Culture Shock and Adaptation Strategies: An Empirical Study of Chinese Students in the Philippine Higher Education Environment

Yan Li [1,2], Christian Prado[1], Wenting Pan[1,2], Xin Sun[1,3], Yong Hu[1]

[1]*St. Paul University Manila, Philippines, Manila*
[2] *Guizhou University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, China, Guizhou*
[3] *Affiliated Hospital of Guangdong Medical University*
Correspondence: Christian Prado（(Faculty, St. Paul University Manila)）

ABSTRACT : *This study explores the cultural shock experienced by Chinese international students in Philippine higher education and their coping strategies. With the growing number of Chinese students choosing the Philippines as a study destination, they encounter challenges related to language barriers, educational system differences, social and cultural variations, and lifestyle changes. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study examines the sources of cultural shock and evaluates the effectiveness of adaptation strategies through questionnaires and interviews. The findings indicate that although students employed strategies like participating in social activities, seeking institutional support, and self-regulation, the outcomes varied based on individual and cultural factors. The study suggests that a combination of institutional support, self-regulation, and social network development can better assist international students in adapting to their new environment and academic life.*

KEYWORDS -*Culture Shock, Adaptation Strategies，International Students*

I. INTRODUCTION

As China's internationalization process accelerates, more and more Chinese students choose to study abroad. According to statistics from the Ministry of Education of China, the total number of Chinese students studying abroad has continued to grow in recent years, especially in emerging study destinations such as the Philippines. The Philippines has attracted a large number of Chinese students to study with its excellent English education environment, relatively low tuition fees and friendly study abroad policies (Sun & Zhang, 2019). This trend has not only promoted exchanges and cooperation between China and the Philippines in the field of education, but also provided a good opportunity for the international development of the Philippines.

However, culture shock is a common challenge faced by Chinese students in the process of cross-cultural adaptation. Culture shock refers to the confusion, anxiety and discomfort that individuals feel when they come into contact with and adapt to a new culture due to cultural differences (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). For Chinese students studying in the Philippines, they may encounter problems such as language barriers, differences in education systems, social and cultural differences, and inconsistent living habits (Wu & Hammond, 2011; Chen & Tran, 2020). These cultural conflicts not only affect their learning outcomes, but may also have adverse effects on their social interactions and daily life.

This study aims to explore the cultural shock and adaptation strategies of Chinese international students in the Philippine higher education environment in order to enrich and expand the existing cultural adaptation theory, especially cross-cultural research in the context of Southeast Asian education (Yang & Li, 2021). The results of the study will provide effective coping strategies for Chinese international students to help them better adapt to the learning and living environment in the Philippines. At the same time, this study will also provide targeted cultural adaptation support suggestions for Philippine universities to further enhance the learning experience and overall satisfaction of Chinese international students and promote long-term cooperation and development between China and the Philippines in the field of education (Li & Wang, 2022).

Study Framework. First, the Cultural Adjustment Theory emphasizes that individuals go through different stages when they come into contact with a new culture, including the honeymoon period, culture shock, adjustment period, and mastery period (Oberg, 1960). This theory provides a basis for studying the cultural adaptation of Chinese international students and helps understand their psychological changes in their study and life in the Philippines. Secondly, culture shock itself is an important concept, defined as the confusion, anxiety, and discomfort that individuals feel in a new cultural environment (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). For Chinese international students, they may encounter language barriers, differences in education systems, and inconsistent living habits during their study in the Philippines (Wu & Hammond, 2011; Chen & Tran, 2020). Finally, the study of adaptation strategies will focus on how international students cope with culture shock, including building social support networks, participating in cultural activities, and adjusting learning methods (Yang & Li, 2021). The effectiveness of these strategies will provide important references for Chinese international students to help them better adapt to the educational environment in the Philippines.

Statement of the Problem. The problems mainly focus on the specific manifestations of culture shock, the effectiveness of adaptation strategies, and influencing factors. The study will explore the strategies adopted by Chinese international students in dealing with these culture shocks and their effectiveness. By addressing these issues, this study will help enhance the educational experience of Chinese international students and promote exchanges and cooperation between China and the Philippines in the field of education.

