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By

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The film is about a newly arrived Japanese student's initial period of adjustment at the University of North Texas. This observational documentary film follows the student and witnesses the student's first reactions to various social environments.

An accompanying production report describes the research process, the pre-production, production, and post-production stages.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
PRE-PRODUCTION	15
PRODUCTION	18
POST-PRODUCTION	22
CONCLUSION	24
ENDNOTES	28
APPENDIX	30
REFERENCES	38

## INTRODUCTION

### Purpose

The purpose of this creative thesis project was to depict the difficulties that international students encounter at the beginning of their stay in America. The specific execution plan was to produce a half-inch color video documentary about the initial stage of new overseas students' lives at the University of North Texas. The finished length of the video was thirty minutes.

The initial goal of the video was to provide useful visual research material to people who are interested in the acculturation of foreign students. Because of its realistic character, the video can give its audiences a more immediate and vivid picture of foreign students than existing written literature. By giving an authentic portrait of the students' hardship and adjustments, the ultimate goal of this video was to increase the American people's appreciation of the difficulties encountered by foreign students who come to this country equipped with limited social assistance and resources.

A production report accompanied the video. The written report focused mainly on the production process, and served as a useful reference for future students who are interested in using video as a creative medium.

### Background

Overseas study has been an important aspect of the global higher education system for centuries. In the report The College, the University and the Foreign Student, the writer defines the international character of the university: "Since the quest for knowledge knows no boundaries, the university is the one institution above all which is universal."<sup>1</sup> The report also indicates that the primary responsibility of the university is to discover and

impart knowledge. As a result, "the university is the opposite of parochial; indeed it has been international since its birth."<sup>2</sup> In fact, the developing international character of higher education has been an ongoing process since the middle ages. The most recent decades of this process are the most important historical foundation of this project. Based upon the United Nation Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) statistics, there were 107,589 global overseas students in 1950, a total which rose to 938,804 in 1985. According to William K. Cummings' prediction, by 1991 the total global number of international students would easily exceed one million.<sup>3</sup> Those students, scholars, and technicians who study abroad become the most powerful dynamic for the international exchange of knowledge. In addition, overseas students are recognized as social vanguards in their home countries upon their return.

Because of the uneven social and economic developments in different countries, the distribution of global overseas students has been concentrated in several advanced societies in modern history. The major direction of overseas students flow is from the developing countries to the developed countries. In 1980's UNESCO Statistic Yearbook, the data revealed that over two-thirds of all international students were enrolled in the schools of only five advanced societies, including the United States, France, the former Soviet Union, the former West Germany, and the United Kingdom. The U.S. alone received 28.3 percent of the total number of overseas students in 1968, 33.8 percent of the total number in 1980, and 37.2 percent in 1985. The absolute number of foreign student enrollment in the United States increased from 311,882 in 1980 to 349,620 in 1985. This huge number of foreign students has drawn the attention of American educators and policy makers.

In the report The College, the University and the Foreign Student, scholars acknowledged the importance of American universities' participation in the education of

international students. The report also recommends changes in American foreign student policy on both the national and local levels. The constantly growing number of international students in this country forces American education to "abandon the cliches and destroy the stereotype that falsely constrict its vision of what education exchange is all about."<sup>4</sup> Above all, the increasing number of foreign students requires that the American education system recognizes the need for innovation and flexibility. Large-scale research has started to investigate the problems related to foreign students. The investigations are generally focused on two themes: 1. overseas students' personal adjustment problems and 2. the sociological impact of overseas students on American society, especially within the educational system. Both research fields are productive, and they have provided a wealth of helpful insights to aid in easing the overseas students' adjustment process.

Motion pictures, both the film and video mediums, have proved that they are uniquely effective means to demonstrate real examples of research questions. For years, researchers and educators have used both film and video as observational media. As a result, the educational applications of film and video have proved to be enormous. Almost every teenager remembers the experience sitting in a biology class to watch a film about the development and motion of cells. On the other hand, students majoring in anthropology or sociology are heavily reliant on filmed records in order to examine different social behaviors and cultural patterns. By the same token, visual observational records can provide additional helpful material to people who are interested in international student studies.

According to the Open Doors data, in 1993 the University of North Texas enrolled 1218 overseas students.<sup>5</sup> These foreign students comprise 4.6 percent of the entire student population at the university. 569 of these students were pursuing undergraduate degrees, and another 649 students were admitted as graduate students. In addition, there

were 172 foreign students who were enrolled in the Intensive English Language Institute (IELI), a program which assists foreign students in developing their written and spoken English skills.

The large population of foreign students at the University of North Texas provides an excellent observational environment for international student study. The university is located in Denton, Texas, 38 miles north of the Dallas metropolitan area. It is considered a transitional area between a highly commercialized region and agricultural areas in north Texas. The geographical location of the university makes the University of North Texas an ideal place to examine the social adjustment of foreign students. In terms of getting international students' most authentic and immediate reactions to new social environments, the introductory period after the arrival of new overseas students is an ideal time for observation. Using video as a medium to record the interactions between the overseas students and the new social environment is an effective and vivid approach to learn about international students' adjustment processes.

### Methodology

As mentioned in the purpose section, the primary goal of the video is to present a record of new overseas students' initial reactions to and acculturation within the unfamiliar American social environment. Consequently, the filmmaker's creative motif is closely related to the spirit of documentary filmmaking. Historically, the sociological role of documentary films has evolved through various stages. Erik Barnouw's analogy of the documentary process is a good example. He compares the documentary filmmaker with the prophet, explorer, reporter, bugler, poet, observer, guerrilla, etc.<sup>6</sup> Although they differ in style and design, every documentary film contributes to the preservation of a segment of reality in history using various approaches, techniques, and points of view. This contribution has been recognized by film scholars as well as academics in other fields.

