treat it as a normal thing according to their attitudes and behaviors. I don't want my child to see these scenes, and I don't know how to answer their questions about it.

Female interviewees have more concerns with this problem, while male participants take a more objective view of the situations. Male participants thought there is a generational change in China, people are starting to have different attitudes about divorce and marriage:

Television screenwriters like to exaggerate normal life to add drama; the marriage problem may happen, but it likely does not represent actual U.S. life. It is also normal to find divorce in China currently. If a couple doesn't love each other anymore, why do they have to stay together and waste their time? The previous generation considered divorce to be a shameful thing, but it is becoming increasingly common in this generation.

Another man expressed his interests in the U.S. love pattern; he stated "I agree with Americans in love relationships. I like to date different women at the same time so I can compare them and find which one is a better woman for me. Girls should do that, too."

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

Eastern countries have a totally different understanding about marriage and love relationships compared to Western countries. In China, to remain single was once a problem, and to get divorced was more than a problem. Chinese people treat marriage and love relationships very seriously. Since children have great thinking capability, Chinese parents begin to build a sense of propriety, justice, honesty and honor in children's minds. Among all, a sense of honor is the most important, because it relates to reputation. Chinese parents do not allow their boys and girls to live together before they get married. Contrary to Chinese traditional conceptions, some Americans like to live together when they first fall in love and they express the idea that living together is the way to prove their love and compatibility for each other. One interviewee went along with cohabitation:

Living together is a sign to couples that they care about and love the other. Americans are much more open than us; our society and culture are against premarital sex, but they are not. At least in their TV shows or movies, I did not feel or realize it. For example, Rachel and Ross have sex and a baby before they get married, and most of their friends are not surprised at this result. These friends are totally fine with this consequence. You can easily find other examples in U.S. shows. After watching them, you would establish the open concept about U.S.-style love life. I attribute this different concept to national conditions and culture; there is an obvious contrast between the cultures of East and West.

This participant's response represents the thoughts of a typical Chinese individual. In addition, there is a famous Chinese motto that says "One day of husband and wife, 100 days of conjugal love," which means that each couple should cherish their love and relationship forever. This motto is a miniature version of the Chinese traditional marriage conception; Chinese do not like divorce at all. Even though the divorce rate has become much higher than before, they still have a mindset to treat divorce as a shameful thing. In other words, divorce is still equated with a loss of reputation in China, especially for women. One participant provided her personal example about it:

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

I divorced last year, and I felt embarrassed about it. My parents also did not want to mention it in front of me or even their relatives and friends. I can feel the social pressure about divorced women. But in U.S. television, divorced women can also live happily with their families. In simple terms, it is an expression of societal change. However, China is still on the way, but it is much better than the past.

Just as she said, Americans handle this problem calmly. In 2012, the lowest state's divorce rate was 8.1%, and the highest state was 14.2% (Statistic Brain, 2012). Divorce is a common phenomenon in the United States. This social phenomenon also emerged in many TV shows. Participants provided many examples about U.S. style divorce, such as *Desperate Housewives*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Friends* and so forth. The majority of U.S. dramas include divorce at some point in the series. Marriage problems in the shows make the Chinese audience rethink their culture profoundly, and form both positive and negative perceptions about U.S. culture through television.

Violence Problem. Five participants mentioned that the gun problems left powerful impressions upon them after watching U.S. TV shows, one participant said:

You can see guns in almost every U.S. TV series. Not only policemen have legal guns, but also normal residents and even illegal immigrants have guns. And it may arouse a juvenile's curiosity. It happened before, after the airing of the famous movie series, *Young and Dangerous*, the youth were dreaming of becoming hooligans in China.

Another female university student further added, "Most of U.S. Television can truly reveal current U.S. situations. For example, *Criminal Mind* has some stories that allude to school attacks and serial killers actually existing."

Even though four interviewees showed their worry about the violence phenomenon, there was still one man who expressed his preference that "U.S. television has been saturated with murder, guns and violence. Some pictures may be too bloody or scare the female audience, but I like excitement. Violence can help me reduce my accumulated tension that is generated by continuous work."

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

Drug and Alcohol Problem. Another issue that appeared in U.S. television was the problem with drugs and alcohol. The gender difference is blindingly obvious here. Female participants held bad impressions: “Marijuana, heroin and alcohol raised so many social problems. There are many accesses to purchase these prohibited goods in the shows.” And another female provided her example from U.S. TV shows: “Do you know how many times Max says weed in the *Two Broken Girls*? Probably thousands of times.”

A young mother related the drug and alcohol problem with the youth driving problem as well, “Youngsters always like to push themselves when driving cars on the freeway. Their behavior is not only dangerous for themselves, but also for other drivers. Meanwhile, alcohol and drugs would increase the size of the problem and consequences.”

However, two male participants understood it from another perspective. One of them even thought that drugs and alcohols were not a bad thing. One male participant stated: “If I have a chance, I would like to try marijuana. I am not crazy; I just want to try everything new, and I’ve also heard it is legal in some states, so why not?”

The other man was more objective, and he provided a particular example to take a calm and dispassionate view of the drug and alcohol problem:

In my opinion, the drug and alcohol problem is because of high pressure. One of my uncles became a drunkard after he lost his job and got divorced, he could not find any other way to reduce his depression and pressure. Drugs and alcohol may help us forget unhappiness in a short time, but when they are abused, it will bring much trouble.

A Horrible Public Order. Young Chinese audiences covered a wide range of this topic. Most participants expressed similar opinions about U.S.’s public order system. A university student mentioned:

U.S. government allows citizen to have weapons; it leads to many public order problems. *Criminal Minds* is an example. In this show, I learned that it was too dangerous to walk downtown in the middle of the night. Too much robbery, rape and murder happens there at night. However, I can walk freely and safely in

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

China, even if it is midnight. And I support firearms control, because you never know who is crazy and will use weapons to kill innocent people.

There were three other participants who agreed with this concept:

The cities of the United States are full of crime in the shows. At the same time, the policemen are so brave to fight against these evil forces, but they still cannot completely eliminate crime and its effects on the citizens. In addition, racists still exist in U.S.A. There are some stories in *Criminal Minds* to show how white people killed or tortured people of other races. That is so shocking to me.

A 28-year-old interviewee pointed out that “Bullying is a common phenomenon among teenagers. For example, in *Gossip Girl*, rich girls have their small group and they enjoy bullying children from poor or lower classes. And don't forget school shootings, it is much more terrible than bullying.”

Most participants who mapped out their opinions about horrible public order in the U.S.A. have never been to U.S. before; all they knew about this country was based on U.S. TV shows and daily news from Chinese TV stations. In their descriptions, they expressed their concern and worries about the U.S. social situations. And the most frequently used words were: “Murder,” “Crime,” and “Shooting.” However, individuals who had been to the U.S.A had a more neutral understanding of this social problem. For example, a manager made some pertinent comments on this subject: “U.S. TV shows are similar to ours, producers like to exaggerate social problems, such as public security. When I went to the US, I thought it was a safe place to stay and live if you follow local people's suggestions.”

Certainly, U.S. TV shows are a window to present a seemingly real world, especially for someone who has never been to the United States. According to Cultivation Theory, heavy television viewers are confused about objective reality and television reality over time (Gebner & Bross, 1976). In other words, television viewers are cultivated by the programs they have watched. U.S. TV shows are full of violence and dangerous public environments. When television viewers watch such horrible public

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

disorder again and again in the shows, they will be cultivated that U.S. is a hazardous place. The more they watch this type of programming, the more they will generate negative feelings in their minds. In fact, these participants' statements and opinions are fitting examples of the cultivation theory discussed in this paper. The more similar TV series they watch, the more firmly rooted their negative thoughts of the U.S. become. There is no doubt that these public problems exist; however, TV shows put too much attention on it or exaggerate social influence and actual conditions. In the shows, *Criminal Minds* and *CSI*, murders and criminal cases never stop happening around this country.

In fact, not everyone receives the opportunity to visit U.S. to learn about the background and culture. Among all of the participants, only eight of them had been to U.S., for reasons such as travelling, business and education. These eight people had a better understanding of U.S. society and safety situations than the others. Compared to these 10 participants, the others had a much more negative impression of U.S.. Because they had never visited, their only information came from the way life was portrayed in television and news.

Cultural Diversity

Cultural influences show how the young Chinese audience understands culture shock and cultural integration after watching U.S. TV. In this section, participants applied many positive words to describe U.S. culture. For example, participant listed the following themes, U.S. dream, optimism, confidence, western culture, humor and heroism. When participants talked about these themes, they forwardly compared U.S. culture with Chinese culture in many aspects from what they saw in the U.S. television programs. And they found lots of difference between these two countries according to the content of the U.S. television programs.

