The majority within the minority: Exploring Chinese international students' college experience and satisfaction in U.S. higher education

DONGBIN KIM
Michigan State University

DESIREE QIN
Michigan State University

SEYOUNG HONG
Michigan State University

ANDREA LOUIE
Michigan State University

ADAM GRIMM
Michigan State University

Abstract: In this case study, we examine the college experiences of Chinese international undergraduate students at a large public university in the Midwest (MU), comparing them to domestic and non-Chinese international students. Using survey data, we explore differences in student satisfaction, sense of belonging, faculty interactions, and academic adjustment. Our findings reveal that Chinese international students report significantly lower satisfaction levels, particularly in academics, and face greater challenges adjusting to academic requirements, professors' teaching styles, and interactions with U.S. classmates. While they form strong peer networks within their ethnic community, we suggest that these networks may limit their engagement with faculty and the broader campus environment. Given that faculty interaction and a sense of belonging are key predictors of student satisfaction, we recommend that universities implement targeted initiatives to foster inclusive academic environments, enhance faculty-

student interactions, and support Chinese students' adjustment to U.S. academic expectations.

Résumé : Dans cette étude de cas, nous examinons les expériences universitaires d'étudiants internationaux chinois de premier cycle dans une grande université publique du Midwest (MU), en les comparant à celles d'étudiants internationaux nationaux et non chinois. À l'aide de données d'enquête, nous explorons les différences en matière de satisfaction des étudiants, de sentiment d'appartenance, d'interactions avec les professeurs et d'adaptation scolaire. Nos résultats révèlent que les étudiants internationaux chinois affichent des niveaux de satisfaction significativement plus faibles, notamment sur le plan académique, et rencontrent davantage de difficultés pour s'adapter aux exigences académiques, aux styles d'enseignement des professeurs et aux interactions avec leurs camarades américains. Bien qu'ils forment de solides réseaux de pairs au sein de leur communauté ethnique, nous suggérons que ces réseaux peuvent limiter leur engagement auprès des professeurs et de l'environnement plus large du campus. Étant donné que l'interaction avec les professeurs et le sentiment d'appartenance sont des prédicteurs clés de la satisfaction des étudiants, nous recommandons aux universités de mettre en œuvre des initiatives ciblées pour favoriser des environnements académiques inclusifs, améliorer les interactions professeurs-étudiants et soutenir l'adaptation des étudiants chinois aux attentes académiques américaines.

Introduction

After a significant drop in the number of international students during the Covid-19 era, U.S. universities have witnessed a significant surge in international undergraduate enrollment, reaching an all-time high of more than 1.1 million international students during the 2023-2024 academic year. Among them, the top three sending countries—China, India, and South Korea—have remained consistent for over a decade (Institute of International Education, 2024). The case university in this study, a large public university located in the Midwest (MU), experienced the same

trends, with a noticeable increase among Chinese international students. With a record high number of Chinese international students, MU is among the top ten U.S. universities enrolling the largest number of Chinese students (IIE, 2018, 2024). To respond to the changing demographics of undergraduate students on campus, MU reorganized the Office of International Programs to emphasize international partnerships and student success (OISS, 2016).

Nevertheless, institutional report indicate that Chinese international students had significantly higher probation rates among undergraduates, reaching 20% in 2017, compared to 6.3% among domestic students and 7.8% among all other students (Jianyang, 2020). Puzzled by the significantly higher probation rates among Chinese international students, coupled with a limited understanding of their academic and social experiences at MU, which in turn affect their academic success, this case study seeks to understand Chinese international students' college experiences and how their experiences are associated with their satisfaction with MU. While situated within a case study framework that is not intended to generalize, but rather describe, understand, and explain (Yin, 1989), we believe the findings not only inform MU's efforts to provide tailored programs and services that meet the needs of different student groups on campus but also offer implications for other universities' efforts to create a college environment where all students can experience campus life equitably and achieve the educational outcomes that they seek to achieve, regardless of their country of origin.

Research Questions

Drawing on survey data collected from MU, this study examines Chinese undergraduate students' college experiences as compared to domestic and other international students, and the association between college experiences and their satisfaction with the university.