As a result, documentary filmmaking was chosen as the appropriate approach for this project.

The physical execution plan of the project was to select two to three new overseas students at the University of North Texas as the main subjects of the video. The primary selection criterion was that these students did not have any previous experience living in the U.S. The students' activities were closely followed and recorded for the first two to three weeks after their arrival. During the filming process, the filmmaker consciously minimized his manipulation of any aspect of the students' activities. The purpose of this close observation of the students' lives was to get an intimate look at their reactions to new social and cultural environments.

#### Budget

The total budget of this project was \$500.00. The majority of the production cost came from purchasing S-VHS videotapes. The filmmaker had accumulated twenty-five hours of master footage from shooting. Another five tapes were used for editing purposes. In sum, a total of thirty S-VHS videotapes were used for the project, at cost of \$300.00. Another \$200.00 was spent for other miscellaneous production expenses, including everything from transportation costs to microphone batteries.

#### Logistical Difficulties

During this project, there were four major problems which were encountered by the filmmaker during pre-production and actual production stages. The initial problem was the representation of overseas students as a whole. The first critical decision for the filmmaker to make was to determine the selection process of the subjects who were to be chronicled in the film. Because the intention of the filmmaker was to capture the first reactions of new foreign students to their new social surroundings, potential subjects were limited to those who were newcomers to the U.S.



Considering the invasion of personal privacy and the potential inconvenience which could be caused by the project, it was preferable to grant the permission and cooperation from every potential student subject. However, it was very difficult to communicate with someone who was not yet in the United States. In addition to the high cost of international telecommunications, the filmmaker was also taking a risk of miscommunication when explaining the project to a student who had low English proficiency. Also, the personal information of new overseas students was kept confidential by the International Student and Scholar Office. As a result, the selection of student subjects became the most troublesome aspect of the pre-production stage.

Acquiring location permissions was the second difficulty encountered during the project. Since the ultimate intention of the film is to observe new overseas students' reactions to new social environments, it was very important for the filmmaker to follow the students to the places which initiated the students' responses. As a result, it was important for the filmmaker to receive shooting permission from any potential location the students would visit immediately after their arrival in Denton. The first step to achieve this pre-production goal was to list all of the likely places the students might visit. The second step was to acquire the permissions. In reality, it is impossible to figure out a complete shooting location list. However, there are certain essential places for newly arrived overseas students to frequent. For example, new foreign students need to purchase groceries, personal, and school supplies. Consulting with some experienced overseas students from different regions also helped the filmmaker to get useful guidelines for the completion of the location list. In terms of the acquisition of location permissions, the success of this part of pre-production rested largely upon good communication skills. As a result, an assistant producer was recruited for this specific task. In addition, a brief proposal and faculty endorsement letter were prepared to help persuade merchants to

approve filming in their places of business. By focusing on these two problems in the pre-production stage, the filmmaker was able to start shooting on schedule. Nevertheless, two other dilemmas were waiting when the camera started to run

The first problem for the filmmaker in the production phase was making a directorial decision of the degree of involvement of film crews with the students. When a foreign student arrives in a new environment, it is understandable that he or she will become very reliant on the people around them. Hence, the filmmaker had to decide the degree of the crew's involvement with the students. Since the shooting schedule was very intensive, the filmmaker had to pre-determine whether the production team, or to be more specific, the camera eye, would become an active participant or just a pure observer. The decision was important because it affected the style and look of the final product. This directorial decision has no right or wrong answer. It was merely a good question for the filmmaker to keep in mind and to be aware of.

Another problem encountered by the filmmaker involved the technique of sound gathering. The available video equipment, a Panasonic® AG-450 S-VHS video camcorder, was considered handy in terms of mobility and quality. However, the most pressing technical problem was the limitation of the sound recording equipment. The built-in microphone of the video camcorder was not ideal under many shooting conditions because of its auto-gain control. Consequently, a piece of extra audio equipment was needed on location. However, most external microphones controlled by a boom operator have to be connected to the camera and the AG-450 was no exception. This kind of design dramatically decreased the mobility of the camera in an unpredictable shooting situation. Fortunately, this production problem was accommodated with a new set of wireless microphones which the department acquired not long before the production started.

### Review of the Literature

In preparing for this project, two areas of study were undertaken. First, research into the literature concerning the experiences of foreign students in the U.S. was conducted in order to gain more insight into foreign students' problems. The other primary research field involved the evolution of documentary film styles. This research served as an important guide to the filmmaker in deciding the style and approach of the video.

In 1992's Digest of Education Statistics, it shows that there were 396,600 nonresident alien students enrolled in U.S. higher educational institutions in 1990. The population of nonresident alien students constitutes almost 3 percent of the entire higher education student body in the United States.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the number of overseas students in this country is growing at a steady rate. Research related to foreign students in the U.S. has focused within two complementary approaches. One research field concentrates on the internal sociological impacts caused by the presence of foreign students in the American educational system. The other field focuses on the foreign students' personal adjustment to a new social environment. There are many reports and experiments in both fields. However, because of the rapid growth of the international student population in many academic institutions, there are more discussions of the students' personal adjustment problems.

Klein, a devoted sociologist, described the power of four different patterns of encounter and their consequences.<sup>8</sup> These include: instrumental adapter, identification, withdrawal, and resistance.

According to Klein, the "instrumental adapters" group possesses clear professional, academic goals. Their social adjustment and contact with the host are minimal and limited

to the professional role. The social life of this group continues with fellow nationals; their major tensions and adjustment occur in task performance.

