

Predictors of acculturative stress in Chinese academic sojourners in Pakistan

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Objective: To examine the predictors of acculturative stress among Chinese academic sojourners in Pakistan.

Methodology: In this cross-sectional survey, 250 Chinese academic sojourners were enrolled from International Islamic University Islamabad and National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad. Data were collected from January to March 2017. Self-report instruments like East Asian Immigrant Acculturation, Culture Distance Index and Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students were used. Multiple regression analysis was used for data analysis.

Results: Different acculturation strategies differently influenced acculturative stress. Integration and assimilation strategies positively

predicted acculturative stress while separation and marginalization negatively predicted this among Chinese academic sojourners. Moreover perceived culture distance also predicted acculturative stress positively.

Conclusion: The study confirmed that while living for a limited time in Pakistan, Chinese use different acculturation strategies that differently affect the level of stress and vice versa. Therefore, Chinese sojourners are suggested to use appropriate acculturation strategies and focus on the similarities in both cultures that will surely help to reduce their acculturative stress. (Rawal Med J 202;45:902-905).

Keywords: Acculturation, perceived culture distance, acculturative stress.

INTRODUCTION

The movement of academic sojourners and scholars across the national boundaries has become a common trend all over the world in recent years. They travel to other countries for sake of studies and training. Such flow toward different societies comes with great cultural changes that may result in negative psychological consequences. Thus, acculturation has become the major focus of studies in cross cultural psychology. The government of Pakistan has special plan to make Pakistan a center of international education in South and East Asia.¹ Berry defined acculturation a process that involves the changes and transitions rooted in cross cultural contacts.² Acculturating individuals have to face multiple psychological and socio-cultural transitions while they start living in diverse societies that are very different from their heritage culture. Such individuals experience different level of acculturation that determines different degree of psychological health and mental satisfaction. Cultural transition is always hard to handle because it appears with number of negative consequences such as hostility, uncertainty and depression.^{3,4} This

stress may become a serious risk for overall quality of life, physical and psychological functioning and well-being among sojourners.⁵ Acculturation is considered as dimensional phenomena and in order to handle challenges of acculturation, acculturating individuals may use four strategies including assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization. All strategies are based on two questions, first is related to what degree acculturating individuals think to maintain their cultural identity with the heritage culture while the second question deals with to what degree immigrants consider the participation with the host culture is valueable.⁶ Assimilation is the attitude of acculturating individuals marked with preference to have contact with the host society while little concern to maintain heritage culture. In contrast, separation strategy involves the preference to maintain culture of origin while having no value for interacting with the host society. Marginalization is considered very weak strategy that represents neither preference for heritage culture maintenance nor for contact participation with host culture.⁷ Acculturation strategies have predictive

relationship with acculturative stress, also known as cultural shocks marked with feeling of depression, confusion, anxiety and stress while experiencing cultural transitions.^{8,9}

Level of acculturative stress is based on chosen strategy during the course of acculturation. The integration is found as positive predictor of psychological health. Sojourners have concern not only to maintain their cultural identity but also focus to have extending relations with the dominant society. Such individuals experience less acculturative stress and easily adapt the new culture. On the opposite hand, marginalization and separation is associated with greater level of acculturative stress.¹⁰ Cross cultural literature demonstrated that sojourners are high risk group to involve in acculturative stress.¹¹ A comparative study on acculturative stress was conducted among different acculturating group and non-acculturating group such as immigrants, refugees, native and ethnic groups and showed higher level of acculturative stress among sojourners than their counter parts.¹² In addition, concept of cultural distance was introduced to examine the extent of distress experienced by sojourners who move toward a new culture that is different from their culture of birth.^{13,14} The level of psychological distress increased when greater cultural distance was perceived by cultural travelers.¹⁵ The present study is an aim to investigate the effect of acculturation strategies and perceived culture distance on acculturative stress.

METHODOLOGY

This cross sectional survey included 250 Chinese academic sojourners and Purposive sampling was used for data collection. Only those sojourners became part of study that were full time university students enrolled in any degree program and had been living in Pakistan minimum for one year and maximum for five years. Sojourners did not meet predefined criteria were excluded from the study. Students were personally approached by researcher from different departments of International Islamic University Islamabad and National University of Modern Languages Islamabad. Data were collected with the permission of concerning authorities. Written informed consent was obtained from the

participants.