(1) Do Chinese international students experience college (in terms of in and out of classroom learning environment on campus) differently from their counterpart domestic or non-Chinese international students?
(2) Are college experiences associated with student satisfaction? Are there different patterns across Chinese, domestic, and non-Chinese international students?

Literature Review

Student Satisfaction as a Predictor of Positive College Experiences and Outcomes

Research in higher education examines student satisfaction as a means to an end (Schreiner, 2009; Weerasinghe & Fernando, 2017), including how satisfaction is related to student involvement/engagement with college (Kuh, 2009; Wong & Chapman, 2023; Zhao & Kuh, 2004), a sense of belonging (Crowe, 2021; Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tinto, 1994), persistence/retention (Carter & Yeo, 2016; Roberts & Styron, 2010; Schreiner, 2009, 2013; Sosa-Alonso et al., 2025) and academic performance (Oducado & Estoque, 2021; Pike, 1991, 1993). Astin (1992) advocated for satisfaction as an intermediate college outcome measure (i.e., a measure that leads to eventual college outcomes). In his model, satisfaction is influenced by a variety of college experience measures including a student's place of residence (living on campus versus off campus housing), participation in honors programs, degree of academic involvement (the extent to which students work hard at their studies), student-faculty interaction, athletic involvement, and involvement in student government. Similarly, scholars of student engagement often identify a positive association between engagement and satisfaction: the more students are engaged, the higher their rates of reported satisfaction (Branard et al., 2015; Carini et al., 2006; Kim & Sax, 2017; Webber et al., 2013).

Building on student integration literature, Tinto (1994) contested that overall student satisfaction might serve as a proxy for a student's social integration into the college environment or "the degree to which a student feels comfortable in the college environment" (p. 5), which in turn influences student persistence (Schreiner, 2009). Schreiner and Nelson (2013) found that student satisfaction with college—even when considered independently of other student characteristics—is a strong predictor of whether students will persist to the subsequent academic year. In another study, Roberts and Styron (2010) found that students departing from a program had statistically lower satisfaction with the program than those who returned.

Recognizing the importance of academic achievement (i.e., grades) on eventual degree completion, researchers have also examined the relationship between satisfaction and academic performance. This line of research finds that not only are student

satisfaction and academic performance correlated, but that student satisfaction is a better predictor of academic performance than the other way around, meaning that satisfaction influences grades more strongly than grades influence satisfaction (Kim & Sax, 2017; Pike, 1991, 1993).

Limitation in Existing Research

Existing research on student satisfaction has made significant contributions to improving the quality of education, but it also has some fundamental limitations. Firstly, the perspective that views students as consumers—and their satisfaction as the most important indicator of the product (e.g., learning in higher education)—runs risk of reducing students to mere instrumental means of providing financial resources to sustain institutions (Molesworth et al., 2009). This perspective has been criticized for arguably treating international students, in particular, as "cash cows" for universities, as they often pay higher tuition fees than domestic students while experiencing marginalization (Cantwell, 2019; Stein, & de Andreotti, 2016; Yao et al., 2019).

Second, grouping diverse and heterogeneous subpopulations together in studies on student satisfaction has a critical flaw in that it fails to identify the unique backgrounds and structural dynamics that different subgroups of students bring, which may influence their satisfaction differently. Previous research has demonstrated that factors influencing satisfaction may vary depending on the subgroup or background to which students belong. For instance, Park (2009) found that the strongest influence on satisfaction for students of color attending predominantly White institutions is the heterogeneity of the institution, arguing that student satisfaction research and administration should actively incorporate student diversity and campus climate. Just as expectations for college are likely to differ, patterns of engagement and satisfaction have also shown differences for international students. International students' satisfaction is closely associated with their friendship circle or interaction with domestic students: International students with higher numbers of host country friends reported higher levels of satisfaction with their college experience (Glass & Westmont, 2014; Hendrickson et al., 2011). Further, international students who reported more frequent contacts with host-country students had higher satisfaction with their academic and social experiences in college (Luo et al., 2019; Perrucci & Hu, 1995). By contrast, negative experiences, including perceived discrimination, are an

important contributor to their dissatisfaction with the college experience (Benita, 2021; Karuppan & Barari, 2010; Lee, 2010).

