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# ATTITUDES OF CHINESE STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES\*

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## ABSTRACT

Previous studies suggest that the most significant determinants of a foreign student's attitude toward the host country include the national status of his home country, the degree of his contact with Americans, the frustration he encounters during his sojourn, the length of time he has been in the United States, and his authoritarianism. This study found Chinese student attitudes toward the United States positively associated with contact with Americans, but negatively associated with authoritarianism. A U-curve hypothesis concerning attitude changes through time was partially supported. No association was found between a Chinese student's attitude and the perceived national status of his home country, or his degree of frustration.

### Introduction

During the last two decades, numerous foreign-student studies have been conducted in the United States. Most were concerned with the attitudes of foreign students toward the United States. Studies in the 1950s were mainly exploratory attempts to identify factors that determined the foreign students' attitudes and adjustments; subsequent studies have been concerned with testing hypotheses suggested by earlier studies.

Five major hypotheses concerning the attitudes of foreign students were developed by past studies. The national-status hypothesis asserts that the national status accorded to a foreign student's home country by Americans is directly related to his attitude toward the United States (Morris, 1960; Lambert and Bressler, 1956; etc.). The association hypothesis asserts contact with Americans tends to produce a favorable attitude among foreign students toward the United States (Selltiz, *et al.*, 1963). The frustration-aggression hypothesis asserts the degree of frustration a foreign student experiences in the host country is inversely related to his attitude toward the host country (DuBois, 1956; Singh, 1963; etc.). The U-curve hypothesis asserts that a foreign student has a favorable attitude toward the host country upon his arrival, has an unfavorable attitude dur-

ing the adjustment stage, and has a favorable attitude during the post-adjustment stage (Lundstedt, 1963; Lysgaard, 1955; Gullahorn, 1963). The authoritarian-personality hypothesis suggests that a foreign student with an authoritarian personality tends to have an unfavorable attitude toward the host country (Scott, 1965; Farris, 1960; Levinson, 1957; Sampson and Smith, 1957; Rokeach, 1962; Gladstone, 1955).

Although these hypotheses have been generally accepted, it would be interesting to test them against a specific foreign-student group, i.e., Chinese students. Chinese students have a unique sociocultural background, and, therefore, may have a unique kind of life experience in the United States. The combination of the unique sociocultural background and life experiences may produce a special kind of attitude among Chinese students toward the United States. The present Chinese-student study was intended to investigate the life situation of Chinese students in the United States and their attitudes toward the United States, as well as to test the hypotheses developed by earlier studies.

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#### The Socio-Historical Background of Chinese Students in the United States

During 1969-1970, there were approximately 19,000 Chinese students in the United States. Among them, approximately 8,000 came from Taiwan, 7,000 from Hong Kong, and 4,000 from unidentified origins (Institute of International Education, Open Doors, 1970).

The influx of Chinese students into the United States started at the beginning of this century when the American government transformed a sum of Chinese reparations into a fund for scholarships. Before the end of the Second World War, a small number of highly selected Chinese students came every year, most of them under the auspices of this fund. They often studied at the prestigious American universities and returned to China when they had completed their study. This kind of exchange program lasted for half a century until the 1950s, when suddenly Chinese students started to pour into this country in large numbers. Several factors contributed to this drastic increase, one of which was the political transformation in China after World War II.

Immediately before 1949 when the Nationalist Chinese government was expelled from mainland China by the Communists, a large number of middle class Chinese had moved to Taiwan. These mainland Chinese never expected to stay in Taiwan but hoped to return to mainland China, a hope that expired after the Korean War. Since the 1950s, there has been a tendency among the mainland Chinese in Taiwan to migrate to other countries. The large influx of Chinese students into the United States represented, at least partially, this movement. It reached its climax during the 1960s when there were more than 2,000 Chinese students coming to this country every year (Appleton, 1970).

Chinese students are conservative in their outlook (Appleton, 1970; Hwang, 1967; Chin, 1963). This is partly the result

of the traditionally conservative Chinese culture, partly the result of contemporary educational practices and governmental policies administered in Taiwan.

Most Chinese students have an idealistic picture of the United States before they come. To most of them, the U.S. represents democracy and freedom and the American people represent friendliness and liberalism.

