



Stereotypes of Chinese international students held by Americans[☆]

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 6 February 2012

Received in revised form

29 November 2012

Accepted 22 December 2012

Keywords:

Chinese international students

American students

Stereotypes

ABSTRACT

This study examined stereotypes of Chinese international students held by Americans in two parts. To begin, 100 American students from a large Midwestern university listed traits describing a typical Chinese student, generating 31 frequent descriptors. Next, 146 American participants reported the percentage of Chinese students they believed to possess each of the 31 traits and the favorability of those traits. Exploratory factor analysis revealed five primary stereotypes of Chinese students. Some reflect previous literature concerning stereotypes of Asians generally (e.g., smart/hardworking, shy/not social, and bad English/not assimilated), whereas others are more unique (e.g., nice/friendly and oblivious/annoying). Stereotypes ranged from highly favorable (i.e., nice/friendly and smart/hardworking) to highly unfavorable (i.e., oblivious/annoying). Results are discussed with respect to prior literature on stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans and implications for communication between American and Chinese students.

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1. Introduction

The globalization movements of the last two decades have generated not only significant economic ties, but also cultural exchanges between the U.S. and China (Guthrie, 2009; Institute of International Education, 2010a). On the one hand, the U.S. and China are very much connected economically, working together and competing with one another on a daily basis as China is becoming a superpower in the global stage. The U.S. is a significant importer of goods from China, providing a boost to China's growth. The number of Americans working in China and Chinese having business in the States will only continue to increase in today's economy. In addition, the U.S. has enormous amounts of debt in bond markets, and the majority of those bonds are held by China. In looking forward to the future, rises in both countries' populations, environmental change, and decreases in access to natural resources such as food, water, and energy sources mean that these two nations will need to continue to cooperate and find productive ways to work together or potentially fall object to conflict and hostility. Hence, much of this economic cooperation may begin with individuals from both cultures coming together, learning about one another, and developing positive interpersonal relationships.

One context where there is great potential for cultural exchange between Americans and Chinese is on university campuses. As of 2010, there were a total of 690,923 international students enrolled at U.S. educational institutions; of those, approximately 18.5% (or 127,268) of international students originated from China alone. In fact, Chinese students are the largest group of students from a particular nation (Institute of International Education, 2010a). Many of these Chinese

[☆] This paper is based on the first author's dissertation under the direction of Yan Bing Zhang. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2012 annual conference of the International Communication Association, Phoenix, AZ.

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students who are primarily singletons due to the Chinese one child policy (Deutsch, 2006), however, encounter difficulties with stress and adaptation during their stay in the U.S. due to perceived cultural differences and lack of support from others (Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008; Heggins & Jackson, 2003; Le & Gardner, 2010; Yan & Berliner, 2009).

North American (specifically the United States) and East Asian (specifically China) cultures differ significantly from one another in many ways (Szalay, Strohl, Fu, & Lao, 1994). As an example, according to Geert Hofstede's *Cultural Taxonomies* (2001), U.S. culture and Chinese culture differ significantly on values of collectivism/individualism, power distance, and long-term/short-term orientation. Additionally, Chinese and U.S. American cultures differ greatly in communication style (Hall, 1981). Specifically, China is a more high-context culture than the United States, which could lead to misunderstandings when individuals from these two cultures interact (Würitz, 2005). With the potential cultural differences that exist between individuals from the U.S. and China, it is critical that we develop a better understanding of how communication difficulties may be avoided and positive relationships developed between individuals from the two cultures (Buzan, 2010).

Previous research has shown that international students, and Asian students specifically, face discrimination as a result of stereotypes when studying on US campuses (Bonazzo & Wong, 2007; Lee & Rice, 2007; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). This discrimination has adverse effects on a student's ability to adapt to the host culture and increased levels of depression (Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007). However, it is rare to find studies looking at stereotyping and specific international student groups on U.S. campuses. Although there are commonalities in the adaptation process across cultural groups (e.g., language barriers, unfamiliarity of cultural norms, separation from family and friends back home), the experience of adaptation and relationships with host nationals can vary greatly among cultural groups (Yoon & Portman, 2004). Thus, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the perceptions that American students have toward Chinese international students (the largest group of students from a particular nation currently studying in the U.S.) as a way to better understand this group's experience. This has important implications for intercultural communication and cultural adaptation. Stereotypes (such as those held by Americans toward Chinese international students) may discourage communication between cultural groups or shape the communication that occurs in ways that limit the depth and appropriateness of an intercultural encounter (e.g., Operio & Fiske, 2003).

