

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS AMONG CHINESE AND AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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### INTRODUCTION

College students, in a transitional period from late adolescence to early adulthood, meet many new and ever-complicated environments which they have never encountered before. They experience a wide variety of difficulties in making satisfactory adjustments to college life. Personality problems are frequently precipitated in college students by stresses met in attempted adjustments to perplexing situations. Therefore, college faculty and guidance personnel should be aware of the concerns and problems of the students whom they serve. If the information about adjustment problems of college students is available and their needs and feelings are considered and understood, the professional staff in college will be in a better position to provide adequate education for students.

During the last three decades increasing attention has been given to personality development and adjustment problems of college students. A growing number of studies have been directed toward exploring various aspects of college students' problems. From a review of the related literature, it is evident that investigators have used various techniques in an effort to better understand the concerns and problems of college students. The methods most frequently used are the questionnaire and checklists. Most of the studies were general in nature, directed toward discovering what kinds of problems college students were usually faced with. A few studies were concerned with the problems of special types and classes of students in colleges. It was indicated that college life became increasingly harassing and a variety of perplexities were encountered by college students. In general, problems in regard to effective study and adjustment to college work were most frequently perceived and reported by the subjects in various studies. However, many kinds of personal and social troubles were also frequently found to underlie academic problems. Factors related to the reported problems of college students were examined, and some researchers (Hartman, 1968; Hu, 1967; Ottoson, 1968; Suinn, 1967) found that student problems were a function of sex and year in college.

It appeared that few research projects had put much emphasis on the problem patterns of college students in different learning environments, and that no comparisons had been made between the adjustment problems experienced by

college students in two different countries. A comparative study of the college student problems in the light of different cultural backgrounds, especially between Western and Eastern societies, seem still neglected. In order to provide some data in this respect, the present study was undertaken.

The chief concern of this study was to ascertain, compare, and analyze the self-perceived and self-reported problems of Chinese and American undergraduate students. To achieve this major purpose, the following aspects of the problem were explored:

1. To identify the distinctive personal problems of Chinese and American college students.
2. To analyze the patterns of problems of Chinese and American college students.
3. To compare the individual predominant problems and major problem areas between Chinese and American college students.
4. To determine the relationship between the problems expressed and variables such as cultural background, sex, class, and college of major.
5. To examine the sources of help which Chinese and American college students preferred to seek for their problems.

## METHOD

**Subjects** The sample for this study consisted of 360 Chinese undergraduate students drawn, by stratified sampling, from the National Taiwan Normal University and an equal number of American undergraduate students from the University of Northern Colorado. Only those who were between 18 and 25 years of age were selected as subjects. Both Chinese and American student groups were further divided into subgroupings on the basis of sex, class, and college of major.

**Instruments** The Mooney Problem Check List (College Form, 1950 Revision) and a Chinese Revision of the Mooney Problem Check List (College Form) were used as an instrument to gather data concerning the individual problems and problem areas of American and Chinese college students. Recognizing the limitations of the MPCL and in order to examine the sources of help sought by college students, the writer prepared an one-page supplementary questionnaire (in Chinese and in English) which consisted of two parts. The first part was a question which asked the student to list the personal problem of most concern and three other perceived problems. The second part was a checklist of persons with whom the student would like to discuss his own problems and from whom he would seek help.

**Procedure** The necessary data concerning the problems of the participating

students in this study were obtained through the administration of the MPCL and a supplementary questionnaire devised by the writer. The testing was conducted under the supervision of the writer and an assistant in a regular class setting during the fall quarter or the first semester of the 1972-1973 academic year. Before administration of the MPCL, the supplementary questionnaire was distributed to each subject, who answered it in the first five minutes. Afterwards, the subjects took the MPCL, following the directions as stated on the first page of the booklet. No time limits were used. In an effort to assure confidentiality and to encourage the subjects to respond openly, anonymity was maintained by allowing the students to write their code numbers instead of their names on the answer sheets.

**Methods of Data Analysis** The MPCL answer sheets of the subjects were carefully hand-tabulated by the writer in an effort to keep errors to a minimum. The raw scores and related information obtained from the individual subjects were entered on master sheets, from which IBM cards were punched. Statistical analyses of data were performed by the computer IBM-360 at the Computer Center of the University of Northern Colorado. Procedures for the analysis of data were as follows:

1. The raw data were analyzed by employing the multiple linear regression technique to determine the relationship between the criterion and predictors.
2. Frequency means and standard deviations of each problem area and of the total on the MPCL for each student group were computed.
3. Analysis of variance and the  $t$  test for multiple comparisons were utilized to determine the significance of differences among or between the problem frequency means of various student groups.
4. Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficients were calculated to determine the degree of agreement between the rankings of problem areas for various student groups, and  $t$  was used to test the significance of correlation coefficients obtained.
5. The percentage of Chinese college students and American college students checking each individual problem on the MPCL was computed respectively.
6. The percentage of Chinese college students and American college students checking each source of help on the supplementary questionnaire was computed respectively, and  $z$  was used to test the significance of differences between two groups.

