

The Foreign Student Adaptation Program

Social Experiences of Asian Students in the U.S.

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"The more we uncover the painful facets of the adaptation most foreign students make in the United States, the more difficult it is for us to take any position that would lead to the glossing over of foreign student problems. Perhaps the best progress can be made by shifting our focus from the foreign aspect of the foreign student process to the human aspect."

FOUR YEARS AGO we embarked on a study of the American experience of the foreign student. As psychiatrists and psychologists, our interests quite naturally went beyond the student's educational adjustment to his personal, lived-life experience—his moods, concerns, social world, and general style of life. As clinicians, we were especially concerned with the many stresses present before, during, and after the sojourn. We were interested both in delineating these stresses and in devising workable ways to predict, understand, and treat cases of maladaptation.

Our focus in designing the specific studies within the scope of these general objectives has been on diversity.¹ There are more than 120,000 foreign students currently in the United States, and countless more who have remained after completing their studies. More than 150 nations are represented.² Consistent with the results of a series of

studies sponsored by the Social Science Research Council,³ we expect different life styles and adaptations to occur, both among groups with different cultural backgrounds and traditions, and within cultural groups as a function of situational and individual personality factors. The identification and longitudinal study of these different styles will broaden our understanding of their immediate implications and long-term impact on the student's attitudes and life pattern. Our working conception of maladaptation is equally diverse. The wide range of stresses that impinge on different students should lead to an equally wide range of adaptations and coping methods, some effective, some not. More than simply to categorize any one adaptational mode as healthy or unhealthy, we hope to reveal the underlying background and cultural factors that predict it, to learn its consequences for the individual, and to develop further our methods for

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prevention or intervention when appropriate.

Some Basic Assumptions

To understand the process of cross-cultural education and adaptation, it is essential to work within a multivariate and multidisciplinary framework. Principles from psychology, sociology, anthropology, and other fields are all relevant to this complex subject. At the very least, a given student's experience in the United States is shaped by his cultural background and norms, by his personality, which has developed within this cultural context, and by special situational factors at home and in the United States.

Let us elaborate the role of cultural and situational factors:

(1) *The foreign student's behavior and adaptation cannot be predicted or adequately evaluated without considering the frame of reference provided by his specific culture.*

A Chinese boy who may seem to us to be normal and well-functioning, that is, moderately independent, striving, interested in girls, somewhat brash, willing to take things as they come like the normal American male, is, in

the context of home values, deviantly abrasive, somewhat psychopathic, and probably an outcast from his peer group. Conversely, the "proper" Chinese girl who presents herself in our interview—hesitant, shy, eyes downcast, giggling, responding only to direct questions, self-deprecating—seems by our standards to be pathologically inhibited and inappropriate. And our impression of her shyness and fragility masks the fact that this same young girl, in order to get to the United States at all, had to engage in a massive yearlong struggle with her parents to overcome their strong opposition.

(2) *Situational factors have a powerful influence on the student's adaptation and behavior in the United States.* More and more research shows that situational factors are important determinants of the foreign student adaptation. Brain drain rates, for example, are better predicted by the nature of employment opportunities and the relative standards of living in home and host countries than they are by the individual's personal motives or values.⁴ The development of friendly ties with Americans is greatly facilitated, especially for those lacking in motivation to reach out, by certain kinds of living arrangements.⁵ Most of the depressed reactions we have treated in our clinic are traceable primarily to the loss of family and loved ones, or loss of social anchorage through political upheaval.

Situational variables of special importance in the foreign student's experience are the quality and role-expectations of previous educational or occupational settings, demands and expectations of parents, sponsors, and supporting agencies, career opportunities and specific openings, family events, and political trends both at home and abroad. Experiences in the United States are also deeply influenced by features of the particular educational institution attended (e.g., large vs. small, rural

vs. urban, high prestige vs. low prestige). The compatibility of weather, food, attitudes, and behavior of faculty and fellow-students, opportunities for contact within the broader community, and the availability of fellow-nationals are essential determinants of the visitor's social life, health, and general sense of well-being.