While a growing body of literature discusses how satisfaction, in relation to college experiences and college outcomes, has different meanings for various subgroups of students—e.g., different racial/ethnic groups or those in different fields of study (Ammigan et al., 2021; Outcault & Skewes-Cox, 2002), it is worth noting that prior literature tends to be exclusively focused on domestic students or it has treated domestic and international students as one group (Wekullo, 2019). International students, however, due to their differences in linguistic, ethnic/cultural, racial and socio-economic backgrounds may experience college very differently from their domestic peers; thus, the factors that contribute to their satisfaction are not necessarily consistent with the findings of their domestic peers (Ammigan et al., 2021; Lee, 2010). For instance, Chinese international students, with their unique cultural and worldview differences from American or other international students, may have distinct factors influencing their satisfaction (Heng, 2019; Jiang, 2021). These findings contribute to our understanding of the factors that contribute to student satisfaction and provide insights into the specific dynamics that influence the satisfaction levels of students from different nationalities studying in different countries.

This study, therefore, examines how students experience college, which college experiences lead to student satisfaction, and whether different patterns exist in the association between college experiences and student satisfaction across different groups of students: Chinese international students, non-Chinese international students, and domestic students.[1] Through this effort, the study seeks to provide specific suggestions and implications that can help develop programs and services that enhance student college experiences and positively improve college outcomes, regardless of whether they are domestic or international students.

Chinese International Students in U.S. Universities
With the large number of Chinese international undergraduate students in U.S. higher education, research has examined what challenges they experience, how they experience them, and the

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[1] Grouping non-Chinese international students as a single category is an unavoidable approach, as they represent more than 100 countries, making it impossible to analyze individual countries of origin within the survey format.

consequences and implications of their experiences on American college campuses. Previous literature has often claimed that Chinese students struggle in 'traditional' western academic settings (Wu, 2015; Yan, 2017). Of the possible stressors that international students—particularly Chinese—express concerns about is language proficiency. Recent research, however, is pushing back against the assumptions of deficit and advocating for more constructive ways to think about Chinese international students (Heng, 2016). For instance, in examining the experiences of Chinese undergraduate students, it is crucial to take into account the sociocultural context in which these experiences are embedded (Heng, 2016). When placing oneself in a foreign sociocultural environment, challenge is inevitable. Oftentimes, Chinese students find themselves "caught in a deep dilemma of needing to change, and while at the same time, they are unable or unwilling to change" (Yan, 2017, p.16).

Focusing on student peer groups and communities, research has noted that Chinese undergraduates have created for themselves a "home away from home" in their "student enclaves" at their U.S. host institutions. Chen and Ross (2015), adopting ethnic enclave theory to examine the social experiences of Chinese undergraduates at a U.S. university, argue that while higher education administrators often assume the stereotypes of Chinese students as being meek, quiet, or standoffish, who are unwilling to integrate into campus life, Chinese students' involvement in campus life has taken on different characteristics (e.g., forming their own formal and informal networks and communities) that are often not recognized by peers or administrators as involvement in campus life. Overlooking the diverse nature of Chinese (and international) students may lead to an inaccurate understanding of their experiences, which in turn may hinder efforts to improve their academic and social satisfaction.

Research Methods

Survey Data from the Midwest University (MU)

This study focused on Chinese international students, along with non-Chinese international and domestic undergraduate students enrolled at the Midwest University (MU). We sent out an e-mail survey invitation with a link for the study through Qualtrics to randomly selected first-year undergraduate students during the spring semester. Incentives provided to survey participants

included $10 for all students who completed at least 80% of the survey questions (based on the number of questions students answered) and a chance to participate in a lottery for four $150 Amazon gift cards. The final data for statistical analysis were from 436 Chinese students (54% response rate), 76 non-Chinese international students (30% response rate), and 1,243 (22% response rate) domestic students.