The "identification" group demonstrates primary interest in involvement with the host culture. Major adjustments are made to facilitate contacts and interaction with the new culture. The interest is in learning local customs and exploration of the community. Interpersonal problems are the greatest source of stress for this group. Satisfying interactions are likely to lead to positive and/or differentiated attitudes toward the host country and to shifts in identification and interpersonal style.

The "withdrawal" group shares the same goal with the identification group. Their primary interest are also in involvement with the hosts and exploration of the community and culture. Tensions arise in the interpersonal context and block adjustment. If the disappointment with host nationals is too great, this group will close their contact with the host nationals and only remain in contact with their fellow nationals. This pattern represents an attempt on the part of the sojourner to cope with unsatisfying social experiences.

The "resistance" pattern shows the role of cultural ambassador as most salient. Primary social contacts are maintained with the sojourner's own national group or other foreigners, interaction with the host is organized around exchange of information about culture, and the attitudes are largely dependent on that status accorded to the home country. Attitude change will be minor with no significant shift in national identification.

Several theoretical models or hypotheses have been proposed to explain the adjustment to a new culture. Two of the models which have received considerable attention are:(1) the U-Curve and W-Curve hypotheses, and (2) the culture shock and cultural disparity models.

Culture is inevitably a salient feature in the enterprise of interpersonal communication and the understanding of other people. To understand other people it is necessary to understand the cognitive structures which shape their perceptions and hence determine their behavior. Korten stated, "Culture is far more than the consistent patterns of behavior among a given group of people. The similar cognitive structures in turn cause that cultural group to perceive their environment in certain consistent ways."<sup>9</sup>

International students come to the United States with a given characteristic way of perceiving their social environment. They bring with them the unique achievement of their society that distinguishes them from other cultures. It is very important to be aware of the cultural factors which play essential roles in their adjustment process. Most international students experience differences in climate, food, social values, modes of behavior, and verbal and non-verbal behaviors when they come to the United States. These encounters of tremendous culture shock often result in a loss of cultural and personal identity.<sup>10</sup>

Maynard points out that "In this American culture emphasis is placed on conformity in dress, life-style, and communication patterns. Those who differ from the majority are considered different, difficult, or even defiant".<sup>11</sup> Some cultures, for example the Chinese and the Ethiopian, value highly self-control and inhibition of strong feelings rather than conformity in dress, life-style, or communication pattern. Conformity to authority or elders, inhibition, and introversion are common in these cultures.<sup>12</sup> Hence behaviors, ideas, and beliefs with which people are comfortable and which they consider "proper" or the right way in a particular culture become inappropriate and distasteful to people from other cultures.

From an anthropological perspective, Oberg introduced the term "culture shock" to the sojourner literature.<sup>13</sup> It was his contention that culture shock happens when an individual enters a new culture where he experiences distress as a result of missing many

of the familiar signs and symbols he was accustomed to in his home culture. As a result of challenges and strains in a new environment, students may suffer from undue anxiety and fear, commonly referred to as "culture shock." A few of the symptoms of culture shock include inappropriate anxiety, confusion, fear of illness, fear of failure, exclusion, hostility, homesickness, loneliness, frustration, and physiological problems such as headaches and stomach aches.<sup>14</sup>

Many international students, especially Asian students, try to reduce the anxiety and pressure of adjustment by associating with co-nationals rather than reaching out to the new social milieu.<sup>15</sup> This may be interpreted as a reaction to loss of group identity, and/or protection of self against the low-status given to the minority group by the majority. Some international students may attempt to find in-groups made up of international students from different nationalities. Others might devote themselves to their books and attain satisfaction by means of academic success.<sup>16</sup>

It has been hypothesized that cultural disparity between the host culture and the home culture plays a significant role in the degree to which the sojourner adjusts to his culture. On the scale of traditionalism-modernity, individuals from cultures that are further toward the modernity end, as compared to cultures that scale more toward the traditionalism end, tend to adjust better and faster to a modern culture.<sup>17</sup> Hull and Morris also suggested that students who come to the United States from traditional and conservative cultures, which are predominantly represented by developing countries, encounter more difficulties in adjusting to the host country than do those who come from European and industrialized countries.<sup>18</sup>

Among the most prominent models is one suggested by Lysgaard which is known in the literature as the U-Curve hypothesis.<sup>19</sup> Lysgaard's U-Curve hypothesis was based on a survey of 200 Norwegian Fulbright grantees who had studied in the United States.

According to this hypothesis, the adaptation of a foreign student to the host culture takes the shape of a U curve. The student likes what he or she sees in the new culture during the first phase of his or her sojourn. This phase lasts about six months, after which the sojourner faces the reality of a new and foreign situation. During this stage of the sojourn the student feels the pressure of school requirements, the need for friends and companions, and the need to meet other social demands in his daily life, such as shopping and transportation. Lysgaard believed that this phase ends after the eighteenth month of the sojourn. When the sojourner comes to terms with people, and begins to meet other demands successfully, he or she is more likely to recover and adapt to the host culture.

The W-curve proposed by Gullahorn extended the single U-curve to a double U-curve, which adds a second peak of tension occurring when the sojourners are deciding whether or not to return. They then undergo another decrease of adjustments followed by a second stage of recovery.<sup>20</sup>

In his book, Foreign Students in the United States of America: Coping Behavior Within the Educational Environment, Hull raised some questions regarding the U-curve hypothesis. Hull doubted that international students who arrive in a different season (winter, summer, spring) demonstrate that the same adjustment patterns occur regardless of age, sex, national origin, and other personal characteristics.

