Cultural Anxiety and Its Impact on Students' Life: A Case Study of International Students in Wuhan University

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Abstract—This article illustrates that how non similar culture become a cause of constant anxiety among international students in China. For that, a survey was carried out among international students of Wuhan University, China. The association among non similar culture, non familiarity of Chinese culture, self finance students and food problem is looked at through a regression line, and in the light of empirical results, a model is anticipated which elucidates these results. Some suggestions were directed at the end which will help to mitigate the anxiety among prospective students in Chinese universities.

Keywords—Anxiety, international students, non similar culture, Wuhan University

I. INTRODUCTION

JOURNEY and mass departure do not remain same to one place rather the proclivity always shifts time to time due to international events or cultural obstructions and resources [1], [2], [3]. There is barely any country intervened by academic sojourn. Major chunk of the international students' mobility is from the developing countries to the west [4], [5]. They leave their countries and family in pursuit of education, like other sojourners do for business or tour etc. China has unbolted its doors for the international students and the numbers of students are increasing every year to pursue their education in different Chinese universities from across the globe [6], [7]. But due to its inimitable culture; students find difficulties to adjust in the host culture. Mainly, students move across the borders to equip themselves with new techniques and learning but when they cross their national borders, they feel themselves entangle with psychological problems [8], [9], [10], socio-cultural problems [11], [12], [13], [14] and academic problems [15]. Kim [16] is also of the view that "as foreign immigrants move from one culture to another, behavioral modes and values in the old setting may prove maladaptive in the new." The biggest problems which they face are communication gap, food, adjustment with new environment etc. Some of these variables will also be taken, later on, to analyze the author's stance. The authors will strive to stumble on that how non-similar culture become a cause of anxiety for students when they move from their culture to unfamiliar and non-similar Chinese culture. Joseph and Richard [17] in American context viewed that similar culture background international students have greater adaptability as compare to non-similar cultural background students. It created a strong motivation to the authors to look into the issue in Chinese context, which has a unique symbol based language and deep rooted values, which has opened its borders for internal students. To analyze the issue statistically, non similar culture (NSC) has been taken as a dependent variable and through probit model we will see the results that how non familiarity with Chinese culture (NFCC), self finance students (SFS) and food problem (FPr), which are independent variables, is associated with NSC. In the line of this hypothesis, following questions need to be answered.

What is cultural anxiety or cultural shock, how international students come across to it and how to relieve the cultural anxiety in intercultural communication? To find the answers of these questions, the author has conducted a survey among international students of Wuhan University, one of the best universities of China, where more than 2000 students are currently enrolled from more than 100 countries. Furthermore, the author selected this university because it is one of the top order universities of China. It is situated in central China and, thus, not so much exposed to the foreigners as Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen etc are. The study will help to understand cultural anxiety among foreign students and its main factors.

The rest of the article is structured as follows: section 2 highlights the related studies, section 3 illustrates theoretical grounds for hypothesis, section 4 deals with data analysis, section 5 tells about regression analysis, results and suggestions will be explained in section 6 and the last section will conclude this toil.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Number of endeavors has been done, till now, to dress up the cultural and psychological issues, especially identity crises, cultural shocks, anxiety, frustration, prejudices, discriminatory behavior etc. [18], [19], [20]. The issue is still under consideration among anthropologists, sociologists and recently among mass communication researchers. Every scholar tried to explain his stance on the issue and put forward his suggestions for the betterment of mankind. Paul [21] is of the view that none can impose action programs, to modernize, on others until to motivate and involve them for betterment or development.