In the analysis of data, the .05 level of significance was adopted. Those which were significant at the .01 level were also reported.

## RESULTS

### 1. The Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 1 shows the values of multiple correlation coefficient (R), RSQ, and F of one full model and five restricted models with the total problems of concern reported on the MPCL as the criterion. Each or all of the four predictor variables including cultural background (Cu), sex (S), class (Cl), and college of major (Co), of the student were deleted in the restricted models as shown in the Table. The results pointed out that:

Table 1. Regression Analysis of the Contribution of Predictor Variables to the Prediction of the Total Problems of Concern Reported on the MPCL

Model	Variable		R	RSQ	F	
	In the model	Deleted			df	Value
FM	Cu, S, Cl, Co	None	.1587	.0252		
RM <sub>1</sub>	None	Cu, S Cl, Co	.0000	.0000	4, 715	4.62**
RM <sub>2</sub>	S, Cl, Co	Cu	.1364	.0186	1, 715	4.78*
RM <sub>3</sub>	Cu, Cl, Co	S	.1568	.0246	1, 715	.43
RM <sub>4</sub>	Cu, S, Co	Cl	.0959	.0092	1, 715	11.70**
RM <sub>5</sub>	Cu, S, Cl	Co	.1520	.0231	1, 715	1.55

\* $p < .05$

\*\* $p < .01$

1. The full model (FM) which included all 4 predictor variables to predict the criterion yielded an R of .1587 and an RSQ of .0252 indicating that these predictor variables together accounted for 2.52 per cent of the total variance in the criterion. When this RSQ was tested against chance (RM<sub>1</sub>), an F-value of 4.62 was obtained which was statistically significant at the .01 level.
2. When the variable of culture was deleted, the RM<sub>2</sub> yielded an R of .1364 and an RSQ of .0186; it indicated that the cultural background of the students accounted for 0.66 per cent (.0252 - .0186 = .0066) of the variance in the criterion. When this RSQ was tested against the RSQ in the FM, an F-value of 4.78 was obtained which was statistically significant at the .05 level.
3. When the variable of sex was deleted, the RM<sub>3</sub> yielded an R of .1568 and an RSQ of .0246; it indicated that the sex of the students accounted for only 0.06 per cent (.0252 - .0246 = .0006) of the variance in the criterion. When this RSQ was tested against the RSQ in the FM, an F-value of .43

was obtained which was not significant.

4. When the variable of class was deleted, the  $RM_4$  yielded an R of .0959 and an RSQ of .0092; it indicated that the class of the students accounted for 1.60 per cent (.0252 - .0092 = .0160) of the variance in the criterion. When this RSQ was tested against the RSQ in the FM, an F-value of 11.70 was obtained which was statistically significant at the .01 level.
5. When the variable of college was deleted, the  $RM_5$  yielded an R of .1520 and an RSQ of .0231; it indicated that the college of the students' major accounted for only 0.21 per cent (.0252 - .0231 = .0021) of the variance in the criterion. When this RSQ was tested against the RSQ in the FM, an F-value of 1.55 was obtained which was not significant.

## 2. The Analysis of Variance of Problems

Table 2 shows the analysis of variance of total problems which were of concern to the Chinese college students. The F-value for classes was the only one significant at the .05 level, indicating that the difference between the frequency means of total problems reported on the MPCL for lowerclassmen and for upperclassmen, 52.52 and 46.78 respectively, was statistically significant.

Table 2. Analysis of Variance of the Total Problems of Concern on the MPCL for the Chinese College Students

Source of Variation	df	Mean Square	F
Sexes (S)	1	254.883	0.45
Classes (Cl)	1	2963.674	5.29*
Colleges (Co)	2	386.309	0.69
S x Cl	1	375.352	0.67
S x Co	2	56.016	0.10
Cl x Co	2	459.315	0.82
S x Cl x Co	2	187.676	0.33
Within Groups	348	560.368	

\* $p < .05$

Table 3 reveals the analysis of variance of total problems which were of concern to the American college students. Only the F-value for classes was significant at the .05 level. The frequency means of total problems reported on the MPCL for lowerclassmen and for upperclassmen, 48.83 and 43.17 respectively, were significantly different.