The survey questions used for this study are grouped into several categories: (1) demographic characteristics such as family income, parental education, race/ethnicity, or gender; (2) psychosocial adaptation to college experiences (i.e., sense of belonging); (3) college experiences including the use of campus facilities, services, and programs and interaction with peers, campus administrators, and faculty; and (5) student satisfaction with college experiences.

Data Analysis

First, descriptive statistical analyses were conducted to understand whether there are different patterns in the college experiences and satisfaction with college across by subgroups of students. Given that the outcome measure—student satisfaction—is measured by ten different indicators, all of which are highly correlated (correlation coefficients among the ten satisfaction measures range from .56 to .87), we conducted a factor analysis to establish a reduced number of satisfaction measures. Table 1 presents two factors that are produced from the factor analysis and their alpha scores: Factor 1, consisting of three specific aspects of satisfaction measures, represents academic experiences that students are satisfied with: academic experiences with MU in general, classes at MU, and college major. Factor 2 represents student life on and off campus, including student satisfaction with housing conditions, food on campus, lifestyle (shopping and entertainment) in the area, healthcare facilities at MU, food off campus, and transportation on campus.

Table 1. Student satisfaction factors

	Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Satisfaction with core element of academic experiences	Satisfaction with institution in general	.80
	Satisfaction with classes	
	Satisfaction with major	
Satisfaction with student life on- and off-campus	Satisfaction with housing conditions	.78
	Satisfaction with food on campus	
	Living in campus town/community	
	Healthcare facilities on campus	

Lastly, two separate regression analyses were conducted for two distinct satisfaction composite measures: satisfaction with the academic experience in college and satisfaction with on- and off-campus student life.

Findings

Table 2 presents whether there are statistically significant differences in student satisfaction with MU. For both satisfaction measures—academic experiences at MU and student life on and off campus—Chinese international students were significantly less satisfied than non-Chinese international students or domestic students. A post-hoc Tukey test shows that non-Chinese international and domestic students are considered homogenous in their satisfaction level, as compared to Chinese international students.

Table 2. Satisfaction factors for selected student groups (ranging 1 to 5, most satisfied)

	CIS	Non-CIS	Domestic	F Score
Satisfaction with core element of academic experiences	3.51	4.18	4.18	78.614***
Satisfaction with student life on- and off-campus	3.87	4.22	4.28	24.698***

Note: CIS indicates Chinese international students, Non-CIS indicates international students from countries other than China.
*** < .001, ** < .01, * < .05

Among the college experience measures, Chinese international students reported the lowest adjustment levels regarding MU's academic requirements, professors' teaching styles, and interactions with U.S. classmates. In contrast, non-Chinese international students reported the highest adjustment levels in relation to MU's academic requirements and professors' teaching styles. Similarly, while Chinese international students reported the lowest level of sense of belongings (3.54) among all survey respondents, non-Chinese international students' sense of belongings was almost identical to that of their domestic peers (3.88).

Table 3 presents students' perceptions of faculty support and interaction. Non-Chinese international students had the highest scores across all seven measures, suggesting that compared to other student groups, they believed they received more support from their professors—not only in terms of academic advice and support but also emotional support and professional advice. In contrast, Chinese international students reported the lowest levels of faculty support and interaction, except for two measures: help with improving study

skills, and emotional support/engagement, where domestic students had lower scores than Chinese international students. Given that Chinese international students often report difficulties with their academic skills and emotional adjustment to new living styles and college environments, it is understandable that they received more support and help from their professors than domestic students.