The idealization of the United States is often intensified and perpetuated by Chinese returning from America, who typically report the rosy aspects but conceal the hardship and embarrassment of their sojourn. To those who return to their home country, the sojourn is itself a social capital, and to make slight of it would depreciate its value. The selective reporting and exaggeration of the rosy aspects of the sojourn have produced a misconception of the sojourn and intensified the adjustment difficulties among Chinese students in the United States.

Many other factors lead Chinese students to have unrealistic expectations of the sojourn. The social prominence of the returned Chinese students in China is an important one. Among the first cabinet of the Republic of China, there were three or four returned students from the United States (Wheeler, 1925). The anticipation and over-identification of Chinese students with these reference individuals lead them into an unrealistic expectation of the sojourn experiences in the United States.

#### The Sample

The present research project involved the selection of a sample of 250 Chinese students in the United States. Owing to limited time and resources, a purposive sampling method and mailed questionnaire were used. Among the total sample, 40 per cent were selected from Austin, Texas; 43 per cent from Los Angeles, California; and the remaining 17 per cent were almost evenly distributed among New York City, Seattle, Washington, and Urbana, Illinois.

The sex ratio among the Chinese students was 210, meaning approximately two male to each female. The median age was 28, ranging from 18 to the 50s.

A majority of Chinese students in the United States came from middle and upper socio-economic strata. About 20 per cent of the fathers of Chinese students were in the upper occupational stratum of Taiwan (e.g., cabinet members, board directors of business firms); 50 per cent were in the upper middle occupational stratum (e.g., college professors, business managers); and about 30 per cent were in middle and lower occupational strata (e.g., middle range governmental officials, and school teachers, etc.).

Sixty-seven per cent of the Chinese students in the sample were born in mainland China; 23 per cent in Taiwan; and over 10 per cent in Hong Kong. Approximately 43 per cent of the sample of Chinese students were married. Thirty-six of the sample of Chinese students were Christians.

Among the sample of Chinese students, 40 per cent had completed a Master's degree; 50 per cent had completed a Bachelor's degree; and 10 per cent had no degree. About two-thirds of the sample were students in the natural sciences, and the rest were in the social sciences and the humanities.

The average length of residence in the United States among Chinese students was 38 months. The length of residence of the individual Chinese students varied from a few days to more than eight years.

#### Attitudes Toward the United States

Altogether, 83 per cent of the Chinese students expressed a favorable attitude toward the U.S. and the American people. Yet the percentage with very favorable views of the United States was higher than the percentage with very favorable views of the American people. This difference may reflect the belief of some Chinese students that Americans tend to be racists.

The attitudes of Chinese students toward the major American social patterns were diversified. A great majority of the Chinese students had a favorable attitude toward the American educational system and American democracy, and about 60 per cent thought that American economic opportunities were more equal than those opportunities in other countries. But a great majority of the Chinese students thought that the United States was more materialistic than other countries; that the interrelations among American people were shallow; that there was racial prejudice and discrimination in the United States; that divorce was serious in the United States; and that American foreign policy was mainly determined by its self-interest. Also, about 60 per cent of the Chinese students had an unfavorable attitude toward the American family system. They believed that parental relations and parent-child relations among the Americans were superficial.

#### Perceived Personality Traits of Americans

Chinese students under study were also asked to select five personality traits from a list of 22 that best characterize Americans and to evaluate each of the five traits as favorable or unfavorable. The ten traits with the highest percentage of Chinese students selecting them were: practical, energetic, materialistic, friendly, optimistic, open-minded, success-oriented, civic-responsible, consider-foreigner-inferior, and ambitious. Each of these traits were selected by 25 per cent or more of the Chinese students.

Most of the ten traits were considered by Chinese students as favorable, with the notable exceptions being "materialism," and "consider-foreigner-inferior." The traits of "practical," and "success-oriented" received ambivalent evaluations. Of great interest is the trait "practical." On the one hand, it was selected by most of the Chinese students (76.5 per cent of them selected this trait); on the other hand,

the evaluation of this trait was indeed ambivalent (53.5 per cent of the Chinese students who selected this trait considered it unfavorable). The trait "success-oriented" also received an ambivalent evaluation (65 per cent of the Chinese students who selected this trait considered it unfavorable). The evaluation of the other traits is unequivocal.

