

Participant P4

School Experience: Public high school with a large Chinese student community

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself and tell me when you came to the United States?

Response:

My name is Wang Yilin. I moved to Houston, Texas, with my family in 2023 because of my father's job. I started ninth grade after arriving in the United States and am now in eleventh grade.

2. What was the biggest challenge when you first arrived in the United States?

Response:

The biggest challenges were socializing and understanding what was happening in class. Because of both language and cultural differences, I found it difficult to make friends and often could not understand what my classmates were talking about, such as celebrities, music, and other popular topics. I also struggled to keep up with classroom instruction at the beginning.

3. Can you describe your experience learning English?

Response:

My English was average when I was in China, and I struggled to understand spoken English after arriving in the United States. Biology was especially difficult because it included many technical terms that I had to look up and translate. Over time, however, I gradually adapted and was able to follow the lessons more easily. My biology teacher was also very supportive and provided me with a great deal of help.

4. Do you remember a moment when language made you feel excluded, embarrassed, or misunderstood?

Response:

One experience that stands out was giving presentations in English class. Because my spoken English was not very fluent and my pronunciation was sometimes inaccurate, I often felt embarrassed when I mispronounced words. If my classmates laughed or reacted in any way, I became even more self-conscious and uncomfortable.

5. Do you feel like the same person when speaking Chinese and English? Why or why not?

Response:

I do not feel exactly the same. When I speak Chinese, I feel much more natural and talkative because it is my native language. I know how to continue conversations and express my thoughts clearly. When I speak English, however, I need more time to think before responding. Sometimes I do not know how to continue a conversation, and if people speak too quickly, I cannot fully understand them. As a result, I feel a greater sense of distance when communicating in English.

6. Has moving to the United States changed the way you think about being Chinese?

Response:

Yes. When I lived in China, I rarely thought about being Chinese because everyone around me shared the same background. After moving to the United States, I became much more aware of my Chinese identity. Through conversations with my classmates, I realized how many cultural differences existed, which made my identity more visible to me.

7. When do you feel most Chinese? Can you give an example?

Response:

I feel most Chinese when I am talking with classmates about hobbies, favorite celebrities, or popular culture. Many of the topics they discuss are closely related to American culture, and I often find it difficult to join those conversations. At those moments, I become especially aware that I am Chinese.

8. When do you feel most American? Can you give an example?

Response:

I feel most American when I am speaking English with my classmates and discussing everyday school life. I also feel more American when people speak quickly and I can still understand everything they are saying.

9. Have you ever felt caught between two cultures? Can you tell me about that experience?

Response:

Yes, I have. Because I moved to the United States during high school, I sometimes feel that I no longer write Chinese as well as I used to, while my English is still not as strong as that of native speakers. I feel as though neither language is perfect, and I am somewhere in between both languages and cultures.

10. If you could describe your identity in one sentence, what would that sentence be?

Response:

I am like someone reading two books—one written in Chinese and one written in English. The stories are essentially the same, but each contains different cultural perspectives, and I am gradually bringing the two books together.

Participant P4

学校经历：公立高中(中国学生较多)

1. 请简单介绍一下自己, 以及你是什么时候来到美国的?

回答:

我叫王依琳。我于2023年来到美国, 当时因为父亲工作调动, 我们全家搬到了休斯顿。我来到美国后开始读九年级, 现在已经读到十一年级。

2. 刚来到美国时, 你遇到的最大挑战是什么?

回答:

刚来到美国时, 我遇到的最大挑战是社交和课堂学习。由于语言和文化存在差异, 我很难融入同学之间的聊天, 也不太能理解他们讨论的内容, 例如明星、音乐等流行文化话题。同时, 刚开始上课时, 我也很难跟上老师的讲课节奏。

3. 你能描述一下自己学习英语的经历吗?

回答:

我在中国时英语水平比较一般, 刚来到美国时, 很多英语内容都听不太懂。九年级的生物课尤其困难, 因为里面有很多专业术语, 我需要不断查单词、翻译才能理解课程内容。后来随着学习时间增加, 我逐渐能够跟上课堂节奏。此外, 我的生物老师给予了我很多帮助, 这也让我更快适应了学习环境。

4. 你是否记得某个因为语言而感到被排斥、尴尬或被误解的时刻?

回答:

让我印象最深的是英语课做课堂展示(presentation)的时候。由于我的英语口语还不是特别流利, 发音也不够准确, 每当自己读错单词时, 就会觉得很尴尬。如果台下同学发出一点笑声或者其他反应, 我都会变得更加紧张, 也更加没有自信。

5. 当你说中文和说英文时, 你觉得自己是同一个人吗? 为什么?

回答:

我觉得不完全一样。说中文的时候,我会更加自然,也更健谈,因为中文是我的母语,我知道如何接话,也能够更加准确地表达自己的想法。说英文的时候,我需要经过更多思考,有时不知道该如何回应别人,或者因为别人说得太快而听不懂,因此会产生一种距离感。

6. 来到美国以后,你对于“中国人身份”的理解有发生变化吗?

回答:

有。在中国的时候,我从来不会特别意识到自己是中国人,因为身边的人都和我一样。来到美国之后,在与同学交流的过程中,我越来越意识到自己的中国人身份,因为文化差异会不断体现在日常聊天和相处中。

7. 在什么情况下你最能感受到自己是中国人?能举个例子吗?

回答:

当我和同学聊天,尤其是聊到兴趣爱好、喜欢的明星或流行文化的时候,我最能感受到自己是中国人。很多美国同学讨论的话题都与美国文化有关,我常常很难参与其中,也因此更加意识到自己的中国人身份。

8. 在什么情况下你最能感受到自己像美国人?能举个例子吗?

回答:

当我和同学用英文聊天,讨论学校里的事情时,我最能感受到自己像美国人。特别是当别人说话速度很快,而我也能够完全听懂的时候,我会觉得自己已经越来越适应美国的生活。

9. 你有没有感到自己夹在两种文化之间?可以分享一个相关经历吗?

回答:

有。我来到美国时已经是高中阶段,因此现在感觉自己的中文和英文都没有达到最理想的状态。我的中文书写能力逐渐退步,而英文也还没有达到母语者的水平。我觉得自己既没有完全属于中文,也没有完全属于英文,而是夹在两种语言和两种文化之间。

10. 如果让你用一句话描述自己的身份认同,你会怎么说?

回答:

我觉得自己像是在读两本书，一本用中文写，一本用英文写。两本书讲述的是同一个故事，但因为文化不同，它们有着不同的表达方式。而我正在慢慢把这两本书融合在一起。