The Danger of Acculturation Process Phase to International Students' Academic Achievement: A Case Study of Zhejiang Normal University

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Original Research Article

ABSTRACT

With the rising number of international students in China, there has been a great need for assessment and evaluation of the acculturation processes as well as challenges in regard to their academic progresses. The cultural gap may not be big between China and other Asian countries. However, it really exists with Non-Asian ones. With the fact that culture determines comfort in one's life, the following un-answered questions were worthy to be answered in this paper: How do international students acculturate in China? What are the social and academic impacts during the acculturation process? What are the academic effects of failing to acculturate, especially among international students in China? The data shows that, 34% of international students only connect with their own culture. Majority (51%) of those who acculturate successfully, take more than one year to do so. Among the behaviors which were described as bad ones, alcoholism is leading among others, which are adapted by international students in the process of trying to assimilate or acculturate. Positively, 48% of students admitted to have learned time management as part of acculturation process in China.
Despite the acculturation process being challenging to some students, scholarship has been one of the factors for them to stay. Scholarship students, especially from economically disadvantaged families choose to stay and achieved their academic goals through scholarship. Notwithstanding,

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their academic performances among students who fail to acculturate have been relatively low. Several measures such as introduction of intensive orientation programs as well as guidance and counseling office may enable international students understand each other's culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

Acculturation is considered to be a complex process that can be defined not only at the societal level, but also at the individual level. It involves accommodation of both migrant and host culture, that will also include (*among other things*) modification of persons' customs, language use, habits, life style as well as value orientation [1]. The social scientists once defined acculturation as a process of change that occurs when an individual from different cultures gets a chance to interact as a result of migration, political conquest, or even forced relocation [2]. Notwithstanding, the term can also be defined as a culture learning process which is experienced by an individual who has been exposed to a new culture or ethnic group. However, individuals cope with this phenomenon on different ways, as some will be capable to affiliate or connect exclusively with their culture of origin or only with members of the host culture, while others affiliate with members of both cultures or with neither culture [3].

Acculturation is an important construct which is articulated across several disciplines. In *sociology* for example, acculturation refers to the process by which the group of immigrants are integrated into the larger society over the course of generations. In *psychology*, the weight (emphasis) has been placed on understanding how individuals may change attitudes, behavior and cultural identities because of cultural contact [4]. Acculturation being '*a process*' of cultural change that occurs when individuals from dissimilar cultural backgrounds come into prolonged and continuous first-hand contact with each other, such contact leads into several changes, hereby referred as impacts, not only at individual level, but also at the group level. However the process is commonly referred to minority group adopting the majority group's culture [5]. As applied to individuals, it is studied in individuals who are living in either countries or regions other than where they were born [6].

Some scholars suggest some measures to which acculturation can be measured in different degrees, such as the predominant language spoken and generation level, socio-cultural factors (education, socio-economic status, number of family members) and citizenship status. These factors often result in long-term psychological as well as socio-cultural adaptations between these groups. From the psychological point of view, by which acculturation can be defined as one's subjective impression of his or her overall happiness and well-being, different studies have found the relationship which exist between acculturation level and personal or psychological adjustment [5a].

A U.S. born Latino adolescent for example, is more likely to '*experiment*' with substance use than his foreign-born peers, and the lower risk of substance use initiation for immigrant youths diminishes the longer they are in the U.S (acculturation is one factor that may explain the association between length of residence in the U.S. and risk of substance use among immigrant youth). Some studies show negative acculturation effect to different cultures. Example, the Latino acculturation to the U.S culture correlates to several unhealthy behaviors such as the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs [3a]. In a recent time, most of the works have also involved with the examination of how immigrant groups and ethno-cultural groups change and relate to each other as a result of their attempts to live together in culturally plural societies [7].

1.1 Background of China's Inflow of International Students from 1950's to 2017

The issue of international student education has been given great importance by the Chinese government not only in the recent time, but also from the time such as 1960 when the country's economy (GDP) was still not higher ($59.716 billion) compared to U.S whose economy was already $543.3 billion by the same time [8]. With the increase of international students in China, the country has helped to produce a number of degreed students in the fields of science, technology, education, diplomacy as well as management. International scholarship in China

has been enhancing the political, diplomatic and economic ties between China and those countries as well as promoting the exchange of culture, education and personnel.

The first group of 33 international students from the East European countries arrived in China by 1950. By 2000, the number of international students from more than 160 countries increased in China to 407,000. From 1978 when China initiated her reform and opening-up policy, the issue of international students' education also entered into a new stage. This made a dramatic change of the number of international students, reaching 342,000 from 1979 to 1999. For the sake of implementing the 2003-2007 Action Plans for Rejuvenating Education, the Ministry of Education in China had worked creatively and effectively on the policy of *'expand the size, raise the level, guarantee the quality and regulate the management'*. As the result of this plan, a total of 77,715 students of different levels, from 175 different countries were accepted by 353 Chinese higher education institutions.