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Sarles [22] mentioned that Edward also believes that the world is full of cultural shocks, especially, for those who has the experience to work abroad or study broad and are ignorant to the host country's signs and symbols. Taking it as a positive, he said, "Ability to read these signs enables us to be "sensitive," to know how the other person is reacting to what we are saying and doing." Kalin [23] explained the causes of misunderstandings that, "The cultural relativity of words, notions and concepts, and, even more importantly, the lack of consciousness of the differences in perception, are major sources of misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication." Shan [24] has also analyzed different aspects of cultural anxiety and supported his arguments with self-discrepancy, attributive and cognitive dissonance theories. The author elaborated his stance with three basic elements which are "external features, mental structure and cultural image." Apart from general discussions and elaborations on cultural anxiety and shock, different models have also been used by different scholars to analyze different factors and forward their suggestions that how to bridge the gap between two cultures and to mitigate the anxieties. For example, the most relevant work has been done by Brein and David [25]; he used W-curve to explain his stance. He mentioned that how with the passage of time students were going to adjust with new culture and compared that most relevant cultural groups adjust easily than from different cultural groups. Similarly, convergence model has been used by Barnett and Kincaid [26] and anxiety/uncertainty management theory by Gudykunst [27] to analyze the problems of cultural anxiety among different cultural groups. His work was further supported by Witt [28] that "In uncertainty/anxiety reduction theory, anxiety and attribution confidence are said to be the basic causes of intercultural adaptation." Hammer et al, [29] used a developmental model of intercultural sensitivity to analyze the process of denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation and integration. To review the literature discussed, it has been analyzed that most of the scholars agree on the problems faced by international students and tried to mitigate them with their own perceptions and by developing new models. This study will try to fill the gap with existence theories and will see the international students' anxiety and its impact on their life in Chinese context, which is not only a fast emerging issue in China but will also leave some interesting facts for the scholars to work on. On the bases of these writings, I will try to analyze my data for the support of my hypothesis.

III. THEORETICAL GROUNDS FOR HYPOTHESIS

Gudykunst and Kim [20] have presented multi-models to analyze the adaptation process of international students. The studied found that language proficiency and cultural competence are the important indicators to ease the adaptation process of academic sojourners. Similarly, it was also analyzed that gender differences count up in cross cultural adaptation and male sojourners are more adaptive as compare to female sojourners. The current work is also based on Gudykunst and Kim theories [20] to analyze the anxiety of international

students in Chinese context. Before going in depth, it is important to know that what is cultural anxiety and how one can understand it, so that, to get the clear depiction of the problem which will be discussed shortly.

A. Cultural Anxiety

When people come across to different cultures, the first setback which they face is cultural shock or cultural anxiety. Spradley and Philips [30] defined that, "the difficulties and frustrations of living in a foreign culture are known as culture shock". It was Oberg [31] who coined the term, "culture shock". As Spradley and Philips [30] has mentioned that, "It goes by names: anxiety, anomie, conflict, uncertainty, frustration, and culture shock." He further added that stress or anxiety "arises from external threats, goal striving, and cognitive dissonance". According to Sussman [32], "Culture shock is an intense, negative affective response, psychological and physiological, experienced by new expatriates when faced with unfamiliar symbols, roles, relationships, social cognitions, and behavior." Foreign students often confused when they first step in China because of different cultural environment. The work will analyze soon that what are the main problems which they face after joining their respective universities in China. The study will be particular about students of Wuhan University, Hubei Province.

B. How to understand Cultural Anxiety?

Anxiety in intercultural communication comes from anxiety of cultural identity which starts off from an imbalance between the self and cultural environment. Cultural identity and its substantiation lead to its maintenance, protection and consolidation. Identity problem happens when a person move from one cultural group to another, like international students, immigrants, trade etc. According to Spradley and Phillips [30], "Language differences confront one with new phonemes, morphemes, and semantic units; personal space is defined differently and cues for locating oneself in relation to others are changed; new foods, ways to eat, sleeping customs, time schedules, affective responses, and a host of other changes are encountered by those who experience a drastic change in cultural environment." Kalin [23] further clarified that, "words, notions and concepts which carry the same label often embody different meanings in different cultures; they are culture-bound." The only solution to come out from this anxiety or frustration is to respect and understand the host culture. We have to come out from the problem as mentioned by Paul [21], "We are too inclined to perceive the negative and overlook the positive when we behold the customs of others." The regression-resocialization model, as used by Kracke [33] in his article, can overcome this shortcoming. According to this model, a positive concept in intercultural communication, cultures can be engaged with one another and the process will lead towards an integration of different cultures into one.