In addition, many researchers suggested that some demographic factors, such as age, length of stay, major, nationality, language, home residence, and academic classification, are the variables that influence international students' adjustment process.

Another essential part of the background research for this project involves locating an appropriate filmic style and approach. As mentioned earlier in the methodology section, the filmmaker demands that the documentary film style has the characteristics that

are needed for the project. As a result, writings on documentary styles have been the focus of this phase of the research.

Barnouw's history of non-fiction film has provided a good starting point. In the introduction of his book, Documentary: a History of Non-fiction Film, Barnouw says that cinema was given birth by scientists and showmen "who felt a compelling need to document some phenomenon or action, and contrived a way to do it."<sup>21</sup> This was when the documentary film had its first stirrings. Since its creation, documentary film has experienced various historical stages and played many different sociological roles in the swirl of human history. During the course of its evolution, a number of styles have been used; among these, one of the most resilient and effective has been called the observational documentary.

According to Barnouw, thanks to the development in the 1950s of new lightweight equipment for recording, involving both image and sound, documentary film became especially suited to the role of observer. The more portable camera and sound recorder made it possible for documentary filmmakers to follow and observe their subjects more closely. Especially important was the improvement of sound recording technology, which opened a whole new dimension for documentary filmmakers. They were able to gather authentic synchronized sound for their films. Hence, observational documentary filmmakers not only watched their subjects, but also listened to them.

In Colin Young's article, "Observational Cinema," he raises the biggest concern in many documentary filmmakers' minds - the objectivity of observational cinema. When cinema was first introduced to the public, people were sometimes relatively naive about the medium's realistic duplications of moving images. Since then, the capacity for visual authenticity has been recognized as one of the most fundamental characteristics of cinema. However, observational documentary filmmakers constantly struggle between the poles of



authenticity and objectivity, and selectivity and subjectivity on the other. In negotiating this difficult terrain, filmmakers have employed various techniques. Usually, an intimate shooting approach is adopted because it enables the filmmaker to obtain a detailed visual record. And in the post-production stage, the greatest possible respect to the integrity of shooting is preferred in order to minimize the level of misrepresentation of the event. The two most familiar terms associated with observational documentary are cinema vérité and direct cinema.

Cinema vérité was named by Jean Rouch, a French anthropologist and filmmaker.<sup>22</sup> The most important feature of this kind of filmic approach is that it records life directly, without any rearrangement or staging of any kind. In America, the growth of cinema vérité was encouraged by Robert Drew. In 1958, Drew formed a documentary film unit at Time, Inc.<sup>23</sup> Within this unit, Richard Leacock, David Maysles, and Donn A. Pennebaker are three names who have developed reputation as being masters of observational documentary filmmaking. In addition, Fredrick Wiseman is another strong figure in this kind of filmmaking. Cinema vérité and direct cinema are two terms that are constantly associated with observational documentary filmmaking. The most distinctive difference between these two observational styles lies in the degree of the filmmaker's involvement with and manipulation of their subjects during the filming process. Unlike cinema vérité filmmakers, people who work with direct cinema rhetoric post themselves at a pure observational position. In cinema vérité filmmaking, the filmmaker's involvement with the subject is constant.<sup>24</sup> However, both approaches are intended to depict their stories in an authentic fashion. Despite their minor stylistic distinctions, cinema vérité and direct cinema have been two of the most effective techniques that allow documentary filmmakers to investigate the truth in all levels of sociological syntax.

The following report describes the execution process, production difficulties, and learning experiences which were encountered by the filmmaker during the pre-production, production, and post-production stages.

### PRE-PRODUCTION

The pre-production period of this project covered from July 26, 1993 to August 21, 1993, the day before the shooting started. A twenty-seven days period is considered a very limited and compressed pre-production working schedule. Fortunately, the filmmaker had just finished a documentary video project on a related subject. This saved the filmmaker time in doing printed material research. The two most important pre-production tasks were: searching for new foreign students who were willing to be recorded during their first few weeks in the U.S. and obtaining permissions from various locales in order to have a more complete video coverage of the subjects' adjustment process.

Looking for potential subjects was the most troublesome process in the entire preparation stage. First, the filmmaker contacted the International Student and Scholar Office at the University of North Texas for information about new incoming overseas students. However, according to the office's policy of confidentiality, personal information is not made public. Thus, the filmmaker's goal of contacting subjects prior to their arrival in the U.S. became less achievable. However, the International Student and Scholar Office directed the filmmaker to UNT international student organizations. The filmmaker contacted the International Student Council, Chinese Student Association, Indian Student Association, Japanese Student Association, Muslim Student Association, and Turkish Student Association. The results of these contacts were not encouraging. Through these efforts the filmmaker only spoke to an Indian student and a Taiwanese student and both declined to be involved.

At this point, the filmmaker contacted another school entity, the Department of International Studies and Programs. Within this department there is a unit which is in charge of every sponsored student at the university. The Sponsored Student Programs provides detailed arrangements for new, international sponsored students during the initial set-up period. After reviewing the project proposal provided by the filmmaker, the office personnel expressed excitement about the idea and a willingness to provide necessary assistance. This resulted in the filmmaker's decision to concentrate on the new foreign students coming through the Sponsored Student Office. Finally, the initial meeting with potential subjects was set with a Japanese student group which was expected to arrive on August 22, 1993.

On that date, the filmmaker met for the first time with Hideaki Harada at the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport. Fortunately, Harada was willing to cooperate and gave the filmmaker permission to follow his activities for a period of three weeks. Harada's cooperation set a solid foundation for the successful completion of the film. At the same time the filmmaker continued to look for other potential subjects who were willing to participate.