By 2007, Asian countries topped the list with the total of 295,043 (59.95%) students in China. 81,562 (16.57%) students were from Africa, 73,618 (14.96%) from Europe, while 35,733 (7.26%) students were from North America and only 6,229 (1.27%) from Oceania [9]. According to Xinhua news reports on April 15th 2019, a total of 492,185 international students from 196 countries and regions were studying in China by 2018. As they cited from the Ministry of Education, the number was said to have increased by 3,013 over that of the previous year (2017) whereby, among all international students in China, 60% of them were from Asia, with the Republic of Korea, Thailand and Pakistan ranking in the top three.

Table 1. The top 10 provinces/cities with the largest number of international students

Province/City	Number
Beijing	80,786
Shanghai	61,400
Jiangsu Province	45,778
Zhejiang Province	38,190
Liaoning Province	27,879
Tianjin	23,691
Guangdong Province	22,034
Hubei Province	21,371
Yunnan Province	19,311
Shandong Province	19,078

Source: MoE (2019)

With 33 provinces in China [10], the Ministry of Education in China lists few provinces that rank higher than others in terms of hosting international students in the country. Table 1 shows top 10 provinces with the highest number of international students.

1.2 Problem Statement

The population of foreign students in People's Republic of China is high (492,185) and it keeps increasing year by year. However, there is lack of enough studies that focus on how these students get acculturated in China and, the way acculturation process, or, that course of being acculturated may be affecting their academic progress in China. Cultural adaptation or adjustment (acculturation) is a complicated process in higher education institutions such as universities. According to prior simple survey and daily life experience in China, there have been cultural challenges that negatively impact students' academic life. Lack of clear information about the issue, culminates in shortage of new policies and proscribe from being proactive in controlling the situation, which has partly been one of the reason some scholars hold Chinese universities responsible for being either so much reluctant to their traditional policies, or, slowly adapting with the policy of higher education internationalization in the midst of speedy internationalization. Meanwhile, academic achievements among international students are affected and becoming not convincing during the course of acculturation process.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to study on how the international students are being academically affected during the course of acculturation process. Students' connection to new people and new culture was said to have impacts in their academic life, as it involves modification of persons' customs, language use, habits, life style as well as value orientation. Some international students may choose to reject the first-hand contact of new people and get modified. However, their life will still be in isolation, which, in one way or the other, will also impact their studies. From several dimensions of acculturation described by scholars, the study focused on short term acculturation (as opposed to long term one) and first-hand contact (as opposed to remote). The study collected both quantitative as well as qualitative information, whereby, narratives from 8 international students from 4 different countries

(Algeria, Chile, Myanmar and South Africa) were recorded. Open ended questions aimed to help students express in detail, the way they became acculturated or rejected to modify their behavior after arriving in China. That detailed information would involve the effect of such course of contact to their academic matters. This study is very important as it will be used as informative agent to Chinese universities on: first, what is going on among international students during the acculturation, and secondly, its impacts academically, so as come up with more measures of accommodating both international and local students.

In the quantitative part, a questionnaire was designed, where a couple of questions (closed ended questions) were asked, focusing on their biographic information, ways to which they coped with the cultural differences (getting acculturated or rejecting), the longevity difference of getting acculturated in China and the level to which they were either positively or negatively affected by acculturation. Through quantitative information the study also wanted to know the number of students who connect neither with people, nor with the foreign culture during their course of study, and its associated impacts in academics. A sample of 105 valid questionnaires (87.5% of

return rate) from different international students were filled and collected from international students.

1.4 Scholars' Recent Proposed Dimension of Acculturation

Cultural and educational scholars see the vitality of describing different dimensions of acculturation that should be focused. In their perspectives, some dimensions are recently receiving more attention compared to others, and that the scholar's chosen dimension of acculturation to be studied will depend on various circumstances such as the objectives of the study, the point of time at which the research is done and the reality. Scholars have successfully described in detail the following dimension:

a) Remote vs. firsthand contact acculturation
b) Short time vs. long time acculturation
c) International vs. Local (multiple ethno-cultural groups) acculturation