1.1. Stereotypes

Stereotypes are person perception schemas of a particular group of people (Fiske, 1998). Essentially, they may be seen as cognitive structures that contain information about a group and the attributes that characterize members of that group (Weber & Crocker, 1983). Stereotypes serve important functions within intercultural communication (Fiske, 1998). Typically, stereotypes about cultural groups are varied and contain a combination of both positive and negative attributes (Operio & Fiske, 2003). There is a basic assumption among social psychological theorists that categorization is a normal human process, which allows people to more quickly make sense of the world around them. Stereotypes may be accurate in certain contexts and for certain group members, but they can be problematic in that they may cause one to overlook counter-stereotypic information and lead us to behave in ways that direct interactions to reinforce our pre-existing stereotypes (e.g., the self-fulfilling prophecy, Snyder, 1992). Much recent research on stereotypes has centered on the reasons why individuals rely on stereotypes in interactions (*stereotype functions*), the ways that stereotypes work in interactions or the ways they can be changed (*stereotype processes*), and *stereotype content*. The current project focuses on stereotype content, or the actual generalizations that individuals make about particular groups (e.g., Madon et al., 2001).

Some of the first research dealing with stereotypes was related to stereotype content. Researchers would compile lists of the most common stereotypes held about particular groups in society. Often the goal of these types of studies was to explore the rigidity and inaccuracy of minority group stereotypes (Madon et al., 2001). The most famous of these make up the Princeton trilogy (Gilbert, 1951; Karlins, Coffman, & Walters, 1969; Katz & Braly, 1933). In these studies, participants selected the traits (out of a list of 84) that best described 10 ethnic and national groups (e.g., African Americans, Chinese, Irish, and Turks). In the later part of the 20th century, there was a move away from stereotype content research and toward stereotype processes because of the ability to generalize knowledge about stereotype processes (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). That is, stereotype content is considered to be applicable only to the specific populations and groups examined, but knowledge about stereotype processes can be used across contexts. However, generating knowledge about stereotype content can be beneficial in terms of understanding the experience of particular groups in a society and encourage stereotype change by finding ways to counter the most damaging of stereotypes. Thus, this project returns to one of the original aims of stereotype research to better understand the experience of a specific group within the United States.

1.2. East Asian stereotypes

Of the research that has been conducted to compile lists of stereotypes about individuals of East Asian descent, most is focused on Asian Americans as a general category, and much of these lists are developed through analyses of media portrayals of Asian characters. Very little research examines stereotypes about particular Asian cultural groups (such as Chinese international students) within the U.S.

Whereas more recent stereotype research has grouped all those who originate from Asia into one category (often called "Asian Americans"), the original stereotype content studies (e.g., Gilbert, 1951; Karlins et al., 1969; Katz & Braly, 1933) examined Chinese individuals as a group separate from other Asian cultures (specifically Japan and Turkey). In 1933, Katz

and Braly found that Chinese individuals were stereotyped as superstitious, sly, conservative, tradition-loving, and loyal to family ties. By 1951, Gilbert found that the stereotype had moved away from the idea that Chinese are superstitious and sly to a perception of Chinese as primarily tradition-loving. With the passage of history and changes in human experience (e.g., opening of borders and greater access via technological forms of communication), it is likely perceptions have changed, though how dramatically is unclear. Research on current perceptions of Chinese, especially within the specific context of Chinese international students is rare. Instead much of the focus has been on Asian-Americans, a broad and highly diverse group of people within the United States.

Today, research has consistently found that Asian Americans are underrepresented in the media (Lee & Joo, 2005). Of the portrayals that do exist, many Asian characters are in stereotypical roles (Lee & Joo, 2005; Park, Gabbadon, & Chernin, 2006). The most frequent stereotypes represented are that of an immigrant who is not assimilated, speaks poor English, and lacks basic social skills (Suzuki, 2002) and/or that of an immigrant who is hard-working, intelligent, and polite (Lee & Joo, 2005; Park et al., 2006).