Table 3. College experiences: adjustment, sense of belonging, and interaction with faculty

Variable	CIS	Non-CIS	Domestic	F Score
Adjustment to:				
University Academic Requirements	3.75	4.16	4.15	19.494***
Faculty Teaching Styles	3.81	4.30	3.90	5.276**
Interacting with US classmates	3.49	3.84	4.19	62.362***
Overall Sense of Belonging	3.55	3.88	3.89	9.969***
How Often do Faculty Provide:				
Advice about your academic program	2.74	3.68	2.91	11.521***
Emotional support and encouragement	2.70	2.95	2.39	9.829***
Help with improving study skills	2.93	3.49	2.84	6.828**
Feedback other than grades	2.83	3.66	2.98	9.048***
Chances to discuss work after class	2.88	3.56	3.47	25.875***
Chances to discuss non-class topics	2.54	3.02	2.68	3.144*
Chances to discuss professional goals	2.45	3.24	2.73	9.318***

*** $< .001$, ** $< .01$, * $< .05$

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Chinese international students experienced significantly lower faculty support and interaction compared to non-Chinese international students. Since faculty support and interaction are known to increase student satisfaction, academic achievement, and college outcome measures, the lower level of support and interaction with faculty among Chinese international students are expected to their satisfaction levels.

Student Satisfaction: Which College Experiences Matter?

All things being equal, Chinese international students were still less likely to be satisfied with their academic experiences at MU than their domestic counterparts, whereas non-Chinese international students were not statistically different from domestic students (see Table 4). Recall that Chinese international students reported significantly lower satisfaction with academic experiences than domestic and non-Chinese international students (see Table 2). The low satisfaction with academic experiences among Chinese international students—even when they had the same levels of adjustment to MU and sense of belonging, all things being equal—suggests that they uniquely experience and perceive their academic environment compared to domestic and non-Chinese international students. Therefore, it is important to address factors that may contribute to academic satisfaction, particularly among Chinese international students.

Among the college experience measures, a sense of belonging, adjustment to MU's academic requirements, adjustment to American professors' teaching styles, and faculty support and interaction were significant positive predictors, regardless of whether students were Chinese international, non-Chinese international, or domestic. In other words, students who reported higher levels of adjustments to MU and faculty support and interaction were more likely to be satisfied with their academic experiences at MU. Given that Chinese international students were less satisfied than domestic students, all things being equal, this finding suggests that increasing their sense of belonging, adjustment to college, and faculty interaction could raise their academic satisfaction to a level where no significant difference exists between Chinese and domestic students.

Regarding satisfaction with on- and off-campus life, Chinese international students were not different from their domestic counterparts—no statistically significant differences were found between the two groups. This finding suggests that the seemingly significant differences in satisfaction with on- and off-campus between Chinese international and domestic students (See Table 2) may be attributed to other factors including sense of belonging, or faculty interaction, both were positive predictors of satisfaction with on- and off-campus life. In other words, all things being equal, students with a stronger sense of belonging or more frequent faculty interaction and support were significantly more likely to be satisfied with their on- and off-campus life. It is worth noting that a sense of belonging and faculty interaction and support positively influence satisfaction with both academic experiences and on- and off-campus life.

Table 4. Multivariate Regression Findings

	Satisfaction with academic experiences	Satisfaction with on- and off-campus life
Chinese (reference: Domestic students)	-.579***	ns
Non-Chinese (reference: Domestic students)	ns	ns
Age	ns	ns
Gender	ns	ns
Parental Education	ns	ns
Sense of Belonging	.284***	.164***
Adjustment to academic requirements	.144***	ns
Adjustment to U.S. teaching styles	.199***	ns
Adjustment to interacting with U.S. peers		ns
Interaction with faculty	.123***	.095*

*** < .001, ** < .01, * < .05

Note 1: ns represent the variable was not statistically significant.

Note 2: Due to multicollinearity, individual measures of student perception of faculty support and interaction are created as a composite measure (Cronbach's alpha= .898) and was entered to regression model as a single variable.

Discussion

As large number of international students continue to come and study in US higher education institutions, student adjustment and experiences on campus have become a pressing issue facing colleges and universities across the country. In this paper we focus on student satisfaction, which has been shown to be strongly associated with persistence, retention and educational achievement for college students and often considered an important college outcome measure in itself. While there has been much research on student satisfaction among domestic students, to date, our understanding of international students' satisfaction with college remains limited (Huong et al., 2017). In this study, we drew on survey data collected on three groups of first-year undergraduate students: Chinese international, non-Chinese international, and domestic students attending a Midwestern University (MU), to examine similarities and differences in student satisfaction and how their satisfaction may be associated with factors such as their experiences on college, academic adjustment, and perceived faculty support.