#### Hypotheses and Testing

##### 1. *The National-Status Hypothesis*

The concepts of nationality and national-status are essential to the understanding of the attitudes and adjustment of foreign students. The attribute of nationality generally occupies a peripheral position in one's self-concept within the boundary of one's country but becomes important immediately when one enters a foreign country. A foreign student assumes the role of "unofficial ambassador" of his country and begins to evaluate himself and others in such terms (McClintock and Davis, 1958).

In a study of the relation between the national status and the attitudes of foreign students, Morris (1960) emphasized that a foreign student's perception of the status accorded his home country by Americans vis-à-vis the status he accords his home country is the most significant determinant of his attitudes toward the United States. In the present study, scales were constructed to measure: (1) *perceived-status accorded* - the perception of status accorded to China by Americans, and (2) *self-perceived national status* - the status accorded to China by the Chinese students themselves. The *national-status rating differential* was computed by subtracting each student's self-perceived national status score from his or her perceived-status-accorded score.

Other studies of foreign students have found that the degree of involvement with one's home country also plays a significant role in determining a foreign student's attitude toward the host country. Appar-

ently the national status becomes salient only among those students who are highly involved with their home country. In this study a national-involvement scale was used to measure differences among Chinese students in their degrees of involvement.

In the present study, it was hypothesized that:

Among the highly involved Chinese students there is a direct relation between the national-status rating differential and the attitude toward the United States. Among the less involved, there is no relation between the rating differential and the attitude.

This hypothesis was assessed through a chi-square test, the result of which is shown in Table I.

The findings showed, however, that the relation between the national-status rating differential and attitude toward the United States is not significant among the highly involved Chinese students.

The national-status hypothesis has been a central thesis for several recent studies of foreign students. While Morris' study (1960) found support for this hypothesis, the present study and those of Selltiz, *et al.* (1963) and Barnes (1969) did not. Contradictory findings concerning this hypothesis could be the result of different instruments measuring national status and different types of samples of foreign students used in these studies.

##### 2. *The Association Hypothesis*

The association hypothesis, in a simplified form, states that contact with members of a different group results in liking that group (Selltiz, *et al.*, 1963: 3-4). Most social psychological studies support this hypothesis (Newcomb, 1951; Stouffer, *et al.*, 1949; Deutsch and Collins, 1951; Hoffman, 1969). There is however, some disagreement concerning this hypothesis. Sherif (1956) found that increased contact between racial groups increased prejudice. Smith's (1968) study found no evidence to

TABLE I  
RELATION BETWEEN NATIONAL-STATUS RATING AND ATTITUDE  
TOWARD THE UNITED STATES AMONG CHINESE STUDENTS  
WITH NATIONAL INVOLVEMENT CONTROLLED

National Status Rating Differential	National Involvement					
	High (16-20)			Low (10-15)		
	Attitude toward U.S. (in per cent)		Total	Attitude toward U.S. (in per cent)		Total
	Favorable	Unfavorable		Favorable	Unfavorable	
Positive	90.0	10.0	100.0 (20)	80.0	20.0	100.0 (10)
Even	72.7	27.3	100.0 (66)	72.7	27.3	100.0 (22)
Negative	72.5	27.5	100.0 (69)	78.3	21.7	100.0 (23)
$\chi^2=2.75$ , $df=2$ , n.s.			$\chi^2=0.29$ , $df=2$ , n.s.			

support this hypothesis. Newcomb (1956) and Berelson and Steiner (1964) have argued that contact will not necessarily increase intergroup friendship when there is outgroup discrimination. Brislin (1968) restated the hypothesis in exchange terms, emphasizing equal status as a necessary condition. In the present study it was hypothesized that:

A Chinese student's contact with Americans is directly related to the favorableness of his attitude toward the United States.

