

Links Between Parenting Practices and Chinese International College Students' Psychological Adjustment

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Introduction

- One in three international students enrolled at U.S. institutions of higher education is from China (33.4%).
- Chinese international students (CIS) encounter unique adjustment challenges, including fitting in socially, differences in the education system and social norms, lower perceived social support.
- Social support can play a significant role in the psychological adjustment of CIS, but parents as a major support source, has rarely been studied.
- As suggested by Bowen Family System Theory, the parent-child relationship should adapt to the emerging adults growing independence.
- Self-Determination Theory holds that a universal need for autonomy exists and fulfilling this need is directly related to individual well-being.
- Very few studies have examined the role of parents in CIS's stress and loneliness, despite accumulating evidence that parents are still the main source of emotional and social support for their college student children. In the present study, we examined the role of parent-CIS contact, parent-CIS conflict, parental involvement, and helicopter parenting in CIS' psychological adjustment (i.e., loneliness, stress).

Research Questions

1. Do parent-child contact and parent-CIS conflict predict CIS's loneliness and stress?
2. Do helicopter parenting and parental involvement predict CIS's loneliness and stress above and beyond parent-child contact and conflict?

Participants

- N = 167; Mage = 21.2 years, SD = 3.63; 59% male
- 62.3% university accelerator programs, followed by undergraduate (22.8%), and graduate (15%) programs.
- An accelerator program involves training ESL international students with intensive academic English skills and/or American culture before beginning regular academic courses
- Average length in the U.S: 14.5 months (SD = 15.8)

Table 1: Correlations and descriptive statistics for all studied variables

	M% (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	59.3	-							
2. Length in the U. S	14.45 (15.81)	-.10	-						
3. English competence	3.16 (.70)	-.21**	.26***	-					
4. Parent contact	5.47(.74)	.04	.02	-.01	-				
5. Parent-child conflict	1.51 (.72)	-.04	-.08	-.07	-.08	-			
6. Parental involvement	3.71 (.55)	.14	.21*	.15	.38***	-.11	-		
7. Helicopter parenting	2.73 (.59)	-.23**	.00	-.08	-.02	.37***	-.10	-	
8. Stress	2.76 (.56)	-.01	.09	-.03	-.11	.36***	-.04	.41***	-
9. Loneliness	2.19 (.49)	-.05	-.03	-.19*	-.19*	.18*	-.21*	.26**	.37***

Note: Gender was coded as 0=Male and 1 = Female; length in the U.S. is measured by months.

Table 2: Predicting Chinese international student loneliness and stress from parent-child communication and parenting strategies

Predictors	Loneliness		Stress	
	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β
Model 1: Control variables				
Gender	-.07 (.07)	-.09	-.01 (.08)	-.01
Length in U. S	.01 (.00)	.02	.00 (.00)	.11
English competence	-.15 (.06)	-.21**	-.05 (.07)	-.06
R ²	.05		.01	
Model 2: Parent-child communication				
Parent-child contact	-.12 (.05)	-.18*	-.06 (.06)	-.08
Parent-CIS conflict	.10 (.05)	.15~	.27 (.06)	.35***
R ²	.09		.15	
ΔR^2	.04		.14	
Model 3: Parenting strategies				
Parent involvement	-.09 (.08)	-.10	.03 (.08)	.03
Helicopter parenting	.18 (.07)	.21*	.32 (.08)	.34***
R ²	.13		.25	
ΔR^2	.04		.10	

Note: ~p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; *** p<.001;

Measures

- **Frequency of parent-CIS contact.** "how often do you communicate with your parents (e.g., talk on the phone, video chat, receive a text message, email)
- **Frequency of parent-CIS conflict.** "how often do you argue or fight or have a lot of difficulty with your parents"
- 6 items were used from the **Parenting Involvement Scale** (Yu et al., 2010). ($\alpha = .70$).
- 8 items were used from the **Helicopter Parenting Scale** (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). ($\alpha = .74$).
- **Loneliness** was assessed using eight items from UCLA Loneliness Scale Short Version ($\alpha = .71$).
- **Stress** was assessed using six items from the College Stress Scale (Rodriguez et al., 2000). ($\alpha = .71$).
- **English competence.** Referred to and revised from previous studies (e.g., Faulkner-Bond et al. 2018; ($\alpha = .85$).

Results & Discussions

- Frequent parent-CIS contact was associated with less loneliness, whereas more parent-CIS conflict was associated with more loneliness (marginally) and stress.
- Both parental involvement and helicopter parenting were associated with loneliness at the bivariate level. When considered simultaneously, only helicopter parenting had a significant positive association with loneliness.
- CIS benefit from some parental involvement, but once parents become overinvolved in their life, it becomes helicopter parenting and becomes burdensome to CIS.
- University counselors should find ways to deliver messages to international students' parents (preferably in these students' native languages) about striving for a careful balance of parental involvement and adult child autonomy support during emerging adulthood