Another essential job to be accomplished in the pre-production stage was obtaining shooting permissions. Because of the large scale of this task, an assistant producer was recruited for the project. Ruth Wedergren, a Radio, Television, and Film graduate student with previous production experience, was generously willing to commit to the project. Several pre-production meetings were held to prepare a location list, persuasion strategies, and location release documents. The first dilemma came during the formation of a complete location list. The objective was to construct a well-considered locale list; however, this proved difficult. After consulting with several experienced foreign students, the filmmaker was able to narrow his focus to a few places which were most desirable for

new foreign students to visit. These included: the university, various retail stores, the U.S. Post Office, and the banks. The second step of the preparation was to create sufficient printed materials to support a verbal presentation of the project. The written documents included a one-page description of the project and a letter of endorsement from the project's supervising professor (see Appendix). The third step of preparation was to compose both location and model release forms for the purpose of future release clarification (see Appendix). With a mixture of anxiety and confidence, the pre-production team started to contact university officials, local grocery stores, clothing and discount stores, the U.S. Post Office, and local banks. In general, the process went smoothly. The project received much support from the local community.

However, there were still stores like K Mart, Wal-Mart, and J.C.Penney which were unwilling to allow any type of video activity. The reasons for their rejection were due to corporate rules against video taping. In the case of J.C.Penney, the store manager was very excited about the project when the pre-production team explained the idea. Nevertheless, the manager was scared away when the team asked him to sign the location release. From the experience of negotiating location access, the filmmaker learned that in order to get people's cooperation patience, clear communication, and a good persuasion strategy are essential elements.

In the case of getting permission from the Sack'n Save supermarket, the filmmaker had to write a letter to its corporate headquarters. Since the Sack'n Save is the closest grocery store to the university campus, the pre-production team felt that it was one of the most important permissions were needed for the project. While writing the letter, the filmmaker mentioned some already secured permissions from other grocery stores to convince the decision maker to approve the location release (see Appendix). The executive office of Sack'n Save gave approval to the project. The filmmaker received

permission from 90 percent of all entities with which the pre-production team had contact. In general, the success of this part of the pre-production work rested on good preparation, supporting documentation, and good communication strategy and skill. On most occasions, the pre-production team was able to satisfy questions by representatives of the businesses and institutions. The pre-production team's contact with different locales also provided the opportunity for on-location research. By scouting these locations, the pre-production team was able to spot potential problems for future shooting work.

Another necessary aspect of preparation at this stage involved testing the film equipment. In this project the principal equipment included a Panasonic® AG-450 S-VHS video camcorder and an Audio-Technica® PRO 88W VHF wireless microphone system. Because it was the first time the filmmaker had utilized a wireless microphone system, it was very important to test the capability of the unit. The results showed that the wireless system possessed excellent sound reception. The system's omnidirectional microphone captured very detailed sound from the subject and environment. However, when any radio interference appeared the sound reception became unacceptable. Because of the unpredictability of radio interference, using the wireless microphone system became the most risky decision in this project. The filmmaker's final determination was to adopt the wireless microphone system in order to gain more mobility in the shooting process. Nevertheless, a shotgun microphone was prepared as a back-up sound recording system. Before starting the production stage, much preparation work had been done to secure locations and find a subject. On August 22, 1993, the project began, thanks to the principal subject's generous cooperation.

## PRODUCTION

The production stage of the project took place in the municipal area of Denton, Texas. The majority of work done in the production phase involved videotaping the

activities of the principal subject. Almost all production took place between August 22 and October 30, 1993. During the production period, the principal subject spent most of his time on the campus of the University of North Texas. On the first shooting day Harada experienced the school dormitory check-in process, and later he went on a grocery shopping trip. On the trip the filmmaker was able to capture Harada's reactions to a first visit to an American supermarket.

The first day of shooting was crucial for the subsequent production work because it was a time for the subject and filmmaker to build their trust and confidence. It was also the initial point for the subject to get used to being filmed. During the first shooting assignment, the biggest problem encountered by the filmmaker was deciding on the degree of involvement between the filmmaker and subject. This question struck the filmmaker several times when Harada unselfconsciously proposed questions directly to the filmmaker/camera. As mentioned in the introduction, the two major observational documentary styles, direct cinema and cinema vérité, are often distinguished from one another based on the filmmaker's degree of participation and involvement with the subject. Being conscious of the different styles, the filmmaker was wrestling with the question of which direction to take. The original idea was to act as a pure observer. On the other hand, eliminating all direct address footage might mean a loss of cinematic excitement and spontaneity. The supervising professor's advice to the filmmaker was to allow situations grow out of themselves, since in practice there is often a mixture of both observational documentary styles. The professor's suggestion indicated a clear path for the filmmaker.

At the beginning of the production stage, the filmmaker still did not give up the idea of having more than one participant under observation in the project. Another Indian student was contacted through the India Student Association. The first meeting with the student went smoothly, and the filmmaker was able to get the student's initial oral

permission. The first taping of the Indian student was set for the day of the university's orientation program for new foreign students. At this point, the filmmaker started to construct a new shooting schedule for the two subjects. Unfortunately, on the morning of the first shooting day with the Indian student, the filmmaker realized that the subject did not want his voice to be recorded and used in the project. This caused a tremendous disappointment for the filmmaker and significantly altered the strategy of the production. By only following one principal subject, the idea of cross-cutting between different students' initial experiences in the U.S. became impossible to achieve. After a reevaluation of current production conditions the filmmaker decided to re-focus the project on the single subject, Harada.

