

Research Status about Influence Factors of International Students' Cross-Cultural Adaptation with Different Models

Man Luo*, Xiaofang Zhang

Department of Public Health, Medical School of Yangtze University, Jingzhou, China

Email: *luoman1215@126.com

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Abstract

With the advancement of global economic integration, the internationalization of higher education is constantly increasing, along with flourishing studies about cross-cultural adaptation of international students. Cross-cultural adaptation of international students was studied by researchers from different perspectives such as cross-cultural psychology, cross-cultural communication, and social psychology. To provide theoretical basis for the management of international students, this paper summarizes several predictors of cross-cultural adaptation with different models observed amongst international students.

Keywords

International Students, Cross-Cultural Adaptation, Influence Factors

1. Introduction

With the development of economic globalization and the convenience of studying abroad, more students choose to study abroad. According to data from United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, the number of internationally mobile students—those who study in foreign countries where they are not permanent residents jumped by 41% between 1999 and 2004 (Millward, 2006). International students, accounting for a large percentage of the population will produce cross-cultural pressure when facing different natural environments and social cultures. If there are not enough countermeasures, acculturation will fail. The failure of acculturation makes international students not only suffer from academic failure, but can also cause serious physical and psychological diseases (Yu, Chen, & Li, 2014; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Arasaratnam, 2015). In addition, the social and cultural adaptation of international stu-

dents in the country where they study will affect their evaluation of that country after they return to their homelands. Therefore, the study of cross-cultural adaptation of international students has become a practical need.

Research on cross-cultural adaptation initially originates from immigrant groups found in western countries where the situation of international students and immigrants is similar, yet different. A large number of scholars have applied the cross-cultural adaptation model of immigrants to international students, discussing the influencing factors of the cross-cultural adaptation. Some studies have proposed that there are different modes of cross-cultural adaptation and different influencing factors under different modes (Shafaei, Razak, & Nejati, 2016). Starting from the mode of cross-cultural adaptation, this paper makes a comprehensive and systematic review of the main influencing factors of student cross-cultural adaptation in different modes, therefore providing the theoretical basis for the management of international students.

2. Concepts and Modes of Cross-Cultural Adaptation

2.1. The Concept of Cross-Cultural Adaptation

The study of cross-cultural adaptation originated in the United States in the 20th century. Opinions may vary on the concept of cross-cultural adaptation. At present, most scholars accept the following two concepts. In 1936, Redfield et al. defined cross-cultural adaptation from the perspective of sociology as “the phenomenon that continuous and direct cultural contact between groups with different cultures leads to the change of the original cultural mode of one or both parties” (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). Subsequently, the cross-cultural psychologist Berry J. W. proposed this concept from the perspective of psychology, that is, “the change of social culture and psychological behavior caused by two or more cultural groups and/or individuals in the contact process” (Berry, 1992). Such changes are reflected at the group and individual levels. The group level pays more attention to the changes of social structure, economic foundation and political organization, whereas the individual level primarily refers to the changes of individual values and behaviors. Furthermore, Berry points out that this change occurs not only in the acculturating population, but also in the host population, only emit less of an effect on the subjective population.

Ward C. and his team believed that cross-cultural adaptation includes psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation (Searle & Ward, 1990). Furthermore researchers use different outcome variables to evaluate psychological adaptation from both positive and negative aspects such as homesickness, depression, stress, suicidal thoughts, sense of belonging on campus, psychological well-being, life satisfaction, self-esteem, etc. (Maffini, 2017; Glass & Westmont, 2014; Tonsing, 2013). Social cultural adaptation is mainly evaluated based on the living environment adaptation, interpersonal adaptation and perceived value adaptation. Aspects of such adaptations include the host culture consciousness, the ability to deal with problems, and the ability to establish and maintain rela-

tionships with the host population (Xiong & Zhou, 2018; Pedersen et al., 2011; Yu & Wright, 2016). Afterwards, some scholars should also put forward a specialized group for international students including academic adaptation in the social cultural adaptation (Bastien, Seifen-Adkins, & Johnson, 2018).

2.2. Mode of Cross-Cultural Adaptation

At present, there are three widely recognized modes of intercultural adaptation: pressure coping mode, cultural acquisition mode and social identity mode (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

The pressure coping mode is held in the absence of external stimuli and interference, therefore allowing the individual's mind and behavior to remain in a stable state. When individuals come into contact with the host culture, a person's way of thinking and values will be impacted, leading to changes in a person's cognition and behavior, causing pressure on people. When individuals do not have sufficient coping strategies to face stressors, cross-cultural pressure will be very large, thus leading to depression, anxiety and other psychological problems (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

The cultural acquisition model holds that the process of cross-cultural adaptation is a process of continuous learning. This model focuses on the social interaction between the host population and the adopted population. In the process of individual growth, customs, gestures, norms and so forth form parts of a culture, on which people rely on to adapt to the environment. When individuals leave the common original culture and enter a new host culture environment, they will feel uncertain, pressure, and even face anxiety among many other emotions. In order to reduce this anxiety, individuals must learn the skills and rules of communication about the subjective culture. The famous theory in this model is the uncertainty avoidance and anxiety theory by William B. G. (Yang, 2009b).