When non-Asian Americans are asked about their perceptions of Asian Americans, they report similar stereotypes as those portrayed in the media. In a study involving nearly 900 undergraduate students, Ho and Jackson (2001) identified negative characteristics (i.e., antisocial, cold, cunning, deceitful, narrow-minded, nerdy, pushy, selfish, and sly), positive characteristics (i.e., ambitious, hardworking, intelligent, mathematical, family-oriented, obedient, self-disciplined, serious, traditional, artistic, imaginative, expressive, and musical) and neutral characteristics (i.e., quiet and reserved) that are attributed to Asian Americans. However, they also noted that positive characteristics related to intelligence and self-discipline can lead either to positive attitudes such as admiration and respect or to negative attitudes related to threat. Asians are often considered a “model minority” in that they are seen to be hardworking, ambitious, intelligent, mathematical, obedient, self-disciplined, serious, and traditional, traits which contribute positively to society (Ho & Jackson, 2001; Lee & Joo, 2005). Wong, Lai, Nagasawa, and Lin (1998) found that Asian Americans also attribute similar stereotypes to their own group. According to Fiske et al. (2002), Asians are most often considered to be highly competent but cold. They refer to this as the “envious” stereotype because non-Asian Americans view competence as positive, but they feel that Asian competence may weaken their own group’s status. These stereotypes may lead non-Asian Americans to feel less likely to communicate with Asian Americans (Aberson & Haag, 2007; Q. Zhang, 2010; X. Zhang, 2010).

This project looked in particular at Americans’ perceptions of Chinese international students. Therefore, the goal of the project was to identify common stereotypes that American students have about Chinese international students. Although these stereotypes were expected to be similar to existing literature concerning stereotypes about Asians (e.g., Ho & Jackson, 2001), it is important to check for differences in stereotypes or additional stereotypes for this particular group of East Asians in the U.S. so that this information may be used to encourage stereotype change, as necessary, and potentially facilitate better relations between American students and Chinese international students. As such, the following research question was posed:

RQ1: What are the primary stereotypes that Americans students have about Chinese international students?

2. Study 1

2.1. Method

To begin, members of the population of interest (American students on a large Midwestern university campus) were asked to report their perceptions of Chinese international students. Specifically of interest were the traits that American students attribute to Chinese students. The goal of this particular study was to explore the particular stereotypes that this population might hold toward a particular group of Asians in the United States. This university was chosen due to its high percentage of Chinese international students (47%, or 948 out of 2031 total international students on campus, including 861 students from Mainland China, 57 from Taiwan, and 30 from Hong Kong). Although participants in this study were not asked about the quantity of contact they have had with Chinese culture, other research using this population has shown that it is common for American students on this campus to encounter Chinese students in classes or in common areas such as the library or student union. However, there are relatively few relationships developed between American students and Chinese students (Ruble, 2011).

2.1.1. Participants

Participants were 100 volunteers recruited from a large Midwestern university (M age = 20.43, SD = 1.13; 52% females). The majority of the participants were Caucasian (i.e., 95%). Students finished a paper-and-pencil survey independently either in a small group setting or individually with the presence of the researcher. They received course credit in exchange for their participation.

2.1.2. Procedures

Following the procedures of Hummert, Garstka, Shaner, and Strahm (1994), participants were asked to think about how they would describe the typical Chinese international student based on their personal opinions. They then wrote down these traits using short phrases or single words. Participants were informed that they could include all descriptors that they

Table 1
Frequency of traits listed by American students to describe Chinese international students.

Trait	Frequency
Smart	67
Quiet	26
Good at Math and Science	24
Shy	24
Studious	22
Incompetent in English	21
Friendly	19
Nice	19
Intelligent	16
Always with other Chinese	16
Hardworking	15
Polite	15
Loud	14
Socially awkward	14
Only friends with other Chinese	11
Loner	10
Funny	9
Intrusive on personal space	9
Strange	9
Cliquey/exclusive	8
Never speaks English	8
Not assimilated	8
Kind	7
Efficient	7
Different	7
Oblivious	7
Annoying	6
Conceited	6
Fashionable	6
Not social	6
Rude	6

associated with Chinese international students regardless of whether these descriptors were positive or negative or whether they personally believed the descriptors to be true.