As with cultural factors, situational factors must be considered in *evaluating the quality* of a given adaptation. Depression in a Biafran when his country is in the final agony of defeat is understandable and may be seen as an appropriate adaptive mechanism that allows him to express his grief. Suspicion and distrust of strangers is quite realistic when home-country secret police informers infiltrate local student groups and liberal students are arrested or curtailed professionally upon their return home. We must take care to avoid premature inappropriate labeling of apparent maladaptive reactions and concern ourselves instead with the question of why some students are more vulnerable to these situational forces than others.

Several other important assumptions stem from these principles outlined above.

(3) *The evaluation of adaptation and outcome for the foreign student requires multiple criteria.* Many studies of foreign student adaptation have simplistically focused either on superficial indices of academic adjustment or on the development of knowledge of positive attitudes toward the United States as criteria for success. While such criteria are understandable from the standpoint of our goals for international exchange, they do not tell the whole story in a meaningful way. Recent directions in foreign student research show the importance of looking beneath the surface and considering the personal and social adaptation that the student must make in

order to meet educational needs, career goals, and situational demands. In case after case we have seen what on the surface seems an ideal adaptation—a straight-A student making steady progress toward a Ph.D. with a definite position awaiting at home. But time and again we have found on closer examination that this progress may be made at the expense of personal happiness. The apparently "ideal" student may be living a life of loneliness, drudgery, nagging minor physical illness, and a despairing sense that the present has little to do with the shape and texture of his real life that cannot start until after his studies are completed.

One clear result of the SSRC and other studies has been to highlight the appropriateness of including the following aspects of adaptation in research design: completion of educational and professional goals, development of positive, friendly contacts with Americans, successful career placement (preferably in the home country), a continued sense of confidence, health, and well-being, and the emergence of differentiated and detailed perspectives on American life. Moving away from the "surface" aspects of adaptation, there are more subtle but equally important factors such as the strength of identification with home country vs. broadened international identity, change in social behavior patterns, increased tolerance and flexibility, a sense of individual adequacy and autonomy, and the ability to adapt training and integrate personal change appropriately to home situations and values. Such criteria are essential because they deal with the actual processes involved in adaptation and attitude change.

If one were to characterize the ideal adaptation to facilitate academic success and return home, it would involve only the minimum changes in behavior and attitudes essential for the student to meet his

goals with confidence and success. It would allow friendly, positive, mutually supportive relationships with Americans but not lead to permanent disillusion or alienation from the home culture. This kind of time-limited adaptation and rapid behavioral change requires certain mediating capacities: tolerance of ambiguity, flexibility, willingness to experiment with the new, sensitivity to oneself and to social cues—especially to implicit assumptions and expectations in social situations, the ability to take roles, and readiness to integrate changed behavior into personal value systems.⁶ These adaptational strengths are definitely enhanced by esteem and approval from significant figures in the environment, by the availability of positive interpersonal experiences, and by opportunities for continuing self-satisfying anchorage within the home culture. More transient stresses, such as political events, financial distress, health or family problems, may be important from time to time, but we would expect considerable individual variations in vulnerability to these stresses. That is, if the basic adaptive capacities are strong and supported by the sojourn environment, the student will be better able to weather situational stresses.

In holding this view we are cognizant of the conclusions drawn recently by Barbara Walton and others that "the foreign student is more student than foreign in his modes of adjustment."⁷ It is also suggested that research focused on a special array of problems unique to foreign students (such as culture shock) may be potentially misleading or misguided. While we definitely agree that many foreign students make excellent adaptations and that the bulk of their energies and concerns are directed toward their student roles, we are acutely aware of the dangers inherent in succumbing to the temptation to think all's well with our foreign students. The most promising

direction research in this area could take is to move away from oversimplified blanket distinctions between maladjustment vs. adjustment, satisfaction vs. disillusion, success vs. failure, and work instead to clarify a range of adaptations with multiple criteria to yield a detailed picture of different life styles prevalent among foreign students. Our purpose would be not to label any one style as good or bad, but to understand their short- and long-term implications especially in light of the basic processes of adaptation and attitude change involved.

