



**Exploring the Challenges
and Cultural Differences
Faced by East Asian
International Students in
the U.S.**

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Learning Objectives

- Objective 1: You will expand your understanding of the historical contexts and its psychological influence in Japan, Korea, and China.
- Objective 2: You will be able name practical counseling tips for East Asian clients.
- Objective 3: You will gain knowledge on the challenges East Asian International students face in the U.S.
- Objective 4: You will explore the concept of microaggressions and examine specific examples that affect the East Asian community.

East Asian Countries

- The easternmost region of Asia, both geographical and ethno-cultural terms.
- East Asia States include **China** (Hong Kong & Macau), **Japan**, **Mongolia**, **North Korea**, **South Korea**, and **Taiwan Region**.



History, trauma, and Colonization

- World War II (1939-1945)
- Korea: Japan -> South Korea <- North Korea & China
- US Military Bases → Public image of western countries
 - in South Korea: 15 US Bases
 - in Japan: 23 US Bases
- China: Critical point of view
- Japan: Natural disasters

How they are impacted from the history

- Transgenerational trauma within historical background of colonization, war, and poverty (Iwamasa, 2012)
- Emotional oppression (Hohenshil et al., 2013)
- Mental health as the matter of willpower/ cognitive control (Iwamasa, 2012)

**International
Individuals
(East Asians)**

**Asian Americans
Pacific Islanders**

Similar but
Different



Name: _____



**Biracial & Multiracial
Asian Americans**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXPUM4tQgUY>



What East Asian clients might share in Common

- Collectivism
- Confucianism & Buddhism (Hohenshil et al., 2013)
- filial piety & traditional familism (Kira, 2021) → family oriented & gender roles
- Hierarchical relationship → preference for directive guidance (Hohenshil et al., 2013)
- Somatic symptoms



Helpful Tips for Intake

- Mental health stigma
 - Confidentiality
- Less proficiency in Language
 - "Do you understand?"--> "Am I making sense?"
- Humility as a virtue
 - strengths, resources
- Prior counseling experiences
 - indigenous healing & traditional healers
- Check in their ethnic identity
 - level of acculturation



Tips for Counseling

- Check ins for Asian Hate Crimes
- Transgenerational trauma
- Clients' employment history/ status
 - Model minority myth
 - Bamboo ceiling effect
- Non-directive communication
 - somatic symptoms



Traditional Healers

- Client's problem is understood in the context of their culture
 - Client's culture is the healing instrument
 - Coping skills
- Report of somatic symptoms
- Less stigma



Challenges Faced by International Students on U.S. Campuses

- Acculturation Stress
- Mental Health Issues
- Maintaining Legal Status
- Microaggression



Acculturation Stress

- **Acculturation stress** defined as the difficulties encountered during the adjustment to a new culture (Berry, 1992).
- Both **group** (changes in social and institutional structures as well as cultural practices) **and individual** (adaptations of beliefs, values, attitudes, and expectations + external aspects in relation to how individuals adopt the host culture through social interactions) levels.
- Continued exposure to such stress can result in **significant mental health issues**.

Acculturation Stress

- Many international students undergo acculturation stress as they navigate the differing cultural norms, values, and expectations during their transition to a new cultural environment (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).
- culture shock, managing long-distance relationships, dealing with loneliness and homesickness, and struggling with language proficiency stress (Young, 2017).