American Dream. The American Dream is one representative of the U.S. culture, and normal Americans are so proud of it. The American dream refers to equality for all people, as well as the opportunity for prosperity and success. Since the United States of America is a country of immigrants who have not had this opportunity, this is very

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

appealing to them. In particular, “The American Dream” represents positive emotions, spirit and specific character of U.S.. This category contains the following similar opening codes: “Dream,” “Poor to Rich,” “Success,” “Nobody to somebody,” “American dream,” and “Land of hope.” Participants used “American Dream” to conclude all these things in their minds. For example, a dedicated fan of *Desperate Housewives* explained the American dream this way:

Gabrielle Solis came from South America, and actually, her childhood was miserable. Her stepfather raped her and she did not have the chance to get higher education. But she never gave up, so when she grew up, she made every effort to leave her hometown and she went to U.S.. Fortunately, she became a super model and married a wealthy husband after coming to this magic country. So I think U.S. is kind of a dream maker. Once you have ambition, aspiration and diligence, you will gather in the crops there.

U.S. TV shows spread these kinds of attitudes; you can attain success in the United States of America if you have ambition, determination and dreams, as in *Ugly Betty*. Participants offered this example to prove the American dream in their mind, for example:

Ugly Betty is a positive show that illustrates the American Dream. Betty did not have a pretty face, but she worked hard and was kindhearted, treating everyone nicely. Her boss did not like her at first because individuals usually judge people by appearance. But as time passed, his thoughts toward her changed and she became a success.

Optimism. Aside from personal characteristics, participants also mentioned that watching these TV shows led them to a deep impression of Americans' positive spirit and optimism. Their reasons are crystal clear; they argued that optimism and attitude help Americans to shape their norms and mind-sets. One of them gave a specific example of these conclusions:

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

They are natural optimists and realists. As we all know, it is inevitable to avoid sadness, pain and hopelessness in the course of life, but Americans can adjust their status and emotions very well. In U.S. TV shows, you can easily find normal tragedy, such as divorce, death of children, bankruptcy, serious disease and so forth. It is true that some of them suffer from acute depression or hard drinking, but most of them can step out of the shadows by using mutual-help groups, counselors, or advanced medical support. I have a great example to explain their optimistic attitude. It is from the show, *Cougar Town*. Jules Cobb was divorced when she was 40 years old, and also had an adolescent son. At that time, she found her beautiful face and body had declined as well. Everything in her life was trouble except for one great friend and partner. However, she never gave up hope; later she fell in love with her neighbor and finally figured out a way to maintain a great relationship with her ex-husband and son. This show exhibited attitudes that can be found in most U.S. people: optimism, energy, activism, and the ability to overcome hardship.

Participants' attention to optimism is obviously based on their age. The age range of this study is from 18 to 30. Chinese people in this age range face so much pressure, such as college entrance examinations, job-hunting, housing, and marriage and family problems. According to the report of Xinhuanet (2005), 70% of the young generation in Guangzhou felt they were under high pressure; 41.1% white-collar workers admitted they had high levels of tension everyday in the office. High pressure does not only happen in young people who live in Guangzhou, it is a universal phenomenon among the young Chinese generation. Under this kind of pressure and keen competition, optimism seems more important to young Chinese people. Consequently, the optimism in U.S. shows can easily draw their attention. One senior student commented:

I have to take a college entrance examination this year. The pressure placed upon me by my parents, school, and myself seems out of my control. Every time I feel depressed, I would like to remember what Michael did in *Prison Break*. His optimistic attitude and the spirit of 'never give up' inspired me. But it is easier

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

said than done in real life. I know I should be optimistic, and then I just cannot achieve it.

Among all participants, those below 22 years of age demonstrated a more personal interest in optimism. They considered it to be a mandatory attitude to help them face job-hunting, marriage, and many other future problems. However, those above 22 years of age were a little more impersonal when it came to optimism:

It is a personal quality, also related to social background and family circumstance. I like that attitude, but I am not that type of person. Americans emphasize the enjoyment of pleasure in good time; they seem to never worry about tomorrow, just have fun today. We are different.

Confidence. Confidence is another strong feature of Americans; it is a least perceived to be a mark of U.S. culture. All participants alluded to this idea, and their impressions include both positive and negative understandings. There were nine participants who provided specific examples from television programs they had watched, including *Desperate Housewives*, *Drop Dead Diva*, *House of Cards* and so forth. The others simply expressed their opinions and understanding of it. One interviewee stated:

As I said before, their confidence is obvious, just like the jewels on their necks; you can find it easily because of its shine.” Another participant provided her example: “Frank Underwood of *House of Cards* is a house majority whip; he has fully demonstrated this confidence during the whole story. Sometimes I looked much more worried than him. His tone, expression, and even body language expressed how much confidence he had.

Most participants expressed strong, positive attitudes toward this feature; they indicated that American confidence could bring so many benefits to people. However, there were eight people, mostly males, who expressed opposite ideas. A male white-collar worker said that “Obviously, having confidence is great thing, but sometimes they seem overdeveloped in it. In my opinion, Americans have excessive confidence about

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

everything, and sometimes their confidence is blind. They trust to their own ability too much.”

Historically, Chinese people have always exhibited too much modesty, and a lack of confidence. The Chinese are very different compared to Americans. For example, after interviewing many outstanding Chinese students, the Director of International Education at University of Glasgow, Mr. Lexy Docwra (2012), told the media that Chinese students have excellent grades and full preparations; however, most of them were short of confidence. U.S. people also have stereotypes of normal Chinese students: they are hard working, devoid of humor, gauche, wealthy. But the most prominent typecast of them is their lack of confidence and their feeling of shame. Chinese people's diffidence and shame is the label of their personality, and this personality is based on traditional Chinese culture. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Chinese traditional culture is rooted in the ideological system of the ancient Chinese philosopher, Confucius. And the essence of Confucius's philosophy is the golden mean, which emphasizes that everyone should be modest, without displaying too much personal talent (Chinakongzi, 2011). For example, when you ask a Chinese and an American how they judge their achievements, the American would probably tell you of his satisfaction with his piece of work, while the Chinese would tell you how many deficiencies are still included in his work. In view of this kind of thought, it is evident that Chinese people's diffidence is a longstanding feature. Under this circumstance and cultural background, it is much easier for the researcher to understand why these participants do not comprehend the confidence of Americans.

Western Culture. Participants pointed out that U.S. TV shows acted as a window for them to know about Western culture. A female participant explained the reason she chose to watch U.S. TV shows:

I want to know more and deeper information about U.S.. You know the United States is the most powerful country in the whole world in recent years, and the success of this country is based on its culture and social system. Meanwhile, there is a saying in China and it is very famous, 'He that lies down with dogs must rise

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

up with fleas.' This saying means that your environment may bring so many influences back to you. So watching U.S. TV shows creates a circumstance and communication way for me to understand and learn Western culture better.

Another female interviewee made mention of her personal opinion:

I adore Western culture since I have travelled around some Western countries, such as U.S., Germany, Switzerland, England, and France. Among all of these countries, the United States is my favorite. After viewing scenes from places to which I had traveled, Beverly Hills, the Hollywood sign, and Golden Gate Bridge; I was reminded of those memories and I felt connected.

Similarly, a male participant also referred to this context when he said:

I don't know why, but I just like U.S. culture very much. I have gone to U.S. several times, but it seems too expensive for me to keep doing that because I have only worked for 4 years after graduation. But watching TV shows is way cheaper than travel, and I really enjoy U.S. culture. They are full of fun, close to life, and their culture is much more free than ours.

As usual, seven participants hold opposite viewpoints about Western culture, and the contradiction between them and Western culture is due to cultural difference.

Participants listed the main reasons they feel uncomfortable about Western culture:

Western culture in my mind is openness about sex. It is against our concept; I mean Chinese conception. And we are shamed to talk about sex in a public place, not even among close friends, so the conversations in the *Sex and City* will never happen to me. If I have premarital sex, my parents will probably break my legs as well as the legs of the man I love.

A male interviewee also identified his negative understanding of Western culture: "I thought western culture overemphasized me, not us. But Chinese culture is more traditional and collective; we prefer to stick to our family, and our decisions mostly are based on interest of family or group." Another female student further explained her

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

opinion about Western culture: “Western culture in the U.S. places emphasis on materialism, money, and power; it seems too cold-blooded.

In Chapter 2, we discussed the difference between China and the U.S., including individualism and collectivism. Participants' expressions prove the influence of this cultural diversity. Chinese audiences felt uncomfortable when they met and recognized these distinctions because the Western culture was contrary to the traditional Chinese culture. For example, Western culture publicizes individualism, achievement-oriented and materialistic opinions, and it involves the forbidden zone in the Chinese culture, such as the gender topic. When these audiences cannot accept unadoptable information, they produced conflicting emotions about Western culture. The scholar Kealey (1989) demonstrated that cross-culture communication could bring both positive and negative psychological quantitative change to audiences. When an individual adopted a new culture and satisfied the current status, he or she would have a more positive feeling about it. However, if the individual could not blend into the new culture or felt uncomfortable, he or she would have anxiety, depression and other negative reactions. According to Kealey's theory, it is easy to understand the reactions of these participants.

Humor & Heroism. These two categories are not like other ones receiving both positive and negative feedback at the same time; all participants had favorable thoughts toward them. The predominant reason is that these two traits are the excellence of U.S. culture because they represent justice, pleasure and a yearning for peace. Some of the comments are follows:

Most of my male friends' favorite show is *Prison Break*; Michael is the best example to show how to be a hero and how to fight against the right cause. We are impressed with what he did and the relationship between him and his older brother; it is about family, friendship and love.