(4) *Two concepts, role conflict and self-esteem, are especially crucial in conceptualizing essential determinants of adaptation.* Role conflict refers to the degree of correspondence vs. dissimilarity between home and host values and expectations. It defines the amount of change required for adaptation, and is a social psychological redefinition of the concept of cultural distance. Consistent with previous research, academic and social adjustment should be easier when role conflict is minimal and more difficult when role conflict is severe.⁸ If, for example, a student was expected at home to memorize texts and passively receive lectures, role conflict will be high for U.S. study settings where independent thinking and active challenge of traditional conceptions are highly valued.

Self-confidence and the self-esteem derived from recognition by significant figures in the environment are crucial predictors of adaptation. It has been demonstrated in many different ways that the students who fare best are those with initial self-confidence and who continue to be successful in gaining status and recognition while here. One particularly acute problem that foreign students face is the loss of status and esteem that comes from moving from home, where recognition and status were high, to the United States, where

this specialness is at best only temporary and much too bound up with the "foreigner" role. This status loss has been conceptualized as role shock.⁹ It is especially acute when established professionals have to adopt what seem to them regressive student roles with personally threatening implications of ignorance and dependency. This problem is acute and leads visitors to be hypersensitive about status and to find ways of coping or compensating that are often misunderstood or lead to out-and-out rejection by Americans.

(5) *Any study of the foreign student experience must be longitudinal in scope and make allowance for different phases of adjustment.* Changes and shifts in adaptation and in attitudes toward the United States are well documented phenomena.¹⁰ There is dispute regarding the exact shape of adjustment curves (U-curve vs. W-curve), but there is agreement that students are vulnerable to different stresses at different stages and show phases of attitude change. For example, problems typically shift from homesickness, making social connections, or using language early in the stay, to conflicts about future plans, reconciling changes in identity, or resolving intimate relationships established during the stay. Coelho and others have traced the development of attitudes in Indian students from an initial period of blanket acceptance and enchantment with the United States through a period of sensitivity and criticism to a more differentiated and informed acceptance after years of exposure. Any assessment of attitude change or adaptation made for foreign students must consider these phases of adjustment and the shifting pattern of vulnerability.

The predeparture period is especially in need of more detailed study. As DuBois points out, this should be considered an important aspect of the sojourn experience.¹¹ The student is in the midst of making what

is often a very difficult decision and personal commitment. He may be in a state of conflict about leaving his family responsibilities and feel considerable ambiguity regarding his future. And studies that show that foreign students come to the United States with an initially high level of positive attitudes suggest that the predeparture period may also be a time when important impressions of America are formed.¹² One hypothesis that it would be interesting to test would be that the adequacy of coping with decisionmaking stresses and anxiety expressed during the predeparture period would be predictive of adaptational adequacy in the United States and also of the nature of specific problems encountered.

(6) *Negative attitudes and experiences of foreign students are difficult to assess reliably.* Most students are polite and feel implicitly obliged to voice positive attitudes toward the United States and to demonstrate friendly social contacts with Americans. For pragmatic reasons they want to show sponsors and professors that they have reaped what they know are the expected benefits. On a personal level they prefer to believe that experiences have been good in order to mask any pain or stress. And it is painful and difficult for anyone from any culture to share personal negative thoughts and feelings with strangers. This difficulty is compounded further by our own readiness to believe positive things about ourselves. Even when one is actively aware of this problem as a potential source of bias, it is especially difficult to overcome in interview situations where cultural differences make interactions somewhat awkward and difficult. It is far easier to accept the first wave of praise or denials of difficulty as "the answer" than it is to continue to probe awkwardly and painfully. But our experience has shown us time and again that extensive probing and contact reveal negative attitudes and pain-

ful experiences we would never know of had we not persisted. As interviewers and researchers we must take extreme precaution not to fall into a "charade" with the foreign student that leads us to overemphasize the positive.

