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# Chinese Students' Perceptions of Level of Stress

Qinwei Veronica Zhang advised by Dr Yan Xia

## Introduction

- Total number of Chinese students = 304,040 and 31.2% of the total international student population. (Institute of International Education/IIE, 2015),
- Have financial impact and cultural richness for the US society. (Heggins & Jackson, 2003), e.g., Chinese international students alone contributed 9.8 billions to the US economy in 2015 (IIE, 2015).
- Important to recognize the special characteristics and experiences of Chinese students in US colleges, and
- Need more culturally competent services to support their academic and psychosocial well-being

## Existing Literature

- International students generally share a set of similar challenges upon arriving in the US regardless of their cultural, social, religious, and political backgrounds (Mori, 2000)
- During the adaptation process, linguistic, academic, interpersonal, financial, and intrapersonal problems can all become stress factors in addition to the adjustment stress from high school to college.
- Strategies of coping stress: forming quality relationships with significant others and participating in student organizations on campus
- International students tend to undervalue and underuse the counseling services provided on campus (Olivas & Li, 2006).
- When undergoing stresses, they tend to turn to their friends and family members for help as opposed to seeking out assistance from the professionals. (Olivas & Li, 2006)
- There is little research investigating the specific needs and concerns of Chinese undergraduate students throughout their studies in the US colleges.

## Purpose and Research Question

Purpose of the study -- to explore Chinese students' perspective on their lived experiences, stress and coping during their study in the US.

Research questions:

1. What are their main challenges and stress?
2. What are some positive and effective, as well

as ineffective strategies of coping stress and challenges?

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

•30 (14 female &16 male) Chinese undergraduate students in a public university at the Midwest; 3 freshman, 4 sophomore, 7 junior and 16 senior.

• They were recruited to the study through our designed Recruiting flyers.

- signed a consent form before participation,
  - filled up a brief demographic sheet,
  - were interviewed 45 minutes to one hour,
  - either chose to talk in Chinese or English,
- All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, coded and analyzed. The qualitative study used open coding for content analysis to explore students' perspectives and lived experiences.

## Findings

### Coding

#### Stressors and challenges:

- Language Barriers
- Lack of local friends
- Time management, Self- discipline and self- control in academics
- Adapt to local culture
- Making decisions on their own

**Positive, effective coping:**

- Make friends across the globe
- Actively learn about and participate in local cultural events and activities
- Find an on campus job
- Ask for classmates', friends' and professors' advice about academics and life
- Articulate stress and ask for advice and comfort from friends

#### Ineffective coping

- Avoid and distract oneself from the problems by eating or watching TV
- Themes**
- Three themes emerged from the data.
- 1. Major stressors and challenges to

#### Method

Chinese students include language barriers, adapting to the teaching style in the US colleges and host culture, as well as lack of local friends during the time of their study in a US university.

#### Findings

2. Most effective coping strategies are intentionally making friends, being open and learn about American culture, and actively involving themselves in local activities.

3. Living and studying alone in the US provide Chinese students opportunities of being more independent and experiencing differences, which lead to their improved skills to handle different life trifles, better self-discipline abilities, increased independence and a broader and more sensitive perspective to view the world, etc.

4. Most Chinese students are not willing to seek for professional help due to a variety of reasons, e.g., lack of understanding of counseling services and stigma. Some use food and TV to cope.

**Examples**

1. *We don't have many mutual topics (to talk about), it is very hard to be accepted to their friend circle. Even though when they initiate to talk, it is all out of the friendliness. Along with the deficiency in the language, I can't fit in their life.*
2. *After joining in those multicultural organizations, I get to know more about American culture... You must gradually get to know it, then you understand what their society and culture is like.*
3. *I become more independent here, the way I see things seems different...*
5. *The counselors in our school should be good, but they speak English...feels as if I had registered for an extra English class for myself so I would not add that kind of extra stress on me.*
6. *My fear to socialize with people... like my English is not fluent enough to talk with American students without obstacles.*

## Discussions

- This study supports that language barrier, adjusting to school and lack of friends are stressors for Chinese students identified by Mori's study (2000) .
- The current study reveals:
- students used positive coping strategies. It appears to be that Chinese students who are more involved on campus activities and seek out resources, and have more interactions with their peers and professors may demonstrate a higher level of psychosocial well-being;
- most Chinese students are not willing to use counseling services because they fear of communicating with the professionals in English and fear of being diagnosed, if any, as having any mental health issue

### Limitation of the study:

The study was conducted at a Midwestern university. It is a small sample study. The result of the study might vary considerably in different regions across the US. It is not intended to generalize the finding. Moreover, students might not willing to share some of their unpleasant emotions and experiences during interviews.

### Suggestions for future study

Future studies should examine the specific relationships between different stressors and coping strategies, and students' psychosocial well- being. For example, survey research can be conducted to investigate which stressors play a more significant role in determining Chinese students' psychosocial well-being. Furthermore, future studies can also examine Chinese students' experiences who are from different regions of China as they might vary substantially due to their geographical locations and culture distinctions.