Cultural identity is based on external features, mental structure and cultural image. All these three identities play their own respective role and, thus, create a balance [24]. Stolcke [34] argued that, "relations between cultures are by "nature"

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hostile and mutually destructive because it is in human nature to be ethnocentric; different cultures ought, therefore, to be kept apart for their own good."

Shortly, the study will analyze the cultural shock or anxiety, and will try to find that how non-similar culture become a cause of anxiety for students when they move from their cultures to China. Kim and Gudykunst [20] has differentiated the adaptation process of sojourners, in the line of cultural differences and similarities, as "The larger the disparity between the two, the more difficulty strangers are likely to face." The main factors will be identified by analyzing the data and will try to know that how students' lives are affected in cross-border movements. The authors have constructed some variables, so that, to sort out the results to verify their stance.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

This part of the study will discuss, in a while, the construction of variables, survey and data collection, frequency distribution analysis and finally the regression line analysis.

A. Construction of Variables

Before data collection, some variables were constructed to test. The first variable is other subject (OS) and the basic rationale was to know that whether students come to China to study Chinese Language or other subjects and, furthermore, how much hitch they face in the class lectures (PCL), which is another variable. The author also tried to find that whether the students are coming to China on self support bases or scholarship? It will help to find that if they are planning to study in China, then, how much they are ready to coup with the problems, for that, the author also constructed a variable of non familiarity with Chinese culture (NFCC). Kim (2003) defined familiar and unfamiliar culture as "The familiar culture, then, is the "home world," which is associated closely with the family or significant others. An unfamiliar culture, in contrast, is one that is out of harmony with one's basic understanding of self and reality." Food problem is another variable (FPr) to test. The work also tried to find that how international students categorize Chinese students and were asked that whether the Chinese students have reserved attitude (CSR) or not? It will also help to analyze the level of satisfaction among the relationship of international students and the local students, which does matter to minimize the gulf between foreigner and local students. To buy things (PBT) is another problem for the international students, mainly, because of language barrier. How international students feel when they face problem, for that, we tried to know that whether they become confuse (FPC) or not? On the bases of above variables, it was also tried to investigate that whether they will stay in China after graduation or will go back (GBC) to their respective countries. To test the hypothesis, non similar culture (NSC) was taken as a dependent variable. The study will focus on three independent variables, (NFCC, SFS, FPr) and will see, shortly, that how much these variables have the impact on dependent variable, NSC.

B. Survey and Data Collection

The questionnaire is framed in such a way that we know the different dimensions of cultural anxieties and shocks. For that, 25 questions were asked in which 20 were closed and 5 were opened form questions. The basic objective of the closed form questions was to know about some of the variables, like, problems in class lecture, communication with Chinese students, problem in buying things, to avail facilities etc. while rest of the five were left for an open choice which will help out in anecdote analysis.

To analyze the main causes of cultural shock, for that, 100 questionnaires were distributed among international students in Wuhan University and got back 95 with responses. The data comprised of the students from diverse cultural groups across the world, studying in Wuhan University. The data was administered personally and the questions were explained to the respondents where they find difficulty.

The author divided the students into three basic groups, based on their span of time in China. First, those who have studied less than a year, secondly, who studied more than a year but less than two years, and thirdly, those who are studying more than three years. This categorization of the groups is based on the earlier studies which support that span of time is also an important factor in cross cultural adaptations, along with the changing behaviors of sojourners [20], [14]. According to the data, the students less than a year are 28%, more than one year and less than two years are 16% and 54% are those who are studying more than three years (See Figure No.1).