2.2. Results

The descriptions provided by participants were compiled by collapsing synonymous descriptions (e.g., efficient and fast working) and removing irrelevant and non-trait related descriptors (e.g., “fortune cookies,” “rice,” “camera”). The authors of the paper worked together to make all decisions regarding collapsing of synonyms and removal of non-trait related descriptors. A total of 86 descriptors were listed by at least two participants. In order to determine which traits were frequently listed by the 100 participants, Kenny’s (1987) binomial distribution formula was used. The results showed six as a statistically significant frequency ($p < .003$). Thus, the 31 descriptors mentioned by six or more participants were considered frequent traits.

The 31 frequently listed traits encompassed a range of positive and negative characteristics about Chinese students (see Table 1 for a list of traits and their frequencies). These traits are consistent with previous research regarding stereotypes about East Asians generally, specifically relevant to stereotypes about Chinese students as smart, hardworking, quiet, socially awkward, and non-assimilated (Ho & Jackson, 2001; Park et al., 2006; Stephan et al., 1991). In addition to previous research, additional characteristics emerged such as friendly, nice, loud, annoying, intrusive and conceited. While these traits are useful in understanding American students’ perceptions of Chinese international students, a second study was conducted by focusing on the types of stereotypes these traits represent.

3. Study 2

3.1. Method

To further explore the stereotypes that American students hold toward Chinese international students, the next step asked participants to report their perceptions of how prevalent the 31 traits from Study 1 are in the Chinese international student population. Participants also indicated the favorability of those traits.

Table 2

Factor loadings for exploratory factor analysis with Promax rotation of traits attributed to Chinese students by American students.

	1	2	3	4	5
Good at Math and Science	.869				
Smart	.846				
Intelligent	.834				
Studious	.782				
Hardworking	.661				
Polite		.840			
Kind		.784			
Friendly		.753			
Nice		.743			
Efficient		.643			
Funny		.507			
Fashionable		.457			
Different			.849		
Only friends with other Chinese students			.727		
Cliquey/exclusive			.682		
Always with groups of other Chinese students			.665		
Bad at English			.659		
Not assimilated to American culture			.424		
Quiet				.737	
Shy				.710	
Loner				.686	
Not social				.621	
Socially awkward				.580	
Intrusive on personal space					.908
Conceited					.777
Oblivious					.734
Loud					.712
Annoying					.639
Rude					.587
Never speaks English					.529
Strange					.404

Note: Factor loadings > .40 are shown.

3.1.1. Participants

One hundred and forty-six American citizens at the same large Midwestern university completed an online survey. They were recruited from the basic communication studies course pool and received course credit in exchange for their participation. The average age of the participants was 19.85 years old ($SD = 3.26$), and 46.6% of participants were female. Of the students who reported ethnicity, 86.3% were White/Caucasian, 2.1% were African American, 6.1% were Hispanic, and 4.8% were biracial/other. No participants reported being of Asian ethnicity.

3.1.2. Procedures

Participants were directed to an online survey where they were first asked to read an informed consent statement. After consenting to continue with the project, they reported basic demographic information (age, sex, and ethnicity/race). Next, participants completed a stereotype measure for Chinese international students. This measure included the list of traits generated during Study 1, which were incorporated into a revised version of [Stephan et al.'s \(1991\)](#) percentage technique for the measurement of stereotypes. This technique asks participants to indicate the percentage of group members who possess a particular trait. In addition, participants reported the favorability of each of the traits using single-item likert-like scale (e.g., 1 = the trait is very unfavorable, 7 = the trait is very favorable).

3.2. Results

A principal component analysis (PCA) with oblique rotation (promax with kaiser normalization) was conducted on scales reporting American student perceptions of the prevalence of the 31 most frequently listed traits culled from Study 1. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, $KMO = .81$ and all KMO values for individual items were well above the acceptable limit of 0.5. Bartlett's test of sphericity chi-square (465) = 1686.93, $p < .001$, indicated correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA. An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each component in the data. Seven components had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criteria of 1. The scree plot showed inflexions that would justify retaining the first five components. Together, these five components explained 60.40% of the variance. Thus, analyses were run again, limiting the number of factors to 5. [Table 2](#) shows the factor loadings after oblique rotation.