I am a crazy fan of all heroes, including Superman, Green Arrow, and the doctor in *House*. I idolize these people who can save others. It is more than just worship for their super capacity, but for their humanity and love for the populace. And the key point is that U.S. heroes are common people as well; they have emotion, they

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

have to face dilemma, they are real people, not like deity in our culture and religion.

The United States of America is a country that advocates heroism, so heroism becomes an inescapable topic when studying U.S. culture. U.S. heroes are not like other Western countries that historically have a hero archetype, such as Homer's Epic and the legend of Arthur. Heroes of the U.S. are more simple and easy to approach. They are the normal people living with us. But when a country is facing trouble or vicious power appears, heroes will emerge to save the whole world. In fact, heroism is by far the largest movie and TV genre. People can find it through various kinds of movies: action or adventure, westerns, science fictions, detective and police dramas, martial arts, natural disasters, or war movies. In Chapter 2, Hofstede's dimensional model of national culture explained power distance's role in the cross-culture communication. Hofstede mentioned that China is high power distance and U.S. is low power distance. High power distance people feel uncomfortable with denying their leader, so the hero does not often appear in China's culture because of their social system and political issues. Most Chinese prefer to follow the directions of the government, never thinking to challenge the power class, even though they realize that corruption scandals are very common in the social system now. Guangjun Chen (2013) claimed that most of Chinese people have strong emotions to this country, which was based on the traditional Chinese culture. And these kinds of emotions also were an extension of nation patriotism. It is undeniable that there are so many social problems and negative phenomenon happened in China currently because of social developments, however, most of people are bystanders because they could not find real connections between problems and themselves, and they also have complex thoughts about it. For example, Chinese people hate corruption scandals, but most people still want to be government officials because this class of people represents power and money. In conclusion, Chinese people have complicated thoughts about the government, but most of them are still willing to follow what government told them because their lives are much better than before. Most heroes of the parent generation are still the anti-Japanese War heroes based on what they experienced in the past. But as time has passed, the young generations understanding of heroism has turned to U.S. heroes. In fact, one young

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

university student stated: "Chinese television programs also include many heroes, but most of them are anti-Japanese soldiers. I appreciate what they did in the past, but TV likes to exaggerate their capacities and contributions, and their personalities are inauthentic. On the other hand, even U.S. heroes are dreamed up, but their characters have made them so true to life."

U.S. heroes not only represent super capacity, but they also fight on behalf of the struggle over unfairness and injustice. Currently, China is in a period of social transition, though network barriers still exist. For instance, you cannot log into your Facebook account in the area of China, or even Twitter. But the Young Chinese generation gets more access to understand Western culture. They do not like the ways of their parents' generation; they have become free to talk about politics or other previously forbidden topics. At this time, the heroism displayed through U.S. television fits their needs and inner desires. One teacher provided her view on this topic: "There are many unfair things happening in our country, yeah, I mean I love my country, but I also want someone who can show up like Green Arrow to change the current status and punish those corrupt officials or bad guys."

In addition to heroism, the U.S. style of humor also impressed young Chinese viewers. Actually, Americans are very skilled at humor. Wang Yingyu (2005) analyzed the difference between Chinese and U.S. humor. These differences were identified as: content, social function, technique of expression, and level of implication. But because of cultural diversity, the failure to appreciate humor easily occurs when Chinese audiences come across some certain cultural elements with which they are not familiar. However, the online translation teams play a role here. The officer participant provided his personal opinions: "I cannot fully understand jokes in U.S. TV shows, but translation teams make them work, sometimes, even better than the original one, because they combine the jokes with Chinese culture and current issues."

By way of translation teams, U.S. humor gets a shortcut among the Young Chinese audience. On the other side, compared to Chinese humor, U.S. humor is much more simple, direct and entertaining. And this distinguishing feature is in accord with the

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

young generation's need for speed and high efficiency. The main reason that participants chose to watch U.S television was for entertainment, as illustrated by this participant: "I enjoy watching U.S. comedy shows; they are full of funny conversations. In the *Big Bang Theory*, the conversations between Sheldon and other characters are uproarious, though there is too much academic discourse in it sometimes." And another responded: "U.S. situation comedies, such as *Friends* and *Everyone Loves Raymond*, have brought so much relaxation and enjoyment to me. I like their self-mockery and they crack jokes about superstars, celebrities, or even the President."

The second reason stated by participants for watching U.S. programming was as a means of learning spoken English. Some participants claimed they utilized U.S. TV shows as a learning tool. When they watch or listen to U.S. TV shows, they can learn daily English from pure English speakers. Being different from what they learn from Chinese English textbooks, daily English is more casual, funny and useful when they need to converse with an English speaker.

I like to use U.S. shows to start a conversation with American co-workers; it is much better than using weather or food. I worked in an international company, so I had many foreign co-workers and managers. I used to think it was hard to make friends or build favorable working relationships with them because of culture barriers, but U.S. TV shows provide so much U.S. style humor that can be fully understood. Now they call me an U.S. expert and love to hang out with me.

Written English is too formal for speakers to use as a communication tool. However, most young Chinese learn written English from an early age. Using this formal language in conversation with friends would often create many funny or awkward stories. For example, a graduate student stated: "Through watching U.S. TV shows, I have realized how many phrases I have used to communicate with English speakers that are wrong or ambiguous. Jokes are not easy to say when you speak the second language."

U.S. TV shows not only bring so much fun to Chinese audiences, but also provide a wonderful platform for audiences to learn to handle U.S. humor and culture in a variety of daily situations. U.S. linguist Claire Kramsch's theory (1993) mentioned that

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

mastering a foreign language is not only to study language itself, but also to know the background and culture. Language can reflect the features of a nation, a nation's history and culture, and a nation's customs and habits. U.S. sitcoms contain not only cultural transmission but also education which can amuse young Chinese audiences, so they can learn and accept U.S. culture easily.

U.S. Fashion

U.S. TV shows conveyed U.S. fashion to Young Chinese audiences as well. As mentioned in Chapter 1, there are many boutiques distributed around big cities of China, which have used many U.S. young idols' pictures to attract customers' attention. In China, there is a famous saying, clothing, food, shelter and transportation -- basic necessities of life. So you can image how important clothing is for Chinese people. Meanwhile, fashion is a fundamental part of modern life, but fashion needs financial support. With the development of China's economy, the Chinese have become wealthier than before and they even "gamble at high stakes," which means they can throw away a thousand dollars and not be worried about it. International Business Time (2013) reported that Oxford English Dictionary is considering adding a brand new Chinese word, Tuhao, in its dictionaries of the 2014 edition to explain how China's flashy, elite class spends money to purchase luxury goods all around the world. Thus, the current exchange rate between RMB (Chinese money) and U.S dollar has decreased to about 6. This means 6 RMBs equal 1 U.S dollar, but Chinese people can still afford their fashion desires. Females are the main force of the fashion trend. Participants did not restrict the concept of fashion to just clothing, shoes, make-up, or other traditional fashion aspects; they also turned their attention to fashionable concepts, such as consumption concept and family types. These female participants, especially, regarded clothing and shoes as an important motive for watching U.S. TV shows. They can use these shows to glean fashion tips.

Clothing and Shoes. Female participants regarded this important aspect according to their statements. It is one of their motives for watching U.S. programming.

The first U.S. series that I watched was *The O.C.* It is a domestic idol TV series in which every actor and actress looks fabulous. The way they matched their

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

clothing influenced me so much. There are many women like me in our website, Tianya. We like to share different fashion tips from various shows to learn how to make them work together.

Gossip Girl is a moving fashion magazine. Every week, I would sit in front of my computer to wait for its update. The major reason for watching is all about fashion trends. Through it, I know more worldwide brands, such as Jimmy Choo and Roger Vivier.

Aside from simple appreciation, participants further elaborated that they would actually seek out where they could buy this clothing, shoes and accessories, which actresses are wearing in the shows. A female interviewee excitedly stated that “At the first sight of Roger Vivier on Blair’s feet, I told myself I have to buy this pair of shoes, and I actually did it.”

I have a Taobao shop to serve Chinese customers who want to buy foreign products (Taobao is an online shopping platform that is similar to Ebay). My customers always ask me to find U.S. TV stars’ clothing and shoes that they wore in the U.S. shows.

Participants thought U.S. fashion seemed to combine the properties of both comfort and appearance. The actual operation and function gave them inspiration in daily life. According to female participants’ opinions, U.S. TV shows have brought so many benefits to them, enriching their spiritual and material world.

Many male participants indicated that they did not have much feeling about U.S. fashion, but they still had access to receive information about it from social media, conversations with friends, and magazines.

I have always heard my female friends discussing clothing from U.S. shows. They have also shown me and other friends what they purchased from U.S. websites or Taobao, which are similar to the style of *New Girl* and *Desperate Housewives*. They seem very happy to copy the styles from the U.S. shows.

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

Therefore, gender difference plays an important role in this category. Female participants are crazy about U.S. fashion, while men, being aware of this current trend, really have no strong feelings about it.

