Social incorporation and transnationalism among Chinese immigrants in the U.S.: results from a network survey.

Ted Mouw and Giovanna Merli

Introduction

In this paper, we use data from a network survey of Chinese immigrants in North Carolina to test whether new modes of incorporation have developed among contemporary migrants that alter the process of immigrant social and cultural incorporation. The survey that we use, the 2018 Chinese in Raleigh-Durham (ChIRDU) study [N=400], is a sample of the social network of Chinese immigrants living in the Raleigh-Durham area of North Carolina. In addition to collecting detailed network information on local and cross-border social ties, the survey asked questions about host country integration, labor market outcomes, and migration intentions. This allows us to test the relationship between attitudinal measures of cultural incorporation and patterns of social integration as measured by social network data.

Understanding the process of incorporation of Chinese immigrants to the United States is important not only because of the size of the Chinese immigrant population—Chinese immigrants comprise the second largest immigrant group in the United States (Yin 2007), with over 2.1 million arriving since 1965 (Yang 2012)--but also because the diversity and complexity of contemporary Chinese immigration provides us with central insights about the future of migrant incorporation in the 21st century. On one hand, the apparent success of post-1965 Chinese immigrants seems to confirm traditional models of immigrant incorporation. For instance, the fact that many recent Chinese immigrants are highly educated and have experienced economic success in the United States seems consistent conventional models of linear incorporation (e.g., Alba and Nee 2003). On the other hand, new patterns of transnational migration have developed as the result of China's rapid economic growth where highly-educated professionals engage in career-related circular migration (Wong 2006) that might complicate their process of host country incorporation.

In contrast to a conventional linear model of immigrant incorporation, a transnational perspective stresses the ability of immigrants to maintain ties and connections to both their origin and destination communities (Glick Shiller, Basch, and Blanc 1995). As such, it stresses that contemporary immigration is not one-directional and that not only people but also ideas and information flow in both directions. Although immigrants have always maintained ties to friends and relatives back home, the advent of modern telecommunications technology facilitates the maintenance of those ties (Vertovec 2001) and allows migrants to live—at least psychologically—in two places at once. Although the concept of immigrant transnationalism has been criticized as not fundamentally altering the process of immigrant incorporation (Waldinger 2010), contemporary Chinese migration represents an ideal case to test the relative importance of this perspective.

First, overseas Chinese represent the world's largest diaspora community, with a long history of settlement in areas as diverse as Southeast Asia and the United States and longstanding business and entrepreneurial networks that extend across countries (Chan and Koh 2018). Thus, we argue that Chinese migrants illustrate the role of continued cross-border networks long before the popularity of the term "transnationalism" in the academic literature. Second, "new migration" from China after 1979 consists of large numbers of students and highly educated professionals who have created new patterns of settlement (Chan and Koh 2018).

Yang (2012) describes the history of Chinese migration to the United States as consisting of three basic periods. The "sojourner" period during the 19th Century which consisted of migrants who expected to work in the U.S. temporarily before returning back to China, followed by the "settler" migration of the

post-1965 era, which consisted of migrants who expected to remain permanently in the United States because greater opportunities compared to China. In contrast, he describes contemporary migration as transnational—as a combination of the sojourner and settler modes—as economic globalization combined with greater opportunities in China create work-related opportunities for return or circular migration that didn't exist for previous generations of immigrants.

In Wong's (2006) study of Chinese immigrants in Silicon Valley, he illustrates the type of "transnational" settlement pattern described by Chan and Koh (2018) and Yang (2012). Wong describes the role that migration plays among highly educated Chinese professionals as a step on the career ladder, as work experience in high tech firms in the U.S. can lead to increased opportunities back in China. In this sense, the rise of China as an economic power plays a complementary role as the diffusion of knowledge workers across the border generates opportunities in both countries for workers with the cultural and linguistic facility to operate in both labor markets. Yang (2012) describes these workers as "astronauts" who repeatedly move back and forth between the U.S. and China for work.