No additional lighting or filters were used during this production, although, lighting equipment was available from the department. To the filmmaker, their use would have hindered the spontaneity of the documentary process in this particular shooting situation and would have been disruptive to the situations under observation. The Panasonic® AG-450 S-VHS video camera contains an automatic white balance function for use in different color temperature situations, which can be placed in three different settings: outdoor, auto, and indoor (balanced for Tungsten color temperature). Much of the shooting occurred when natural lighting was the principal lighting source; thus, no additional lighting or color correction was necessary. The interior shots usually occurred in mixed lighting situations with both fluorescent and exterior lighting. This situation is difficult for many video cameras to resolve. During most of interior shooting the camera was placed in the auto white balance mode. In most cases, the camera adequately resolved this lighting disparity.

One very significant technical problem happened at an early stage of the production. A bundle of ten Sony® PRO-X T-60 S-VHS video tapes purchased for the principal

shooting assignment were found to be defective. On August 25, the first three tapes displayed serious tracking problems. All three tapes showed bad tracking adjustment starting from the fifty minutes point. This problem damaged the footage of Harada's experience in taking his very first examination, the English proficiency placement test. After viewing daily rush footage the filmmaker immediately switched the video stock to Fuji® Double Coating S-VHS T-60 video tape which the filmmaker had used successfully in earlier projects.

Another crucial directorial question gradually emerged as the production proceeded into its second week. After a week of intensive production, approximately fifteen hours of footage had been shot. As a result, a more selective filming practice became necessary. The filmmaker's selection criterion was to follow the subject only if it was his first time in a new situation. The decision also helped the filmmaker to stay focused on the theme and to avoid an overwhelming amount of post-production logging work.

The appeal of making an observational documentary lies in the evolving development of themes and emphases. During the production process, the filmmaker became gradually involved with the subject and more familiar with his personality, and started to understand and identify with the subject. Harada, proved to be an outgoing, exuberant character, and he tried hard to make initial adjustments. His interactions with the social environment were smooth and consistent. Through the filmmaker's off-camera observation, there were two things about which Harada was most nervous. First, Harada was very eager to meet his roommate, Scott Erwin. The delay of Erwin's arrival made Harada anxious during the production. Erwin showed up the day before school started. Since this was also the first time away from home for Erwin, their first meeting demonstrated the difficulty of cross-cultural communication. Secondly, Harada was worried about his future academic performance. For every required school meeting



Harada arrived at the designated place ahead of time, and studied any supplemental reading material. In addition, Harada constantly asked the filmmaker questions about academic issues when the camera stopped. These two observations provided the filmmaker with the potential thematic structure of the film.

As the production proceeded into its third week, shooting dropped off dramatically. At this point, the filmmaker started to work on a detailed, descriptive logging record of the footage which had been shot. Also a post-production editing plan was finalized to meet the project deadline. The production was ready to proceed the next stage.

#### POST-PRODUCTION

There was a total of twenty-two hours of footage accumulated from the principal shooting phase. It took another approximately thirty hours to finish logging footage. However, a detailed logging record allows a filmmaker to save time in locating a specific segment from piles of video tapes. Another advantage the filmmaker gained through this logging process was that it allowed the filmmaker to evaluate the quality and value of the footage. With a detailed logging recorder, the filmmaker was able to discuss the editing strategy with the project producer, Vivian C. Hsiung.

Both filmmakers agreed that although the project was about a specific foreign student's initial experience in the United States, they still wanted to relate this individual incident to a broader picture of foreign students in this country. After a series of discussions, a crafted opening seemed to be needed to best convey a sense of historical context. In the intended opening sequence, a general printed statement of the history of overseas students in the U.S. was juxtaposed with a short sequence of archival footage of early foreign students. This idea involved some unplanned production work: searching for appropriate archival footage. The initial contact the filmmaker made with the UCLA film archive was discouraging. The base price of footage for non-profit productions is \$

10 per second, and the UCLA film archive is considered the most reasonably priced source. The cost was much more than the filmmaker could afford. Taking another approach, the filmmaker decided to use a montage of still photographs instead of archival footage. Still photographs of people of different nationalities and costumes were considered to possess equivalent historical quality. In addition, an old-fashioned typewriter and computer unit acted as transitional devices to move the filmic tense from past to present.

Scott Joplin's composition "Weeping Willow" was chosen as music to be used in the prologue and credit sequences. Copyright clarification research was done, and the result showed that the composition is in the public domain. Later, a University of North Texas music student, Feng-Yi Liu, was contacted to record a piano performance of the song for use in the video.

The first step for the editing plan was to pick out significant footage or incidents with good sound reception and video quality. Based on the resulting list, the filmmaker visualized several different structures. The most appropriate one was to present the incidents chronological order. This seemed logical in that the project revolved around the accumulative nature of the subject's adjustment process. Moreover, creating a consistent time frame could ease the audience's potential discomfort caused by watching a juxtaposition of footage of different locations and times.

The first rough edit took approximately thirty editing hours and was an hour and three minutes in length. A rough edit viewing took place in early October. The project's supervising professor, Ben Levin, suggested that the filmmaker make further selections from incidents already included in the rough edit. In addition, many loosely structured sequences needed to be re-edited. Levin's suggestions led the filmmaker to eliminate

redundant sequences. Also, the filmmaker was able to draw a tighter focus on the intended theme, the first encounter experiences.

The second, version was completed on October 17, and it was thirty-two minutes in length. Later, a formal meeting of the filmmaker's graduate committee took place on October 22. In the meeting the project was viewed and discussed. In general, every committee member approved the video for the filmmaker's partial fulfillment of the Master of Arts degree. However, some minor fine tuning still needed to be done in order to make a better final product.