Consumption Concept. There is no doubt that there are some historical and cultural reasons for the different consumption concepts between China and the United States of America. One participant provided a little example to reflect the distinction between these two countries:

A Chinese old lady and an U.S. old lady met in heaven. The U.S. lady said, 'I finally paid off my housing loan after working for 30 years.' But the Chinese lady then said, 'I finally bought an apartment after having worked for 30 years.'

From this little story, we can see the divergence of consumption concept between the two countries. China's consumption concept has included conservative spending and a priority on saving. On the contrary, Americans, in general, spend more and save less. In other words, Chinese people emphasize practicability; they are very scrupulous in saving for their future plans. Americans, however, have focused on the enjoyment of material goods and pleasures, even if it means going into debt. But things are changing in China with the influence of Western culture; the young generation is beginning to think more like Americans when it comes to consumption. One male officer said: "U.S. consumption concept and life attitude has influenced me a lot. Life is short, why not have some fun while we still have a chance?"

Another female participant just got married, but her marriage was a new style, "naked marriage." A "Naked marriage" is when the couple gets married without buying an apartment, cars, or even a wedding ceremony. She was frank and honest to confess that she formed this idea based on U.S. TV shows and Western culture:

My parents cannot understand my decision; they thought I was crazy because most of the girls in my city would ask her husband to buy a new apartment. But from U.S. TV shows, and my American friends, marriage can be much simpler; couples can rent a house to live together. It is so expensive to buy an apartment in

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

China; I don't want to ask our parents to provide money like others do. Saving face belongs to a past time. Now we need to make some changes according to the trends.

Chinese culture attaches great importance to marriage; it contains many complicated courtesies and requirements. For example, in most places, husbands should prepare an apartment, betrothal present, wedding feast, and so forth. According to statistics (Xian Newspaper, 2012), the average cost involved with a marriage is 42.5 million RMB, almost 70 thousand U.S. dollars. This is just the average level. In China's big cities, Shanghai, Beijing, or Guangzhou, the cost will be much higher. For middle-income families, marriage becomes a burden. On the other hand, saving face is another key point in the Chinese culture. Most Chinese place a high emphasis on reputation (identity), so parents prefer to hold a wonderful wedding to help their children earn respect in front of family members, friends, and other people. In fact, this participant is one microcosm of the young generation; she frankly presented her new idea about marriage cost and the influence of Western culture.

There were another 5 participants who mentioned the pattern of consumption with regard to credit cards. They are not like their parents who are used to paying in cash; credit cards will be the first choice for them.

When I was still in the university, I applied for my first credit card because most Americans were using them in the shows. I thought it was so cool to pay without having to make change. Just swipe the card and it is done.

Another female participant who enjoys shopping gave this illustration: "Credit cards let me buy anything I want, even if I don't have enough money; my bank can lend the rest to me. Now, I have become like the U.S. consumer."

Older participants expressed their worry about this kind of U.S. consumption concept. Their standpoints concentrated upon a poor sense of financial management and anxiousness over the future. A 29-year-old participant commented: "I used to own three credit cards, but later I lost control. So I cancelled all of them, and my life turned back to

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

the right track. Maybe Americans know how to control themselves and use cards better than me.”

In U.S. shows, people are never worried about tomorrow. They spend every dime to make their life better. They enjoy traveling with the whole family to go to the beach, camp, or abroad, but I have insisted on my saving habits so I don't have to worry about any bad things that may happen tomorrow.

Gay Couples. Participants repeatedly pointed out the presence of gay couples in U.S. programming. This surprised the researcher because they thought of it as a new fashion or trend. These participants formed two opposing opinions of U.S. gay couples from the shows. U.S. society has placed a high importance on personal respect and choice, as well as the composition of the love relationship. With the development of human rights, human being's moral concept has turned to diversification and liberalization. That means everyone has the same right to fall in love with anyone. Under this common view, homosexual families and couples also appear in the U.S. TV industry. The industry is proud of, and advocates, this cross-gender love. Some members of the Chinese audience have gradually started to accept this new style.

Mitchell and Cameron [referring to the show *Modern Family*] is a gay couple; they subvert my comprehension of the traditional family. I don't know if it is right or wrong, but their love for each other and the adopted baby has impressed me. I think this kind of lifestyle would never appear in Chinese television.

A young girl added: “Gay couples are fine with me. U.S. TV shows provide many realistic examples to build a concept in my mind; everyone deserves to be loved, whether he or she is heterosexuality or homosexuality. Love is just love.”

Modern Family is not the only U.S. TV series to include gay couples; you can also find this phenomenon in other shows, such as *Desperate Housewives*, *The New Normal*, *Queer as Folk*, and *The L Word*. These are not just stories; *The New Normal's* content has a sobering effect on the audience in its presentation of love, how to love and how to overcome difficulties.

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

Every episode has its specific topic in *The New Normal*. It is not just about gays and relationships; it includes race, friendship, family, and other up-to-date topics, even politics. As the story progresses, one would feel touched by this couple.

Different from U.S.'s culture and understanding, Gay and lesbian couples are still taboo in China. Chinese traditional culture cannot tolerate the gay lifestyle. The mainstream media avoids the existing gay problem and people discriminate against gay couples. Consequently, homosexuality has become a non-mainstream or undergrounded phenomenon in China (Huang Kang, 2013).

I think U.S. TV shows spread some wrong ideas for the audience. For example, homosexuality seems to be a correct love style. I totally do not agree with it but it has become a fashion in Shanghai. I always find young men or women holding hands on the street, or even kissing in public.

In my opinion, gay couples are not real couples, and I don't think the Television industry should try to build this kind of wrong concept to the audience. I am glad that Chinese TV shows never talk about it. No offense to them but I still think males should love females; it is natural.

These two kinds of opposing participants represent two actual standpoints among average Chinese people. Many social media sites, like Weibo, Weixin, and Baidu, have become forums for debate on this topic. The content of U.S. TV shows has offered much food for thought in China. According to the interview results, the young Chinese generation is not overcome with disgust for homosexuals; they have found that gays not only exist in U.S., but also in their own country. Participants who hold negative opinions consider the fact that Western culture encourages people to admit they are gay, even portraying a great image about it. A male university student stated, "In U.S. shows, most homosexuals had great jobs, including fashion editor, artist, actor, and lawyer. It is not hard to understand why currently some young people feel conceited."

This study does not focus on gay couples in China, but the interview results demonstrated that this topic was prevalent among the participants of this study. This gay

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

topic demonstrates that the cultural communication in U.S. TV shows does have a significant impact on the Chinese audience. U.S. TV shows have drawn attention to a subject that Chinese people may have avoided or ignored previously.

Sense of Identity

In this axial category, participants revealed the influences from what they watched. People are apt to confuse sense of identity with cultural diversity. These are both based on different cultures; however, Sense of Identity focuses on subjective initiative. This means that participants have already changed or decide to adjust themselves based on what they have learned or understood from U.S. TV shows.

Individualism. Individualism is one of the most fundamental values in the United States. Its definition varies from one scholar to the other, but most of them agree that individualism extols personal initiative and self-reliance, and claims that individuals, rather than any group or institution, should be the core of society (Xueru Cui, 2010). Individualism is also reflected in U.S. television. When a white-collar worker mentioned individualism in the shows, he concluded that “Individualism is much more important than the group interest in the U.S.”

Participants expressed in abundance that they took notice this phenomenon in the U.S. shows. As usual, some people agreed with it, but others disliked it. Among all of the interviewees, older people agreed with individualism based on their working experience and lifetime, while students still placed a high importance on team effort and not trying to be a lone hero. A male officer said, “My understanding of individualism from U.S. shows has become a little different from my past definition. Individualism is not selfishness; rather, it implies personal effort.”

Another male agreed with the idea and he added his understanding that “Individualism could not exist without a strong personal work-ethic; many people do not look out for others, only for themselves. So it means you have to survive by yourself in the harsh reality.”

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

Actually, many participants stretch individualism to cover new meaning in light of what they have watched. In the past, China's media has defined individualism as a negative word, equal to selfishness. People who belong to individualism never think about others and behave out of control (BWChinese, 2012). However, through watching U.S. TV shows, young Chinese audiences have redefined the meaning of individualism. When the researcher would ask for the reason, most of the participants fully intertwined the content of U.S shows with their personal career experience.

Ugly Betty provides an example of my thoughts on individualism. Betty cannot blend into Fashion magazine because she is so different from others in her style and personality. If she were focused on the feelings of others, she would not be able to achieve success in the magazine. Her diligent effort and unique personality may make her unusual, but it also lets others praise her. I also have experienced those moments when I began my career; she gave me so much to think about on self-examination.

I used to be a collectivist, but my career and experience have made me rethink it. Currently, the Chinese people are facing a transition period. Too much stress has been placed on money and position, and that reality has forced people, like me, to fight for myself and not for community. U.S. television shows have followed this developing tendency and it has revealed the cutthroat competition.