The counterpoint to this optimistic portrayal of cross-border labor markets is that the process of adjustment of these "new migrants" is imperfect, reflecting resistance in the context of the receiving society and challenges to cultural adjustment among the migrants themselves. Grossman (2010) notes that Chinese diaspora communities are often characterized by considerable heterogeneity and conflict. Chan and Koh (2018) argue that the bipolar nature of contemporary Chinese migration to the U.S –with large numbers of both highly educated and less educated individuals—has generated a chasm between "uptown" Chinese who live in the suburbs and "downtown" Chinese who live in traditional enclave neighborhoods.

Lo li and Yu (2017) argue that despite the comparative success of Chinese immigrants in the U.S., there are considerable problems of economic incorporation, with considerable underemployment as well as "glass ceilings" in career progress as a result of discrimination. They argue that this leads to considerable underutilization of the skills of the new immigrants. Wong (2018) describes migrants who return home because of blocked mobility in the U.S. as "sea turtles" who return because of negative experiences abroad. Shan (2012) conducts an ethnographic study of highly educated Chinese workers in a Canadian engineering firm, and argues that they face considerable emotional and psychological difficulties in adapting to a Western style work environment.

In this paper we will test three competing perspectives on the mode of incorporation among contemporary Chinese immigrants. The conventional assimilation perspective (Alba and Nee 2003) argues that process of social incorporation proceeds progressively over time and applies in general to non-European post-1965 immigration despite the persistence of racial and ethnic discrimination in the U.S. In contrast, the segmented assimilation perspective (Portes and Rumbaut 2001) argues that the maintenance of ethnic identity without assimilating to the mainstream culture may both beneficial for success and a reaction to the context of reception. Finally, as argued above, the transnational perspective argues that it is increasingly possible—and desirable—for migrants to maintain ties to their communities of origin, particularly if career and educational opportunities are enhanced by maintaining those ties as well as a bicultural identification.

Data

In this paper, we use data from the 2018 ChIRDU study of Chinese immigrants in the Raleigh-Durham area.[1] This is a survey that used a link-tracing sampling approach, Network Sampling with Memory (NSM, Mouw and Verdery 2012), that collects social network data as part of the survey and then uses the

[1] ChIRDU is an acronym that stands for "Chinese in the Raleigh Durham" area.

resulting network data to randomly sample new respondents. In contrast to other link-tracing sampling strategies such as respondent driven sampling (RDS), which relies on current respondents to choose the next wave of respondents, NSM attempts to improve the sampling process by collecting network data and then using the revealed network of the population to assist in the sampling process. In particular, NSM collects partially identifying name and demographic information (such as first name and last initial, gender, and age) and then use that information to reconstruct the social network of the target population. There are two sampling modes. In the "search" mode, the sampling algorithm uses information about the network ties in the data to select nodes that are on the edges of the currently explored network. In the "list" mode, the sampling algorithm selects respondents randomly from the list of all potential respondents who have been listed on the network rosters of previous respondents. The survey starts out in "search" mode and then shifts to "list" mode once the network of the population has been explored. In simulated sampling on existing school and university-based Facebook networks, NSM has a higher rate of precision than alternative approaches such as RDS and snowball sampling.

In the ChIRDU study, we began with a list of 7 original seed respondents, and then proceeded to collect a sample of 400 respondents (as of 9-15-18, the survey is still in the field), using three different interviewing modes—face to face, phone, and online. The face to face and phone interviews have a response rate of 71%, while the online interview has a response rate of 50%. In addition to questions about migration history, basic demographic information, attitudes about the social context of migration, and labor market outcomes, there are three network rosters. Roster A consists of a list of up to 6 friends and relatives who are members of the local Chinese immigrant community living in the Raleigh Durham area. In addition to demographic information, Roster A includes partial names (first name and first initial of the last name). Roster B consists of friends and acquaintances who are not Chinese immigrants living in the same area, and Roster C consists of ties to Chinese living outside of the United States. Rosters B and C consist of up to three nominations for each respondent.