Figure No. 1 Number of Students and Stay in Wuhan
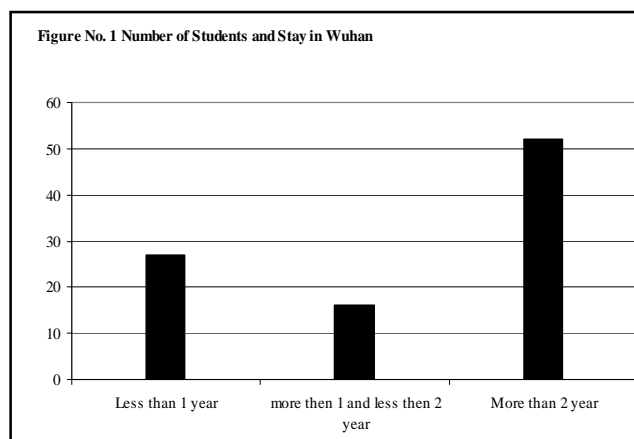
C. Frequency Distribution Analysis

The initial data (see Table No.1) demonstrates some interesting facts. It shows that China has got popularity in education sector and fascinated the students around the world [6] developed by Ministry of Education China. For example, 94% students came to study different majors, other than Chinese Language[3]. Another appealing fact is that 63% are self paying students, who came from different cultural backgrounds, which mean that China has become a flashpoint

[3] Despite of that School of Chinese Language in Wuhan University is one of the best schools in China.

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for the international students. According to the data, 92% students want to go back to their respective countries after getting their degrees which induce to think that what are the main reasons and why they don't want to settle in China. (See Table 1)

TABLE I FREQUENCY ANALYSIS

Variables	Total	Percentage
OS	88	92.632
PCL	44	46.316
SFS	60	63.158
NFCC	65	68.421
NSC	65	68.421
FPr	36	37.895
CSR	24	25.263
PBT	37	38.947
FPC	27	28.421
GBC	88	92.632

OS stands for Other Subject. It means those who don't keep Chinese Language as their major.

PCL stand for Problem in Class Lecture

SFS stands for Self Finance Students

NFCC means Not Familiar with Chinese Culture

NSC means Non-Similar Culture

FPr stands for Food Problem

CSR stands for Chinese Students Reserve attitude

PBT stands for Problem in Buying Things

FPC stands for Face Problem become Confuse

GBC stands for Go Back to Country

The major shock which students feel is the communication or language barricade. The data clearly proves that students feel difficulty to understand their lectures in the classes. Language, which is one of the variables of this toil, shows that 46% students feel problem to follow their teachers. Before coming to China, 68% students were not familiar with Chinese culture. Gudykunst and Kim [20] argue that those "who are familiar with host language and culture prior to moving" have greater propensity to adapt with host culture. Apart from that, food is also one of the causes of anxiety and 37% students considered it a big problem. Due to lack of communication or language competency 39% students also feel problem in buying things which is also one of the important factor to create anxiety. In short, the frequency table clearly epitomizes that all the above mentioned variables are equally responsible in creating anxiety among the international students, in one way or another, which not only impound them to themselves but also affect their study, at large.

D. Correlation Analysis

The association among different relevant variables can be shown through correlation analysis. It, generally, gives a rough picture of the relevancy of the variable but does not tell about the causation. This study also uses the same methodology at

this stage. We study the association of non-similar culture (NSC) with other variables (see Table 2).

