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# Chinese Student Engagement in Residence Halls: A Mixed Methods Study

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## ABSTRACT

This mixed methods study assessed first year Chinese students perception of racial climate and community in residence halls at the University of Dayton. The quantitative study indicated that the students' attitude toward floor acceptance and racial harmony correlates with their perceived ability in diversity and interpersonal learning outcomes. The qualitative analysis identified the impact of high school preparation for Chinese student assimilation into residential hall living, their perception of American peers and culture and factors attributing a positive social adjustment.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1.) What are Chinese students' perception of the residence hall living environment, community, and diversity?
- 2.) How do these perceptions impact their level of engagement on the floor?
- 3.) What are the social and cultural factors influencing Chinese student perception and attitudes regarding their living experience?

## METHODS

### Quantitative Study

A quantitative, cross-sectional research was conducted Chinese students living in residence halls in the Spring 2013 and Fall 2013 terms. The Mandarin survey instrument consists a demographics, satisfaction, and racial climate perception section. The questionnaire was presented in a Likert-type scale ranging from 1(Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). The spring survey yielded 86 responses (57% response rate). The fall survey yielded a total of 47 respondents out of 101 Chinese students (47% response rate).

### Qualitative Study

Seven first year Chinese students voluntarily participated in semi-structured interviews conducted in the fall of 2013. Volunteers were recruited through the residence life mailing list and participated in semi-structured interviews that lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. Questions included students' high school living experience, and their perception of the floor community, environment, and racial climate in their current residence halls. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin in order to encourage participation.

## RESULTS

<b>n=169</b>
Males:65%; Females: 35%
91% RAs are White
93% respondents are under 21.
FY: 57%; IEP: 43

Table 1: Survey Respondents

These factors...

- RAs related well to students
- People getting along
- Peers are friendly
- I feel accepted by peers

...directly impact these...

- Programs are diverse
- Hall is a great place to live
- I'm confident about my ability to live with others
- Strong sense of floor harmony

And these factors...

- Having multicultural hall programs
- Satisfaction with RAs efforts to get to know them; RAs are fair;
- Feeling welcome when first moved into the floor

...has little to do with these

- Student's respect of diverse others
- Desire to become an RA
- Feeling like a part of the floor

<b>n=7</b>
Males: 4; Females: 3
All have Chinese roommates, except one in single room
All respondents are under 21.
FY: 4; IEP: 3

Table 2: Interview Respondents

Table 3: What factors impact our students' perception?

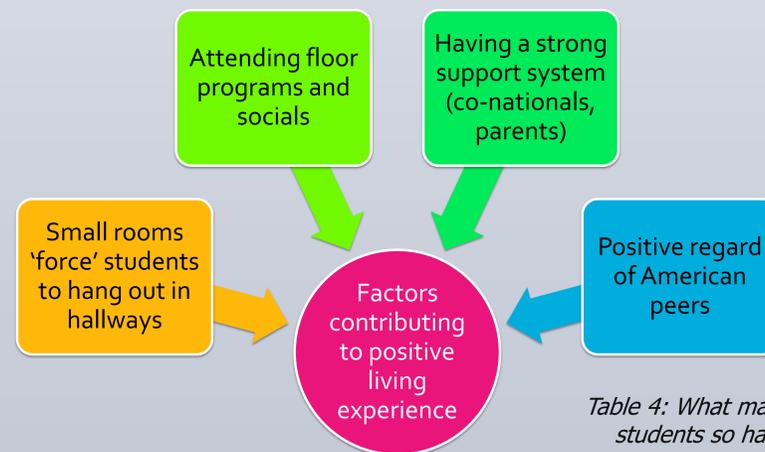


Table 4: What makes our students so happy?

Themes	Select student quotes
High School Life	"I lived in 'military-type' dorms." (David, 18)
	"I had to do everything by myself." (John, 19)
Initial Adjustment	"There's a lot of freedom here...it doesn't feel like a jail." (Wang, 18)
	"Everything I need is here." (Ziyi, 19)
Relationship with American Peers	The RAs are "friendly," "nice," and "helpful." (Keira, 20)
	"The Chinese don't think partying is particularly fun, but the Americans seem to enjoy it." (Keira, 20)
	"Sometimes I don't understand the jokes." (Kai, 20; Wang, 20)
	"The Americans are very helpful and very friendly." (John, 19)

## CONCLUSIONS

- First year Chinese students appear to be very satisfied with their on-campus living experience. They enjoy their newfound freedom, being supported by their families, and having a Chinese roommate.
- Students generally have a positive attitude toward their American peers, but the qualitative research suggests that cultural barriers inhibit deeper relationships from forming.
- Chinese students appreciate the social benefits of living on campus and having resources readily available to them, but perceive learning as a process that occurs mainly inside the classroom.

## IMPLICATIONS

- Because Chinese students tend to value academic performance over social adjustment, collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs staff could provide integrated learning opportunities for students.
- Programmatic efforts on the development of intercultural competence for both Chinese and domestic students would be helpful.
- Further research could examine if other East Asian students display similar patterns of adjustments.

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