An association scale was used to measure differences among Chinese students in their degrees of contact with Americans. Chinese students were classified into three groups according to their association scores, and a chi-square test was performed to examine the attitudinal differences among these three groups. The result of the chi-square test is shown in Table II. A highly significant relation was found between contact with Americans and attitude toward the United States. More specifically, a substantially higher percentage of the high-contact group of Chinese

students had a more favorable attitude toward the United States than the low-contact group of Chinese students.

The significant relation between contact and attitudes does not prove that contact leads to more favorable attitudes, although that is one possible inference. The latter inference was assessed by considering statements of Chinese students about their pre-arrival attitudes toward the United States. The pre-arrival attitude was a retrospective datum in this study. The relation between contact with Americans and the pre-arrival attitudes of Chinese students was examined through a chi-square test, the result of which is shown in Table III.

While Table III shows that there is no relation between contact with Americans and the pre-arrival attitudes of Chinese students, Table II shows that there is a significant relation between contact with Americans and the present attitudes of Chinese students. Based on these findings, it is inferred that contact with Americans leads to a more favorable attitude toward the

TABLE II

RELATION BETWEEN CONTACT WITH AMERICANS AND ATTITUDE TOWARD THE UNITED STATES AMONG CHINESE STUDENTS

Contact with Americans	Attitude toward the U.S.		Per cent	Total N
	Favorable (6-8) (in per cent)	Unfavorable (2-5) (in per cent)		
High (7-9)	94.1	5.9	100.0	68
Medium (4-6)	71.1	28.9	100.0	76
Low (1-3)	64.9	35.1	100.0	94
$\chi^2=19.20, df=2, p<.001$				

TABLE III

RELATION BETWEEN CONTACT WITH AMERICANS AND PRE-ARRIVAL ATTITUDE TOWARD THE UNITED STATES AMONG CHINESE STUDENTS

Contact with Americans	Pre-Arrival Attitude Toward the U.S.		Per cent	Total N
	Favorable (in per cent)	Unfavorable (in per cent)		
High (7-9)	86.8	13.2	100.0	68
Medium (4-6)	92.2	7.8	100.0	77
Low (1-3)	91.2	8.8	100.0	91
$\chi^2=1.40, df=2, n.s.$				

United States rather than the other way around. The present findings are consistent with the association hypothesis.

### 3. The Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis

Frustration is a central theme among all studies of foreign students. The sources of frustration are numerous and divergent, arising from cultural distance or adaptational problems. Financial problems, language difficulty, racial barriers and consequent social isolation are all frustrating experiences. Frustration is both relative and absolute.

In addition, the inherent difficulty and competitiveness in post-graduate studies poses another source of constant frustration and insecurity. A Chinese student's

academic progress may not only be impeded by his inadequate English facility but also by his Chinese cultural background. To some Chinese students, the adjustment process is too painful to withstand. Many develop depressive and withdrawal symptoms. Under these repressive conditions, a Chinese student often projects an unfavorable, or even hostile attitude toward the United States. In the present study, it was hypothesized that:

The frustration of a Chinese student is inversely related to the favorableness of his attitude toward the United States.

A frustration scale was constructed in the present study to measure differences among Chinese students with respect to:

TABLE IV

RELATION BETWEEN FRUSTRATION AND ATTITUDE TOWARD  
THE UNITED STATES AMONG CHINESE STUDENTS

Frustration	Attitude toward the U.S.		Total	
	Favorable (6-8) (in per cent)	Unfavorable (2-5) (in per cent)	Per cent	N
High (19-23)	72.3	27.7	100.0	65
Medium (13-18)	75.6	24.4	100.0	127
Low (8-12)	76.9	23.1	100.0	39
$\chi^2=0.36, df=2, n.s.$				

(1) academic difficulties; (2) the degree of satisfaction with one's academic progress; (3) the difficulty in English facility; (4) the degree of financial strain; and (5) whether one holds an outside job during study. The findings showed a great majority of Chinese students had experienced a high or moderate level of frustration.

The relation between frustration and the attitudes of Chinese students toward the United States was examined through a chi-square test, the result of which is shown in Table IV. The attitudes of the three groups of Chinese students with different degrees of frustration are approximately the same, and hence there is no significant relation between frustration and attitude toward the United States.

Given the particular measure adopted in this study, the findings in Table IV can be interpreted as showing no relation between the frustrations a Chinese student encounters in his "student-role" and his attitude toward the United States.

