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PREVIEW

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**Chinese students' needs and adjustment problems in a U.S.
university**

Ye, Yongwei, Ph.D.

The University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 1992

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Ann Arbor, MI 48106**

PREVIEW

**CHINESE STUDENTS' NEEDS AND ADJUSTMENT
PROBLEMS IN A U.S. UNIVERSITY**

by
Yongwei Ye

A DISSERTATION

**Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Major: Interdepartmental Area of
Administration, Curriculum and Instruction**

Under the Supervision of Professor Alvah M. Kilgore

Lincoln, Nebraska

December, 1992

DISSERTATION TITLE

Chinese Students' Needs And Adjustment Problems In A U.S. University

BY

Yongwei Ye

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CHINESE STUDENTS' NEEDS AND ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS IN A U.S. UNIVERSITY

Yongwei Ye, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 1992

Advisor: Alvah M. Kilgore

The purpose was to examine needs and adjustment problems of Chinese students in a U.S. university, specifically, to identify (a) language, (b) academic, (c) personal, (d) social, (e) cultural, and (f) financial needs and adjustment problems of students from mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Differences were determined in needs and adjustment problems between (a) students from mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, (b) male and female Chinese students, (c) undergraduate and graduate students, (d) majors among students, (e) ages among students, and (f) years living in the U.S. among students. This study consisted of all Chinese students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln from August to December, 1992, including follow-up interviews based on the findings of the questionnaire.

Data were tabulated and computer input was verified. Frequencies were reported, and Hotelling's T-square multivariate F-tests were used as follow-ups to determine which dependent variable(s) contributed to the overall significant difference.

The study revealed that UN-L Chinese students had problems in reading, writing, and speaking English, but little trouble with academics. Chinese students needed someone to turn to in crises. They had problems in making American friends and in accepting American social values and difficulty in telling a counselor about personal life. They also had problems applying for financial aid. There were significant differences between Chinese students from Hong Kong/Taiwan and mainland China, but no significant differences between genders, ages, degrees, majors, and years living in the U.S.

Hong Kong/Taiwan students needed help preparing a budget. They had more problems in writing papers or answering essay questions, in class discussions or group

activities, and applying for financial aid. Mainland China students had more problems with American food, lifestyle, and social behaviors, and telling a counselor about their personal problems.

Recommendations regarding Chinese students' needs and adjustment problems were made, including helping Chinese students improve their English, adding more information about financial aid, providing more social activities, and providing counseling opportunities for Chinese students.

PREVIEW

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Yongwei Ye

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

International students who attend universities in the United States come from diverse social, economic and academic backgrounds. Chinese students, who are one of the largest groups among international students, often find themselves struggling in a totally new environment. In order to assist Chinese students to successfully complete their academic programs in the United States, the examination of their needs and adjustment problems is essential.

Context of the Problem

International students' needs and adjustment problems have been a concern to the host institution in the United States. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in international students' adjustment among faculty members, administrators and student personnel professionals. Studies conducted on international students' needs and adjustment problems have undoubtedly provided important information, little attention has been given to the needs and adjustment problems of the students who come from certain national or regional groups. Basically, researchers have tended to take international students as one group, often to the exclusion of the unique characteristics of students who come from a particular culture and social system. In this study, some of the pertinent research relative to needs and adjustments of the Chinese student were examined, and the Chinese students' needs and adjustment problems in a U.S. university were tested.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine the needs and adjustment problems of the Chinese student in a U.S. university. Specifically, the objectives of this study were to identify (a) language, (b) academic, (c) personal, (d) social, (e) cultural, and (f) financial

needs and adjustment problems of the Chinese students who are from Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

Research Questions

1. What are the English language needs and adjustment problems of the Chinese student?
2. What are the academic needs and adjustment problems of the Chinese student?
3. What are the personal needs and adjustment problems of the Chinese student?
4. What are the social needs and adjustment problems of the Chinese student?
5. What are the cultural needs and adjustment problems of the Chinese student?
6. What are the financial needs and adjustment problems of the Chinese student?
7. Is there a difference of needs and adjustment problems between the Chinese students who come from Mainland China, and those who come from Taiwan and Hong Kong?
8. Is there a difference of needs and adjustment problems between the male and female Chinese students?
9. Is there a difference of needs and adjustment problems between the undergraduate and graduate Chinese students?
10. Is there a difference of needs and adjustment problems between majors among Chinese students?
11. Is there a difference of needs and adjustment problems between the ages among Chinese students?
12. Is there a difference of needs and adjustment problems between the years living in the U.S. among Chinese students?