The only problem left was the use of footage from defective Sony® S-VHS video tapes. The quality of this damaged footage was acceptable, but, tracking problems caused some instability in the video signal at the bottom of the frame. Unfortunately, the footage includes a very important speech given by a university faculty member. It occupied an important position in the film and could not be eliminated.

### CONCLUSION

During the entire production, there were several important learning processes. First, the filmmaker was able to enhance his skills in documentary production, especially the observational style. In this project limited production equipment and crew provided a very solid and stringent learning ground. Due to the popularity of video equipment documentary production is gaining momentum. The new video technology allows filmmakers to shoot under lighting conditions which previously were difficult to work within. The Panasonic® AG-450 S-VHS video camcorder was able to produce acceptable images under various lighting conditions. This capability provided a good deal of flexibility to the project. However, severe hot lighting spots and dim lighting still caused a degradation of picture quality as editing generations increased. The most troublesome production aspect was sound recording. The employment of a wireless

microphone system added a new educational dimension to the project. The wireless microphone system functioned properly only sixty percent of the time. Forty percent of the footage contained unacceptable sound. This high ratio of defeat was caused by the system's sensitivity to radio activities which occurred during the shooting. However, newly developed wireless microphone systems are considered important devices for increasing camera mobility, which is essential for observational documentary filmmaking. In fact, by employing the wireless microphone system, the filmmaker was able to decrease the number of people needed for the production crew and get permissions from several busy facilities. By learning how to integrate video equipment into uncontrolled shooting conditions, the filmmaker experienced a most valuable lesson one could not get in the classroom alone.

Second, the filmmaker was able to personally experience the ramification of an issue frequently associated with observational documentary film. The degree of a filmmaker's involvement with the subjects under observation is more than a matter of style in this kind of production. In this project, the filmmaker experienced the dilemma of attempting to determine the degree to which it was appropriate to become actively involved in the subject's adjustment process. The final decision was to allow situations to develop naturally through the circumstances of the shooting process. Since the subject was totally new to this social and cultural environment, his confusion and curiosity were overwhelming. The filmmaker naturally became the one who was able to answer some of the subject's questions. These kinds of interactions happened from time to time throughout the shooting assignment. In the editing stage the filmmaker preserved a few of those interactions in the final version of the project, and they became key elements in the video.

Third, the filmmaker learned the importance of pre-production research and preparation. As soon as the actual shooting started, the filmmaker immediately perceived the strength and weaknesses of various aspects of the pre-production work. Sufficient pre-production research and preparation can give a project a solid foundation, and resolve in advance or anticipate problems which might damage the success of a project. In this project the pre-production team's efforts to obtain location permissions paid off when the shooting crew entered various places. The only surprising rejection was from the university's library which requires a specific permission apart from the general consent the filmmaker obtained from the UNT Vice-President's Office. The filmmaker learned to be attentive to every small detail. Besides adequate pre-production planning, in-depth research of the intended subject matter also helps the chances of a project's success. For this project, the filmmaker conducted broad-based research on foreign student adjustment patterns. The research helped the filmmaker to anticipate some of the subject's fundamental psychological quandaries. Specifically, the filmmaker used the U-Curve hypothesis, culture shock, and cultural disparity theories to assist in "reading" the subject's inner state. This smoothed the interactions between the filmmaker and subject. The pre-production research also helped the filmmaker in planning the structure of the video. The initial state of confusion and later of excitement on the part of the subject corresponded to the U-Curve adjustment pattern hypotheses, and became a structuring element of the video.

Fourth, during the post-production stage the filmmaker learned the importance of discipline and focus in observational documentary production. Thought-provoking questions occurred in every phase of structuring the edited versions of the video. As the filmmaker was selecting footage, the idea of presenting a clear and concise message became the most crucial selection criterion. The biggest problem with the rough edit was

its loose structure and long takes. Based upon the primary selection criterion, the filmmaker was able to cut the second version to thirty-two minutes and present a more clear and vivid picture of the subject's adjustment process. The same kind of approach was adopted for the final cut. By working as the director, cinematographer, and editor, the filmmaker often found it difficult to be objectively analytic in the selection of footage. This impairment of editorial judgment can cause a project to veer away from its intended theme. Staying focused is important both when working with a camera view finder and with an editing monitor.

This was a fruitful project in the context of the director's production experience. The filmmaker learned important concepts and techniques from the different phases of production. As a foreign student, another source of satisfaction for the filmmaker came with the opportunity to present some aspects of the adjustment of overseas students to a new social environment. The filmmaker hopes that the video can help viewers to understand more about cross-cultural exchange and communication.

## ENDNOTES

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## APPENDIX

## **PROJECT PROPOSAL**

This is a proposal of a documentary video project. This project is originated and constructed by Eric J. Teng, a master's degree candidate in the Radio-TV-Film program at the University of North Texas. The entire project is under the supervision of the Department of Radio-TV-Film at the University of North Texas. The intention of this presentation is to grant your full support by explaining the nature and spirit of this video project.

### **Goal:**

This is a project which concerns about students from overseas. Each year thousands of foreign students come to the United States from different societies and cultures. The majority of these students will experience various degrees of culture shock. Those experiences are hard to recognize by Americans who grow up within their culture. On the other hand, the "global village" concept teaches us that it is important to understand and appreciate different ideas. This video project intends to depict the difficulties which international students encounter at beginning of their stay in America. By understanding their problems and differences, people can further open their minds to other cultural ideologies and social behaviors.

