To What Extent are Internal Components the Main Causes of Culture Shock

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ABSTRACT. *With an increasing number of students studying abroad, difficulties in transitioning to the host culture contributes to serious and widely-spread culture shock. As culture shock often limits students' social and academic success, education institutions are aware that training students' ability to release culture shock is important. Institutions usually offer material support to students studying abroad, but overlook their internal feelings. However, an effective training program can be accessible only when the causes of culture shock are understood clearly. This paper explores how important internal components are in causing culture shock. An online questionnaire correlates 163 participants with various backgrounds. Findings indicate that the majority of participants would attribute culture shock to internal causes, such as homesick problems or lack of pressure management ability. These results lead to suggestions and recommendations on how to develop the ability to release culture shock and adjust to new culture.*

Keywords*: culture shock; students studying abroad; intercultural adjustment*

1. INTRODUCTION

Pedersen (1995, p. 1) defines culture shock as "the process of initial adjustment to an unfamiliar environment". He also notes that culture shock has been used to describe the emotional, psychological, behavior, cognitive, and physiological impact of the adjustment process on the individual. Such an impact might result in upset, even mental diseases, especially to young people without a stable mind and abundant experiences. If people desire a less negative impact of culture shock, to figure out the main causal factors is important. Because migrants or students studying abroad will solve their uncomfortable emotions caused by culture shock more quickly and accurately when knowing where the troubles originate. And more

efficient training programs that help get rid of culture shock will be developed by focusing on the main causes. Migrants could benefit from these training, developing a stronger immunity against stress in the process of adapting to a new environment.

In the most comprehensive effort to date, Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001) classifies major causes of culture shock in terms of the affective, behavioral, and cognitive components, which they view as complementary and interacting. Affective components are defined as the capability of migrants' bearing the stressful life events in the adjusting process. It is related to individual inborn personality. The stronger one's personality is, the more stress he or she could bear. If affective component influences on culture shock most, more training programs will be focused on develop intercultural traits with strengthening individual personality. Alfred Presbitero (2016) holds that cultural intelligence (CQ) matters most in culture shock. Culture intelligence has been defined as the capability of an individual to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity (Earley & Ang, 2003). Compared with inborn affective components, cultural intelligence is inclined to be acquired through migrants' experiences. In Alfred's research paper called Culture shock and reverse culture shock: The moderating role of cultural intelligence in international students' adaption, he finds out that culture shock is significantly related to cultural intelligence. CQ is working when migrants face difficulties in adjusting because they lack culturally relevant skills and knowledge, for example, using foreign language to talk with local people. Alfred set up and disseminated an online survey for 189 new international students and 123 international students who had just finished their study abroad and returned to their home countries. Five different scales were used to measure the answers of participants. Results indicated that CQ can moderate the relationship between culture shock and adaption. However, whether CQ is a more important factor or not needs further proof. According to Alfred's research, this adaption includes both psychological and sociological adaption. There are 12% of participants believing that a higher CQ can help them make a better psychological adaption while 9% answering that a better sociological adaption could formed by a higher CQ. The author makes the viewpoints that CQ is the main cause of culture shock, basing on that CQ helps more in international students' psychological adaption. This mental adaption process could be directly affected by affective components whose influence will be stronger than CQ's influence. Therefore, CQ is a less persuasive cause of culture shock than affective

components.

Affective components and CQ are both internal components, for they are developed and directed by an individual's mind and decision, instead of being influenced by external factors which are offered by others but gives an individual indirect influence. Although these research discussed about and supported that causes of culture shock are mainly internal components, external components of environment, social facility, stereotype, and social support are still necessary to be taken into consideration. The reason why external components should be taken into consideration is that people might have lay theories about what causes culture shock. Susan and Sadie (2015:187-194) made the research about lay theories among US college students that the majority of participants in their research take external factors as main causes of culture shock. Thus, this paper gives discussion of what mainly causes culture shock between internal and external components. And this research will also explore to what extend are the internal components the main causes of culture shock, which will reveal the closest relevant internal factors to cause culture shock. With the method of questionnaire research, the results find that the majority of participants have corrected their lay theories to supporting internal factors as main causes for the problems.