Definitions

1. **International students**—Those who hold a valid Nonimmigration Student Status Authorization and are neither American citizens nor permanent residents.

2. Chinese students—Those who are from Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong with a valid Nonimmigration Student Status Authorization.
3. Mainland China—That part of China named the People's Republic of China.
4. Taiwan—That part of China named the Republic of China.
5. Hong Kong—That part of China which will be returned to Mainland China in 1997.
6. Chinese-American Students—Those who are either citizens or permanent residents of the United States with Chinese origin.
7. Needs—Those information, knowledge, skills and things that are essential for international students to achieve their academic and career goals.
8. Academic needs—Any needs that are related to students' performance in academic courses and research.
9. Personal needs—Any needs that are related to students living and studying in the United States.
10. Social needs—Any needs that are related to students' social interaction with host nationals.
11. Cultural needs—Any needs that are related to students' language, customs, mores, values, behaviors, and systems in the United States.
12. Financial needs—Any needs that are related to students' financial conditions in the United States.
13. Culture—A total way of life shared and transmitted by members of a particular society or community.
14. Acculturation—Those changes which take place between two cultures in contact.

15. Adjustment problems—Those problems of a language, academic, personal, social, cultural and financial nature experienced by international students in the United States.

Assumptions

1. The Chinese student perceptions of needs and adjustment problems were observable and could be measured.
2. The questionnaire was an appropriate instrument for the measurement of needs and adjustment problems of the Chinese student.
3. The procedures used to identify the Chinese students selected for the study were valid and the Chinese students selected provided a representative sample.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

1. The population involved in the study was confined to the Chinese students of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln from August 1992 to December 1992.
2. This study concentrated on needs and adjustment problems as measured by ratings in the survey questionnaire.

Limitations

1. The rating average was determined by the perceptions of the Chinese student. These perceptions were subject to any weaknesses inherent in these measures of perceptions.
2. This study was subject to those weaknesses inherent in a survey study such as nonequivalent groups and self-report method.

Significance of the Study

This study should begin to answer some of the questions that staff members, administrators and student personnel professionals have concerning the needs and adjustment problems of the Chinese student. The study also looked for some further

insights into differences in perceptions between gender, ages, college levels , and majors, years living in the U.S., especially the difference between the Chinese students who come from three separate areas living under different political, economic and social systems. The study should stimulate researchers to further investigations into broader areas in helping Chinese students toward more meaningful and successful experiences within and/or out of U.S. institutions of higher education.

PREVIEW

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of the present chapter is to review research completed since 1958 related to the Chinese student's needs and adjustment problems on U.S. university campuses. The review deals with needs and adjustment problems in six perspectives: (a) English language proficiency, (b) academic, (c) personal, (d) social, (e) cultural, and (f) financial. The chapter closes with a summary and conclusions concerning needs and adjustment problems of the Chinese student.

English Language Proficiency

Among all the needs and adjustment problems, English proficiency is almost always the first difficulty international students encounter and have to overcome (Gaither & Griffin, 1971; Rising & Copp, 1968). Ability in English language is related to most of what students do in terms of their academic work and social conduct. To a large extent, English proficiency is positively related to a student's academic success and social interaction (Hull, 1978). Therefore, ability in English language is used in many studies as one of the main variables associated with academic performance and social behaviors (Han, 1975; Hull, 1978; Lee, 1981).

In a number of studies, lack of English proficiency was found to be the major problem in adjusting to academic life. In a study of 416 international students enrolled in colleges in Florida (Breuder, 1972), the author used the Michigan International Student Problem Inventory and found that at least half of the junior college students had problems with the English language, using a modified form of the questionnaire developed by Gaither and Griffin (1971). Reiff (1972) surveyed 367 international students at the University of Georgia. He also found more than half of the total sample identified English

proficiency as a problem. Some studies have focused on identifying the problems of particular regional groups. Using a questionnaire consisting of 62 items, a study of 118 international graduate students from the Far East at the University of Southern California (Han, 1975) found that the English language and the financial difficulty were the two most serious problems students had in achieving their academic goals. Hull (1978) reported on a survey of international students newly enrolled in three institutions. He found that Asian students rated their academic English extremely low in categories of writing papers, reading, speaking in class and understanding lectures. Compared with other regional groups, Asian students were among the least satisfied with their ability in English with regard to writing papers and reading speed, as well as with regard to their poor ability to speak in class, understand in discussions and lectures, and comprehend their reading materials (Hull, 1978).