II.　　METHODOLOGY

This study uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to fully understand the adaptation process of Chinese students in the Philippines. The study is divided into two stages:

1. Quantitative stage: questionnaire survey

The living and learning experiences of 100 Chinese students were collected through questionnaires, and the samples covered different subjects and grades. The questionnaire content includes:

1.1 Cultural adaptation challenges: language barriers, academic pressure, social difficulties and cultural differences.

1.2 Adaptation strategies: such as taking language courses, academic tutoring, social activities and psychological support.

2. Qualitative stage: in-depth interviews

Ten students were randomly selected from the questionnaire survey for in-depth interviews to further understand their adaptation experience and explore their feelings and coping strategies.

3. Data analysis

3.1 Quantitative data: Descriptive statistical analysis was performed using SPSS statistical software, and the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.85, indicating that the questionnaire had high reliability.

3.2 Qualitative data: Thematic analysis was used to code the interview content and identify patterns of adaptation challenges and strategies.

III.　　RESULTS

Main sources of cultural shock

Language barriers: Language barriers are a common adaptation challenge for international students, especially when studying in a non-native language country (Li, 2023; Zhang & Johnson, 2022). Although many

Chinese international students have received English training before going abroad, they still encounter difficulties in actual life and learning, especially in informal communication and professional terminology. This language barrier not only affects class participation and academic performance, but also limits their communication with local students and teachers, leading to a sense of isolation (Zhou et al., 2008; Wu & Hammond, 2011).

Differences in education systems: Differences in education systems play an important role in the adaptation process of international students around the world, especially cultural differences in assessment methods and learning methods (Wang & Li, 2021; Miller & Brown, 2021). The differences between the education systems of China and the Philippines are mainly reflected in teaching methods, assessment methods, curriculum settings, and cultural values education. Chinese education tends to be centralized and standardized, with emphasis on imparting knowledge (Chen & Tran, 2020; Wu & Hammond, 2011). Philippine education curriculum is more flexible, with more emphasis on active student participation and classroom interaction (Sun & Zhang, 2019; Zhou et al., 2008). These differences may have an important impact on the adaptation process of Chinese students in the Philippines.

Sociocultural differences: In the process of sociocultural adaptation, the difference between individualistic and collectivist cultures is an important topic in cross-cultural adaptation research (Kim, 2020; Rodriguez & Chen, 2023). China and the Philippines have significant differences in cultural customs, religious beliefs, social etiquette, and lifestyles. For example, Philippine social culture emphasizes individual expression and participation, while Chinese culture is more conservative and focuses on collectivism. These differences may cause Chinese students to feel uncomfortable in their daily lives and affect their integration into the local society(Yang & Li, 2021).

Differences in living habits: Differences in living habits are common challenges in the process of cross-cultural adaptation, especially in diet, accommodation conditions and social services (Lee & Garcia, 2021; Thompson, 2022). Differences in diet, accommodation conditions and public services can also bring certain inconveniences to Chinese international students. The dietary style in the Philippines is different from that in China, which may cause some students to have difficulties in adapting to the diet. In addition, different pace of life and climate may also have an impact on their daily life and mental state (Sun & Zhang, 2019).

Adaptation strategies

Actively participate in social activities: Many students expand their social circles by joining clubs and participating in activities to promote communication with local students and other international students (Li & Wang, 2022). Social interaction and cultural adaptation play a key role in enhancing the mental health and sense of belonging of international students (Chen & Liu, 2021; Martinez, 2023). This participation not only helps them adapt to the new social environment faster, but also enhances their sense of belonging.

Seek school support: International students generally believe that the psychological counseling and cultural adaptation courses provided by the school have played a positive role in their adaptation process (Sun & Zhang, 2019). Studies have shown that school support services are important for international students to adapt to a new culture (Park & Jones, 2022; Evans & Smith, 2023). Such services can help them better understand the local culture and enhance psychological resilience.