The social identity model pays more attention to the change of individual attribution, expectation, attitude and value. In the cross-cultural process, due to long-term contact with the host culture, individuals will think about their self-positioning, whether to give up their original culture or to adopt the host culture (Yang, 2009c).

In addition, some researchers put forward the Relative Acculturation Extended Model (RAEM) (Navas, García, Sánchez, Rojas, Pumares et al., 2005) and the recovery Model of cross-cultural adaptation (Wang., 2011). RAEM Model proposes that no matter the host group or the adopted group, they each adopt different cross-cultural strategies in different situations. For example, in study and work, they adopt the assimilation strategy, meanwhile in the aspect of belief, they adopt the isolation strategy. Besides, the model divides the cross-cultural adaptation strategies of the adopted population and the host population into ideal strategies and practical strategies. For example, the host population expects to adopt an integrated cross-cultural strategy, but when the host population adopts an apartheid strategy, the adopted population is forced to adopt an actual

strategy of separation or marginalization in the process of intercultural adaptation (Navas, García, Sánchez, Rojas, Pumares et al., 2005). Cross-cultural adaptation recovery mode hold that cross cultural adaptation is a dynamic process in which the adopted people are brought into a new culture, and new environment having high spirits at the initial delight stage. However, with the increase of contact with the host population, all sorts of problems emerge gradually increasing depression. Whilst gradually learning new culture and adapting to the new environment, the adopted population feels stabilized (Wang, 2011).

3. Factors Influencing Cross-Cultural Adaptation

Cross-cultural adaptation is a complex process involving different influencing factors of cross-cultural adaptation in which patterns may vary. Nevertheless, there are also common influencing factors, the demographic characteristics of students, such as, gender, age, education, marital status, and if they study abroad or not (Mahmood & Burke, 2018; Bulgan, 2017). Furthermore time and the pro-phase experience of studying abroad, whether to accept cross-cultural training, the purpose of the study abroad and so forth are all factors that involve cross-cultural adaptation (Sit, Mak, & Neill, 2017; Yang, 2005). The following is a summary of the three main intercultural adaptation modes of specific factors.

3.1. Influencing Factors Based on Stress Coping Mode

3.1.1. Personality

Personality has always been an important factor in the study of intercultural adaptation. The Big Five Personalities have long been used to predict intercultural adaptation. Studies have shown that an extroverted personality is easier to adapt to the environment and is positively correlated with psychological well-being, while neurotic personality is negatively correlated with mental health (Chen, Benet-Martínez, & Bond, 2008; Benet-Martínez & Karakitapoglu-Aygün, 2003). However, some scholars have proposed that although the Big Five personalities are universal, they lack the particularity of cross-cultural situations, therefore, developing special personality tools. Take for example the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) proposed by Dutch scholars Van D. Z. and Van O. in 2000. The questionnaire divides multicultural personality into five dimensions: cultural empathy, cultural openness, social initiative, emotional stability and flexibility. Studies have found that cultural empathy, openness and flexibility are positively correlated with intercultural adaptation (Ahadi & Puente-Díaz, 2011).

3.1.2. Adult Attachment Style

Attachment theory was first proposed by British psychoanalyst Bowlby in 1969 when he studied the special emotional attachment between caregivers and children (Bowlby, 1969). Later, it was found that the experience of early parent-child relationship forms people's "internal working model", which will play a role in intimate and marital relationships in adulthood. This influences people's attitude

towards strangers and unfamiliar environments (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). Chia-Chih DC Wang et al. conducted relevant studies on Chinese students in the United States and found that both high attachment anxiety and high attachment avoidance were negatively correlated with socio-cultural adjustment and mental health (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Another survey conducted by Anigonos Sochos et al. among Brazilian immigrants living in the UK found that secure attachment and dismissing attachment play a moderating role on the impact of socio-cultural adjustment difficulties on one's mental health (Marre-ro-Quevedo, Blanco-Hernández, & Hernández-Cabrera, 2019).