Additional studies have investigated not only the problems of the international student in general but also of particular national groups. In analyzing the results of the questionnaires, Reiff (1972) compared responses of Chinese and Indian students apart from other international students. He found that Chinese students most frequently noted English as a problem. Using a modified version of Reiff's questionnaire (1972), Guglielmino and Perkins (1975) surveyed 210 international students at the University of Georgia. They found that the Chinese student noted English proficiency as the first of the top five problems. In order to be accepted by American universities, Chinese students have to pass an English proficiency examination, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) given by the Educational Testing Service in New Jersey. In some universities, the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) and field-related tests are also required for admission. Yet a fairly large number of Chinese students still find it hard to become accustomed to speaking and writing English in their academic work and daily social life.

Besides the obvious disadvantages such as lack of access to proper training in their home country and areas, Yao (1983) recognized two phenomena hindering the Chinese student's progress in English in American universities. First, the likelihood of choosing a Chinese roommate and continuing to share the same style of daily living including Chinese language; and second, the choice of their majors such as computer science, accounting and engineering require a minimum of language skills. The tendency of keeping oneself isolated from the mainstream culture and having less practice with English often results in new difficulties in students' future academic and social adjustment.

Some studies relate to the issue of prediction of academic performance of the Chinese student at an English-language university. Spinks and Hu's (1984) study provided evidence of factors which are important in determining the ability of a student to adapt to an English-language university. The data were collected longitudinally over five years from 190 male and female undergraduate students at the University of Hong Kong. Using multiple regression, multiple correlation, path analysis and canonical correlation analysis, the review showed that ability in English language provided a good and reasonably independent predictor of success.

Other studies identified needs of intensive English studied in the United States and its relation with personal and social problems. Using a needs statement inventory, Deressa and Beavers (1986) studied 70 international students to identify their academic and nonacademic needs in a midwestern college of home economics. Significant differences were found between the variables of (a) English studied in the United States, (b) the effect of English language when taking examinations, and (c) adjustment in personal and social problems. Additional findings indicated that students wanted faculty members to consider the language difficulties they encountered when asked to take essay examinations and while listening to lectures. Based on the study, recommendations were made including those of creating an awareness among faculty and advisors in the college of language difficulties

when taking examinations, finding ways to reduce the difficulties, and encouraging students to master the English language in addition to taking the required English courses and the English placement examinations.

Academic Needs and Adjustment

International students come to the United States from almost everywhere in the world. Some of their most important goals which are frequently mentioned are: (a) acquiring knowledge and skills in their academic fields, (b) obtaining an advanced degree from the American university, and (c) improving career opportunities at home, or in the host country (Han, 1975; Lee et al., 1981; Leong & Sedlacek, 1988; Yao, 1983). In assessing the international student's academic needs, a number of studies found that difficulties in understanding lectures, participating in class discussions and preparing oral and written reports, all language related, were the most serious academic problems (Breuder, 1972; Rising & Copp, 1968; Sharma, 1971). Other studies found that the international students need to be acclimated to the unfamiliar U.S. academic system. In addition to mastering course materials, they may have to become familiar with a new grading system and the difference between units and credits, semesters and trimesters. They also have to become accustomed to the use of discussion sections and numerous multiple-choice exams (Deressa & Beavers, 1986; Leong & Sedlacek, 1988). Although the international students face difficulties in adjustment on U.S. campuses, they also have been found to have strong academic skills, high educational aspirations, and positive attitudes toward their colleges and universities (Boyer & Sedlacek, 1986; Carter & Sedlacek, 1986; Leong & Sedlacek, 1986; Manese, Leong, & Sedlacek, 1985; Manese, Sedlacek & Leong, 1988). In a study of the academic and career needs of 215 international students, Leong and Sedlacek (1988) found that the international students were less concerned about specific study skills such as using the library, taking tests, and taking better notes. Instead they were more concerned about their academic plans and expressed greater need for

(a) help in selecting/scheduling courses (ranked first), (b) more help from academic advisors (ranked fifth), and (c) help in establishing their academic program plan (ranked sixth).