Figure 1 shows the graph of the social network of the Chinese immigrant community in the ChIRDU sample who were sampled or nominated in Roster A of the survey. As described above, because we collected partial name and demographic information, we are able to match individuals who were nominated by multiple respondents—which allows us to reconstruct a snapshot of the network. In Figure 1, square nodes indicate individual respondents in the survey, while circles indicate individuals who were nominated but were not sampled. Overall, as of 9-18-18 the survey consists of 389 respondents and 1,704 nominations in roster A (members of the local Chinese immigrant community), as well 979 nomination for roster B (local non-immigrant network ties) and 1,059 for roster C (members of the larger Chinese diaspora outside of the United States).

Preliminary Analysis

Here we present the results from a preliminary analysis that illustrates our attempts to use the combined survey and network data to test competing models of the social incorporation process.

Graph A1 shows the network map. As discussed above, because we collected partial name information as part of the survey, we are able to construct the network of all members of the Chinese immigrant community who were sampled or nominated on a network roster in the survey. Squares indicate someone who was interviewed, and circles are individuals who were nominated but not sampled. The graph consists of 1,496 unique individuals, and is color coded by educational level. Green indicates a college education, and blue indicates someone with more than a college education (or an associates degree). Orange is high school, and purple is less than high school.

[Table 1 about here]

Table 1 provides a list of the variables used in the analysis, along with a description of the variable and the sample mean.

[Table 2 about here]

Table 2 presents a preliminary analysis of three variables measuring social and cultural incorporation. First, in Model 1 we estimate logit models of the probability that the respondent reported identifying completely as Chinese. In Table 1, we found that 59% of respondents said that they were "completely Chinese." The other two options for this variable were "part Chinese, part American" and "completely American" and only 3 respondents chose the latter option, so we have collapsed those two categories together. This is an important indicator of cultural incorporation. One would expect that if the respondent intends to go back to China—or if they have experienced difficulty or resistance to adapting to life in the United States, then they would be more likely to retain their Chinese identity.

The key results for Chinese identity in Model 1 are that time in the U.S. has a large negative effect on Chinese identity, consistent with a conventional assimilation/incorporation perspective. In contrast, local Chinese communication frequency—the average level of communication with network members who are members of the local Chinese immigrant community—and the variable measuring negative perceptions of U.S. society has a positive effect. These are both consistent with a segmented assimilation perspective, as ethnic identity is maintained through communication and reinforced through negative reactions to mainstream U.S. society.

In Model 2 of Table 3, we turn to the respondent's report of intending to stay permanently in the United States. This is positive correlated with current amount of time lived in the U.S. and having immigration documents (either citizenship or a green card). Of course, this is not surprising, as we would expect that long-term stays in the U.S. would gradually signal permanent residence. On the other hand, the perceptions of U.S. society score has a negative effect on intentions for permanent residence, indicating that if the respondent has negative feelings about U.S. society then he or she is less likely to intend to stay permanently regardless of the length of time they have lived here.

In Model 3 of Table 3 we estimate OLS models of the percentage of the respondent's local friends who are Chinese. The results for Model 3 show a negative effect of time in the U.S. on percentage Chinese friends, along with a negative effect of working. These effects are both consistent with a conventional incorporation perspective. On the other hand, the local Chinese communication frequency (the average frequency of communication with the local Chinese friends listed in Roster A) has a positive effect on % Chinese friends, which suggests that local Chinese friendships are maintained by communication frequency. In contrast, communication with local native friends and overseas Chinese does not have a statistically significant effect on % local Chinese friends (at the 0.05 level of significance).