1.1. Internal components as main causes of culture shock

The internal factors take the greatest part in causing culture shock. As Susan and Sadie (2015:187-194) put it, "The tendency to attribute culture shock to internal causes was greater for those with higher levels of culture competence." As for students, the internal cause is related to "self-efficacy", which Bandura(1977: 191-215) in his study defined as " the conviction one can engage in behavior that will produce the desired outcome." Thus, students who first move to foreign places often suffer from "the lack of self-efficacy", which could be resulted from unacquainted language, values or lifestyle.

In the online questionnaire, six internal components are given: Away from home by yourself and having homesick; Afraid of making mistakes in new environment; Lack of the ability to handle stress; Not familiar with the new environment; Language barrier; Difficulties in making friends.

1.2. External components as main causes of culture shock

As for the cultural factors, intercultural differences and cultural stereotypes are strongly related. When attempting to adapt into the new culture, the first thing to get in touch with is the culture itself. Therefore, the basic method human are using to acknowledge affairs is communication. However, intercultural communication usually barriers the process (2002: 623). Take American college students for example, different accents and verbal norms would lead to communication failures, which makes them afraid of any unexpected consequences in intercultural intercourse. As a result, culture shock occurs.

The surrounding factors are associated with time. Pedersen Paul (1995:25) divided culture shock into five stages: honeymoon, rejection,negotiation, adjustment and adaption. In different stages, people would start with unfamiliarity with the environment, then develop into acquaintance and ennui. At last, abundant familiarity and affection assists them to get adapted. Culture shock acts mostly on the stages of rejection and negotiation. But concerning about that the adjustment and adaption stages will always occur, this factor is least concerned as the main factor.

In the online questionnaire, six external components are given: Difficulties in making friends; Difficulties in keeping touch with family and old friends because of the time zones and long distance; Having nothing in common with your previous culture (e.g. no hometown food); The time is not long enough for living in a new culture; Racial stereotype; People in the new environment are aloof when you try to communicate with them; Not being provided with adequate social support.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review of: relevant report: Goldstein, Susan, B., & Keller, Sadie, R. (2015). *U.S. college students lay theories of culture shock*. Research Report 47. International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

2.1. Report Summary

Culture shock is widely discussed among college undergraduate students (Furnham, 2004), which indicates the presence of lay theories. Furnham, Daoud, and

Swami (2009, p.464) defined lay theory as an informal explanation or common-sense that individuals make and that is often different from academic and expert theories of the same term. As for culture shock, lay theories research is very rare. Thus, Goldstein and Keller made this research to figure out undergraduates' lay theories of culture shock.

Goldstein and Keller gathered 149 U.S. undergraduate students to response questionnaires. They were asked about the causes of culture shock in their view and to write down their answers. Then, their answers will be classified with scales of self-efficacy, openness, ethnocentrism, language interest, and cultural intelligence. These five scales are predictions of the causes of culture shock in students' lay theories. Predictions are based on Ward, Bochner, and Furnham's (2001) view that culture shock comprises internal component, behavioral component, and cognitive component.

The result shows that students who are holding lay theories tended to ascribe culture shock to external rather than internal causes. They focus more on difficulties in sociocultural adaption, rather than psychological adaption as the source of culture shock. However, the authors believe that students may need to be primed to consider psychological aspects of culture shock so that they can know better of this feeling and have greatest control. The authors claim that cultural competence was able to shape and develop by doing more intercultural training programs, such as buddy program between foreign students and local ones. This could make more intercultural students enhance their capability to overcome culture shock and lead a comfortable life in the host culture more quickly.

