

Experiences and Perceptions of Chinese Students (Ph.D. Dissertation Research)
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Some General Findings

- Limited interactions and friendships with Americans.
 - positive attitudes, but did not describe many deep, or meaningful interactions, experiences, etc.
- More relationships and more contexts = more opportunities to meet Americans who they can connect with...
- They recognize they need to be more outgoing and not isolate themselves, but think **Americans** should also be more outgoing to them.

Acculturation & Adaptation

- Low levels of *Cultural* adaptation
 - Few examples of *questioning, trying new things, being learners, etc.*
 - Assume Language is their only problem, yet recount many issues that are more culture than language

Culture Difficulty: Examples

“For example, this semester, I have a Sociology of Gender class, they talk all together [girls and guys], for example, male classmates talk with a couple about their [sexual] relationship, in class, its really casual, they discuss everything.”

- Difficulty meeting Americans and developing friendships
- Unease with American morality
- High/Low Context communication difficulties
- Expectations of friendship
- Taking initiative
- Overall ease in American situations
- Roommate Expectations

Possible reasons for low-levels of Acculturation:

- Academic pressure/focus
- Low Motivation

- Lack of understanding what “culture” is, how it affects, & ongoing nature of acculturation/adaptation
 - ...they *believe* they have adapted.
 - May not realize the process takes years.

- American students lack Chinese qualities of outgoingness & hospitality... (which leads to lack of interaction and) lowered expectations.

- **Previous familiarity with American culture through media!?**

“Core-Cultural Norms” in Flux? (Shanghai Intercultural Institute, 2005)

Today's Chinese may have three or more “sets” of values that operate, depending on the context.

- 1) Traditional values:** Hierarchy, Family orientation, Societal order, Relationships, Harmony, Seniority, Face saving
- 2) “Socialist” values:** Egalitarianism, Country orientation, Party Centrality, Class background, Sacrifice
- 3) Emerging “Globalization” values:** Less hierarchical, Individualist-Materialist, Hero: Entrepreneur, Current oriented, More direct communication

Specific Findings (Explanations From Respondents)

- Chinese “Shyness”

“While Americans speak up in class, Chinese will never do this”

“Chinese mostly use the lecture as a format, but also in terms of the general personality, Chinese, compared to Americans, just don't talk that often and don't like to reveal their personal information that often. Compared to some Americans, who really feel comfortable

revealing their personal information, to start a conversation. Um, Chinese are opposite in that sense. So I think its important to know that if Chinese don't speak, its not because they are awkward, but its because they don't feel comfortable speaking in a public setting."

"And so at the beginning... I didn't talk a lot at all. And I got this sense that for American students, if you don't talk, then they really don't think that you know much about the issue. Not like Chinese, where we have *Chenmo shi jin [silence is golden]* – because Chinese they value modesty in a sense, so they don't like people who always talk... Because in China if you were quiet, people would not automatically assume you don't know, they would probably suspect, 'well, maybe you know a LOT, you just don't talk!' But for Americans, they would think that you don't know. You don't talk, how would they know how much you know..."

- Respondents often describe shyness as a cultural trait (hard to overcome)

- Seems weird to them to go up to strangers and make conversation; also takes a while until they feel comfortable asking/sharing personal things with acquaintances.

"Actually, I don't often initiate with them [classmates]. Because I think I can't. I actually haven't asked them questions. At most I just ask a little, like you know we have to write a lot of papers? So I ask things like, 'Oh, what's your paper topic?' but a not more personal than that."

- Collectivistic people tend to stick to their ingroups, and be less open to sharing with outsiders.

- But they DO *want* to speak, and make friends, and have a lot they can say.

- Can be overcome.

Stereotypes & Perceptions of Americans

- Mostly positive toward Americans: "nice," generous; see similarities with themselves

- But... also see Americans as closed-minded

- Keen that Americans don't stereotype them.

Negative Experiences

- Roommates (sometimes)

- Classrooms (sometimes)

- Male/Female interaction with Americans

- Regarding Tea at 3, a female:

"I was looking for a girl, so I could feel more relaxed."

Desires

- Would like for Americans to be more open.

- More adventurous: Try different foods...

- More open to other opinions

- More willing to accept different world-views and points of view...

- More willing to meet new people from new places.

Suggestions

- More supported, planned interactions.

- Chinese need reminders to be brave, step out, investigate!

- Americans Need Training!

- Tend to be anxious/apprehensive

- Not good at accommodating

- Different expectations

- Develop ethno-relativity

- Encourage Chinese to develop networks of Americans rather than look to one or two for their friendship needs.