[Tables 3 and 4 about here]

In Tables 3 and 4 we turn to an analysis of the frequency of communication with overseas Chinese friends and relatives listed on Roster C. We argue that cross-border communication frequency is a key indicator of transnationalism. As telecommunication technologies have facilitated easy cross-border communication, the question is what factors contribute to maintaining those ties. Table 3 shows that of the 1,042 ties to overseas Chinese in the data, only 7.8% communicate daily. However, 34% communicate weekly, indicating a significant amount of frequent conversation.

In Table 4 we model the communication frequency using an ordered probit model, where the frequency levels are coded 1-4 as in Table 3, with higher values indicating more frequent communication. In contrast to the models in Table 2, the length of time in the U.S. does affect the frequency of cross-border

communication, although the variable indicating whether the respondent wants to adapt completely to U.S. culture has a negative effect, as does the intention to live in the U.S. permanently. Recent visits to China—a key indicator of transnationalism indicating that the respondent has "refreshed" his or her ties to their origin community—has a positive effect. In addition, the variable measuring self-reported happiness (coded as a dichotomous variable "very happy") also has a positive relationship with the communication frequency, indicating that psychological well-being is interrelated with maintaining contact with friends and relatives in the origin, which also indicates support for a transnational perspective of immigrant incorporation.

In sum, for the results in Table 4 we find support for both the conventional incorporation perspective—as proxied by permanent residence intentions and cultural adaptation—while also finding support for a transnationalism perspective on immigration. This is not necessarily contradictory as aspects of both may shape the contours of the contemporary process of immigration.

In our subsequent analysis, will further refine these results and we will also we use the network data depicted in Graph A1 to estimate peer effects models of the key dependent variables in Tables 2 and 4. In these models, we will include the responses of people proximate to the respondent in the network as independent variables and estimate their effects on the respondent's outcomes.

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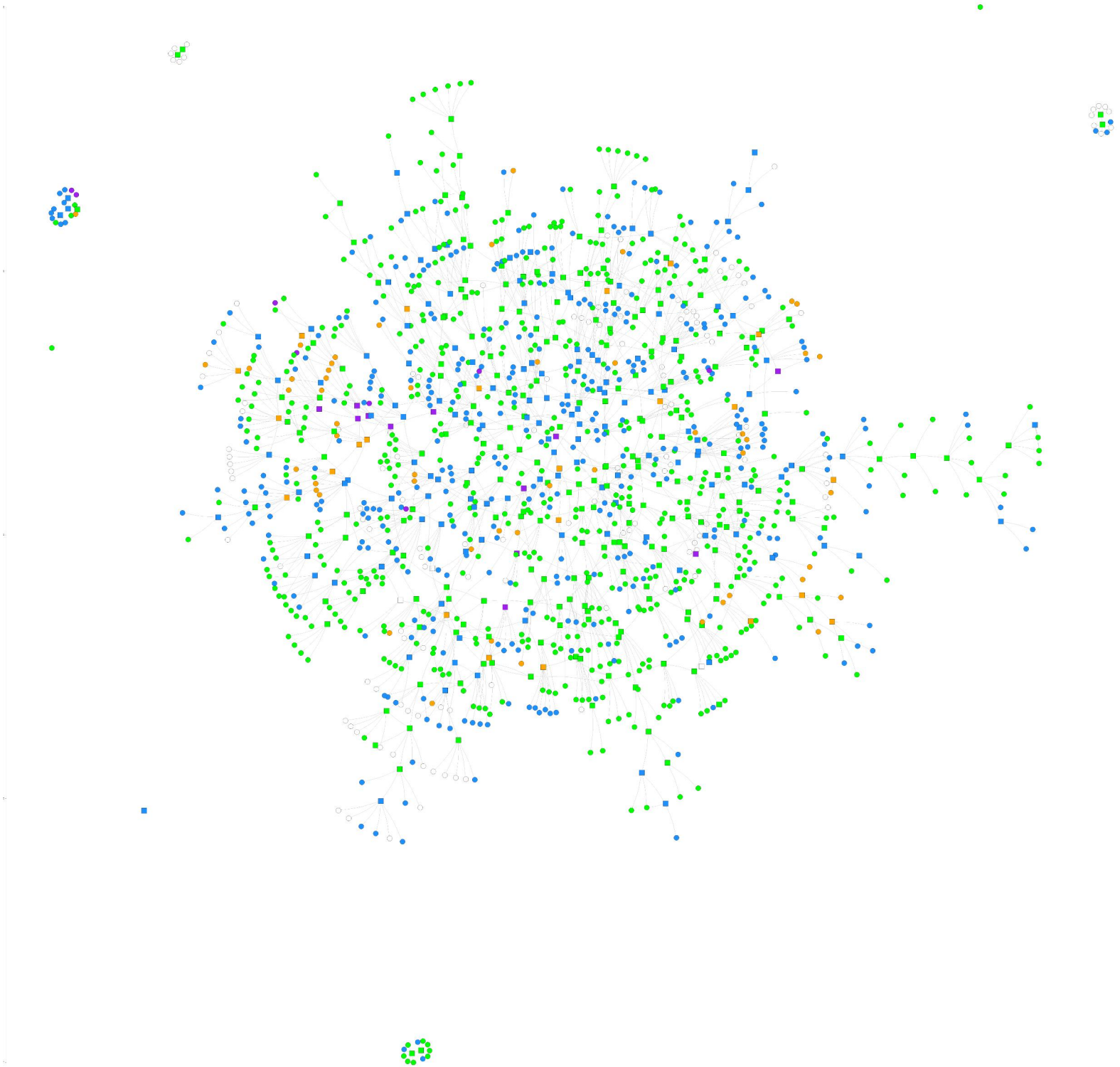
Graph A1: ChIRDU network after 368 interviews, public version no IDs