2.2. Evaluation

2.2.1. Strengths

Goldstein and Keller make a convincing research by doing questionnaires among undergraduates with different background and experience. As the article shows, there are different race of " 58.4% White, 19.5% Latino, 11.4% Asian, 5.4% Multiethnic, 2% Black, 2% Native American, and 1.3% Middle East ". Also, 79.2% of the participants have traveled outside of U.S., including 66.4% tourists, 26.2%

study abroad, 6.7% high school exchange, 5.4% missionary work or military service. Various situations reinforce the reliability of the conclusion. Moreover, through the research, the authors find a perfect answer to my question of what mainly causes culture shock in the view of students. "Participants tended to attribute intercultural adjustment difficulties to external, salient differences in the cultural environment rather than internal." Undergraduates think that negative external factors such as low travel experience and less interest in foreign language lead to culture shock, which is opposite to the ideas of intercultural experts. The professional like Ward, Bochner, and Furnham's (2001) support that internal aspects cause culture shock. Thus, authors' opinion is persuasive that undergraduates should consider more about internal factors in discussing about culture shock, instead of blindly following lay theories that external influences most on the causes. Besides, they also give many suggestions to correct students' opinion and release culture shock that students might be trapped in. For instance, education institutions should provide for accurate directions of internal causes mainly lead to culture shock and train students with programs like experiencing study abroad by themselves.

2.2.2.Weaknesses

However, though the research participants including participants with different background, statistics of 149 undergraduates still lacks qualitative data. In the research of Attitude toward the culturally different: the role of intercultural communication barriers, affective responses, consensual stereotypes, and perceived threat, Rodgers and McGovern(2002)appeal both undergraduates and graduates at two large West Coast universities in USA to enrolling in the study. Compared with a multitude of statistics, Goldstein and Keller need to conclude a larger group of sample to improve and perfect their research. More sample would be useful to make the result more convincing.

2.2.3. Concluding Summary

To sum up, the research in lay theories instead of academic ones makes the paper special and interesting. It is persuasive with a professional theory base and scientific scales. It is a nice article to answer the question of the causes of culture shock in the

view of students and it will be a better one with more qualitative data. Those who are going to refer to this paper should always remind themselves of the limitations of data lacking, in case to wrongly hold a part as a whole. In this paper, we refer to the dates this paper gives, combining and comparing with samples in our research. In this method, the result and conclusion we give will be more thorough and persuasive.

However, this paper supposes that students should have already held correct theories about what causes culture shock, which are the internal causes. Thus, previous researches could inform and guide this research in the aspects of methods, instruments, and scales, etc. This paper will also investigate personal ability of language and learning to fulfill discussion part and give recommendations more accurate.

3. METHOD

3.1 Participants

Questionnaire respondents included 163 participants(121 female) with ages ranging from 10 to 37, most of whom are college students with ages ranging from 18-22 (77.9%). In terms of the continents their home countries, the respondents are comprised of 96.3% Asian, 1.84% Oceanian, 1.23% European and 0.6% North American. A total of 77.3% stated having been abroad, including as students (64.29%), tourists (31.75%) and other purposes (3.97%). Most of them have stayed abroad for more than six months (53.62%). Their destinations are made up of 41.27% Oceanian countries, 26.19% Asian countries, 12.7% European countries, 12.7% North American countries, and 7.14% South American countries. Among those who have been abroad as students, a large proportion (70.37%) are studying/studied for bachelor (or above) degrees and other 29.63% participants are studying/studied as exchange students or high school students.
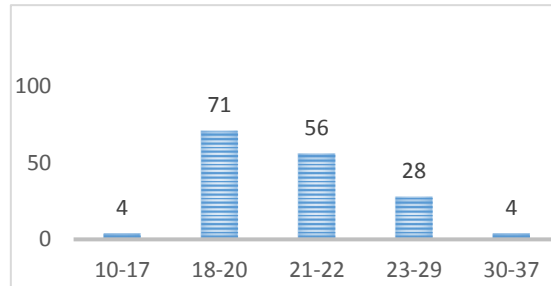
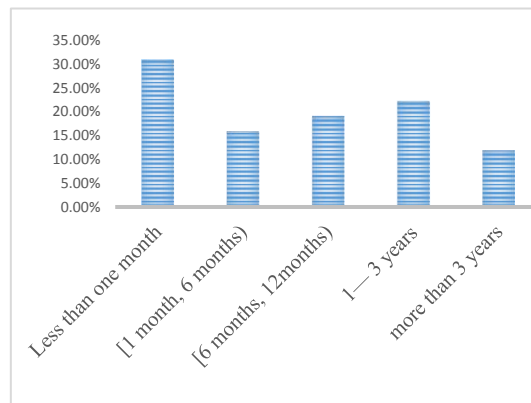*Fig.1: Amount of Participants of Different Ages*
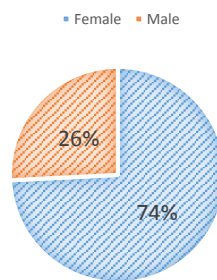