It is important to note that these impressions have not been derived primarily or exclusively from work with patients, but have been broadly supported in all our contacts with foreign students. One technique we have devised that has been extremely helpful has been to include in the interviewing team members of the subject's own culture.

In the remaining pages we will briefly review the specific research projects we have developed within the context of our general goals and philosophy.

Identifying the High-Risk Student

In 1966 and 1967 a total of 580 students from 35 foreign countries were given a background questionnaire as they passed through the Foreign Student Reception Center at the University of Wisconsin. This questionnaire was designed to assess variables that might be related to the student's adaptive capacity, to the specific stresses that he would encounter, or to his general life style. This included personal and family history, goals for study, intimacy of contact desired with Americans, adjustment problems anticipated, self-image, image of Americans, and image of fellow-nationals. These latter questions were intended to assess perceived cultural distance and identification with home norms. Repeated later in the sojourn these would also tap change in identification and social behavior. Also included were two subscales from the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory that relate to adaptive capacity in Americans. Other specific items were derived from an earlier and very

thorough assessment by Rudiselli of the counseling needs of foreign students at the University of Wisconsin.

This questionnaire was given as early as possible in the student's stay so that it could serve as a predictive index of various patterns of adaptation and maladaptation. All questionnaire responses are presently being correlated with the following objective indices of adjustment and follow-up reports:

(1) Academic performance including initial English language ability, admissions rating of potential, number of credits taken, student status, grade point average, and final action (degree awarded, warning, probation, etc.).

(2) Student health service visits made each month of enrollment, including purpose of each visit, nature of complaint, seriousness of complaint, and treatment.

(3) Counseling center and psychiatry outpatient and inpatient contacts, considering nature of complaint, diagnosis, number of visits, treatment administered, outcome.

(4) Foreign student office contacts, including renewal and extensions of stay, change of field or status, housing complaints, financial status and loans, disciplinary action and police reports, and administrative action.

(5) Follow-up questionnaires given at different time points touch upon future plans, problems experienced during the sojourn, and satisfaction with various aspects of the United States experience. Special emphasis is placed on the degree and nature of social contacts with Americans and fellow-nationals, the continuing importance of nationality to the self-image, attitudes toward Americans and attitudes toward the foreign student role, changes in national identity, and relationships with home reference groups.

Approximately 60 Asian students

received the follow-up questionnaire after 9 months on campus, and another 150 responded after 2-4 years. The remaining students are currently being contacted either on campus, at home, or in present work locations to complete a final followup questionnaire. Thus data will be available regarding different student experiences at various points during the sojourn.

About one-third of our sample is still on campus, and the large-scale data analyses await the completion of this study. Preliminary analyses carried out for Asian students on campus yielded some interesting trends. During the first year of study in the United States there are seasonal differences in the incidence of health problems, and there is evidence that the rate of illness at critical times in the academic year, such as the Christmas holidays, is predictable from the amount of anticipated homesickness. Also there was a relationship between grades and the student's initial prediction of his academic potential. More subtle conceptually but more striking is a relationship between self-ratings of anticipated vulnerability to a range of adaptational problems and stated interests in interpersonal contacts with Americans. Those most motivated to reach out to Americans are the more vulnerable; they expect more adaptational problems and score relatively low on our personality measures of adaptive capacity. Conversely this suggests that students with the more favorable adaptive potential are less interested in contact with Americans. If replicated and extended on the larger scale analyses of the data, this finding is striking and should be considered in planning orientation and service programs.