However, those who disagree with individualism also supply their notions about it. Their opinions were concentrated on collective interests being much more important than personal interests. This mindset was most likely formed by the input of parents, teachers, and even government. In other words, they have built deep-rooted ideas about collectivism. Although those supporters experienced the same education system as the protesters, the social experience and influence seems to have made an impact. As mentioned before, protesters are mainly university students or young professionals who are lacking in social experience. A senior university student stated, "If everyone only thinks about himself or herself, how will countries make progress? Individualism may work in U.S., but it is not suitable for China." This is the special example, which

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

presented a strong negative attitude about individualism. The other opinions were mild, such as the following: "The individualism in the U.S. television shows is based on their social system. They over-value personal interest."

Equality. Equality is being labeled a characteristic in the United States, it is also revealed in the content of U.S. shows.

U.S. families advocate equality; parents like to treat their children as adults and respect their personality. In shows, if you pay attention, you will easily find that parents will knock at the door before stepping into their child's room to show respect for their child's privacy.

In reference to equality, participants have conveyed many examples from U.S. television shows; these examples were not just restricted to parents and children, but also involved race, gender, and age topics.

Racial issues are pointed out with various ethnicities holding prominent positions. In *Criminal Minds*, Morgan started his job as a criminal analyst. Because of his excellent contribution, he was later promoted to be a team leader. In other shows, you can also find Asian managers or African senior executives, as in *Grey's Anatomy*. Everyone has the same right and opportunity in the U.S.A. It is inspiring.

There is no doubt that the Chinese audience compares the equality in U.S. to the present situation in China. Some participants compared the two countries' current situations and stated the following: "I think there are so many unfair things happening in our country even right now. For example, rustic children cannot receive the same educational opportunities. We are still on our way to seeking equality." Another participant stated, "U.S. TV shows have given the Chinese people a chance to realize the shortcomings that still exist in China, including the lack of adequate equality."

In China, the social class of a plumber is much lower than that of a lawyer, who is respected by everyone. However, in the United States, a plumber can receive the

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

same respect as a lawyer. In *Desperate Housewives*, Mike is a plumber and his wife also feels very proud of his job, and neighbors never look down on him.

U.S. TV shows have opened a window for young Chinese audiences, and they have exposed a real U.S. society. Television provides a glimpse into the culture, politics, and economy. It is different from the Chinese technique of expression. U.S. shows are skilled in supplying certain scientific evidences to move audiences. All participants generally expressed agreement that China should study the equality of U.S., and ensure that everyone is given this right. They also mentioned that U.S. programming likes to defame the imagination of China to underline and contrast U.S. superiority.

It is often heard in the U.S. shows that Chinese do not have individual rights; they live under the control of the government. This is not a correct perception. There is a difference between the U.S and China, but U.S. programming exaggerates the actual situation.

Warmth. Though U.S. advocates heroism, individualism, and utilitarianism, U.S. shows still reflect normal peoples' warmth. There have been many TV series about 'nobodies:' neighbors, co-workers, doctors, teachers, or anyone around us.

U.S. TV shows have changed my stereotype of the U.S.A. I used to think the capitalist system was so cold-blooded; everyone cared only for personal interest. But most of the U.S. shows I have watched expressed a 'nobody's' life. They help each other and they care for each other. Sometimes there is nothing heroic, but it is still moving, as in *Two Broken Girls*; they supported each other wholeheartedly.

Thirteen participants made mention of this warmth in the U.S. shows. Their opinions are similar to each other and the main idea is comparable to the previous example. It is interesting to hear participants mention their stereotype of U.S. voluntarily. With further inquiry, interviewees utilized several words to describe U.S. and its culture, including heroism, violent place, guns, individualism, cultural mixture, and the symbol of free. They also admitted that U.S. shows have provided a new path for them to know and understand U.S. local customs and practices. It includes every aspect of U.S. life, so they

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

have finally realized that what they knew from China's mainstream media was just part of the United States.

Expression. Participants pointed out the differences between Americans and Chinese in the expression of emotion. Most participants felt that China's mode of expression was characterized by constraint, while U.S.'s was much more open. U.S.'s prefer to speak directly. For example, parents often kiss in front of children to express their love for each other. However, none of the participants experienced this in China. It is amusing to find that Chinese women like the U.S. style of expression; they think the U.S. style is more romantic and heart-warming. At the same time, men prefer to keep the Chinese mode; they believe behavior is much more important than honeyed words. Here are some quotations from women:

I never say 'I love you' to my mom, but after watching U.S. shows, I started to think I should form that habit to say 'I love you' to my parents every day, because you never know when your next chance may be.

In China, expression of emotion is implicative; we do not like to say it publicly or in front of the person. But I wish my husband could change a bit and kiss me before he leaves for work, or say that he loves me forever like the U.S. style.

On the contrary, one man stated, "Do you think their honeyed words or body touch are too much? Sometimes it is, in fact, just a politeness or marriage routine: kiss, I love you, bye."

Independence. American's "Independence" has made an impression on young Chinese viewers as well, because it is contrary to Chinese nature. Chinese government pursued the one-child policy many years ago, which led parents and grandparents to become overprotective towards their child. However, overdeveloped protection has influenced children's self care ability, social intelligence, and independence. In this regard, the growth pattern of U.S. children reminds them that children need to do certain things on their own. This overdeveloped protection has hindered Chinese children in the growth and maturity process that is required for success in life (Li Bin, 2012.).

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

Compared with U.S. children, we are over protected by our parents. In U.S. shows, these children are so independent. They can have part-time jobs in high school to earn pocket money, or to pay their own tuition fees. Most of us have to attend many remedial courses to increase our competitive learning capacity; this greatly limits our activities of daily living.

Some participants have two roles at the same time; they still listen to their parent's instruction, and they have a child of their own to raise. When they step into the real world, they continue this type of control and over-protection, which produces another generation of children who generally lack independence. For example, Xinhua Net (2005) reported news that Haerbing University students hired housekeepers to help them with cooking and laundry. This is a widespread proof that China's children have high intelligence, but are lacking in everyday skills. One participant agreed with this phenomenon, saying, "Independence is one of my weaknesses. I am used to relying on my parents and living with them; they cook for me, and help me make almost every decision. Both my parents and I are satisfied with this relationship."

When this generation started to become parents, they began to encourage or force their children to live independently. They feel that independence will bring so many benefits to their children in the future. One mother stated her opinions:

It is time to make some changes; present children need to have all-round development. In U.S. shows, you can easily find that they are multi-faceted people, especially in gusty situations like *Lost*. We could imagine that if Chinese children were put in that situation, they would probably have no idea how to survive.

Upon further questioning, one young mother replied with deep feeling:

I remember a scene in *Desperate Housewives* when Lynette's twin boys were about to leave for university. At that moment, Lynette was so sad to say goodbye to them; however, she told boys they should rent a house or apartment by themselves. The parents would not be supporting their finance anymore because

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

they were old enough to be men and they needed to learn how to survive in the real world. I agree with that. Parents may protect their children for a period of time, but they cannot keep doing it forever. The best thing they can teach their children is independence, like U.S. parents.

Many participants had a strong awareness to adjust the educational mode in order to train children in independence, but some of them added:

It is hard to actually apply independence training to my child because my parents have become an obstacle. Every time, they try their best to help my children. I have to change their mind first, so I introduced a couple U.S. family dramas to them, and I hope they will understand my thoughts. Everything should be proceeding in an orderly way and step by step.

In fact, independence is mentioned several times during this study, even in other coding processes or participants' quotations. However, a separate coding category was created for this topic because it is one of the most impressive characteristics of Americans mentioned by participants. Participants also thought that confidence had a strong relationship with the other codes.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

Conclusion

The study has explored how U.S. TV programs influence and form young Chinese audiences' understanding of U.S. and its culture. Through an analysis of young Chinese audiences' feelings and understandings about U.S. and its culture, this study has revealed how U.S. TV programs conveyed two opposing impressions of the United States of America to young Chinese audiences who watched these programs. The researcher chose to use grounded theory because it focuses on human being interaction and social processes to explain social phenomena. It is a valuable methodology, more capable of change than other strategies. After organizing and analyzing all data and combining it with literature reviews, the researcher concluded three main findings.

First, curiosity about cultural differences, the need to study English, and the desire for entertainment compel young Chinese people to watch U.S. TV programs. The most common reasons given for watching U.S. programming included the desire to understand U.S. and its culture, the necessity to master English as a second language, the aspiration to identify the current phenomena, and the desire to relax after the high pressure of daily life. With the frequent communication between China and the U.S., more and more young Chinese people have realized the importance placed on comprehension of U.S. and English skills. U.S. television programs provide an enjoyable and substantial way for them to achieve their goals. Currently, China is facing a social transformation period; multiple moral values are appearing on the various information channels simultaneously, such as Internet, news, and interpersonal communication. For example, some people think money is supreme, while others consider emotions and relationships to be the most important matter in life. However, many Chinese people may be confused as to which value system is right or better, especially the young generation; these people lack life experience because of their age. However, these young people are full of curiosity and they easily accept new ideas. In this study, most of participants also admitted they were influenced by U.S. culture and received new ideas from U.S. television programs. And the main reason these young people had these kinds of changes

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

was based on their educational experience and social needs. Current Chinese society is much more open than before, international communication and business play more and more important roles, so most of Chinese children start to get in touch with U.S. culture and learning English skills in their text books. On the other side, multinational corporations entered into China's market, these companies have more chances to earn good salary than domestic enterprises, and so young people are willing to understand western culture in order to blend into companies' foreign cultures. Under this circumstance, we may say that U.S. television programs appeared at the perfect moment for this young generation. The content, culture, value and even life-style portrayed in U.S. television shows is vastly different from China's mainstream programming.