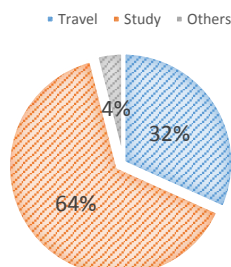*Fig.2 : The Longest Time of Staying Abroad*

Fig.3: Gender

Fig.4: Purposes of going abroad

3.2 Instruments and procedure

We distributed an online questionnaire to international students in different countries and domestic students in China, collecting their essential information, perceived causes of culture shock and self-assessment of individual abilities. The essential information included age, gender, nationality, whether having been abroad and the destination, duration, purpose of being abroad. Provided a list of internal and external causes of culture shock, participants were required to rate their personal feelings of each problem in terms of their experience if they have been abroad or select the problems might happen based on their cognition if they have not been abroad.

According to Goldstein, S., & Keller, S. (2015)'s research of culture shock, they applied several scales into the assessment of the survey, including *Causes of Culture Shock Scale*, *General Self-Efficacy Scale*, *IPIP Openness subscale*, *Generalized Ethnocentrism Scale*, *Interest in Foreign Languages Scale* and *Cultural Intelligence Scale (*Cattell, 1966*)*. Referring to the pattern of their survey and data collection, the central part of our study assessed participant' personal feelings towards twelve causes of culture shock, which we divided into six internal causes and six external causes. According to the scores of each cause, the correlation between culture shock and two aspects of causes are analyzed with the subtotal method utilizing the SPSS system.

4. RESULTS

Following 12 open-ended items are 12 causes of culture shock, which participants were required to rate on a 4-point scale in which 1= "I have no feeling at all" and 4= " I totally have the same feeling." Mean scores ranged from 2.382 to 3.601 with the three lowest scoring items: Not being provided with adequate social support, People in the new environment are aloof when you try to communicate with them, Having nothing common with your previous culture (e.g. no hometown food), and three highest scoring items: Afraid of making mistakes in new environment, Language barrier and Not familiar with the new environment. The average mean score of internal causes is 3.019 and 2.452 for external causes, indicating that internal causes contribute more to participants' experience of culture shock. (see Table 1 and Fig.5)

Table 1 Causes of cultural shock means and standard deviations (IC=Internal Causes, EC=External Causes)

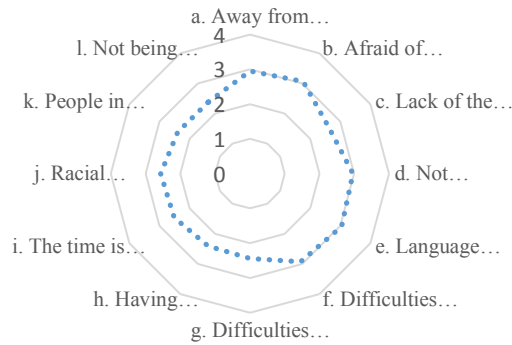|	Item: Causes of Culture Shock	M	SD
IC	a. Away from home by yourself and having homesick	2.950	.850
	b. Afraid of making mistakes in new environment	3.601	.812
	c.　Lack of ability to handle stress	2.629	.839
	d.　Not familiar with the new environment	2.963	1.062
	e. Language barrier	3.049	.805
	f. Difficulties in making friends	2.926	.818
EC	g. Difficulties in keeping touch with family and old friends because of time zones and long distances	2.444	.822
	h. Having nothing common with your previous culture (e.g. no hometown food)	2.407	.863
	i. The time is not long enough for living in a new culture	2.519	.823
	j. Racial stereotype	2.567	.879
	k. People in the new environment are aloof when you try to communicate with them	2.395	.958
	l. Not being provided with adequate social support	2.382	.902