1.4.1 Acculturation that takes place remotely

It has been very normal for researchers to study on the acculturation process that takes place as a result of continuous firsthand contact, however,
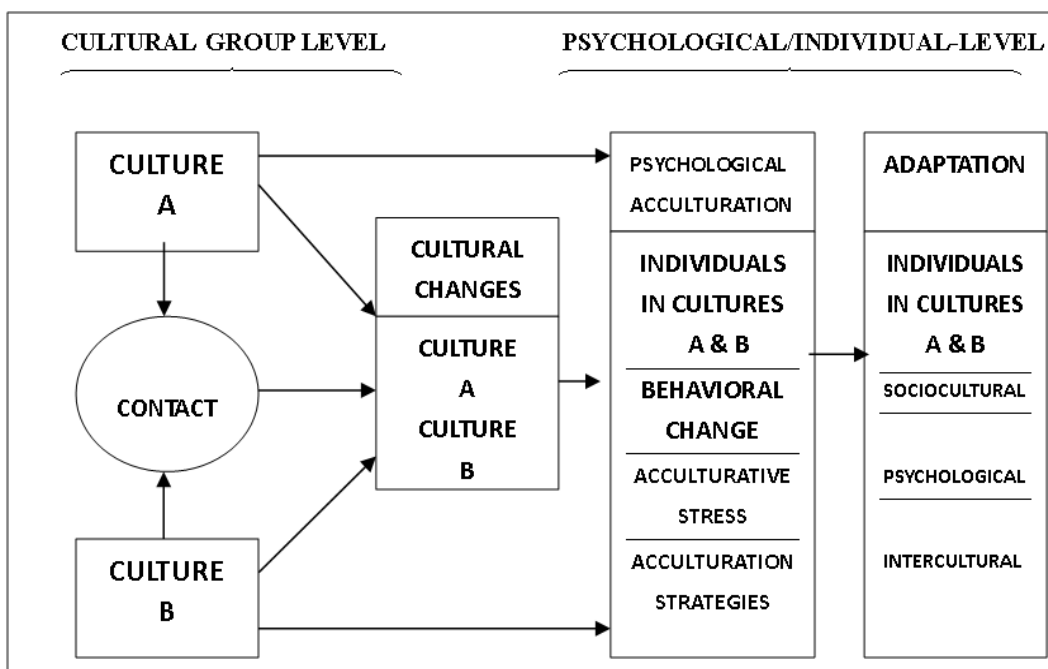

Fig. 1. Acculturation framework
Source: John W. Berry (2017). The Oxford Handbook of Acculturation and Health, Oxford University Press, edited by Seth J. Schwartz and Jennifer Unger

with the development of science and technology (the use of telemedia such as phones, computers and television), it has become undeniable fact that it is possible and normal in the recent time for acculturation to take place remotely. Studies such as that of Ferguson and Bornsten, done in 2012, have shown how people can become acculturated remotely. In their study, they have used the case of Jamaican youths who are taking American culture and other attributes without direct (first-hand) contact with those American societies, but through media they get acculturated.

1.4.2 Long term acculturation

Apart from having such acculturation which can take place during a short time of studentship or being a refugee in a foreign country, or even an acculturation that takes place within a lifetime of an individual, there is another dimension of acculturation which can take place over several centuries or even millennium. It is this dimension that has been used to examine the impacts or general situation of Jewish people, Maori and Chinese.

1.4.3 Acculturation within the single larger society with multiple ethno-cultural groups

Cultural diversity within different nationals has been an increasing phenomenon. However, there are also multiple groups that can be found within the nation such as Tanzania as well (with more than 120 tribes having their different cultures). China with a plenty of small groups found in the country, it is certain that there is a type of cultural contact which is complex within these single societies. With the increasing need of studying this phenomenon, scholars have tried to study on these scenarios. The same type of studies have also been done by Berry and Sabatier in 2010, aiming at examining the acculturation of immigrant youths who had settled in Montreal Canada, the city with two major groups (English and French), whom immigrants may contact.

1.4.4 Acculturation of international students in China and Chinese students abroad

Researches have been done on the situation of international students in East Asia, and they have identified a number of factors that play a vital role in these students' academic adaptation. Among of the factors mentioned include English language proficiency and classroom learning styles. Numerous studies have also indicated the influence of English language proficiency on academic achievement and social adaptation among East Asian students who are studying in U.S. universities [11].

As the result of demographic changes in People's Republic of China, especially in the last ten years, there have been several reasons for researchers to focus on the acculturation processes among Non-Chinese people, specifically students who are continuously choosing China as their destination [5b]. Prior to that, much of acculturation studies were done in U.S, and it was also found that when families immigrate to the U.S., the levels of acculturation are not always the same across all family members. Much progress in these studies has been made in understanding acculturative stress. In China specifically, with the data collected in different settings, researchers have found a number of components of acculturative stress [12], and the following seven components are of great causes of stress, namely: homesickness, rejection, opportunity deprivation, identity threat, cultural competence, value conflict and self-confidence. However, other studies have succeeded to investigate potential mechanisms that link these components to form a structural understanding and getting rid of acculturative stress [13].

The above study by Yu et al. with linear regression analysis showed that after controlling for covariates, Africans and Asians were positively associated with those seven variable's score. Being unmarried and lack of preparedness to study abroad in the other side were negatively associated with variables' scores. International students from African countries scored higher on all seven sub constructs compared to students from other countries outside Africa. However, students from Asia scored higher on *rejection, value conflict, homesickness, self-confidence, and cultural competence* than students from other countries. Most of the Asian students are Buddhist, and due to this religious issue, Buddhist/Hindu students scored higher than those who reported not being part of an organized religion on cultural competence. Christian and Muslim students scored higher than others on homesickness [12a].

The correlation was also assessed on the marital status to the seven chosen variables. The result showed that unmarried students scored lower than others on value conflict and cultural

competence. Findings from other studies apart from Yu, also indicate that acculturation stress is a significant predictor for poor mental health among different populations, including refugees, international students, migrant workers and other international or domestic migrants [14]. Lastly, preparedness was associated with all sub constructs except value conflict and homesickness.