As further test of the model fit, a maximum likelihood confirmatory factor analysis of the 5-factor model was conducted ([Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2006](#)). Results indicated a reasonable fit to the data ($\chi^2/df = 1.78$, $RMSEA = .073$, $CFI = 0.93$, $NNFI = 0.93$) with item loadings ranging from .30 to .90.

Table 3
Means and standard deviations of the percentage of Chinese students who possess traits and the favorability of those traits.

	% Chinese (0–100 scale)		Favorability (7pt scale)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Smart/hardworking</i>				
Intelligent	78.99	15.45	5.99	1.03
Smart	77.99	16.82	5.93	1.25
Good at math and science	75.70	17.07	5.28	1.39
Studious	75.40	18.41	5.47	1.32
Hardworking	72.82	20.59	5.81	1.08
<i>Nice/friendly</i>				
Nice	66.45	20.81	6.04	1.19
Kind	65.21	21.85	5.79	1.37
Friendly	61.80	21.74	6.01	1.23
Polite	61.72	26.02	5.92	1.14
<i>Bad at English/not assimilated</i>				
Always in groups of other Chinese students	75.48	24.35	3.27	1.55
Only friends with other Chinese students	63.65	29.38	3.19	1.49
Cliquey/exclusive	56.94	29.77	2.73	1.39
Different	56.50	26.92	4.02	1.28
Bad at English	51.33	26.80	2.65	1.54
Not assimilated to American culture	50.51	26.98	2.98	1.41
<i>Shy/not social</i>				
Shy	57.37	24.25	3.34	1.27
Socially awkward	48.51	25.41	2.87	1.33
Not social	38.28	24.09	2.74	1.25
Loner	32.71	23.24	2.99	1.40
<i>Oblivious/annoying</i>				
Never speaks English	38.55	27.53	2.48	1.35
Oblivious	38.27	27.80	2.83	1.18
Strange	36.49	26.47	2.88	1.39
Loud	32.31	27.84	3.06	1.24
Annoying	31.73	29.13	2.28	1.19
Intrusive on personal space	30.24	26.81	2.36	1.39
Conceited	28.73	22.22	2.35	1.28
Rude	28.24	23.86	2.04	1.22

Although the CFA had reasonable fit, several items showed low loadings in the initial model test. Thus, the items with loadings below .50 (i.e., quiet, funny, fashionable, and efficient) were removed for a total of 27 items. A maximum likelihood confirmatory factor analysis of this 5-factor model was conducted (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2006). Results indicated an adequate fit to the data ($\chi^2/df=1.64$, RMSEA = .066, CFI = 0.95, NNFI = 0.94) with item loadings ranging from .54 to .90.

The traits that cluster most strongly on the same factors suggest that they fit together to form the same stereotype about Chinese students. Factor 1 (oblivious/annoying) represents a stereotype of Chinese students who never speak English and are oblivious, loud, conceited, intrusive on personal space, rude, annoying, and strange. Factor 2 (nice/friendly) represents a stereotype of Chinese students who are kind, friendly, nice, and polite. Factor 3 (smart/hardworking) represents a stereotype of Chinese students who are smart, good at math and science, intelligent, studious, and hardworking. Factor 4 (bad at English/not assimilated) represents a stereotype of Chinese students who are different, unable to speak English well, only friends with other Chinese students, and not assimilated to American culture. Finally, Factor 5 (shy/not social) represents a stereotype of Chinese students who are shy, loners, not very social, and socially awkward. See Table 3 for means and standard deviations of the percentage of Chinese students that American students believe possess the stereotype traits.

In addition to reporting the prevalence of the traits for Chinese international students, participants in Study 2 were also asked to report the favorability of each trait in general.² Traits ranged from highly favorable (e.g., nice, friendly, intelligent) to unfavorable (e.g., rude, annoying, conceited). See Table 3 for means and standard deviations for the favorability of all traits.