Fig.5: Causes of Culture Shock

In the questionnaire, participants were asked to select either internal causes or external causes as the main cause of culture shock based on their own opinions. Both the majority of people who have been abroad (79.01%) and who have not been abroad (59.76%) regarded internal causes as the main reason.
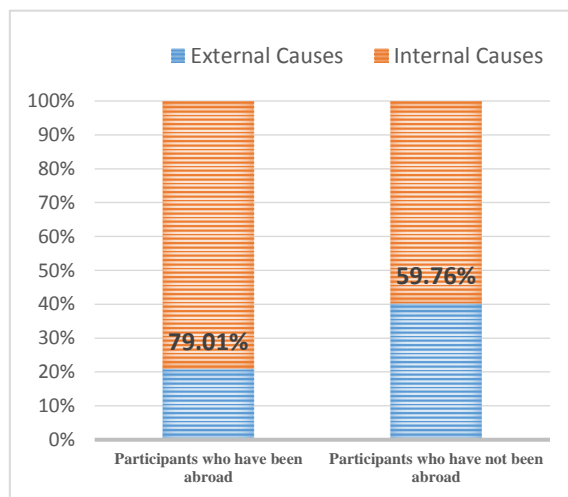

Fig.6: Individual choices of main causes of culture shock

In the self-assessment of individual abilities part, participants rated four abilities

of different aspects (*Language ability, Social skills, Learning ability (including culture learning)* and *Cultural tolerance*) on a 5-point scale. The average scores of each ability ranged from 3.01 to 3.85, with *Social skills* as the lowest and *Cultural tolerance* as the highest.
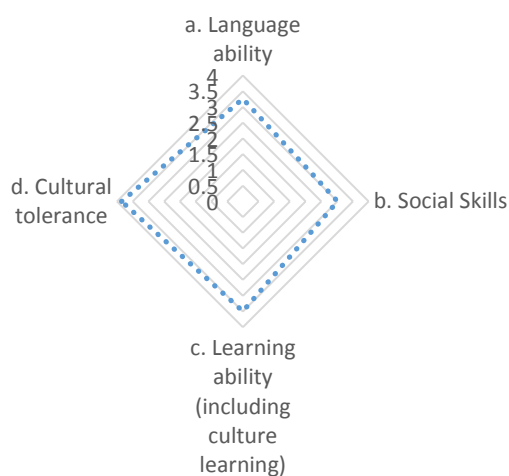

FIG.7:   Assessment of personal abilities

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Major findings

As mentioned in the literature review, in the research of Goldstein and Keller, most participants believe that the main causes of culture shock are external cause, although they are holding lay theories. However, in this research, the result differs from the previous one distinctively. As FIG.6 shows, the majority of participants hold the perspective that internal causes are the main reasons for culture shock, including 79.01% of participants with studying aboard experiences and 59.76% of those who do not have such experiences. This result supports the hypothesized suppose. Also, as this paper takes Asians as the largest group of participants, the result is more convincing from some aspects. In an article by Karen van der Zee and

Jan Pieter van Oudenhoven (2013) called Culture Shock or Challenge? The Role of Personality as a Determinant of Intercultural Competence, they argue that internal components play a determinant role in causing culture shock. The authors hold the opinion that internal components are best represented by stress-buffering traits, including emotional stability and flexibility, together with social-perceptual traits, including open-mindedness, cultural empathy, and social initiative. This opinion is supported by Gray's (1972) theory of brain functions as an motivational system. According to Karen van der Zee and Jan Pieter van Oudenhoven, a research is made among 154 international students in America with different cultural backgrounds and ages. They took a personality test first, then answered questions about culture shock given by researchers. The result is similar among every different cultures groups of samples. But Asian group gives the most evident and persuasive date. Among the Asian samples, about 22% of total, students ranged in age from 17 to 42. The result shows that these Asian migrants with stronger stress-buffering traits and social-perceptual traits would be more immune against negative outcomes of BIS, which shows that internal components are the most main causal factors of culture shock.