In Hofstede's dimensional model of national culture, he mentioned huge differences between Eastern and Western culture, including power distance and individualism/collectivism. He thought these differences might result in cultural misunderstanding during communication. However, in this study, instead of leading to misunderstanding, this kind of distinction aroused young Chinese audiences' curiosity to explore and understand U.S. and its culture. Due to participants' personal preference and gender, they chose to watch diverse types of dramas, which led to various understandings of U.S. and its culture. The participants who preferred watching darker dramas such as criminal, vampire, and politics themes, might easily form negative impressions of U.S.. Other participants who like comedy and idol drama might build a much more positive impression of U.S.. Participants also added that U.S. television programs were not the only resource for them to build their impressions; they also considered news, historical books and other information. However, they believed U.S. shows to be more neutral than other channels of information because U.S. TV programs more comprehensively displayed true lives and aspects of the United States of America. The cross-communication of U.S. television programs satisfied young people's imagination and curiosity of U.S.. In this process, "Culture Soft-Landing" (which means culture is communicated via media so that audiences easily understand other foreign cultures unconsciously) plays a crucial role, which rebuilds the impression of the whole world in the young generation's mind (Wu Ke, 2008). Participants did not directly mention this

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

word, culture soft-landing, but their descriptions confirmed this theory. They stated that U.S. TV series influenced them and their understanding of U.S. unconsciously. U.S. TV series offered the cross-communication a short cut; it utilized narrative technique, naturalness of the dialogue and moving emotions to convey so-called U.S. culture to the young Chinese audience. Unlike other communication modes, U.S. programming combines various sensory means, including auditory and visual senses, and offers a seemingly real world to the audience. Consequently, participants willingly accepted what they watched from the programs, both positive and negative.

Mastering language is another reason for the young Chinese audience to continue watching U.S. television shows. Most participants mentioned the importance of English language skills in their daily lives. Student participants referred to the high pressure of English tests while recognizing their weaknesses in oral and listening skills. Watching U.S television shows allowed them to practice listening and speaking skills simultaneously without spending hours in boring book study. Working people also mentioned the professional demands to improve English skills in the business world. For these reasons, participants added that their parent's generation also encouraged them to watch U.S. TV because these parents did not have the chance to study English when they were young. Based on their own social experiences, they understand the importance of having a solid grasp of the English language in today's society. Taken altogether, this group of young Chinese viewers formed viewing habits of U.S. TV shows based on their own need to grow and learn; most of the participants told the researcher they had been watching U.S. TV shows for at least three years. Additionally, these viewers were mainly white-collar and university students who have high educational backgrounds, open minds, better language skills, and greater interest in Western culture. Many had even lived in U.S. previously. As a matter of fact, U.S. TV shows were not only learning tools for them, but they also offered entertainment and a time for relaxation.

The pace of life in modern society is fast so that young people have to handle intense pressure to survive. Under such high pressure, some difficulties may appear. For example, heavy stress, anxiety of time/space, and insatiable appetite for knowledge and information have made it very difficult for young people to focus and learn from

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

complicated book study (Wu Ke, 2008); they prefer to learn this material through visual media. Compared with traditional study such as books, newspapers and magazines, the content of TV programs are much easier to understand and they fit the young Chinese individual's current needs. Thus, the existence of U.S. TV programs is in accord with the audience's psychology; it is easy to understand, attractive, and can satisfy people's information demands in an appropriate range, bringing much laughter and entertainment to the audience. Further, participants in this study repeatedly indicated that U.S. TV series are teeming with funny stories and U.S. humor. They like to watch U.S. shows after they come home; it is direct and simple fun, and it keeps them up to date. Some participants regarded watching U.S. TV shows as a fashionable behavior or a statement of their high educational background because it improved their English skills and knowledge of Western culture. For example, they enjoy meeting friends in the Cafe shop like *Friends*, or baking pie and cupcakes in the professional kitchens to simulate *Two Broken Girls*. People Net (2014) also reported that a Korean professor proved that those who had high educational backgrounds and income enjoyed watching U.S. shows. Contrary to this study, people with low educational background and income prefer watching Korean TV series. This news is echoed in China's popular social platform, Weibo, which is similar to Twitter. Those who are fans of U.S. shows have become proud of their choices. This Korean professor's results were reflected and confirmed in the participants of this study. Participants further stated that they liked to share what they watched from U.S. shows with friends, co-workers, and even strangers because they thought that most young people watched U.S. shows; it was a great way to start a conversation or resolve the embarrassing.

The first finding affirmed that young Chinese audiences had specific purposes for choosing U.S. television programs; their purposes were related to their personal, educational and social demands. These demands determined which types of U.S. shows they would watch, and the chosen programming influenced what types of impressions would be made in their minds. This process is very much in line with the uses and gratification theory, which suggests that media users play an active role when they choose and use the media. Uses and gratification theory points out that a media user is

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

looking for media outlets in order to fulfill his/her certain needs (Blumler & Katz, 1974). In other words, audiences actively seek out and target specific media that will provide them with gratification. In fact, uses and gratification theory has formed a shift in focus from what the media does to the audience, to what people do with the media (Rubin, 1993). One of the premises of uses and gratification theory is that it explains effects of media use, and audiences' motivations and behaviors (Rubin, 1993). Further, MaQuail (1984, 1987) listed four major motivations for individuals to use media; these include information, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and entertainment. First of all, the audience uses media to learn about relevant events and gain information. Second, personal identity represents the audience's effort to find reinforcement for their personal values and models of behaviors. Third, integration and social interaction expresses the audience's desire to gain a sense of belonging. And finally, entertainment is the audience's desire to simply relax and escape from reality for a time. Participants' purposes for watching U.S. television programs are in accord with those four major categories based on their quotations. Thus, it is easy to understand their distinct choices in programming based on their various desires and demands. However, in light of the venue for U.S. television programs in China, young Chinese audiences have more power over their media consumption because most U.S. TV shows are aired on the online video websites. Therefore, young Chinese audiences have the opportunity to decide which U.S. television programs they want to watch and follow.

The second finding in the study illustrated that young Chinese viewers struggled with understanding U.S. and its culture. The researcher specifically selected this young portion of China's population because they are the future of China. In other words, they can influence the country's future and their opinions about other countries can also alter the relationships among countries. Thus, this selective population can bring many benefits to related and future researchers in this area of study. Additionally, it can allow other researchers to realize the importance of cultural exchange. The participants in this study described their feelings and understanding after watching U.S. TV shows, and how these influenced their actual feelings about U.S.. All participants described their personal opinions regarding what they watched from U.S. TV. Their opinions addressed two

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

different or even opposite concerns about U.S. and its culture. Eighteen participants shared the similar views that U.S. and its culture portrayed excessive negative influence on them. These participants expressed that U.S. TV shows produced some shadowy features of Western society. Participants gave a wealth of examples in the shows presenting many social problems such as murder, marriage trouble, gun rights/violence, security issues, etc. Some participants even revealed their concern about these social problems. On the other hand, other interviewees held opposing opinions; they insisted that U.S. TV shows precisely display U.S. society's superiority and cultural advantages, which include equality, independence, respect, personal opinions, and skills. In fact, these traits are seldom found among Chinese because Chinese traditional culture focuses on harmony and the value of organization, not personal effort. However, with the development of society and cultural exchange, young Chinese people have started to re-think conditional thinking modes and they are attaching more importance on their personal value. U.S. TV shows happen to fit their value system at this moment.

Another interesting finding revealed through this study was that participants seemed to have a cognitive barrier when it came to U.S. television shows. Normally, audiences can easily differentiate between fiction and non-fiction television content. But the results in this study presented an accidental finding; more than half of the participants believed that what they watched on U.S. TV shows was based on reality. They insisted that U.S. TV shows presented actual circumstances of U.S. culture, even though shows may exaggerate a little bit. Upon further inquiry, participants indicated that since the United States of America was a free country, its TV industry has more leeway than China's to reflect the true lives and actual stories. For example, the violence activities or other social evils in the TV programs are based on, or allude to, actual events such as school shootings, serial killers, terrorist attacks, and so forth. After further investigation, participants who held this opinion added that China's mainstream media reports have increased this negative impression of U.S. by regularly broadcasting violent incidents in U.S.. Between television shows and news broadcasts, participants formed the opinion that the United States was dangerous place.

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

Obviously, television can spread values; In fact, spreading values is always in progress in the television programs. John Fiske (2005) mentioned that people considered television as a cultural agent, especially it also could be considered as a provoker and circulator of meanings. However, we must admit that television programs come from reality, but they are often divorced from the facts; what they present is processed and targeted. However, most of the participants had never been to U.S.; all they knew about this country was from different communication channels. According to China's Public Sentiment Report (2013), even network population has increased to 0.6 billion, but most Chinese netizens hold doubts about online information resources; the most trustworthy channels for them were still television, newspaper and other traditional media.