It is hard for adults to acculturate simply because according to studies, in most cases children will learn the new culture more rapidly than their parents and this will involve learning a new language and a new set of values and behaviors associated with the host culture. This differences that exist between the acculturation levels of parents and children are also thought to affect parent-child relations in several ways. Taking an example from the U.S. cases, when children learn the U.S. culture more rapidly than their parents do, parents might become dependent on their children to help navigate and interpret the new culture. This process is thought to undermine the parental authority and most of the time it has been leading to family conflict and inconsistent parental discipline and monitoring [3c].

To conclude this part, it will be worth noting that, education being the social activity; it is associated with other social processes as well. Studies of culture are as important as educational studies. However, there has not been that link from recent scholars to show how the two variables (education and culture) affect each other (positively and negatively). The contemporary cultural studies have largely been dealing with social life as the end in itself, without extending its influence in the aspect of education or schooling. But there is that possibility of extending cultural studies, which would save the sector of education, and, the possibility itself is to connect the cultural studies with learning processes or educational advancement. Extension of cultural studies toward education matters is the deal which has been specifically tackled by this very study, making it different from the previous study, but also vital for this era of higher education internationalization in China.

2. METHODOLOGY AND TRUST-WORTHINESS IN THIS STUDY

The study collected both quantitative as well as qualitative information, whereby, the narratives from 8 international students from four different countries (Algeria, Chile, Myanmar and South Africa) were recorded. Open ended questions, especially in interviews, aimed at helping students express in detail, the way they became acculturated or rejected to modify their behavior after arriving in China. This information would involve the effect of such course of contact to their academic matters. The study would come to be used as an informative agent to Chinese universities on what is going on among international students during the acculturation as well as its impacts academically, so as come up with more measures of accommodating both international and local students. Qualitative information collected in this study provided a vivid, dense and full description in the natural language of the phenomenon (acculturation) under study.

In the quantitative part, a questionnaire was designed, where a couple of questions (closed ended questions) were asked, focusing on students' biographic information, ways to which they coped with the cultural differences (getting acculturated or rejecting), the longevity difference of getting acculturated in China and the level to which they were either positively or negatively affected by acculturation. Through quantitative information the study also attempted to ascertain the number of students who connect neither with people, nor with the foreign culture during their course of study, and its associated impacts in academics. A sample of 105 valid questionnaires (87.5% of return rate) were filled and collected from international students.

2.1 Trustworthiness

Several methods were used to establish trustworthiness and reduce researcher bias as possible. To start with, all research team members (the researcher and the assistants) had a time to discuss their expectations and biases that might have influence on their interviewing, interview transcription and questionnaire's data coding at the beginning of the study. This was done deliberately to allow the researcher and assistants identify their own perceptions and interpretations of the data in the analysis processes [15]. Then, the study was piloted (prior research interview and questionnaire filling) through interviewing two participants who met the participation criteria of the study, but were not among the sample of participating in the formal study. Ten questionnaires were also sent to students who later did not come to participate in the formal study as well. The process allowed researchers to examine if interview questions and questionnaires functioned properly and

logically. Several questions came to be revised, adjusted and reworded. The sequence of asking questions was adjusted after the pilot study. Again, with the case of qualitative part, upon the completion of interview transcription, transcripts were sent back to the interviewees to check again for more accuracy.

3. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

3.1 Respondents' Information

Respondents were from different countries as described in the methodology part, with their biographical information being *gender, age* and *year of study*. The researcher expected to collect data from 120 international students. However, because of several inconveniences including students having busy schedule during this study, only 105 students filled and returned the questionnaire, 87.5% of the expected number of respondents (n=120). Regarding the age of the respondents who accurately filled and returned the questionnaire, 21% of them were 18 to 25 years old, 54% were 26 to 30 years old and 25% were above 30 years old. Among the participants, 32% were first year students, 43% second year students, 21% third year students, while 4% being fourth year students. Other information regarding the number of respondents can be found in Table 2.

3.2 Interview Transcription

There are general two types of interview transcripts that fall under the following classifications; *verbatim* or *non-verbatim*. The researcher adopted *verbatim transcript* to capture each moment and utterance with complete and accurate details which in the case of the study's objectives, it captured the original data by reporting direct phrases and sentences. Verbatim were more illuminated and direct than researcher's words, as the researcher became more faithful to the exact words used by the interviewees. The information also became more rich and detailed. Interview involved four groups with each having two participants (a boy and a girl). The presentation/reporting of data will be in

the following mode; group one to four will be referred as G1 to G4 respectively. Girls will be represented by nominal A, while boys will be represented by nominal B. For instance, G1A will refer to a group one female participant, while G1B will be referring to group one male participant.

3.2.1 Acculturation process and its impacts on international students' academics

Through a questionnaire, students were asked about the process to which they came to be acculturated in China, but also they were asked if at all the acculturation process had affected their academic life in one way or the other. In response to the statement which stated *"Acculturation process in China negatively affected my academic life",* students were supposed to rate their answers from 1 to 5 (*Strongly disagree to strongly agree*), which indicated the rate of agreement to the statement. Their responses were as shown in Fig. 2.