The next finding is that, among people who believe that internal causes mainly cause culture shock, participants with experiences of studying abroad (79.01%) are more than those without experiences (59.76%). According to McCrea and Costa (1987), openness to experiences counts a great deal in intercultural researches. In this context, the more experiences one participant has, the more possible for the individual to understand that internal components are the most effective causes of culture shock. Beside, Fig.7 reveals that these participants value their abilities with an average score of 3.4 out of 5, which is a middle level. Their self-estimates shows that most people are not satisfied with themselves especially on the aspects of social skills. This unsatisfactory leads them to a situation that lacking of confidence deteriorates the negative influences of culture shock on mental problems. Among the choices of internal causes, most participants feel in the same way with afraid of making mistakes in new culture environment. Gray's (1972) theory of brain functions and behaviors as an motivational system shows the neurological basis in the Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS) in the brain, which is sensitive to negative signals, like punishment and non-reward. Participants in our research might have been through such negative signals when they make mistakes during studying

abroad period. These signals negatively contributes to their courage in adjusting to a new cultural environment and releasing their culture shock.

External causes, especially lack of social support fail to be deemed as dues to culture shock. A survey by Stella Pantelidou and Tom K. J. Craig (2006) called Culture shock and social support finds that the lack of social support mainly results in culture shock. According to Brugha (1988), social support refers to "the specific personal provisions of social relationships and particular their more subjective components, e.g. confiding, intensity, and reciprocity of interaction and reassurance of worth". In addition to these qualitative components, when referring to social support consideration is also given to the size and diversity of the social network, where network size refers to the total number of people with whom a person has regular contact and diversity refers to the number of different social roles a person has in the social network (Cohen, 1997). Stella and Tom gathered 133 students in Greek to complete questionnaires about social support and culture shock. The result shows that as receiving social support, migrants are also changing their attitude towards the new home culture. On one hand, the content these support gives properly directs migrants, which develops a positive cognition about the culture. On the other hand, social support given by the education institution or government makes migrants subjectively feel welcomed, and pleased to accept the support. In my opinion, the date can not perfectly prove lack of social support the main cause of culture shock. As the authors mentioned in their limitations, the research was not associated with personality or other subjective issues, for example, personal language interest. Besides, the conclusion can not be widely used, for social supports is not available in every corner of the migration habitat.

This paper finds that internal causes can affect people's confidence in communication and adaption, worsen the influence of homesick, and keep a heavy mental pressure in their mind. The stress within these difficulties contributes a large multitude to causing culture shock. Considering of personal differences, internal causes also depend on personality and personal skills on language,cultural tolerance, and learning abilities.

5.2. Suggestions

This research gives higher education institutions and individuals some hints to release or prevent culture shock. As internal causes matters most, the best way to deal with culture shock is to enhance the ability of psychology balancing, stress management, and improve cultural ability of individuals. In this research, most participants from Asia have the stereotype that language fluency is the most important. However, they overlook the importance of culture itself.

5.3. Limitations and further expectations

There are several limitations to this study. Firstly, due to the limited time and resources, it is difficult to conduct a random data collection. As a result, a large percentage of samples are from female participants. According to Eastabrook and Hollenstein (2014), young female adults are more likely to be sentimental compared to male. Therefore the impact of this intention on the outcome of the study cannot be denied. Secondly, there is room for improvement in the setup of the questionnaire because of the lack of referred authoritative scales in the study. Those limitations might be worth paying attention to for future researcher involved in this topic.

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