#### 4. The U-Curve Hypothesis

The U-curve hypothesis about attitude change among foreign students has received considerable attention (Lundstedt, 1963; Lysgaard, 1955; Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963; Coelho, 1958; Dubois, 1956; and others). It asserts that the attitudes of foreign students undergo three

distinct stages; the spectator, the adjustment, and the coming-to-terms stages. According to this hypothesis, a foreign student brings with him a favorable attitude when he arrives, and his attitude is preserved during the initial (spectator) stage, which usually lasts less than three months after his arrival. This favorable attitude represents his unrealistic and utopian expectations. However, this attitude undergoes drastic changes during the second (adjustment) stage when he faces all sorts of problems and difficulties—financial, academic, and social. After about two years of his stay, the third stage of "coming-to-terms" starts to operate. A Chinese student by this time should have managed to solve most of his problems and become adjusted to his environment.

In this study, it was hypothesized that: A Chinese student has a very favorable attitude toward the United States during the early period of his stay—usually less than three months after his arrival; has an unfavorable attitude during the second stage of his stay—usually between the seventh and eighteenth months after his arrival; and again a favorable attitude during the third stage of stay—usually two years or more after his arrival.

The U-curve hypothesis was assessed by a chi-square test, in which the attitudes of Chinese students among the three stages

TABLE V

RELATION BETWEEN LENGTH OF RESIDENCE AND ATTITUDE  
TOWARD THE UNITED STATES AMONG CHINESE STUDENTS

Length of Residence	Attitude toward the U.S.		Total Per (N) cent	Chi-Square Test
	Favorable (in per cent)	Unfavorable (in per cent)		
3 months & less	100.0	0.0	100.0 (12)	$\chi^2_{12}=4.23$ , df=1, p<.05
7 to 18 months	72.7	27.3	100.0 (44)	
25 months or more	77.0	23.0	100.0 (153)	$\chi^2_{23}=0.31$ , df=1, n.s.

cited above were compared. The result of the test is shown in Table V. The attitudes of the Chinese students in the first and the second stages were markedly different; a significantly larger percentage of those in the first stage have a favorable attitude toward the United States (p. 5). There is some attitudinal difference between Chinese students in the second stage and those in the third stage, but the difference is not significant.

The U-curve hypothesis was assessed further by comparing the present and the pre-arrival attitudes of Chinese students in the second and the third stage of residence

in the United States. Since the U-curve hypothesis postulated longitudinal change, a comparison of the pre-arrival and the present attitudes toward the United States was more appropriate than a strictly cross-sectional comparison. A chi-square test was used to assess the differences between the reported pre-arrival and the present attitudes of Chinese students. The Chinese students in the first stage of residence were excluded from the test because their pre-arrival attitudes were thought to be approximately the same as their present attitudes.

The result of the chi-square test is shown in Table VI.

Among Chinese students in the second stage, the difference between the pre-arrival and present attitudes is not significant, whereas among the Chinese students in the third stage the difference is significant. However, Table VI shows that the percentage difference between the pre-arrival and the present attitudes among Chinese students in the second stage is about the same as the percentage difference between the pre-arrival and the present attitudes of Chinese students in the third stage. Since the result of a chi-square test is partly a function of the sample size, if the sample size of Chinese students in the second stage were larger, the result of the chi-square test might show a significant difference.

Since the chi-square tests partially support the U-curve hypothesis, an analysis of variance was performed to further assess the hypothesis. The attitudinal differences among Chinese students in the three stages of residence were found to be not significant; however, the result approached significance (p=.07). The findings lent some support to the hypothesis.