In order to measure all study variables, self-report measures were used as this measurement method is very effective to reduce the effect of social desirability in survey research. Permission was taken to use scale in present study. Three scales including East Asian Immigrant Acculturation (measures acculturation strategies)⁸ comprised of 29, Culture Distance Index (measures perceive cultural distance)¹² consisted of 16 item and Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (measures acculturative stress among sojourners)¹³ comprised of 36 items were used to measure Acculturation strategies, perceive cultural distance and acculturative stress, respectively. All scales are reported as valid and reliable and have been used in many researches on international students among various societies.¹⁴

Statistical Analysis: Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 22. Multiple regression analyses with enter method was computed with acculturation strategies (Integration, Assimilation, Separation and Marginalization) and perceived cultural stress as predictors while acculturative stress as an outcome variable.

RESULTS

The significant positive effect on acculturative stress was observed for integration and assimilation while significant negative affect was found for separation, marginalization and perceived culture distance.

Table. Multiple regression analysis for the effect of acculturation strategies and perceived culture distance on acculturative stress (N=250).

Variable	Model 1B	95% CI LL, UL	Tolerance	VIF
(constant)	41.75	[28.72, 54.79]		
Integration	-.37***	[-1.99, -1.36]	.45	2.23
Assimilation	-.12***	[-.26, -.70]	.86	1.68
Separation	.21***	[.55, 1.04]	.53	1.86
Marginalization	.11**	[.13, .79]	.37	2.67
Perceived Culture Distance	.41***	[.85, 1.30]	.31	3.19
R ²		.86***		
F		298.48***		

** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Values of VIF and tolerance were computed to check whether the multi collinearity is a cause of

concern or not. Tolerance value above .20 and VIF value less than 5 indicates that there is not serious issue of multi-collinearity (Table).

DISCUSSION

It was hypothesized that acculturation strategies predict acculturative stress among Chinese academic sojourners. Findings confirmed the previous evidences in this context. The contact between two different culture, the host and heritage culture bring number of changes in terms of language, identity, personality traits and even cognitive styles. This situation generally lead toward feeling of distress among cross cultural travelers as the study with Latina women reveals the higher the level of acculturation, the more negative effects are experienced (Falicov 2002).¹⁴

Moreover, we clarified that by adopting some strategies sojourners may increase or decrease the effects such as acculturative stress that are experienced during the course of cultural transition.¹⁰ Evidences consistently indicated that cross cultural transition is related with stress and coping frame work and factors within acculturation experience are responsible for acculturative stress.¹⁵⁻

¹⁷ More specifically, we found that cross culture transitions related with serious threat for psychological wellbeing of students enrolled in higher educational institutes.¹⁸ Studies deal with cross culture contact revealed that the major factors behind acculturative stress are acculturation orientation strategies and amount of stress experienced by sojourners is mainly dependent on the selected acculturation strategy. Integration and assimilation strategies linked with low level of acculturative stress while this picture is completely reversed when separation and marginalization strategy is used.^{4,7,10}

Separated and marginalized are predisposed to have high level of stress while integration and assimilation goal goes with minimal stress.¹⁹ Present study also hypothesized that perceive cultural distance will negatively predict acculturative stress among Chinese academic sojourners. Finding are in line with the existing studies as a study found that acculturating individuals experience mental health problem when they perceive greater distance

between country of origin and country of settlement.²⁰ Similarly, adaptation literature illustrated that acculturating individuals experience greater difficulty to adapt host culture but these difficulties can be minimal if they found values, customs, climate, food and family structure of host culture are same as in their heritage culture. Several studies have been consistently proving that perceived cultural distance positively predict difficulties in cross cultural adaptation in individuals undergone in cultural transition.²¹⁻²³

Acculturation is always fraught with number of challenges that can be threatening for overall well-being of intercultural travelers. Thus, it seems essential to examine the role of acculturation in the lives of sojourners to better understand their psychological health. More over Poyrazli et al argued, "Despite the substantial body of literature that addresses adjustment processes among student sojourners, only a small portion of this literature has in fact, addressed the issue of acculturative stress".²⁴ Thus present study will prove to be a worthy contribution in the existing literature. Despite the fact that present study has important implication it is not free from limitations. Cross-sectional survey research design was used in the present study that has problem of low internal validity. Moreover, all constructs were measured through self-reported measure that may cause the problem of single source biasness. Future researchers are suggested to use multiple sources to illuminate theses issue.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that while living for a limited time in Pakistan, Chinese use different acculturation strategies that differently affect the level of stress and vice versa.

Author Contributions:

Conception and Design: Sehrish Nawaz
Collection and Assembly of data: Sehrish Nawaz
Analysis and interpretation of data: Sehrish Nawaz
Drafting of the article: Sehrish Nawaz
Critical revision of the article for important intellectual content: Naveed Riaz
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Conflict of Interest: None declared
Rec. Date: May 10, 2020 Revision Rec. Date: Jun 27, 2020 Accept Date: Oct 15, 2020

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