From the descriptive statistics, this study found that Chinese international students reported the lowest level of satisfaction compared to the other two groups of peers in the same institution. While there are growing research interests in international students, few scholars have focused on international students and their college experiences and outcomes with particular attention to possibly different patterns by the country of origin. Therefore, it is striking and unexpected that this study found significant differences between Chinese and non-Chinese international students in almost all aspects of college experiences, adjustment, and satisfaction measures.

The difference may be due to the large number of Chinese international students on campus compared to the relatively smaller number of non-Chinese international students from the same countries of origin. As of today, 25% of all international undergraduates come from China, one of the top three senders of international students to the U.S. (IIE, 2024). For Chinese international students, the presence of a large number of co-ethnic peers may provide emotional and social support, particularly shortly after they arrive in the U.S. For the vast majority of Chinese international students in our study, this is their first time living and studying outside China. The availability of co-ethnic friends on campus may motivate many to remain exclusively within their

Chinese social groups, not extensively interact with other groups on campus—including both students and faculty. This may result in a lower level of college engagement—at least as we typically understand it (Heng, 2018)— a lower sense of belonging and adjustment to MU compared to their peers.

Indeed, while structurally diverse social settings (e.g., significant representation of international students on campus), are considered the basis on which intergroup interaction can take place, establishing compositional diversity by increasing representation among diverse groups of individuals is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for interaction across groups. Prior literature has shown that increased ethnic diversity on campus did not lead to students forming relationships with diverse groups, particularly for non-white students (Bowman, 2012; 2013; Bowman & Park, 2015). The compositions of individuals, in terms of the group size, matters in their efforts to reach out: As the relative group size grows, its members are less likely to form "out-group ties" (Savelkoul et al., 2015; Wimmer & Lewis, 2010, p. 590). Among first-year international students at MU, Chinese international students easily outnumber non-Chinese international students on campus. Therefore, it is plausible to assume that the relatively lower levels of adjustment, interaction with faculty, and sense of belonging among Chinese international students, compared to other groups, might be related to their tendency to stay within their ethnic group, largely due to the lack of an urgent need to form out-group ties.

From an institutional perspective, MU may not have been able to properly prepare college environments that are more inclusive of international students and design programs and services that consider the unique needs of these international students, which may have played a role in Chinese international students' lack of involvement and relatively lower positive perception of faculty support and interaction. From the same standpoint, it is worth noting that non-Chinese international students reported similar levels of satisfaction as their domestic peers. Compared to their large numbers of Chinese peers, non-Chinese international students are much smaller in numbers on campus and thus, may have to reach out to faculty and other students, including both domestic students and students from different national/ethnic backgrounds. This possibility may influence them being more similar to domestic students in all aspects of college satisfaction, college experiences and adjustment measures in the study.

All other things being equal, Chinese international students are still less satisfied with the core aspect of academic experiences than domestic students but they are equally satisfied with on- and off-campus life as their domestic counterparts. Given that positive experiences with faculty, greater sense of belonging, better adjustment to academic requirements and U.S. (western) teaching styles are all positive predictors of student satisfaction with the core aspect of academic experiences and that Chinese international students tend to report lower levels of interaction and adjustments for all these measures, it is crucial to provide academic environments or services that take international students—particularly Chinese international students—and their unique difficulties and needs into consideration. A few examples include encouraging faculty to interact with international students more often, providing academic advising services that properly prepare international students for U.S. teaching styles and academic requirements, or building an inclusive campus community for international students so that all students equally feel a sense of belonging on their university campus. Even for the satisfaction with on- and off-campus life, a sense of belonging and interaction with faculty are statistically significant positive predictors, suggesting that not only for the academic aspect of college experiences but also on- and off-campus life in general, it is important to provide campus environment and services that ensure students can develop a strong sense of belong and utilize ample opportunities to interact with faculty (and get support from them) (Kim & Sax, 2017; Glass & Westmont, 2014).