### **Production activities:**

In this video, three to four foreign students who have just arrived at the University of North Texas will be chosen as main characters. Their activities will be closely followed and recorded for the first two to three weeks after their arrival. The purpose of this close observation of these students' lives is to get an authentic look of their reactions to new social and cultural environments. In addition, interviews of these students will be conducted in order to gain personal insights from them.

### **Treatment:**

The video opens with historical still photos of foreign students. Brief orientation of foreign student history in the United States will also be given in the opening sequence. Following the opening, direct observational footage of the new UNT students' activities becomes the predominant visual element of the video. Students' interactions with people and situations which they encountered will provide information about students themselves, and hopefully, will increase the audience's understanding about foreign students. Ultimately, this video should speak by itself and encourage people to learn about and accept different social ideas and cultural behaviors.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT :**

**ERIC TENG**

**1408 TEASLEY LANE #3922**

**DENTON, TX 76205**

**(817) 565-1604**



## University of North Texas

Department of Radio, Television, and Film  
College of Arts and Sciences

July 30, 1993

To Whom it May Concern:

This is to certify that Eric Teng is a graduate student in the Department of Radio, Television, and Film here at the University of North Texas.

As part of the requirements for our Master of Arts degree, he must complete a video documentary. He is doing a production about new international students who are adjusting to life in the United States. He will need to film them in as many relevant situations as possible in order to obtain enough material to make his documentary a success.

We would appreciate any consideration or assistance you might provide him in this effort. Your cooperation would be of immense value to him and to his professors.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions that I might be able to answer. My office number is 817-565-4578 and my home number is 817-387-7651. I will be out of town until August 15th, but you could contact Dr. Steve Fore, the head of our graduate program at 817-565-2565 before August 3rd or after August 8th. If we are not in when you call, please leave a message.

Sincerely,

Professor Ben Levin



## University of North Texas

Office of the Vice President  
For Administrative Affairs

August 13, 1993

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:**

Eric J. Teng, a master's degree candidate in the Radio-TV-Film program at the University of North Texas, has obtained approval to film his master thesis project on the University campus. Mr. Teng will be filming the daily lives of foreign students. The filming is scheduled to take place throughout campus, including inside various University facilities, from August 12 to September 12, 1993.

Other than being permitted to film the normal operations of the University, Mr. Teng will not be needing any additional assistance from University personnel. Mr. Teng understands that he is not permitted to disrupt the normal functioning of the University and its staff with his filming. Furthermore, he understands that he will not be allowed access to any University facility outside of normal operating hours.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Frederick R. Pole".

Frederick R. Pole  
Vice President for Administrative Affairs

CC: Dr. Robert Laforte  
Dr. Thomas Hoemeke  
Mary Yates  
Margaret Hastings

**LOCATION RELEASE****Production Location :**

**The company authorizes Eric J. Teng to record and edit into the video and related materials its name, logo, facilities and activities. Eric J. Teng may use and authorize others to use all or parts of the video. Eric J. Teng shall own all right, title and interest in and to the video, including the recordings, to be used and disposed of without limitation as Eric J. Teng shall in its sole discretion determine.**

**Person in charge :****Address :****Telephone :****Date :**

**APPEARANCE RELEASE****Person Appearing:****Person Title: First Encounter****Production Date: August 22 to September 30, 1993****Production Location: Denton, Texas**

**I authorize Eric J. Teng to record and edit into the video and related materials my name, likeness, image, interview and performance. Eric J. Teng may use and authorize others to use all or parts of the video. Eric J. Teng shall own all right, title and interest in and to the video, including the recordings, to be used and disposed of without limitation as Eric J. Teng shall in his discretion determine.**

**Signature:****Address:****Date:**

**MUSIC PERFORMANCE RELEASE**

**MUSICIAN:**

**PERFORMANCE DATE:**

**I authorize Eric J. Teng to record and edit into the video, First Encounter, and related materials my piano performance of Scott Joplin's Weeping Willow. Eric J. Teng may use and authorize others to use all or parts of the video. Eric J. Teng shall own all right, title and interest in and to the video, including the recordings, to be used and disposed of without limitation as Eric J. Teng shall in his discretion determine.**

**Signature:**

**Address:**

**Date:**

1408 Teasley Lane #3922  
Denton, Texas 76205  
August 11, 1993

Dear Store Manager :

My name is Eric J. Teng, a master's degree candidate in the Radio-TV-Film program at the University of North Texas. I am here to ask your assistance to acquire official permission which will allow me to film part of my master thesis project inside your store.

With this letter, I enclose a copy of my project proposal and a copy of my major professor's endorsement letter. They specifically explain the nature of the project. Because the project concerns the lives of newly arriving foreign students, I want to depict their first encounters with every new social environment. I am anticipating the students will visit your store as soon as they settle down because the store is conveniently located to our campus. However, since I am still waiting for the arrival of new international students, at this moment I can not provide you a specific date on which the shooting will take place.

It will be a great help that if your company can grant me a general permission which will allow me to arrange the shooting between August 22 to September 6. And, I will notify the store about the coming of a film crew at least two days in advance. While shooting, there will be no more than three crew members in your store. The only two pieces of equipment which will be used is a video camcorder and an extension microphone. Because of the realistic nature of the project, it will not require any special assistance from the store and I will respect the rights of customers in the store.

So far, merchants in Denton have been very helpful in permitting me to film in their stores. I have already secured permissions from Dillard's, Target, First State Bank, Golden Triangle Mall, J. C. Penney, Kroger and Albertsons. As part of our community, your permission is very important to the success of the project. I appreciate your patience and understanding.

For further information :

Eric J. Teng  
1408 Teasley Lane Apt. 3922  
Denton, TX 76205  
(817) 565-1604

Sincerely yours,

Eric J. Teng



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