Abstract

Due to the fact that Chinese international students are such a significant population within American universities across the country, it is worth investigating how this population typically adjusts to living in the United States and what stresses or issues are unique to them. However, it is also important to investigate whether or not Chinese international students experience positive changes within themselves as a result of the adjustment challenges that they are faced with. This qualitative inquiry examined these vital questions surrounding Chinese international student adjustment, in order to contribute to a more holistic understanding of the complex experiences of Chinese international students.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the polarization between American and Chinese cultures and how this polarization affects international Chinese students’ overall adjustment to living and studying at American universities.

Method

Individual, one-on-one interviews were conducted with five international students from China and one international student from Taiwan. All participants in this study were students that had spent at least one semester enrolled at full time status at the University of Dayton. Both purposive and snowball sampling techniques were utilized to select participants for this study.

From Struggle to Strength
Positive Adjustments of International Chinese Students

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Research Questions

1. What is the impact of cultural difference on international Chinese students’ acclimation and/or ease of transition to American university life?
2. What are the ways in which international Chinese students manage the challenges of adjusting to a vastly different host culture and environment?
3. Do international Chinese students experience positive transformation within themselves as a result of the adjustment challenges that they are faced with?

Discussion

International students from China experience many challenges while attempting to adjust to their new host surroundings in American universities. Many of these challenges stem from the fact that there are significant sociocultural differences between China and the United States. The participants of this study also experienced positive changes within themselves as a result of having to deal with these challenges. As suggested by previous studies, it is important to consider that, although international students from China are likely to experience adjustment challenges, they may also experience positive transformations within themselves as a result of these challenges.

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“Had I stayed in China for college, I probably wouldn’t have had situations like this. I probably wouldn’t have been stressed like this. But, I probably wouldn’t have had this kind of improvement.”

“If you want to achieve something greater, you have to give yourself time to grow. Gradually, you will learn things and realize who you are and know what you really want. All of these things take time.”