Conclusions and Implications for Future Study

The findings of the study are important in highlighting the challenges faced by many higher education institutions that enroll a large number of international students. While colleges and universities benefit financially from the arrival of international students, they also have a moral and financial obligation to understand the challenges, needs, and trajectories of this population of students—as they do for all undergraduates. At MU and many other public universities, international students pay twice the tuition rate of in-state students, and financial and enrollment management strategies revolve around sustaining this income stream (Cantwell, 2019). Yet support programs and services have not expanded at the same rate as the growth of international students, particularly Chinese students. As a result, universities

are facing an increasing pressure to better support international students (Durden, 2016). Therefore, our findings should inform educational policy and practice at the institutional and national level as universities across the country struggle to support the largest ever number of international students.

With this study, we aim to bridge research and practice through advancing our understanding of the experiences of international students, identifying gaps between university support and students' needs, and helping universities develop and coordinate institutional support for all international students' success. This study provides MU with opportunities to learn how to improve their support of international students. By examining the experiences and satisfaction of students, the findings of the study contribute to theory and practice that improve the organizational leadership for the benefit of institutional diversity and inclusiveness, not only for international students but also for domestic students who will improve their learning in foreign languages, cultures, or openness to diversity (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013; Tsai & Trinidad, 2025).

While the survey data provide enhanced understanding of student experiences, adjustment, and satisfaction, the nature of the survey data also has a number of limitations that restrict the application of the findings to different settings and thus the findings need to be interpreted with caution. First, the survey data are from first-year freshmen who were about to end their second semesters at MU. Therefore, many freshmen, particularly international students, may not yet have had an opportunity to connect with the university environments. After arriving to a new country, international students, particularly Chinese international students—given the findings of the study, may need extra time to get adjusted to their new environment, lifestyle, cultures, languages, and academic systems. The significant differences in student satisfaction with their academic experiences between Chinese and domestic students, therefore, may not be purely because of their lower satisfaction with MU but largely due to the extra time that they need compared to domestic students. Therefore, future research that incorporates longitudinal components in the survey—surveying junior or senior students, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of international students, their adjustment, and satisfaction, particularly as the effects of these factors may change over time.

Another important limitation of the data is lack of variables that provide information about students and their preparedness

prior to MU. It is not entirely clear why Chinese international students present significantly different patterns in their college experiences and satisfaction even compared to non-Chinese international students. One possible explanation might be related to student readiness for academic work in U.S. or the differences in cultural or social backgrounds by the country of origin. International students may experience U.S. colleges and university in distinctively different ways, depending on their country of origin, English fluency, or cultural backgrounds (Lee & Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2020). Against this context, Chinese international students may experience discriminations and a negative campus climate that may also play a part in explaining these differences. Future study, by exploring this area, will certainly expand our current understanding on international students, particularly their different college adjustment and experiences by country of origin. In addition, our data are drawn from one institution that reportedly has significantly large number of Chinese international students on campus. Student composition by race/ethnicity, gender, or country of origin has a significant impact on student experiences, particularly for those from underrepresented backgrounds (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Therefore, the findings of this study may not be equally applicable to institutions where the student compositions or other institutional characteristics differ significantly from MU. Additional research that examines different institutional settings in terms of institutional prestige, student composition, or geographic location could certainly broaden our limited understanding on international, particularly Chinese international students, in higher education institutions.

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Author and Affiliation

Dr. Dongbin Kim
Professor
Department of Educational Administration
Michigan State University
Email: dbkim@msu.edu

Author and Affiliation

Dr. Desiree Qin
Associate Professor
Human Development and Family Studies
Michigan State University
Email:dqin@msu.edu

Author and Affiliation

Seyoung Hong
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Educational Administration
Michigan State University
Email: hongseyo@msu.edu

Author and Affiliation

Dr. Andrea Louie
Professor
Anthropology
Michigan State University
Email: louie@msu.edu

Author and Affiliation

Dr. Adam Grimm
Postdoctoral Researcher
College of Education
Michigan State University
Email: grimmada@msu.edu