From the chart above, 57% of international students either *agree* or *strongly agree* that the acculturation phase during their studentship negatively affected their academics. We may decide to ignore other data of those who either disagree or strongly disagree, especially with the focus of the study at our hand (and they are only 27%, who either strongly agree or disagree). However, it is very important to consider the vulnerability, into which students may in one way or another fail to successfully achieve their ceiling level of potentiality. Guidance and counseling education needs to be provided to international student on the effective ways of getting acculturated in a foreign country. Acculturation process did not only directly affect their academic life, but also their social life which ended up affecting their academic schedules.

"Taking supper around 5 or 6pm was a new thing to me. I have tried to acculturate it but whenever I eat at 6pm, I will need to eat something around 10pm.This changes affected the time schedule to be spent at the library too. It was not easy" G2A reports

Table 2. Participants' descriptive statistics

Cases	Number	Percentage	Gender	
			Male	Female
Prescribed number of participants	120	100%	60	60
Participants responded	105	87.5%	51	54
Valid interview transcript counted	4 out of 4	100%	2	2
Valid questionnaire counted	105	87.5%%	51	54

Another international student explained;

"I couldn't sleep during the night because of the time difference. It took me more 3 months to adapt to the Chinese time zones. During those months, I could not sleep during the night but during the day time when most of the courses are being taught. I don't know if teachers understood this, maybe they just see me as lazy person, but it affected me to the maximum" G4B reports

However, most of the international students appreciated the role played by Chinese teachers, as they accommodated and worked cooperatively with all the students. Students are helped to overcome problems like *rejection, value conflict, homesickness, self-confidence,* and *cultural competence* while in the foreign country. Some of the students admitted that teachers treated them very well, in such a way that they even got another lesson from them, that being a professor is nothing without helping someone to realize his or her dream, especially in the midst of loneliness.

A student said:

"Of course it made me feel at home. He had that routine of inviting us for the dinner and during dinning we shared a lot of experiences. It was a strange situation for me because in our country a professor cannot easily be reached by his or her students. I slowly became confident and felt more valued, which resulted to my spirit of hard work as well" G2B reports

3.2.1.1 Getting acculturated with the Chinese language

About the process of language learning as a strategy to get assimilated more to the hosting culture, it appeared that some students successfully learnt it while some did not. Many of them decided not to learn Chinese language because their major course was neither Chinese nor taught in Chinese. However, some international students, especially those who lived off-campus, worked hard to learn Chinese in order to reduce the complexity of their life with the natives. Few students found it easy to learn Chinese as one of them explained in the interview:

"It was not a challenge to me because I learnt it (Chinese language) in my country

before coming here. However, after arriving in the country I found different pronunciation of the same language that sometimes it makes me hardly understand what they say. In the classroom, there are technical vocabularies that are hardly heard outside, and thus made me take sometimes to catch up with lesson" G3B reports

Others described Chinese as one of the most complicated language to learn

"You know sometimes you can feel like you know Chinese language because you have HSK 5 (Chinese Language Proficiency Level Five), *but when it comes to use it as a medium of instruction, it goes further than understanding the daily conversation"* G4B reports

Others explained their concern that language learning is a complicated process, because it involves learning people's lives too. Language has different levels, and to be competent in language use, one needs to know how different words are used in different culture. Language use and the interpretation of it do differ from culture to culture. In one incident a foreign student explained how the use of phrase "*I miss you*" put him in trouble with his Chinese friend, he explains;

"She (Chinese friend) *was helping me a lot and within a very short time I was able to express several Chinese sentences, now there was a time we did not meet for about four days, I decided to text her 'Hey, long time X* (he mentioned the name)*, I miss you' and she replied 'next time don't use that term'* (miss you) *and later on she blocked me for that reason. My friend told me, words like 'miss' or 'love you' to Chinese girls sound awkward"* G1B reports

3.2.2 Different ways used to acculturate (cope with cultural differences)

Getting acculturated has not been an easy task among international students. From the questionnaires designed for this study, it is shown that 9% of the respondents who at different time tried to acculturate, they took 0-6 months to connect with either people, culture only, or people and culture in China. 28% took 7 to 12 months, 51% took 13 to 18 months and 12% took more than 18 months. Of all the respondents, 18% connected only with the

culture of their origin they whole time they have stayed in China. 31% connected with people but not their (host) culture and, 17% connected with people and culture, while, 34% connected with neither people nor culture.

One student explained during the interview that, getting acculturated takes time not only with Chinese students, but also his fellow international students, because, their cultures too do differ. It takes one's adjustment of his own culture to assimilate with his peer group (international students) so as to have that sense of connectedness within the community. However, before adjusting, one needs to judge the goodness of his point of cultural beliefs against whom he needs to adjust to. A student explained;

> "Beside my room there are people from…. (She mentions the country) whom I integrate with them very well, but they smoke, drink and make a lot of noises, and, I don't like it because, I can't concentrate with my studies unless I move to my friend's room" G3A reports

Some students explained how food culture in China destabilized their stomachs and brought challenge in their life. He explained that the situation had effects in his studies as he could not eat properly, but also he could not sleep well. The next day it was hard for him to attend and participate classes effectively.