Self-regulation: International students cope with cultural shock and academic challenges through self-management and adjustment strategies (Williams & Lee, 2022; Ng, 2023). Some students cope with academic pressure and improve their academic performance by making study plans and proper time management (Zhou et al., 2008). This self-regulation not only improves their learning outcomes, but also enhances their self-confidence.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

Main sources of cultural shock

Research shows that the cultural shock of Chinese students in the Philippines comes from various sources, including language, education system, social culture, and living habits. These cultural shocks do not exist independently, but are intertwined and influence each other.

Complexity of language barriers

Although most Chinese students have a basic knowledge of English before going abroad, they still feel confused in actual communication, especially in daily informal communication and professional learning. This is not only a problem of language skills, but may also be related to students' unfamiliarity with the Filipino accent and expression. In addition, this language discomfort may aggravate their sense of isolation and anxiety, indicating that language is not only a tool, but also an important bridge for cultural adaptation. Therefore, future countermeasures need to go beyond simple language training and focus on cultural and expression differences in actual communication situations.

Adaptation challenges brought about by differences in education systems

Research reveals that the differences in teaching methods and cultural values education between China and the Philippines are a major obstacle to the adaptation process of Chinese students. Although Philippine classrooms place more emphasis on student participation and interaction, it takes a certain amount of time and adjustment for Chinese students to adapt to this flexible and student-centered model. This difficulty in adaptation may not only be limited to the difference in teaching methods, but also involve different expectations for learning and teacher-student relationships in cultural contexts. Therefore, when helping international students adapt, educational institutions may need to design targeted courses or activities to narrow this expectation gap.

The deeper impact of differences in social culture and living habits

Beyond the superficial cultural and lifestyle differences, these cultural shocks also reflect the deep psychological and emotional challenges faced by Chinese international students in a foreign environment. For example, Chinese international students may feel uncomfortable and stressed when facing the openness and directness of Philippine social culture. This cultural adaptation pressure is not just a superficial social difficulty, but also involves issues of self-identity and psychological adjustment.

The effectiveness and limitations of adaptation strategies

The strategies adopted by Chinese international students to cope with cultural shock reflect their initiative and diversity in the adaptation process, but these strategies also have their limitations and deserve further exploration.

The dual role of social activities

Although participating in social activities has indeed helped many international students expand their social circles and integrate into the local society, the effect of such participation varies from person to person. Even if some students participate in club activities, they may not be able to form deep friendships due to language or cultural barriers. This suggests that simply encouraging international students to participate in social activities may not be enough. The design of activities and the establishment of support systems are equally important. We should focus on how to help them establish more meaningful connections in these social occasions.

The role of school support and room for improvement

This study found that the psychological support and cultural adaptation courses provided by the school are helpful to students' adaptation, but their effectiveness may depend on students' willingness to actively seek these services. Therefore, it is not enough to provide services alone. Schools should take further measures, such as actively following up on students' needs and providing more channels for students to learn about these services, in order to improve the coverage and actual effect of services. In addition, future course design can be closer to the actual problems faced by students, such as specific cases of how to deal with cultural differences and academic pressure.

The long-term impact of self-regulation

Self-regulation is a common and effective strategy in the process of student adaptation, but its effect may vary depending on cultural background and personal personality traits. For some Chinese international students, making study plans and time management may help them cope with academic pressure, but this does not completely solve the psychological and emotional problems they face in the process of cultural adaptation. Therefore, self-regulation strategies should be combined with other support mechanisms to form a multi-level

adaptation system to more comprehensively help international students cope with the challenges of foreign cultures.

This study reveals the diversity of cultural shock faced by Chinese international students in the Philippines and the complexity of their coping strategies. Although adaptation strategies have helped them alleviate cultural shock to a certain extent, there is still room for improvement. In response to the above problems, we can explore how to integrate school support, self-regulation and social network construction to form a more systematic support system to help international students adapt to a foreign environment and academic life more effectively.

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