TABLE II CORRELATION MATRIX

	CSR	FPr	FPC	GBC	PBT	NFCC	NSC	OS	PCL	SFS
CSR	1									
FPr	0.095	1								
FPC	0.171	-0.011	1							
GBC	0.002	0.159	0.191	1						
PBT	0.082	0.177	0.071	-0.069	1					
NFCC	0.291	0.017	-0.074	-0.043	0.125	1				
NSC	0.187	0.391	-0.124	0.202	0.078	0.318	1			
OS	0.071	0.054	-0.001	-0.086	0.060	0.068	-0.018	1		
PCL	0.092	0.145	-0.117	-0.022	-0.136	0.086	-0.005	0.100	1	
SFS	0.093	0.102	-0.051	0.083	0.073	0.232	0.326	-0.048	-0.035	1

There is a clear association between non similar cultures and attitude of Chinese students. The data has shown a positive sign with 18% association. It means that the more different the culture is the more reserve students/people will be. There is also a positive sign between NSC and problem of food. The association of 39% exemplifies that students feel great problem here in food. The main reasons are change of taste and religious concerns. Similar association of 17% has also found between NSC and to buy things and the main reason is lack of communication. Similarly, when a student moves in the community, he needs to communicate for interaction. When international students move from their culture to another, mostly, they don't know deeply about that culture. In such cases, they idealize the host culture, but when they arrive to that environment, then, they are entangled by constant cultural shocks and anxieties. In the current study, the data has also shown that 31% students were not familiar with Chinese culture when they stepped in.

As we know from the frequency distributed analysis, 92.63% students come to learn different subjects rather than to learn Chinese Language as a major (see Table 1). The data explicates that 46.37% students feel problems in class lectures and the main reason is lack of language competency. When students come from different cultural group, they are not much familiar with the host culture and, thus, ensnare when they arrive. The data has shown the association of 37% between NFCC and non similar culture. Unlike United States or any other European country, students in China prefer to go back to their respective countries because they can not adjust with new environment completely. The association between NSC and GBC is 20%. It shows that all these associations depend on one another. The data clearly illustrates that when a student moves from one culture to another, it opens a Pandora's Box for him to face. These not only create anxiety but also affect his concentration on study which is the prime objective of the student.

V. REGRESSION MODEL

Correlation analysis shows the association between two random variables and does not clarify about relationship. To

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tone down such problems, then, statisticians suggest using regression analysis. A regression line is a line drawn through the points on a disperse plot to abridge the relationship between the variables under consideration. But our case is not as simple as other regression analyses have, because, we are dealing in our study with dummy variables[4].

Numbers of options are available to deal with the dependent dummy variable analysis. However, the major concern of this article is to estimate the probable impact of defined variables on the dependent side of the equation; therefore, we will use the probit model to investigate the underline hypothesis. The binary nature of the variables, especially on the dependent side, does not allow us to use other option, like the logistic curve model.

The estimatable regression of the model is defined as follows:

$$D_{NSC} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 D_{NFCC} + \alpha_2 D_{SFS} + \alpha_3 D_{F\,Pr} + u$$

In the above equation D_{NSC} is taken as a dummy of non similar culture, a dependent variable. Similarly, D_{NFCC} represents a dummy for non familiarity with Chinese culture, D_{SFS} shows a dummy of self finance students while $D_{F\,Pr}$ stands for a dummy of food problem, which are independent variables, and u is the disturbance term of the specified model.

VI. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

The core objective of running a regression line was to quantify the results. The table typifies that NFCC has 95% probability to impact NSC. The variables are directly proportional, which means that if one unit of NFCC increases it will also drag up the value of NSC. Similarly, if NFCC decrease of one unit it will also affect the value of NSC. The ignorance of students about Chinese culture means that students are from different cultural origin. This study is also in the line of Brein and David [25] who explained that the students of most similar cultural groups can adjust easily and have less anxiety as compare to the students of different cultures. His arguments also supports that if students are not familiar with Chinese culture, they will be from non similar culture and will face greater anxiety compare to students of similar culture.

Similarly, the impact of SFS on NSC is 76% and it has also a positive association. It means that if one unit of SFS increases it will also has an impact on the unit of dependent variable. In the same way, if the value of SFS decreases it will affect the value of NSC. Self paying students intend to study abroad with more expectation but when they step down in the host culture, they become entrap into a chain of anxieties. One of the main reasons to study abroad is to get the label of abroad degree. The second reason is that self paying students can afford the expenses. But, culture varies from country to country and from region to region, so, when they go abroad they also find a

change in culture. Again, it depends that how much students are nearer with host culture. Edward argument is also in the line of our results mentioned by Sarles [22].