numbers=RID, square = sampled node, circle= nominated, white=missing, purple=<hs, orange=hs, blue=college, green=>college

Table 1: Description of the key variables

Variable	Description	Mean
	Dependent variables	
Happy	A self-reported measure of happiness, with 4 being "very happy" and 1 being "not happy"	3.16
Live in the U.S.	1 if the respondent (R) intends to live in the U.S. permanently, and	0.54
Like U.S. culture	1 if R says they "like it" and 0 otherwise.	0.53
Chinese identity	1 if R identifies completely as Chinese, 0 if they identify partly or completely as "American".	0.59
Cold	1 if R describes relations between Chinese immigrants and whites as "cold" and 0 if they describe them as "friendly".	0.18
% Chinese friends	The self-reported proportion of the respondents local friends who are Chinese immigrants	0.65
Communication frequency	The frequency that R communicates with friends on the network rosters. 4=daily, 3=weekly, 2=monthly, and 1=once or twice a year.	
	Explanatory variables	
Native-friend communication	The sum of the communication levels to friends and relatives on the roster of native friends (Roster B, up to 3 friends).	8.51
Local Chinese communication	The sum of the communication levels to friends and relatives on the roster of local Chinese immigrants (Roster A, up to 6 friends)	11.72
Overseas Chinese communication	The sum of communication levels to contacts on the roster Chinese outside the U.S. (Roster C, up to 3 friends)	6.63
Years since immigration	The number of years R has lived in the United States	12.78
Has documents	1 if R is a citizen or has a green card.	0.76
Age		43
Education	Educational category	
Gender	1=Male, 0=Female	0.35
Working	Whether the respondent is currently working	0.71
Enclave	1 if the respondent is working in a firm with over 50% Chinese immigrants, 0 otherwise.	
Recent visit	1 if the respondent visited China (or Taiwan) in 2017 or 2018	0.54
Maintain Chinese	1 if the respondent thinks that maintaining the ability to speak Chinese for themselves and their family is "very important", 0 otherwise.	0.78
	Perceptions of U.S. society measures	
US: racial discrimination	1 if the respondent (R) thinks there is racial discrimination in economic opportunities in the U.S.	0.68
US: weakens family	1 if the R thinks that the American way of life weakens the family	0.26
US: conflict	1 if R thinks there is a lot of conflict between racial and ethnic groups in the U.S.	0.52
US: opportunities	1 if R things that whites have more opportunities than non-whites	0.63
US: no better	1 if R disagrees that there is no better country to live in than the U.S.	0.81
US: feel superior	1 if R thinks that Americans generally feel superior to foreigners.	0.66
Negative perceptions of U.S. society	The sum of the U.S. society measures	3.51