TABLE VI

RELATION BETWEEN PRE-ARRIVAL AND PRESENT ATTITUDES TOWARD  
THE UNITED STATES AMONG CHINESE STUDENTS IN THE SECOND AND  
THIRD STAGES OF RESIDENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

I. Chinese Students in the Second Stage (7-18 months)				
Attitudes	Favorable (in per cent)	Unfavorable (in per cent)	Total Per cent	N
1. Pre-arrival attitude toward the U.S.	86.4	13.6	100.0	44
2. Present attitude toward the U.S.	72.7	23.7	100.0	44
$\chi^2=2.51, df=1, n.s.$				
II. Chinese Students in the Third Stage (25 months and more)				
1. Pre-arrival attitude toward the U.S.	91.4	8.6	100.0	152
2. Present attitude toward the U.S.*	77.0	23.0	100.0	152
$\chi^2=11.97, df=1, p<.001$				

\* In order to be comparable, the first item of the General Attitude toward the U.S. Scale was used. This item asked the Chinese students of their overall views of the United States (cf. Appendix B, the General Attitude toward the United States Scale, Item-1, p. 151).

#### 5. The Authoritarian-Personality Hypothesis

Previous studies of international relations have preponderantly emphasized the relation between the authoritarian personality and one's attitude to a foreign country (Scott, 1965; Farris, 1960; Levinson, 1957; Sampson and Smith, 1957; etc.). An authoritarian personality is thought to be more ethnocentric and ego-defensive and has a less favorable attitude toward a foreign country (cf. Adorno, *et al.*, 1950).

In the present study, it was hypothesized that:

The authoritarianism of a Chinese student is inversely related to the favorableness of his attitude toward the United States.

A shortened F-scale was used to measure the degree of authoritarianism of a Chinese student (Robinson and Shaver, 1969: 262-

65). Chinese students were divided into three groups according to their scores on the authoritarian-personality scale. A chi-square test was used to assess the attitudinal differences among those three groups. The result of the test is shown in Table VII.

The findings showed a strong association between authoritarianism and the attitudes of Chinese students toward the United States. More of the high-authoritarian Chinese students have an unfavorable attitude toward the United States, and more of the low-authoritarian Chinese students have a favorable attitude. Since the chi-square test shows the relation between authoritarianism and the attitude toward the United States to be significant, the authoritarian-personality hypothesis is accepted.

TABLE VII

RELATION BETWEEN AUTHORITARIANISM AND ATTITUDE  
TOWARD THE UNITED STATES AMONG CHINESE STUDENTS

Authoritarianism	Attitude toward the U.S.		Total	
	Favorable (6-8) (in per cent)	Unfavorable (2-5) (in per cent)	Per cent	N
High (13-16)	60.6	39.4	100.0	33
Medium (10-12)	74.0	26.0	100.0	150
Low (6-9)	92.7	7.3	100.0	41

$\chi^2=10.73, df=2, p<.01$

## Summary

The present study's findings lent support to some of the hypotheses developed in earlier studies. A Chinese student's attitude toward the United States was found to be positively associated with the degree of his contact with Americans, and negatively associated with his degree of authoritarianism. A U-curve hypothesis concerning attitude changes through time was partially supported by the present findings. The national-status hypothesis and the frustration-aggression hypotheses were rejected.

The present findings show that in many respects the Chinese students are similar to other foreign students; the similarities are illustrated in the following examples. First, the present findings concerning the Chinese student's perception of the American personality traits are almost identical to those found by Selltitz, *et al.* (1963) among a group of foreign students of all nationalities. Second, the present study found that about 83 per cent of the Chinese students have a favorable attitude toward the United States. In a study of Arab students in the United States, Ibrahim (1970) found exactly the same percentage of his sample to have a favorable attitude toward the host country. Third, studies of Indian

students (Coelco, 1958; Lambert and Bressler, 1956), Japanese students (Bennett, *et al.*, 1958), and Mexican students (Beals and Humphrey, 1957) indicate that their life experiences in the United States are similar to those of Chinese students in this study. All these similarities indicate that foreign students of many nationalities have something in common, and in some instances, they may be treated as a uniform group. Of course, this observation should not lead one to ignore the unique features of a given group.

The study of foreign students has immense implications for social stratification and ethnic and international relations. Since the population of foreign students is quite large, data collection is both convenient and economical. Most studies, including the present one, have not been highly sophisticated in their research designs. Although it is perhaps most practical to limit one's focus to a single national group of foreign students so that the national background can be controlled, comparative studies of adjustment and attitudes among a few national groups should also be fruitful. Hopefully, after more specific studies are completed, a basis will have been laid for a general and comprehensive study of all foreign students in the United States or elsewhere.

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