> "It is not easy, we went there (outside restaurant) and found pocks and chicken are just fetched from the saucepan with the same spoon. I usually avoid eating some kind of foods because they do harm my stomach, but from those restaurants the spoon which was used to pick all the food

varieties (of which she did not realize at first) is what made my stomach destabilized for almost a month. I couldn't go to the library or attend classes for that time" G4A reports

3.2.3 The impacts of acculturation process in students' academic achievements

During the acculturation process, students are affected either positively or negatively. These impacts affect their daily life as well as their academic achievement. This is because in trying to assimilate themselves with the entire group of the hosting community, the international student will struggle to behave the way such hosting community behaves. This affects their academic life, either negatively or positively, depending on the compatibility of those behaviors to students' academic schedule. Below is the information of international students having affected by the process.

3.2.4 Negative academic impacts of connecting with the hosting community's culture

Bad education outcomes (under achievement) which are resulted from the international students' adjustments to the hosting culture are hereby referred as negative outcomes of the acculturation. When the international students were asked about having any bad behavior that they adopted as the result of acculturation process, 24% said 'no', they don't have any bad behavior resulted from the process, while 44% said 'yes' and 32 said they 'cannot say'. With the group of bad behaviors, the following Fig. 3 shows the variety of bad behavior and the percentage of international students adopted it during the acculturation process.
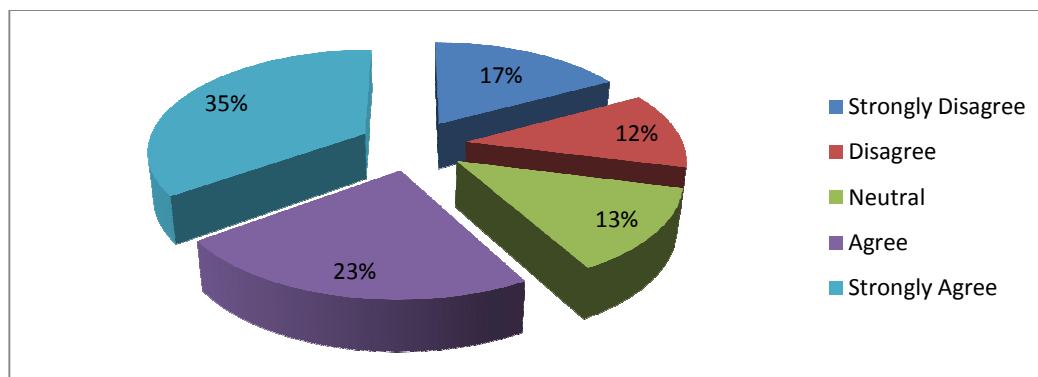

Fig. 2. Perspectives of international students on the contention that acculturation process negatively affects their academics
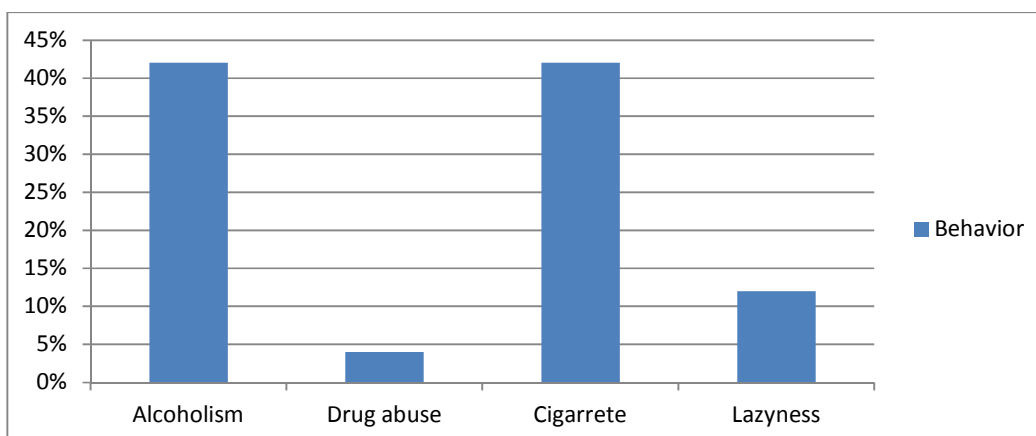
Fig. 3. Bad behavior and the number of students adopted it

One student explained

> *"Smoking was not my hobby at all, but that friend of mine made me smoke and now I can smoke even in his absence. I wanted to feel that sense of inclusiveness to my friends circle. However, I ended up losing those who were very potential for my academic achievement"* G1B reports

3.2.4.1 How about connecting with people without their culture?

During the interview, the interviewer was curious to know more about the adoption of bad behavior. He asked the interviewees on the possibility of having friends without imitating their behavior. The researcher also wanted to know how such behaviors affect their academic progress. The interviewee responded;

> *"How can you have friends and choose only some occasions to be with them? ...I remember the first day we went to coco* (night club*), the smell of cigarette inside the club made me cough the whole week. I could leave them there, but, I thought it was not fair to my closest friends"* G3A reports