This study also evidenced that those who held negative impressions of U.S. were also in the habit of reading or watching the daily news. Consequently, it is quite understandable that China's mainstream media reports still control the thoughts of the average Chinese individual, or at least deepen the impact of their feelings toward the U.S. On the other hand, almost half of the participants who had positive impressions of U.S. and its culture did not like television news and newspapers. These participants believed that the majority of China's media was simply a mouthpiece of the government; their news was targeted and unfair. They did not want to be controlled by this media, so they preferred to "climb over the wall" (use foreign domain) to read news from abroad in order to ensure accuracy. Simultaneously, these participants agreed that U.S. TV programs are part of a cultural invasion. The U.S. shows represented the distillation of U.S. culture and society. Many of the advantages that appear in U.S. television are very much lacking in China's society; these include freedom, human interest, gratitude, tolerance, and religious belief. The participants in this study, as well as other young Chinese people, have some similar characteristics: a high degree of openness, huge capacity for information, quick to adapt to new value systems, and strong subjective consciousness (Tian Jianguo, 2009). Therefore they are easily influenced by other cultures and they can determine which value is better. These participants honestly stated that it took a period of time to change their minds. In the past, they had similar opinions to traditional Chinese people; they felt that the United States of America had too many

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

social problems. However, when they began to watch and read information from other resources, they changed their minds and rebuilt their value system quickly. They indicated that U.S. culture fit their requirements and value system much better than China's. However, they further added that they did not believe Chinese traditional cultures were wrong, simply that they needed to adapt to fit contemporary needs.

The most important finding in this study has to do with the opposing opinions formed through watching U.S. television. Participants with similar educational backgrounds all enjoyed watching U.S. shows, but they formed two completely different understandings of U.S.. The reason for this result is complicated and includes several variables including gender, viewing time, personal experience, individual preference, and stereotype of U.S. from other media outlets. Nevertheless, their understanding of U.S. and its culture is relatively simple; they either like it or dislike it, which is a polarized opinion. Furthermore, participants who dislike U.S. and its culture further claimed that their emotion would not influence their viewing habits because the plots and other techniques, and even their desire to learn the language, still attracted their attention to U.S. TV programs.

Another finding in this study is in accord with Cultivation theory. Most participants who insisted on the reality of U.S. TV shows also had strong viewing habits; they spent at least 2 hours per day following U.S. drama on Chinese video websites. According to cultivation theory, these heavy viewers often confuse reality and fiction because they are influenced by the television programs. The more TV they watch, the harder it is to distinguish between reality and fiction. Those who preferred to watch light-hearted and funny dramas formed a strong positive impression of U.S., while those who predominantly viewed criminal dramas developed negative opinions. What they chose to watch directly influenced their understanding of U.S. and its culture.

This study revealed many considerations to China's television industry and cross-cultural communication researchers. It is undeniable that U.S. television programs receive much success in China's market, powerfully influencing the young contemporary Chinese audience. This kind of cultural invasion is worthy of reflection by Chinese

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

people. In the past, China's television also made brilliant achievement both at home and abroad. However, Japanese, Korean and now U.S. television programs have effectively stepped into China's markets, refocusing the attention of the young Chinese audience from local to foreign television. Furthermore, many of them have become westernized. Western cultures have their advantages and weaknesses; the young generation should learn to identify between the two, to incorporate the advantages into their lives, and forsake the disadvantages. They can preserve the essence of the traditional Chinese culture, and add to it the advanced ideas from Western culture.

Limitations

This study used qualitative methodology to grasp how young Chinese audiences understand U.S. and its culture via watching U.S. television programs. Using semi-structured and open-ended online interviews to collect the data allowed the researcher to explore participants' understanding and personal opinions in depth, and to report the actual feelings of participants using their own voices. Grounded theory was chosen to acknowledge the importance of using theory to draw up the interview questions, to guide data analysis, and to interpret the results. However, some limitations must be noted when the researcher drew conclusions from these findings.

The first limitation was the size of the sample data. In this study, there were 30 participants. Due to the researcher's time and personal ability, this sample size was appropriate. However, 30 participants are not large enough to be an accurate representation of the young Chinese audiences' features and true understandings of U.S. and its culture. If the sample data size could be larger, the conclusion would increase its representativeness and accuracy. In other words, the larger the size of the sample, the more precision there will be in the findings. For future studies, researchers should select a larger size of study population to get more accurate insights from the young Chinese audience.

The next limitation involved the unbalanced number of male and female participants. According to Lihun Yi's study (2007), Chinese female audiences have partiality for specific TV programs, which creates a "'tender trap' for them in a fictitious

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

world.” In this study, the researcher found that male participants preferred watching exciting stories, while female participants enjoyed watching subtle and softhearted ones. This diversity is based upon their natural instincts. In the preparation phase, the researcher did not want gender to influence the study's accuracy so an effort was made to select the same amount of male and female participants for the interviews; however it was difficult to get balance in the practical operation. As mentioned before, there was a selection box in QQ that could be used to choose people's location, sex, age and related information before sending the invitation to qualified individuals. This selection box provided a short-cut for the researcher to find appropriate participants. As a result of the recruitment process, 19 females and 11 males volunteered. Females were easier to recruit than males; they seemed to have more patience to engage in the study. Thus, gender was not balanced in this study, and the result was influenced by this factor. It was extremely difficult to recruit participants via QQ for this study because the average QQ user does not trust strangers. Outstanding effort was made during the invitation process, and 30 individuals agreed to participate in the interviews. For future study, other researchers should avoid gender interference. If the researchers live in China, it would be much easier to secure an appropriate study population, enabling them to obtain more accurate responses and insights from young Chinese viewers.

The third limitation dealt with the questions used to collect participants' data. Although they were designed to be open-ended, the questions did not give participants enough space and depth to communicate their opinions about U.S. and its culture effectively. Based on geographical distance challenge and the lack of material benefits, participants were reluctant to spend significant amounts of time with the interviewer. Consequently, the questions were simplified in order to expedite the interview process. Future researchers should take notice of this weakness and allow for more interview time in order to give participants enough space to express their insights.

Fourth, the grounded theory is hard to master. In the preparation of the study, the researcher read many theses using grounded theory, as well as some prescriptions for how to conduct it. Suddaby (2006) stated that “The seamless craft of a well-executed grounded theory study...is the product of considerable grounded theory...is the product

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

of considerable experience, hard work, creative and, occasionally, a healthy dose of good luck” (p. 639). Grounded theory requires the researcher to have patience, aptitude to analyze effectively, ability to tolerate ambiguity, and plenty of time. Each skill or requirement is not easy for the researcher, but is necessary for the study. The constant comparison between data analysis demands the researcher’s patience. Grounded theory also requires the researcher to have flexibility for emerging themes. The researcher must feel confident in handling the ambiguity in the coding process. All of these requirements must be handled effectively as each one plays an important role in the study. Theoretical knowledge is different from the practical application. Understanding theory is the first step of the process, but the application of that theory in an actual study often creates some problems. Due to the researcher’s lack of experience and practical application in grounded theory, the results and findings may have been influenced by various small errors or misunderstandings. Future researchers who are willing to use grounded theory in their studies should fully understand this theory first, then continue to read related articles to practice the skills necessary for the application of grounded theory. More experience with the application and interpretation of grounded theory will lead to greater insights and conclusions in the study.

The last limitation was the fact that there was only one researcher. As mentioned before, grounded theory requires the researcher to constantly compare codes back and forth. Multiple researchers or co-workers can simplify this process by allowing several minds to work together in order to catch errors and avoid ambiguity. On the other hand, this may also decrease the researchers’ subjective decisions and personal opinions for data analysis because multiple researchers will influence the conclusions for the study. Another problem was that all participants were Chinese and the original interview content was in Mandarin; thus, the researcher had to translate all quotations to English. This led to the possibility of errors due to cultural diversity and language skills. The researcher tried to send the translation of each interview back to the participant to ensure accuracy, and none of them indicated that they found any errors. However, it was impossible to ensure that each of them actually read these transcriptions. Future researchers should pay attention to this potential issue and ask another co-worker to re-check the translation

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

content; this would help to overcome translation interference to ensure more accurate results.

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U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

Appendix A**Informed Consent Statement**

We are taking approximately 20 minutes to have an interview for Peiyu Hu's qualitative study. This study will collect your personal opinions about American TV shows and series. Your opinions could help me to find out why American TV shows and series are so popular and successful in China.

Please complete the attached permission form to include your responses in the study. Your participation is completely voluntary and you can skip questions at any time you want. Your response will be completely anonymous and you will not be individually identified in any way. The consent form, record and transcripts of this conversation will be kept in a secure location accessed only by Peiyu Hu and her supervisor, Dr. Matt Barton. The data you provide will be combined with other responses from other participants and analyzed to find salient meanings and correlations among the various participants.