Table 3. Analysis of Variance of the Total Problems of Concern on the MPCL for the American College Students

Source of Variation	df	Mean Square	F
Sexes (S)	1	1345.079	3.01
Classes (Cl)	1	2888.791	6.47*
Colleges (Co)	2	1199.239	2.69
S x Cl	1	195.583	0.44
S x Co	2	387.303	0.87
Cl x Co	2	410.977	0.92
S x Cl x Co	2	64.044	0.14
Within Groups	348	446.487	

\* $p < .05$

### 3. Comparison of Frequency Means and Rank Orders of Problem Areas

Tables 4 and 5 present comparisons between the whole group of American college students and the whole group of Chinese college students. Table 4 deals with the problems of concern, while Table 5 deals with the problems of most concern.

Table 4 indicates that Chinese students reported more problems of concern in the total and in the areas of HPD, SRA, SPR, ACW, and CTP, but fewer problems in the areas of FLE and CSM, than American students. There were no significant differences between the two groups in the areas of PPR, HF, MR, and FVE. Major problem areas of concern were ACW, SRA, PPR, SPR, and FLE for American students; ACW, CTP, SRA, SPR, and PPR for Chinese students. In general, there was significant agreement between the rankings of problem areas by American and Chinese students.

Table 5 shows that American students reported more problems of most concern in the total and in all areas except HPD and CTP than Chinese students. Major problem areas of most concern were ACW, SRA, CSM, FLE, and FVE for American students; ACW, CTP, PPR, SRA, and SPR for Chinese students. The rankings of problem areas by American and Chinese students were not congruent.

### 4. Comparison of Predominant Problems

There were 74 problems on the MPCL checked as of concern by 20% or more of American college students and 75 by Chinese college students. Of these predominant problems, 30 were checked by both groups. It was found that American students had more predominant problems than Chinese students in the areas of FLE, SRA, CSM, HF, MR, and FVE, whereas Chinese students had more predominant problems than American students in the areas of HPD, SPR, ACW, and CTP. They had an equal number of predominant problems in the PPR area.

Table 4. Comparison of Frequency Means of Problems of Concern and Rank Orders of Problem Areas between the Whole Group of American College Students and the Whole Group of Chinese College Students

Area	American Students (N=360)			Chinese Students (N=360)			t
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	
HPD	3.18	2.26	10	4.14	2.93	6	-4.92**
FLE	4.43	3.37	5	2.91	3.10	10	6.30**
SRA	5.71	3.84	2	6.29	3.93	3	-2.00*
SPR	4.45	3.36	4	5.13	3.44	4	-2.58**
PPR	4.64	3.42	3	4.70	3.76	5	-0.22
CSM	3.60	3.17	8	2.97	2.83	9	2.81**
HF	2.84	2.74	11	2.47	2.40	11	1.93
MR	3.44	3.05	9	3.09	2.70	8	1.63
ACW	5.96	3.99	1	7.53	4.35	1	-5.05**
FVE	4.01	3.11	6	3.83	3.10	7	0.78
CTP	3.81	3.20	7	6.63	4.33	2	-9.94**
Total	46.00	21.34		49.65	23.62		-2.18*
$r_S = 0.66$			$t = 2.64^*$				

\* $p < .05$

\*\* $p < .01$

There were 22 problems on the MPCL checked as of most concern by 10% or more of American college students and 12 by Chinese college students. It was found that American students had predominant problems of most concern in all areas except MR, while Chinese students had no predominant problems of most concern in the areas of FLE, CSM, HF, and MR. Half of Chinese students' predominant problems of most concern were in two areas of ACW and CTP.

### 5. Comparison of the Preferred Sources of Help

The results presented by Table 6 were based on the analysis of the students' responses to the second part of the supplementary questionnaire. The percentages of American and Chinese college students checking each source of help were compared, and z value was obtained for each comparison. Table 6 indicates that:

Table 5. Comparison of Frequency Means of Problems of Most Concern and Rank Orders of Problem Areas between the Whole Group of American College Students and the Whole Group of Chinese College Students

Area	American Students (N=360)			Chinese Students (N=360)			
	Mean	Standard Ceviation	Rank	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	
HPD	0.90	1.09	10.5	0.78	1.30	6	1.34
FLE	1.27	1.55	4.5	0.45	0.99	8	8.46**
SRA	1.42	1.79	2	0.85	1.31	4	4.88**
SPR	1.19	1.59	7	0.82	1.35	5	3.37**
PPR	1.23	1.50	6	0.90	1.49	3	2.96**
CSM	1.30	1.82	3	0.41	0.85	9	8.41**
HF	0.92	1.38	8	0.38	0.80	10	6.42**
MR	0.91	1.39	9	0.35	0.75	11	6.73**
ACW	1.82	2.03	1	1.52	1.89	1	2.05*
FVE	1.27	1.64	4.5	0.58	0.96	7	6.89**
CTP	0.90	1.44	10.5	0.96	1.48	2	-0.55
Total	13.13	10.03		7.89	7.40		7.98**