3.2.4.2 Positive academic impacts of connecting with both, people and their culture

Despite having these mentioned bad behaviors that international students adopt from among themselves or their Chinese friends, there are also good behaviors that have resulted from the acculturation process, trying to assimilate to their peers by imitating their ways of life. The following Fig. 4 shows the group of good behaviors and the percentage of students adapted to it.
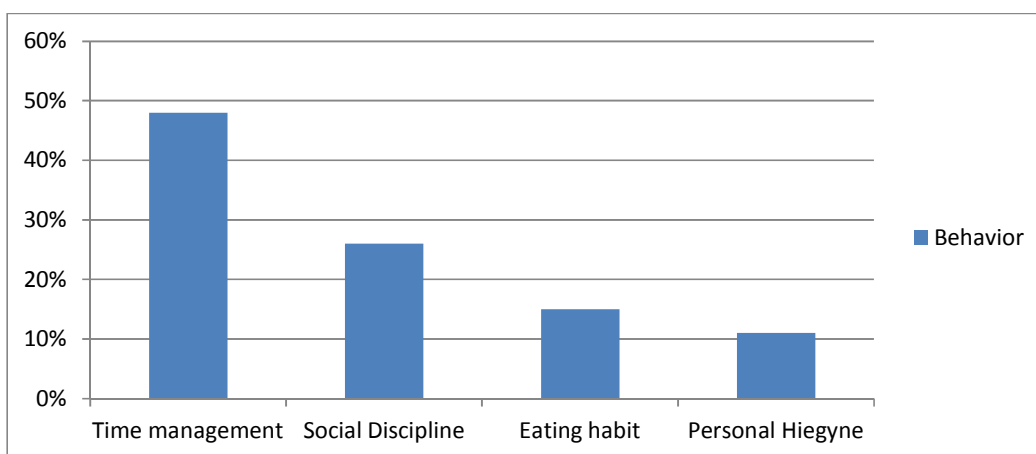

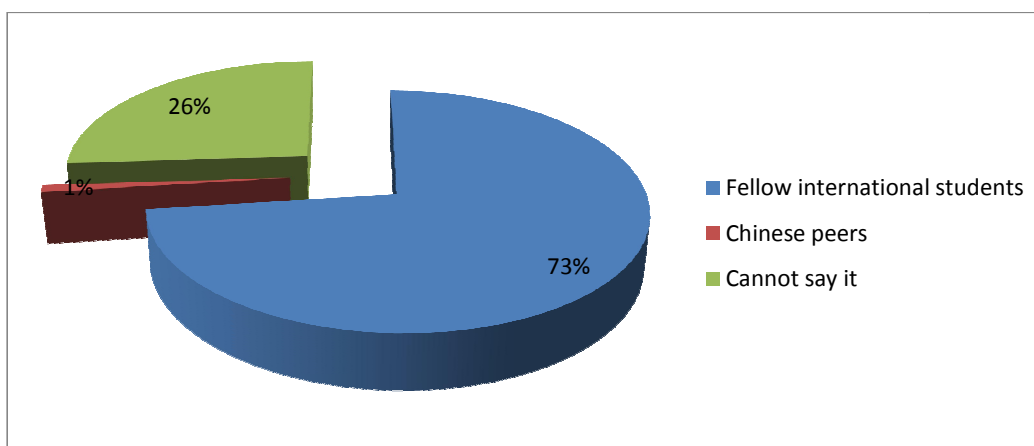**Fig. 4. Good behavior and the percentage of students who adopted it**

Fig. 5. Responses to the question "who contributes to international students' moral decline"

Students explained how some of these behaviors helped them toward achieving higher in their academic works. *Time management* and *Social discipline* are among the areas that most of the international students have changes a lot and the same behaviors contributed to their academic performances as one of them explains;

> *"Only one trial made me pass HSK 4* (Hànyǔ Shuǐpíng Kǎoshì-Translated into English as Chinese Language Proficiency Level four), *a Chinese proficiency Test because of her. She walked around the city with me, introducing to me several Chinese Cultures that helped me to know why language have several features, that it could be hard to understand by myself. I can say I was lucky to have her as my friend*" G1B reports

However, when international students arrive in China, they socialize not only with Chinese students, but also with other international students from different countries. Different countries have different culture, and, in the approach of making oneself more suitable to his peers, students will try to adjust to both Chinese and a fellow foreigner. The researcher wanted to know which group (between Chinese friends and foreign students group) affected participants more (bad behavior). The following Fig. 5 shows the responses from international students.

As we see in Fig. 5, international students are not only struggling to get acculturated to the Chinese ways of life, but also to their fellow foreign community members. Thus, the challenges faced by international students during the phase of acculturation are from the influence of both, Chinese as well as the foreign

community. However, these international students are negatively affected more by their fellow foreign students' influences.

4. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data found in this study shows that, international students are negatively affected by acculturation phase after their arrival in China, the challenge that may lead to their academic underperformance. However, because of the weight associated with internationalization of higher education, there is a great call for these higher education institutions to react effectively to these challenges raised. Internationalization of higher education is an imperative stage and aspect of international relations among universities in the world. Notwithstanding, it is not only regarded as a goal in itself, but also as a means to improve the quality of education provided to its participants. For such internationalization to have impacts through knowledge translation or mobilization of talents in support of global research and attraction of the curriculum with internationals, out of classroom factors such as international students' cultural shock need to be addressed efficiently.