3.1.3. Cognitive Appraisal

In the process of intercultural adaptation, the cognitive evaluation of pressure affects the coping style, thus exerting an influence on intercultural adaptation. According to processes of pressure evaluation, Cognitive appraisal can be divided into primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal refers to an evaluation of an individual's potential to harm caused by a stress source, meanwhile a secondary appraisal compares different coping resources when dealing with a stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to the pressure type, cognitive appraisal can be divided into threat and challenge appraisal, the former focusing on the potential losses in the face of the pressure, while the latter focuses on the acquisition and growth of individual coping ability through the experience of the stress (Szabo, Ward, & Fletcher, 2019). Pan J.Y., taking overseas students in Australia as research subjects found that the threat assessment was positively correlated with negative emotions such as depression, while the challenge assessment was positively correlated with positive emotions (Pan, 2008; Pan, 2015).

3.1.4. Coping Styles

Coping styles refers to all the strategies used to deal with different pressures and a habit preference of individuals in dealing with problems. Lazarus and Folkman divided coping styles into problem-centered coping styles and emotion-centered coping styles (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). On this basis, Endler and Parker further added the avoidance coping styles (Amirkhan, 1990). Problem centered coping tends to seek to eliminate or change the influence of external stressors by taking planned actions, such as making action plans and then implementing them, conducting psychological counseling, etc. Emotion-centered coping tends to adopt psychological defense to avoid and ignore stressors, such as refusing to believe, venting at others, etc. Avoidant coping style adopts pressure transfer strategies to avoid directly facing stressors, such as visiting friends or watching the television. The study also found that the above three coping styles played a mediating role between intercultural adaptation and intercultural stress. In addition, the emotion-centered coping styles were positively correlated with intercultural stress, while problem-centered coping styles and avoidance coping styles were negatively correlated with intercultural stress (Ra & Trusty, 2015).

3.1.5. Social Support Networks

Social support networks refer to the social network in which individuals can obtain various kinds of resource support (such as material, emotional, etc.) Social support obtained by international students mainly comes from their family, compatriots in host population, friends of other nationalities in the host population or the host population. Such support can be emotional support or material support. However, social support networks from different sources have different influences on intercultural adaptation. Hendrickson, B.D. and other studies found that the more friends one has from the main group, the higher the quality of friendship, thus increasing the life satisfaction of international students and lowering chances of homesickness (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011). Jian Raymond Rui et al. stated that the use of quality social network sites and communication with the host population through social network would reduce cognitive barriers and was conducive to intercultural adaptation. Albeit, communication with compatriots in the main population would be detrimental to intercultural adaptation (Rui & Wang, 2015).

3.2. Influencing Factors Based on Cultural Acquisition Models

3.2.1. Sense of Cultural Distance

In 1980, Babiker et al. pointed out that cultural distance refers to the geographical distance between different cultures. Geographically far apart, there are few cultural commonalities, such as social customs, religious beliefs, clothing, weather, food and other great differences. This results in a sense of distance and strangeness causing adaptation between various cultures even more difficult (Yang, 2009a). However, this concept of cultural distance ignores the differences in an individual's subjective perception. In the model of cultural distance, Hallen and Wiedersheim Paul proposed that the perception of cultural distance is influenced by cultural affinity, trust and experience, and the individual's perception of cultural distance will gradually change over time. For example, when foreign students come to a foreign country for the first time, they will have a higher level of cultural distance and overtime will understand the main culture. After establishing trust with others in the main culture, the sense of cultural distance gradually decreases (Guo, 2013). Research shows that the greater the sense of cultural distance, the lower the intercultural psychological adaptation and social cultural adaptation (Suanet & Van de Vijver, 2009; Taušova, Bender, Dimitrovad, & van de Vijver, 2019).

3.2.2. Host Language Proficiency

The fluent language of the host population makes the foreign students more willing to communicate with them, which is more conducive to the learning and adaptation of the host culture. Mahmood, H. and others found that English proficiency of international students in the United States is positively correlated with their intercultural psychological adaptation, social cultural adaptation and academic adaptation (Mahmood & Burke, 2018). Zhang Yuming and other re-

searchers also found that the level of Chinese was significantly positively correlated with intercultural adaptation of students from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan universities at the beginning of their enrollment (Zhang & Zhang, 2016).

3.2.3. Self-Deterministic Motivation

The self-determination theory by American psychologist Deci and Ryan, is about the motivation theories of human behavior. The theory pays attention to the extent to which human behavior is voluntary and self-determination, and emphasizes the active function in the process of self-motivation. Depending on the degree of self-determination motivation is regarded as a continuum from no external motive to internal motive. When individuals think that some kind of behavior is of no value, such behaviors are without any motivation, namely those that are not self-determination behaviors. When individuals think some kind of behavior is advantageous and enjoyable, the actions for the internal motive of this behavior, are namely self-determination behaviors (Zhang, 2018). Studies have found that by developing motivation of self-determination, one has a more outstanding academic achievement and a greater sense of personal well-being (Wei, Shaffer, Young, & Zakalik, 2005). Motivation for self-determination comes by satisfying basic psychological needs to achieve cross-cultural adaptation. In such scenarios, international students are able to dominate their own behavior facing the main culture head on, having a stronger willpower to adapt to the environment, increasing their learning self-efficacy, and a greater desire to participate in social activities, building relations with the host population (Kwok, Chui, & Wong, 2013; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). Therefore, the higher the subjective well-being, the easier it is to adapt to the main culture (Yang, Zhang, & Sheldon, 2018).