If you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact Peiyu Hu (liviariourou@hotmail.com). Your signature indicates that you have received the information above and you give your informed consent to participate:

Name (Printed)

Signature

Date

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

Appendix B

Recruiting flyers

My name is Peiyu Hu, a graduate student from the Department of Communication at Southern Utah University. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to Chinese audience's feelings and attitude about American TV shows. You may participate if you are Chinese and you like to watch American TV shows. Please do not participate if you are under 18-years-old and you never watch American TV shows

As a participant, you will be asked to have an online face-to-face interview with me to talk about your feelings about American TV shows, and it will be approximately 20 minutes.

This research is very important to me, and your responses will give a huge support to finish it. Your personal detail or information will not release to others, your information and record will be kept in a locked cabinet accessed only by me and my supervisor, Dr. Matthew Barton.

If you would like to participate in this research study or you have any question or worry about this study, please feel free to email me (liviariourou@hotmail.com).

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

Appendix C**Table 1 Question Guide for interview**

I would like to ask you some questions about your understanding of America and its culture through watching American TV shows.

Why don't you start by telling me about why you have chosen to watch American TV shows?

What type of American TV shows are your favorite?

Could you give me an example of which scene or show impressed you the most in your picture of the American culture? Why?

How do you feel about America and its culture before you began watching American television? How do you understand it?

After watching them, did you have any change in your understanding of or feelings about the American culture?

If you have noticed a difference in your understanding of/feelings toward America, to what do you attribute the change? Which specific shows have influenced your understanding?

Do you think these shows reflect the real American society and its culture? Why?

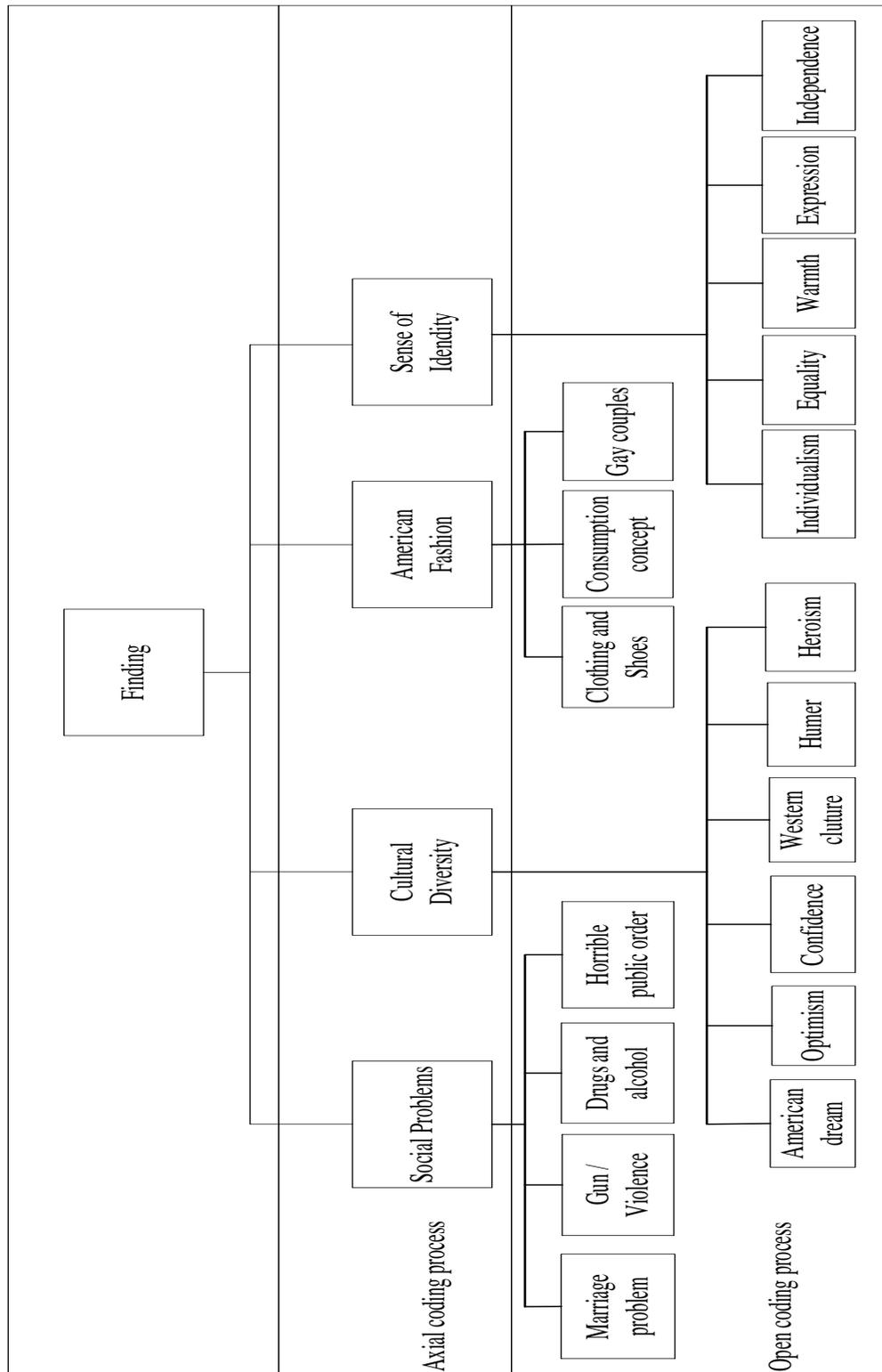
Could you use some words to describe America and its culture, and your thoughts of America and its culture before and after watching these shows?

All in all, is your understanding of America and its culture positive or negative based on watching American TV shows? Please explain your answer?

U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

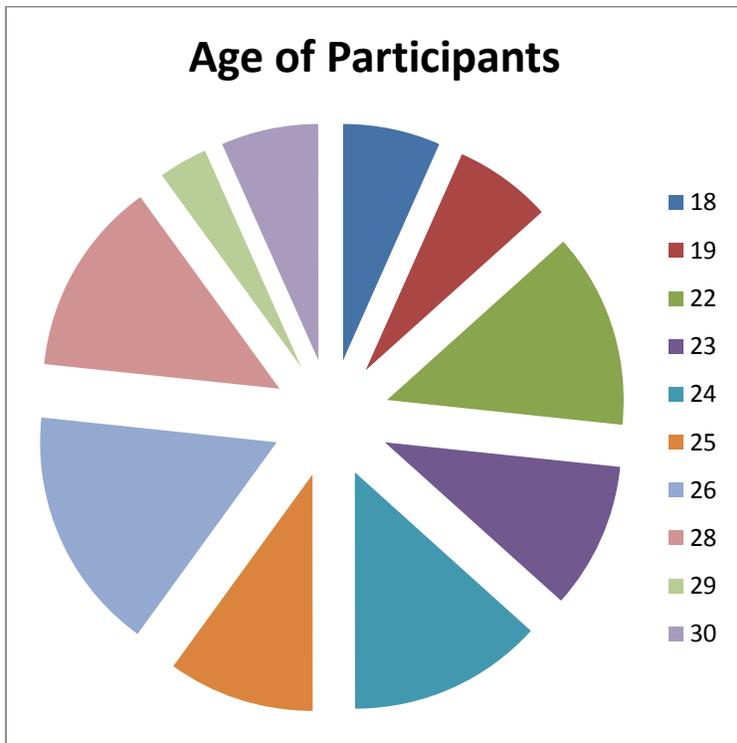
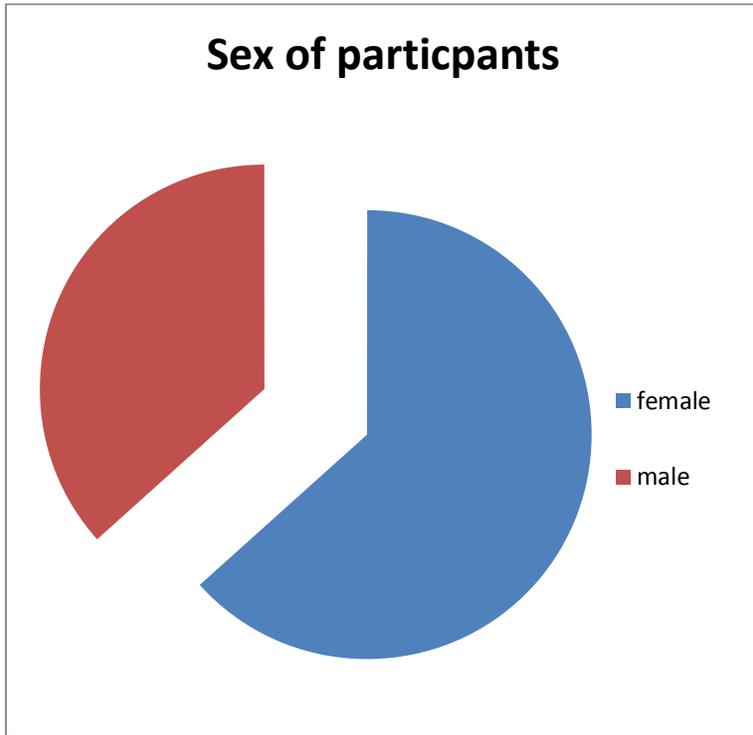
Appendix D

Table 2 Opening and Axial Coding



U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

Appendix E



U.S. TV SHOW' INFLUENCE IN CHINA