Universities from all over the world are currently responding to challenges related to international students' successful acculturation in various ways. One of those responses has been the issue of internationalizing university campuses. This process of internationalization is advised to be preceded by an orientation program to the international students about the life at the hosting university, the diversity of the world in general, cultural tolerance as well as all the expected issues. As scholars suggest [16], in order to gain

from the global trend of education and acculturation in universities, many educational institutions need to try hard in ensuring that they establish agreements and collaborations with regional, international and even intercontinental universities, with the collaboration involving two side movements of staff and students to learn effectively.

The data shows that, the number of international students in China is increasing and is also expected to continue rising. This is because, both the receiver (international students) and the provider of higher education (China through its universities) have considered higher education the most powerful instrument in bringing about changes within individuals as well as in the community at large [17]. However, it should be understood that, education does two things in this matter; it acculturates an individual and it also preserves, transmits and develops the culture of the particular society. With this case, the discussion of culture within education sector is of much important because education and culture are mutually interdependent and indissoluble, as they complement and supplement each other throughout the process. To address the cultural issues that may be affecting education sector is of crucial and beneficial in sustaining and growing science and scholarship through dynamic international academic exchange, as this will be effectively building social and economic capacity in developing countries, which are of much concern.

Acculturation is really challenging international students not only in China, but also in the western world because, it produces something called '*culture shock'*. Culture shock to international students in this case appears when they come to interact with people (being it the hosting community or their fellow international students), whose worldviews and social behavior differ from theirs [18]. It is this point they may realize that there is no such thing as an objective reality. It affects students academically because of the mix of emotions that are resulting from the sudden change after they left behind everything that was familiar to them and move to an unfamiliar place and culture. The good news as revealed by cultural scholars is that, '*Culture Shock'* will only be one phase in an on-going acculturation and learning process. The process will later allow the international students to feel comfortable and get along with unfamiliar cultures, so it is a matter of adapting through

different strategies which need to be developed by both the school and the students themselves.

Foreign community needs to be informed that the initial reaction to their strange surroundings is completely natural, and they should take it as a positive trait because, it is a sign that they consciously or sometimes subconsciously apprehend the differences which are around them as compared to what they were used to. These changes and realization should not shock them to the point of destabilizing their normal life like academic issues because, as the time passes, they may slowly learn to come to terms with their new situation, and with more time that will be spent in those new places, they will doubtless start to like and enjoy their immersion to such different life.

Most of the strategies can be developed by students themselves to get acculturated faster. For example, most of the international students are reporting to be unsatisfied with the food around the campus. However, they can still develop their own strategies of adjusting to this challenge, included ordering food from other restaurants that may be selling suitable food for them. They may also develop a habit of visiting supermarkets or moving off campus. Again, some students have reported to be uncomfortable with the drinking culture of their fellow international students, however, some of them felt drinking was a good way of becoming more socialized with those friends. Here, students with the help from the related offices in their colleges and universities can adopt strategies to better help their international students, and make them build lifelong healthy behaviors.

It is the fact that studying abroad for a few months or several years may mean a dive or jumping into the unknown life style because it will involve meeting new people. However, it is suggested that cultural stress, shock or whatever, can be eliminated by learning a new language, encountering a new academic system as well as dealing with cultural differences strategically. Doing these will be a valuable part of international students' experience of studying abroad, despite the fact that dealing with so much change at a time can also be challenging.

International students' related offices can also keep encouraging their students through an organized orientation program, that there are psychological and socio-cultural adaptation to the

cultural differences they can use. Psychological adaptation refers to a substantial reasonableness or wisdom of psychological comfort, personal and cultural identity, good mental health as well as overall life satisfaction. There are several measures towards psychological adaptations identified, the common one being self-esteem (that sense of worth). Students need to take other several psychological measures of anxiety, depression and psychosomatic (emotional disorder). Psychological adaptation need to be taken together with socio-cultural adaptation, the process which refers to the ability of the migrants (international students in China) to fit in the host's cultural setting. Flexibility to negotiate interaction with the members of the host culture effectively through behavior competence, communication skills (language learning), social skills and cultural skills so as to handle their daily activities in a synchronized way with the host culture.

5. CONCLUSION

Culture is an important aspect in education throughout the world. Ignoring students' culture as determinant of academic achievement and knowledge development is a disaster not only to the education institutions but also to the whole system of education in a particular country. Students' culture can either accelerate or hinder the learning process for students. People's movement towards unfamiliar culture leads to what is termed as cultural shock, the phase of international studentship to which other tasks around them can either seize or be done in an improper way because of the discomfort which will be resulted from such shock. In China, international students are highly academically affected during the phase of acculturation. Despite having some measures suggested in this piece, and despite some students reporting that their teachers are trying their best to help them acculturate, we call for national attention and recognition of such phase, introduction and effective implementation of policies and programs that will help to effectively accommodate international students in China. The effort need to be developed by international student, their respective colleges, university's administration and the responsible ministry as well.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, participant's written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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Peer-review history:
The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
http://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/62113