Another approach to the high-risk student that we have taken is to participate in the diagnosis and treatment of all foreign students seen in our inpatient and outpatient psychi-

atric facilities. Over a 3-year period more than 40 students have been seen. To date our experiences have paralleled those reported by other investigators.¹³ Complaints have ranged from severe psychotic episodes, usually paranoid in nature, severe depressions, through milder anxiety or neurotic states. Once language and problems of communication are resolved, there seems to be nothing unique about psychiatric illness in foreign student populations. There is a notable absence of cases of drug abuse or aggressive acting-out, but the complaints that we have seen among foreign students take a familiar course and have familiar dynamics.

Situational factors however do seem to play an especially important part in psychiatric breakdown among foreign students. Stresses vary at different points in the sojourn. Some students show symptomatology (usually extreme paranoia) almost immediately upon their departure from home. Early in the stay depression is experienced as students face loss of family and go through the initial somewhat lonely getting-settled period. Problems during the middle phase of study are more often precipitated by varying academic stresses such as academic failure or the discovery by a student that he is dissatisfied with his chosen field. Later come problems associated with the necessity of resolving emotional or sexual relations with Americans and conflicts about the impending return home. It is our impression that acute disturbances are often easily resolved by helping the student to deal with situational stresses. We have also noted that quite consistently students with emotional problems are extremely isolated from social contact with both fellow-nationals and Americans. One of our treatment techniques has been to encourage the student to participate more actively in social life even at the expense of study time.

Unlike their American counterparts, foreign students come to the psychiatric facilities only as a desperate last resort, and many are sent by friends, relatives, or neighbors involuntarily. Typically, foreign students take emotional problems to the student health services where they make many visits for multiple psychosomatic and anxiety-based complaints. Thus our experience has supported the generalization from previous studies that foreign students are especially prone to experience psychological problems in physical terms. Cultural and language differences are probably partly responsible. Unfortunately it means that we have insufficient opportunities to intervene early in the development of emotional difficulties. It also means that the students, when we see them, are not open to verbal, insight-oriented methods of treatment. They want medication, changes in their environment, and advice. They are poor candidates for our efforts to expand their range of emotional self-awareness. In order to retain foreign students in treatment we have had to develop very flexible methods: accepting irregular attendance, parrying threats to drop out, using short-term therapy, and acting as intermediaries with professors and foundation officials.

Studies of Asian Students

Over the last 2 years we have carried out intensive interviews with more than 40 students from Taiwan and Hong Kong. These students were "normal" well-functioning research subjects who were contacted at our initiative. None to our knowledge had ever presented himself for treatment and not one saw himself as being particularly maladapted or emotionally disturbed. The primary focus of our interview was on the nature of their social interactions with Americans and with fellow-nationals on the Madison campus. Our impressions

from these interviews were confirmed also by responses to questions about social relations made in the first follow-up contact carried out as part of the "high-risk" study. Questionnaire (for 60 Far Eastern students) and interview results fit together very closely. They suggest very strongly that social isolation from Americans is a fact of life for Asian students. The questionnaire which looked at social relationships broadly and superficially suggested that at least half of the students do not establish close friendships with Americans. Interview material gave a less balanced but considerably more detailed picture: the vast majority of Chinese that we saw clearly failed to establish close relationships with Americans and during their time here came not only to accept this isolation and to find reasons and rationalizations to support it, but also put down strong roots in the Chinese subculture. Once established, the intensity of this isolation and its resistance to change was great. It has serious consequences. Those who experience it come to an unfriendly view of Americans as insincere, superficial, and incapable of making real friendships.

The functions of the co-national subgroup are also important in perpetuating this isolation: it provides structure in a world where manners and morals are discrepant from patterns valued at home. It provides mutual esteem and approval in a familiar frame of reference when academic stresses are at an all-time peak. It provides suitable marriage partners and substitutes peers for parents in complex ways of courting. It provides relief from stresses of coping with new ways in a strange tongue where ignorance is equal to inferiority and embarrassment and loss of face are powerful negative experiences.