Published studies on sex and age differences among international students are limited and show mixed results (Dadfar & Friedlander, 1982; Lee et al., 1981). Manese, Sedlacek and Leong (1988) explored the needs and perceptions of 96 female and male international undergraduate students and found significant differences on two academic needs items. Women reported greater needs to become more comfortable in speaking up in class and to take better class notes than did men. Men and women were similar in the areas of general study skills, writing skills, and academic advising. In a study of 118 foreign graduate students from the Far East, Han (1975) found no significant difference in needs of classroom discussions and writing term papers between students who were under and over 30 years old.

A number of studies have been conducted about the international students from specific areas. Sharma's (1971) study focused on the adjustment problems experienced by 195 non-European graduate students. She found that the academic problems which were considered most severe by the students were giving oral reports, participating in class discussions, taking notes in class, understanding lectures, taking appropriate courses of study, and preparing and writing reports.

In a study of 1,147 international students on their adaptation problems, Heikinheimo and Shute (1986) found that heavy academic pressure is commonly experienced by African and Southeast Asian students. All Chinese students in this study were supported by their families, and family expectations seemed to be an important factor in students' attempts to perform well. In a comparison of the adjustment problems of three international student groups, Perkins and others (1977) surveyed 210 international students and found that the Chinese students perceived "adequacy of educational preparation" and

"difficulty in getting along with my teacher" as more important problems than the Indian students did.

Chinese students, like many other international and U.S. students, have some common reservations about asking questions in class. They are usually very shy, not wanting to look foolish by asking a "dumb" question; not wanting to waste class time on questions that maybe only one student has, etc. (Van Naerssen et al., 1984). In a word, Chinese students prefer to be good listeners rather than talkers. Even though they have questions concerning course materials or class assignments, they seldom ask the professor a question. Instead, they either figure out the answers by themselves or get them from classmates (Yao, 1983). Van Naerssen et al. (1984) collected tape data and contextual notes from 105 graduate science majors in two universities in Southern California, and found additional causes for a reluctance to ask the professor a question. In case a professor does not know the answer, he or she might loose face. Chinese students also believe that disrupting the professor's teaching might be considered rude. They usually assume that questions may be asked after class rather than in class. Feng (1991) reported a study from 52 Chinese students through participant observations and interviews. The results were: (a) Chinese students, either supported by government or families, have heavy pressures to perform well and usually do quite well academically; (b) Chinese students have difficulty in understanding lectures, taking notes, answering questions and writing essays; and (c) academic concerns are expressed differently by Chinese students depending on majors. Science students generally adapt better than social science students. Besides the ability to take notes, participate in class discussions, and write essays and term papers, social science students require a better understanding of American cultures, values and social system. In a comparative study of Chinese-American student life-styles, Kuo and Spees (1983) found that Chinese and American students were very similar in their study habits and reported

similar feelings during exam period. Chinese students in the U.S. should not have much trouble with their study methods once they overcome culture shock.

Regarding academic needs, Deressa and Beavers (1986) suggested investigating ways in which course work could be applicable to the needs of the home country and future careers. Other suggestions included more help from academic advisors, and help in establishing student's academic programs, and in selecting/scheduling courses (Leong & Sedlacek, 1988).

Personal Needs and Adjustment

Although the main goal of international students is educational in nature, they have all kinds of difficulties with their personal needs and adjustment (Han, 1975; Lee, 1981; Deressa & Beavers, 1985). In a study of the academic achievement by international students, Kim (1973) found noticeable differences in their current satisfaction with American educational programs based on their region of origin, academic problems, personal problems and future plans. To identify the adjustment problems experienced by graduate students from Asia, Africa and Latin America in the universities in the state of North Carolina, Sharma (1971) analyzed 195 completed returns and found the most severe personal problems concerned home sickness, adequate housing, enough funds, and finding companionship with the opposite sex. Sharma also found a strong positive relationship among the academic, personal and social adjustment of these students. According to Schram and Lauver (1988), academic success may be hindered by inadequate or slow adjustment to the university setting. Pruitt (1978) found that the major problems faced by international students in her survey were in the areas of adjusting to a different climate, communication with Americans, discrimination, homesickness, depression, irritability and tiredness, particularly when they first arrived on campus. Most of these difficulties diminished overtime. Only a small number of students felt comfortable with American food, climate, establishing friendship and dating patterns.