3.2.4. Cultural Intelligence

In 2003, Earley and Ang for the first time put forward the concept of cultural intelligence. They believed that cultural intelligence is reflected based on different cultural backgrounds, collecting and processing information effectively. Furthermore, making reasonable judgments and the ability to take effective measures to adapt to the new culture, including metacognitive, cognitive, motive and behavior four dimensions also greater reflects on the cultural intelligence according to different cultural norms (Earley & Ang, 2003). A large number of studies have also found that the dynamic cultural intelligence, mechanical dimension, and the behavioral dimension are correlated with cross-cultural adaptation. It is believed that individuals with such high motivational dimensions tend to have sufficient encouragement to learn a new culture and have an increased self-efficacy for cross-cultural adaptation. Individuals with high behavioral dimensions can properly use languages, gestures, facial expressions, and even body language in communication between different cultures (Ang, Van Dyne, Koh, Ng, Templer, Tay et al., 2007; Huff, Song, & Gresch, 2014). Yi Chun Lin found in their research that individuals with high metacognitive cultural intelligence

can handle cognitive process well, and individuals with high cognitive dimension can understand the differences between different cultures rather well. Therefore, both cultural intelligence and cognitive dimension are related to cross-cultural adaptation (Lin, Chen, & Song, 2012).

3.3. Influence Factors Based on Social Identity Model

3.3.1. The Sense of Discrimination

As the largest multicultural country in the world, the United States has been extensively studied on discrimination. Studies show that under the influence of stereotypes, African American students are the most discriminated against followed by Asian Americans, and then white Americans (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Gossett, Cuyjet, & Cockriel, 1998). McCormack proposes that such discrimination increases with time (McCormack, 1995). Senel Poyrazli's study illustrates the result in which he thought with cross-cultural honeymoon period coming to an end, the conflict period of individuals begins with individuals experiencing and feeling uncomfortable in the new environment. That is in addition to an increase in English levels, in which the individual has the ability to understand differences in words or actions (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). The study further found that discrimination levels are high among students, thus leading to an increase in homesickness and an observed increase in cross-cultural barriers (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Suanet & Van De Vijver, 2009).

3.3.2. Cross-Cultural Strategies of Acculturating Population

For Berry, individuals in the process of acculturation are faced with two basic problems. First, preserving the original culture and second, contacting and learning from the host culture. According to an individual's answer to the two problems, the individual in the process of cultural adaptation strategy is divided into four categories. Firstly, we have integration in which one keeps the original culture while actively learning the host culture. Then we have assimilation in which one must give up the original culture and fully accept the host culture. Next, we have separation, the process of cultural adaptation in which a person only identifies themselves as the original culture, unwilling to study from the main culture. Finally, we have the marginalization category in which one does not accept either identity where the original culture does not agree with the host culture (Berry, 1997). The study found that international students who adopted the integration strategy had the least cross-cultural pressure and the highest satisfaction of life. On the contrary, international students who adopted the marginalization strategy were likely to have negative emotions such as sadness, helplessness and tension (Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Pan & Wong, 2011).

4. Summary and Prospect

To sum up, cross-cultural adaptation is based on different modes and has different influencing factors. By controlling above influencing factors, such as: add psychological consulting room to deal with the difficulties which the interna-

tional students faced timely, or increase the cultural exchange activities regularly to reduce the sense of cultural distance, international students could adapt to the new environment as soon as possible. In spite of its insights into existing acculturation research, the limitation should be noted, namely, most of the published articles on cross-cultural adaptation are cross-sectional studies (Shafaei, Razak, & Nejati, 2016; Mahmood & Burke, 2018; Marrero-Quevedo, Blanco-Hernández, & Hernández-Cabrera, 2019). Cross-cultural adaptation is a process, and at different stages, the strategies of acculturation by cross-cultural students and the level of Psychological Well-Being among international students will be different (Emiko & Hisham, 2014; Szabo, Ward, & Fletcher, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to increase the longitudinal research on cross-cultural adaptation, so as to provide reference for educators to intervene in the problem of cross-cultural adaptation of international students.

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Conflicts of Interest

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