$r_S = 0.21$                        $t = 0.64$

\*p &lt; .05

\*\*p &lt; 0.01

Table 6. Comparison of Preferred Sources of Help between American College Students and Chinese College Students

Source of Help	Per Cent of American Students Checking Source	Per Cent of Chinese Students Checking Source	z
Parent	25.28	42.50	-4.88**
Relative, not parent	9.44	16.11	-2.68**
Faculty adviser	5.56	21.39	-6.22**
Professor, not student's adviser	6.11	18.89	-5.18**
Counselor	31.39	8.06	7.87**
Minister	10.28	6.11	2.04*
Doctor	7.22	4.44	1.59
Friend	51.67	45.28	1.72
Other	15.56	1.94	6.46**
No one	13.61	11.66	0.79

\*p &lt; .05

\*\*p &lt; .01

1. Approximately half of American college students and Chinese college students preferred to talk over their problems with friends. There was no significant difference between the two groups.
2. Chinese college students were more willing than American college students to seek help from their parents, relatives, faculty advisers, and other professors.
3. American college students were more willing than Chinese college students to consult counselors, ministers, and other personnel not included on the list.

These differences might be due to different value systems, cultural settings, and provisions of counseling service.

## SUMMARY

This study has been oriented toward an investigation of college students' adjustment problems in the light of different cultural backgrounds, with the variables of sex, class, and college of major being taken into consideration. The purposes of this study were to identify, compare, and analyze the self-perceived and self-reported problems of Chinese and American undergraduate students, and to examine the sources of help which they might prefer to seek for dealing with their own problems.

Seven hundred and twenty undergraduate students were drawn, by stratified sampling, from the National Taiwan Normal University and the University of Northern Colorado. The Mooney Problem Check List (College Form) and a supplementary questionnaire devised by the writer were administered to the subjects in regular class settings.

The major findings based on the statistical analysis of data were as follows:

1. The college students' cultural backgrounds were significantly correlated with the number of problems reported on the MPCL.
2. For both American and Chinese college students, lowerclassmen reported more total problems of concern than did upperclassmen.
3. Chinese college students reported slightly more total problems of concern than did American college students; while the latter reported considerably more total problems of most concern.
4. The major problem areas of Chinese college students were "Adjustment to College Work," "Curriculum and Teaching Procedure," "Social and Recreational Activities," "Social - Psychological Relations," and "Personal - Psychological Relations."
5. The major problem areas of American college students were "Adjustment to College Work," "Social and Recreational Activities," "Personal - Psy-

chological Relations," "Social-Psychological Relations," and "Finances, Living Conditions, and Employment."

6. Both Chinese and American college students preferred to talk over their problems with friends. In addition, Chinese students were inclined to seek help from parents, relatives, and professors; American students tended to consult counselors, parents, and ministers.

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# 中美大學生適應問題之比較研究

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## 摘 要

本研究主要目的在於發現、比較與分析中國和美國大學生在個人適應上所遭遇到的困擾問題，並進一步探討他們在處理這些個人問題時所樂於求助的人員之類別。

(一) 研究對象：以分層取樣的方式，從國立台灣師範大學與美國北科羅拉多大學抽取大學部學生共 720 名，依學生的文化背景、性別、年齡與主修科系等四項因素加以分組，每組學生 30 名。

(二) 研究工具：

(1) 孟氏行爲困擾問題調查表。

(2) 筆者自編的「附加問卷」。

(三) 資料之搜集與處理：在平常課室情境中，以無記名方式，施行測驗與調查。測驗與調查所得資料經初步分類整理後，採用多元迴歸分析、變異數分析、等級相關、t 檢定、z 檢定等方法，進行統計分析。

本研究的結果如下：

(一) 大學生適應困擾問題的類別及數量，與他們生活的文化背景有密切的關係。

(二) 就適應困擾問題的總數而言，中國大學生的一般困擾問題稍多於美國大學生，但後者的嚴重困擾問題顯著多於前者。

(三) 無論中國或美國大學生，低年級學生比高年級學生有較多的適應困擾問題。

(四) 一般言之，不同性別和科系的大學生之間，在適應困擾問題上，並無顯著的差異。

(五) 中國大學生主要的適應困擾問題在下列五方面：(1)大學課業之適應，(2)課程與教學方法，(3)社交與休閒活動，(4)與他人的關係，(5)對自己的態度。

(六) 美國大學生主要的適應困擾問題在下列五方面：(1)大學課業之適應，(2)社交與休閒活動，(3)對自己的態度，(4)與他人的關係，(5)經濟與生活狀況。

(七) 中國和美國大學生皆喜歡與知己朋友談論個人的困擾問題。此外，中國大學生也常求助於父母與師長，但美國大學生則多求助於輔導人員、神父或牧師。