The last but not least result is an association between food problem and NSC in our table. Spradley and Phillips [30] mentioned that in host culture "new foods, ways to eat" always create challenges for new comers. Our result also shows more than 100% association of FPr with NSC. This problem is most expected and more common among international students, because, food is one of the basic entities of culture, like language. And, it varies from region to region and culture to culture in taste and materials. Another important factor is religious obligations, for example, Muslims don't eat pork and similarly, Hindus avoid eating beef.

So, on the bases of our results and research studies, we can conclude that non similar culture and other variables keep the international students in constant anxiety which not only affect their social life but also their studies which is the prime motive for going abroad. We can conclude that, over all, results are significantly positive.

TABLE III THE PROBIT ESTIMATES

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	z-Statistic	Prob.
C	-0.9849	0.3344	-2.9458	0.0032
FPr	1.4980	0.4080	3.6720	0.0002
SFS	0.7568	0.3196	2.3682	0.0179
NFCC	0.9468	0.3386	2.7966	0.0052

Note: Convergence Achieved after 4 iterations
Dependent Variable : NSC

VII. SUGGESTIONS TO TONE DOWN THE STUDENTS' ANXIETY

On the bases of our results, the study suggests that concerned authority of the universities introduce students' restaurants properly, by keeping in mind the religious concerns of the students, inside the university. Food is one of the main reasons of anxiety for Asian students, especially for the Muslims pork is forbidden, while Hindus also don't eat beef. Any proper arrangement and university's interest can mitigate, to some extent, the anxiety of students, regarding food.

Secondly, the Ministry of Education People's Republic of China, at least, makes it compulsory that new students should have some know how about Chinese language and culture before coming to China, so that, they don't face much problem in adjusting with new environment. Ministry of Education can also introduce Chinese language proficiency exams, like, IELTS, TOFEL, GRE[5] etc. Such action will not only allow the standard stuff to come in but will also have a good impact to render the better education services to the international students.

Last but not least, the work suggests that Ministry of Education introduce one comprehensive course, based on Chinese culture, without concerning their major, at least, in the first semester of every new academic year. It will give a taste of

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[4] Dummy variable is used when we convert qualitative variables into quantitative one by giving the values of 0 or 1, according to the definition.

[5] These are the English Language Proficiency Exams.

Chinese culture which will not only help to minimize their anxieties but will also help them to adjust with new culture.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Anxiety is a kind of depression, tension, restlessness or fear when we face danger or threat against our culture or value system. It often happens, especially, when one culture encounters with another. It is an inborn sensitivity which cannot be stamped out. As the people are going across the border, the people are more exposing to different cultural anxieties in the form of language, lifestyle, food, symbols, greetings etc. The new media is also playing a pivotal role in exposing cultural differences and people's reaction to that.

China has become a flashpoint for the international students across the world. But due to its unique culture and language, international students come across a lot of problems which create anxiety for them. The whole system is in Chinese language, and thus, the student encounters with number of difficulties as it was discussed in data analysis above.

It is very easy at individual level to adjust with host culture with the passage of time, by getting language competence and developing interpersonal communication level, but we cannot negate the fact that it also varies from person to person. Gudykunst and his associates [35], [36], [37] and [38] are of the view that uncertainty and anxiety are two of the most basic challenges for new comers in the host society. We have observed that how different variables are associated with one another and become a cause of anxiety for international students.

21st century can turn China as a center of modern education but, for that, it has to market its culture, language and education system, so that, students can easily adopt its environment. Wuhan University is one of the top order universities in China; if this is the anxiety level of international students here we can, by far, guess about other institutions which are low in rank. It is very clear from the data results that anxiety does not come with single factor but a chain of factors, and thus, affects the students' core objective.

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