² It should be noted that prevalence measured participants' perceptions of the percentage of Chinese international students who possessed a particular trait; favorability only measured participants' views of the valence of the traits per se without a particular target group in mind. As stereotypes are essentially prototype-based perceptions of a group of people encompassing both prevalence and valence (Hogg & Tindale, 2005), these sub-stereotypes and their corresponding traits could be used in the future to examine evaluative perceptions by measuring the favorability of these traits *specific* to Chinese international students.

4. Discussion

4.1. Significance of results

The goal of the project was to explore the stereotypes that American students have about a particular group of Asians in the United States, that of Chinese international students. Five stereotypes emerged to describe the perceptions that American students have about Chinese international students. For the most part, they are consistent with previous research on stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans more generally. However, some unique profiles emerged for this particular group.

Notably, some common stereotypes uncovered in previous research are absent from this project. These include stereotypes of Asians (or Chinese more specifically) as cunning, sly, deceitful, obedient, non-athletic, loyal to family ties, and ambitious (e.g., Grant & Holmes, 1981; Ho & Jackson, 2001). Many of these stereotypes have been gleaned through media portrayals (Lee & Joo, 2005; Park et al., 2006) and studies concerning perceptions of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans rather than international students. It appears that although some stereotypes are common for Asians as a general category, American students may perceive Chinese international students as possessing specific traits that distinguish them from other Asians.

It is important to note that these five factors represent five types of students or profiles, and a target Chinese student could be viewed as primarily possessing traits of a particular type of stereotype in a particular context (and thus diminishing the presence of other traits). However, we need to be aware that a target Chinese student could also conceivably be viewed as having any combination of these traits.

The first group of stereotypes that American students reported about Chinese international students and attributed to the highest percentage of Chinese students is that of a person who is smart, good at math and science, intelligent, studious, different, and hardworking. Overall, the traits that make up the smart/hardworking stereotypes were considered to be positive/favorable by the American students and were attributed to more than 3/4 of all Chinese students ($M = 76.18\%$). The smart/hardworking stereotype is a very common stereotype of Chinese and Asians more generally and is consistent with the “Model Minority” stereotype often attributed to Asians (e.g., Ho & Jackson, 2001; Lee & Joo, 2005; Q. Zhang, 2010; X. Zhang, 2010). It is not surprising that this stereotype emerged from this particular population, especially in an academic setting such as university. These traits are especially relevant in this context. Overall, participants perceived smart/hardworking traits to be positive. However, some participants did indicate that the characteristics could be threatening to them by stating that Chinese are “too smart” or “too intelligent.” This same pattern was noted by Ho and Jackson (2001) and fits the assumptions of Fiske et al., 2002 stereotype content model, which proposes that groups who are seen as competent but cold often generate feelings of fear or envy.

The model minority stereotype can have both positive and negative outcomes for Chinese students. In an academic context, instructors and fellow students may perceive Chinese students positively because they have high expectations for them based on their stereotypes. Asian students themselves often rely on these stereotypes about their ingroup, leading them to feel better prepared for college, more motivated to succeed, and capable of higher levels of career success than White students (Wong et al., 1998). These expectations, however, can be damaging to Chinese students’ psychological well-being. If Chinese students recognize that others have high expectations for them because of stereotypes, and they feel unable to meet those expectations, they may experience a high degree of stress and reduced self-esteem (Suzuki, 2002). Thus, Suzuki argues that academic institutions have an obligation to provide Asian students with support resources and to educate support providers on the unique needs of Asian students and the potential damaging effects of the model minority stereotype.

The second stereotype that American students reported about and attributed to more than half of Chinese international students was that of a student who is kind, friendly, nice, and polite. Overall, these traits were considered to be very favorable to the American students. The nice/friendly stereotype is an uncommon one in stereotype research and actually is in contrast to much research concerning Asians generally that shows that individuals tend to view Asians as competent yet cold and distant (Fiske et al., 2002).