When we correlated questionnaire responses with some of the available background information we identified some of the factors that enhance or

inhibit cross-cultural contact. One important variable is self-confidence. If the student anticipates language problems and difficulties getting to meet Americans, he actually experiences difficulties over the first 9 months. If the student encounters difficulties with Americans initially and finds interaction stressful or negative, he is also likely to withdraw. The more a student reported American friends, the more likely he was to have found Americans friendly and no problem to get along with. Other correlations suggest that contact with Americans has an enhancing effect on self-confidence, well-being, and satisfaction with a number of aspects of the sojourn. While it is not clear whether this relationship stems from the fact that better satisfied and more confident students gravitate toward Americans, or whether contact with Americans produces these results, they clearly affirm the importance of self-regard and satisfaction in interpersonal contacts.

Two main themes that emerged from our interviews with Chinese students suggest factors that are important in conceptualizing the nature of the barriers that exist between Asians and Americans. First there are superficial differences in social behavior that require adjustment or relearning of rules and patterns of social conduct. Second, and perhaps more important, are the implicit emotional risks inherent in adaptation to these new ways that stem from basic functional differences in social roles. Briefly what is feared most is the loss of familiar structure and social anchorage, and the absence of a familiar supportive social peer network to fill dependency needs. These fears emerge as a direct function of the contrast between Chinese and American cultures. The Chinese culture is traditional and authoritarian—one in which young people receive a great deal of structure and

support both from family and from peers. American culture stresses quite opposite values for young people including self-expression, challenge to the system, independent behavior, informality, and constant change of peer associations. When faced with these conflicting pressures it is easy, especially for the somewhat insecure Chinese student, to fall back into the security provided by the Chinese subculture. And this withdrawal is enforced by the noticeable lack of tolerance that exists within the subculture toward those who deviate or move too far into Americanization. The Chinese who appears to be about to cast his lot with Americans is subject to a great deal of criticism and censured more as a black sheep than as a countryman wanting to go his own way.

These findings are currently being replicated in an ongoing study of social adaptation and traditional value systems among Korean students on the Madison campus. Mr. Chong-Keun Bae, a Ph.D. candidate in educational policy studies, has interviewed and given questionnaires to over 50 Korean students. His hypothesis is that the degree of social isolation from Americans is directly predictable from the strength of the student's traditional Korean values.

Predeparture Study

In collaboration with our colleagues in Taiwan, Drs. Eng-Kung Yeh and Hung-Ming Chu of the National Taiwan University, we have undertaken several studies of related aspects of predeparture phase. In one study we were interested in comparing Taiwanese students planning to study abroad with a matched sample of students staying at home. In Taiwan a total of 128 applicants to the University of Wisconsin were given a specially prepared version of our background questionnaire (in translation). All accepted for Wisconsin

were further evaluated in an intensive background interview. The 128 students were then matched to a control group stratified as to age, level of academic attainment, and major fields. It was difficult at this time to find any Chinese student who did not have aspirations to study in the United States. Included in the control group are those who reported no concrete plans to study in the United States in the immediate future. This data is now being analyzed in Taiwan to pinpoint differences between the stay-at-home and overseas group. Preliminary frequency distributions suggest that overseas students are more frequently mainland Chinese, better off financially, and see themselves (even before leaving home) as more closely resembling Americans than co-national peers in personality and values. If subsequent analyses confirm these trends, these data will support the interpretation that Chinese students who go out from Taiwan are less typical of their home culture and perhaps already more marginal or alienated from its traditions.

Another aspect of our intensive evaluation of Chinese applicants to Wisconsin was the earmarking of a sample of students for further intensive follow-up during their years in the United States. We have attempted to maintain close interview contact with these students in order to assess their stability, maturity, and adaptational resources. We are presently following over 30 students and will soon add 60 more to our sample. Preliminary results of these interviews have been incorporated into the study of social relations just reported.