Table 2: Analysis of Measures of Social and Cultural Incorporation

	(1) Identify completely as Chinese	(2) Intend to live in the U.S. permanently	(3) % friends who are Chinese
Log Years in the U.S.	-0.883***	0.504**	-3.681*
	(0.206)	(0.167)	(1.521)
Has documents (green card or citizenship)	-0.728	1.185***	-0.184
	(0.403)	(0.351)	(3.372)
Age	0.0675	0.0189	1.443***
	(0.0455)	(0.0332)	(0.367)
Age squared	-0.000344	-0.0000836	-0.00998**
	(0.000447)	(0.000290)	(0.00347)
Education (omitted: B.A.) less than high school	-0.422	0.0798	2.464
	(0.827)	(0.763)	(7.427)
High school	-0.346	0.367	-2.910
	(0.518)	(0.483)	(4.851)
Associates degree	-0.151	1.129*	6.190
	(0.514)	(0.527)	(4.749)
M.A. or professional degree	0.0247	0.225	-1.061
	(0.327)	(0.322)	(3.087)
PhD	0.0427	0.456	-0.182
	(0.369)	(0.367)	(3.501)
Gender	0.165	-0.166	1.827
	(0.266)	(0.261)	(2.486)
Working	-0.0527	-0.0968	-6.848*
	(0.333)	(0.319)	(3.012)
Enclave	0.329	0.0962	6.493
	(0.387)	(0.375)	(3.604)
Local Chinese communication	0.409*	0.113	4.939*
	(0.207)	(0.205)	(2.007)
Native-friend communication	0.149	0.00996	-2.702
	(0.159)	(0.160)	(1.587)
Overseas Chinese communication	0.166	-0.113	-1.090
	(0.174)	(0.172)	(1.743)
Recent visit	-0.162	-0.145	0.753
	(0.246)	(0.244)	(2.324)
Negative perceptions of U.S. society score	0.180*	-0.225**	0.236
	(0.0876)	(0.0865)	(0.808)
Constant	-1.818	-1.863	28.69*
	(1.391)	(1.204)	(12.17)
N	386	386	386

Table 3: Frequency of communication with Overseas Chinese friend or relative

How often do you communicate with this person	N	Percent
1. Once or twice per year	257	24.7
2. Monthly	350	33.6
3. Weekly	354	34,0
4. Daily	81	7.8
Totals	1,042	100

Table 4: Ordered probit model of communication with Overseas Chinese (Roster C)

	(1) Frequency of communication
Log Years in the U.S.	-0.0873
	(0.0483)
Has documents (green card or citizenship)	-0.163
	(0.108)
Age	0.00641
	(0.0204)
Age squared	-0.0000163
	(0.000226)
Education (omitted: B.A.) less than high school	0.0312
	(0.0320)
Male	-0.159*
	(0.0787)
Negative perceptions of U.S. society score	0.0396
	(0.0269)
Recent visit to China	0.220**
	(0.0737)
Working	0.0387
	(0.0850)
Maintaining Chinese language is very important	0.0675
	(0.0878)
Want to adapt completely to U.S. culture	-0.186*
	(0.0729)
Cold relations with Americans	-0.00407
	(0.0978)
Very happy	0.296***
	(0.0767)
Want to live in the U.S. permanently	-0.158*
	(0.0798)
Tie type (omitted: coworker) Friend	0.244
	(0.200)
Other	1.047***
	(0.271)
Relative	1.030***
	(0.205)
N	997
Log likelihood	-1188.0