There could be several reasons that this particular stereotype emerged for Chinese international students. The first possible reason is that because participants were asked to think of Chinese students on their university campus, they referred to actual positive experiences that they have had with Chinese students, rather than relying solely on stereotypes they have learned from media or other sources. The second possible explanation is that because participants were asked to think about Chinese international students on their campus, they saw these particular students as sharing a common social identity, that of ingroup members identifying with the same university, and thus perceived the Chinese students to possess traits that could be attributed to that particular social identity. A third possible explanation is that participants, due to the social desirability bias that can be present in self-report data, wished to not come across as prejudiced or reliant on stereotypes. Accordingly, they included some positive traits in their list of descriptors (from Study 1) of Chinese international students that could apply to any group of people in addition to the more common stereotypes that tend to be more specific to perceptions of Asians. During Study 2, participants were asked to rate the percentage of Chinese students who possessed each trait. That is, American students reported that more than half of Chinese students are nice, friendly, etc. This is an overall positive finding. If American students view Chinese students positively, they may be more likely to interact with them, which is the fundamental first step in establishing intercultural friendships.

The third stereotype that American students attributed to more than half of Chinese students is that of a student who is bad at speaking English, only friends with other Chinese students, not well assimilated to US culture, and socially awkward. These traits were considered to be unfavorable overall and are consistent with previous research about both Asians (Ho & Jackson, 2001) and international students/immigrants generally (Stephan, Stephan, & Gudykunst, 1999). Essentially, the bad at English/not assimilated stereotype describes American students' perception of Chinese students as separate from and perhaps uninterested in becoming part of U.S. culture. Although these traits were considered to be unfavorable on the part of American students, it is possible that this stereotype may actually mitigate some of the negative attitudes that Americans might otherwise feel toward Chinese students. Specifically, Molinsky and Perunovic (2008) noted that American students who viewed a video of a non-native speaker with low fluency behaving in a culturally inappropriate manner rated the speaker more positively than if the speaker had high fluency. That is, when one observes someone who is obviously new to the culture and not well-adapted, one may be more likely to be less judgmental of him/her. This may lead American students who see Chinese students on campus as socially awkward, incompetent in English, or hesitant to develop relationships with Americans to feel empathetic toward the Chinese student situation rather than responding with resentment or other negative emotions.

The final two stereotypes attributed to Chinese students are made up of traits considered to be unfavorable by American students. The fourth stereotype is that of student who is quiet, shy, a loner, and not very social. The American students attributed this stereotype to just less than one half of all Chinese students. They rated the traits that make up the shy/not social stereotype as relatively neutral to unfavorable. It is a fairly common stereotype of Asians generally, according to previous research (Ho & Jackson, 2001). To a large extent, this stereotype reflects American college students' cognitive representations of Chinese international students as a marginalized group, possessing low identification with both the home and host cultures (Berry, 1997).

The fifth stereotype of Chinese international students describe a student who is oblivious, loud, intrusive on personal space (such as crowding the sidewalk or cafeteria), conceited, annoying, strange, and never speaks English. The American students attributed these traits to about one-third of all Chinese students and considered them to be very unfavorable traits for a person to possess. The oblivious/annoying stereotype is relatively uncommon in previous research on Asian stereotypes but may reflect the negative attitudes that American students have about Chinese students as outsiders who do not care to adapt to U.S. culture. This stereotype resembles the separation strategy sojourners use in a new cultural environment, indicating some Chinese international students' mal-adaptation practices and low identification with the host culture (Berry, 1997).

Of note, the traits "never speaks English" from the fifth stereotype and "bad at English" from the third stereotype appear to be quite similar in name. However, the data seem to support participants' perceptual differences of the two phrases. For example, when we manually moved "bad at English" together with "never speak English" on the same factor or vice versa, the model fitness indices and item loading to the factor became significantly worse (e.g., dropped from .87 to .29). Hence, one explanation could be that the bad at English trait indicates that Chinese international students lack competence in speaking the language, which fits well with other traits related to a lack of assimilation/unfamiliarity with the host culture in the third stereotype. However, never speaks English refers more to the *decision* on the part of Chinese students to avoid speaking English, which fits more with the more negative stereotype of a Chinese international student who is unmotivated to make a positive impression on American students.