Orientation Program

In an attempt to reverse the powerful trend toward social isolation among Chinese students while they are in the United States we carried out an experimental orientation pro-

gram in Taiwan this summer. Our main focus was on teaching the soon-to-depart students specific techniques for overcoming interactional difficulties with Americans. This was done in the context of a 5-week intensive live-in language training program in Taipei, Formosa. In an initial evaluation phase questionnaires and interviews were given to assess each student's goals and motives for the sojourn, his attitudes toward the United States, his social expectations and values, and his emotional stability. In the orientation phase students were divided into two groups. The so-called experimental orientation groups met in sessions using techniques adapted from currently popular methods of sensitivity training and group encounter. One goal was to make the student more aware of his social stimulus value and of the implicit cues and demands that operate in his typical social interactions. Differences in Chinese and American international styles and expectancies were demonstrated through the students' active participation in psychodrama and role-playing. As they were gradually guided to role-play different kinds of interactions with Americans and to take the American part in the situations, the students had opportunities to experiment with and to experience new modes of social behavior. Some of the critical situations we used were: not being understood or not understanding, the foolish or embarrassing question, how to say "no," how to handle the "nice to have met you, I hope we see you again soon" phenomenon, how to find out what is expected in an ambiguous situation, how to ask favors, how to start and end conversations, how to start friendships and tell when somebody likes you, romantic and sexual encounters, independent academic function, and racial implications. The interactional problems that these situations deal with include insecurity and status loss, anger and

frustration, ambiguous social expectancies and shifting role demands, engaging in open informal interchanges, and problems of independence and assertiveness. It is our hope that this program will help the students make a better, more comfortable adaptation in the United States and perhaps insulate them from their typical patterns of withdrawal into the co-national subgroup. The control orientation against which these techniques are now being evaluated consisted of more formally, didactically presented information about life and social styles within the United States. The students were given the same information that they received in the experimental orientation but were not encouraged or forced to confront actively their personal modes of interaction or to try out new ways of behaving. The implicit assumption is that the active ingredient of the orientation program was the opportunity it offered the student to become sensitive to his habitual modes of social behavior and to practice new modes. The success of both orientations will be evaluated over this coming year by questionnaire and interview contacts to assess the quality and number of contacts with Americans, their general sense of well-being, emotional stability, and the overall level of adjustment and achievement.

Brain Drain in Indians

Two students, Miss Carolyn Klock and Mr. Bashir Ahmad, have attempted a study of the contributions of situational factors and traditional values to the Indian student's decision to remain in the United States. Over 200 Indian students on the Wisconsin campus were surveyed and those representing the extremes of commitment to stay or return were interviewed further. Several results of this study are worth mentioning. The vast majority of students questioned stated either that they were

definitely going home or that they would "probably" go home. Only a small number confessed to be actively entertaining the idea of remaining in the United States. Only time will tell, but we strongly suspect that these estimates cannot be taken at face value. Many more students will remain in the United States. We suspect that this distortion in response is a function either of the student's fear of authoritative reprisal or of his actual ambivalence. Many students at the point of graduation show an interesting kind of ambivalent behavior: they categorically assert that they will return home, and at the same time they actively seek employment in the United States. Rather than there being a moment when the decision to return or not to return is made, the student seems to engage in a series of delaying maneuvers. He tells himself he'll take a job for 1 year only and then go home. Later he says to himself that he'll go home if he doesn't get promoted.

Consistent with other studies we find that the inclination to remain in the United States is best predicted from a knowledge of specific occupational opportunities available to the student at home. Students who are most certain to return home are those who have specific jobs waiting for them. Uncertainty of return is more frequent among students without definite jobs who see their professional opportunities as limited. Other factors such as traditional values or the nature of their general adjustment in the United States do not predict return. Although students who are returning home mention also that emotional ties and family responsibilities are important, it is clear that these motives are secondary to occupational security. The return home may satisfy personal and emotional needs, but it is determined by professional contingencies. One important impact of this result is that it suggests that

steps taken to assure students professional security will be more effective in reducing brain drain than any attempt on the part of American or home officials to evoke patriotism or a sense of cultural community.