From the intergroup communication perspective, the perceived lack of cultural adaptation or identification with American culture in the third, fourth and fifth stereotypes of Chinese international students could be detrimental. Activation of these stereotypes might accentuate perceptions of Chinese international students as outgroup members, leading to increased communication anxiety and thus low level of willingness to communicate. Social support and connections with others are vital for individuals to successfully adapt to another culture. In particular, communication with host nationals can be a necessary part of the adaptation process (Adelman, 1988; Albrecht & Adelman, 1984; Fontaine, 1986; Kim, 1987). However, individuals going through cultural adaptation cannot communicate with host nationals if the host nationals are not willing to communicate with individuals from other cultures. Hence, in the context of Chinese international students, the degree to which American students are willing to communicate with them influences Chinese students' adaptation to US culture (Zimmermann, 1995).

4.2. *Limitations and directions for future research*

This project contributes a great deal to our understanding of intercultural communication, specifically American student perceptions of a particular international student group. It is not without limitations, however. First, the research was conducted at a single university in the Midwest region of the United States. Although there is a significant Chinese student population on campus, there are relatively few Chinese in the general population compared to other parts of the U.S. The findings may not generalize well to areas where there is a long history of interactions between Chinese and Americans or where interactions take place outside of an academic context. Additional studies in other contexts would provide a more complete picture of the stereotypes that Americans have about Chinese individuals and the influence that those stereotypes have on intercultural communication. Examinations of other cultural groups from this approach could also be fruitful in terms of better understanding the experience of minority cultural groups within the United States and beyond.

Second, it was unclear whether participants viewed Chinese students as distinct from other Asian groups. It is possible that they referred to stereotypes that they would apply to any person of Asian appearance rather than Chinese culture uniquely. Additionally, it is important to note that stereotypes may differ for Chinese international students from different regions within Asia (e.g., students from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Mainland China). Research has shown that Mainland Chinese individuals have different stereotypes for people from Hong Kong (Guan, Deng, & Bard, 2010). For Americans with exposure to different groups of Chinese, it is likely that their stereotypes toward Chinese international students may be more refined. Future studies could be designed in a way that better address the distinctions that Americans make about Asians that they encounter, and whether or not those distinctions are made at all.

In addition, at the university where data was collected, the number of Chinese undergraduate students is nearly double that of Chinese graduate students. However, research shows that the largest proportion of Chinese international students in the United States at the time of data collection were pursuing graduate degrees (31.3% undergraduate versus 52.1% graduate; *Institute of International Education, 2010b*). It is possible that there are distinct differences in perceptions/stereotypes of Chinese undergraduate students and Chinese graduate students due to age, student status, and experience. This project did not make a distinction between these two groups, however. Finally, concerns about social desirability bias may be better addressed through concurrent administration of social desirability measure or the use of a response prediction paradigm (in which respondents are asked to indicate what they believe to be the opinion of other college students).

This research may be expanded by exploring more specifically the ways that these stereotypes influence American students' perceptions of and willingness to engage in communication with Chinese international students. This may be accomplished using experimental or dyadic interactional study designs, in which American students are asked to interact with a Chinese international student and report their perceptions about and reactions to those interactions.

5. Conclusions

Research on stereotypes has a long and distinguished history. This project adds, in its own small way, to our knowledge about stereotypes that American students have about a particular group on their university campuses, that of Chinese international students. Specifically, this study found that many of the most common stereotypes of Asians (e.g., smart, hardworking, shy, quiet) were present in the minds of American participants. At the same time, additional traits emerged (e.g., friendly and nice).

This project further expands our understanding of American student perceptions of Chinese international students, a large and significant population on many U.S. university campuses. With a clearer picture of both the positive and negative perceptions that American students may hold toward Chinese students, universities may be better equipped to develop programs and policies that encourage more interactions between American and Chinese students. Increased interactions between the two groups have potential benefits for both parties. For Chinese students, the stronger their relationships with host nationals (e.g., American students), the better their adaptation and cultural learning while in the U.S. (Adelman, 1988; Albrecht & Adelman, 1984; Fontaine, 1986; Kim, 1987). For American students, interactions with international students such as those originating from China provide an excellent opportunity for gaining knowledge about other perspectives and ways of life and intercultural communication experience that could prove valuable in their futures.

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