Overview

What conclusions can we draw from our research so far? The kind of longitudinal study that we have undertaken is itself a complex business. Add to that the complexities of studying people from different cultures who have a wide range of experiences and who are highly mobile within the United States, and it should become clear why a 3-year research project has only a handful of preliminary findings to report. Looking over the whole of our data impressionistically we have good news and bad news.

The good news is that so many students make it successfully through their years in Wisconsin and earn the high esteem and affection of colleagues and friends. The good news is the reports we occasionally hear of deeply moving interpersonal encounters between foreigners and Americans. The good news is also being able to help the very few students who experience severe emotional problems to continue their stay, or when necessary, to return home with a sense of dignity and growth. In that sense we agree with Walton's conclusions that the foreign student is more student than foreign in the problems that he faces.

We do not agree however with the implication that the foreign stu-

dent's problems are minimal. And this brings us to the bad news. Behind their facade of academic progress we find many students unfortunately walled off from American life, existing from day to day with the despairing sense of drudgery. We have no indication whatsoever that they will ever look back on their years in the United States with fond affection or nostalgia. And time and again when we report our findings to groups that include foreigners they spontaneously say: "I'm so glad to hear you say that, I knew it all the time, but couldn't say so."

THE MORE WE UNCOVER the painful facets of the adaptation most foreign students make in the United States, the more difficult it is for us to take any position that would lead to the glossing over of foreign student problems. Perhaps the best progress can be made by shifting our focus from the *foreign* aspect of the foreign student process to the *human* aspect. This calls for a redefinition of the stresses in the foreign student's experience from those having to do specifically with culture to more individual human terms. If we speak of role shock rather than culture shock we may tap more directly the way the difference between cultures is actually experienced as problematic. The cultures are involved only as they coexist and conflict within the individual's experience, and it is that personal, private lived-life experience of the foreign student and the psychological processes involved in his leaving his home and adapting in a new culture that deserve our attention. □

Notes

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⁴ For example, see Keshav Dev Sharma, "Indian Students in the United States," in *International Educational and Cultural Exchange*, Spring 1969, pp. 43-59.

⁵ Claire Seltiz, Stuart W. Cook, June R. Christ, and Joan Havel, *Attitudes and Social Relations of Foreign Students in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963).

⁶ Herbert C. Kelman especially has looked at the processes basic to attitude change and adaptation, and distinguishes changes brought about through surface compliance or identification—likely to be temporary—from more enduring changes resulting from reorganization of values and internalization. See especially:

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⁷ Barbara J. Walton presents this view in the context of a very thorough and comprehensive review of foreign student research in *Foreign Student Exchange in Perspective* (Department of State Publication 8373, September 1967), p. 30.

⁸ See, for example, Seltiz, *op. cit.*, or Sewell and Davidson, *op. cit.*

⁹ Homer Higbee, "Role Shock—A New Concept," *International Educational and Cultural Exchange*, Spring 1969, p. 71.

¹⁰ DuBois, *op. cit.*; Sewell and Davidson, *op. cit.*

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¹¹ DuBois, *op. cit.*

¹² See Walton, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

¹³ See, for example:

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Community Services at Michigan State

More than 1,300 foreign students at Michigan State University have been aided through the work of the Community Committee for International Programs. Organized 10 years ago for the purpose of supplying winter coats to Southeast Asian students, the group now has 125 volunteer members. Students representing 85 different countries are served through the eight functions of the committee, which works in conjunction with the Office of Educational Exchange at MSU.

The most extensive program is the Host Family, with about 400 participants. Foreign students are matched with families according to common interests, and are invited to share dinners, weekends, and holidays with them.

Another service is the lending center, where students may borrow warm coats, household equipment, baby furniture, and other necessary items at nominal fees.

The hospitality committee welcomes new arrivals by calling on them and distributing booklets containing general information.

Foreign students are invited to attend the Homemaking American Style and English language classes offered by the committee.

Other functions of CCIP include transportation and a scholarship fund for foreign student wives who have completed at least one term at MSU.