Acculturation Stress Diagram

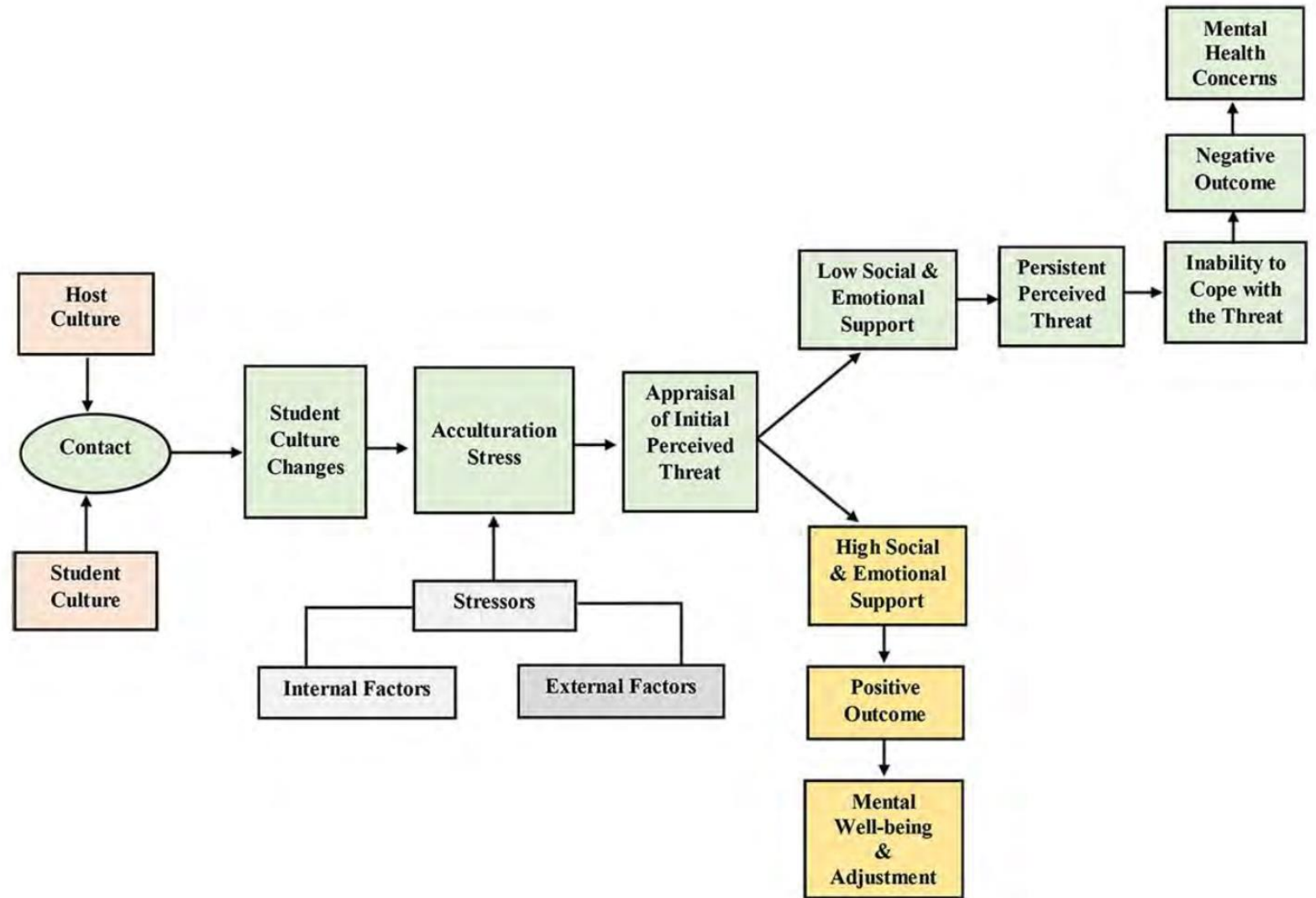


Figure 1. Diagram of a General Acculturation Framework

(Ma et al., 2020)

Mental Health Issues

- discontinuing treatment prematurely,
- expressing suicidal thoughts,
- utilizing crisis intervention services,
- requiring hospitalization compared to their domestic counterparts.
- international students who experience poor adjustment and receive inadequate support within the first six to twelve months of their arrival in the U.S. are at a higher risk of encountering mental health emergencies (Young, 2017).

Vulnerable to Mental Health Crises

- stigma associated with seeking help and mental health issues,
- discourages them from getting assistance until they are significantly distressed.
- international students who have just arrived lack a support network in their new country and are physically distant from their families and friends (Young, 2017).

Visa Challenges for International Students

- High student (F1) visa application fee (\$160) per application F1 Student Visa. (2019, December 11). Immigration Advice Service.
<https://us.iasservices.org.uk/america/student-visas/f1-student-visa/>.
- Allowed to work paid internships up to 8 months in the U.S during the degree.
- Visa interviews only occurs outside of U.S., students have to pay for travelling& accommodation fees when applying for a new F1 visa
- Science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) major international students are highly likely to experience background check (1 week to about a year)
- STEM major students are likely to get only 1 year of F1 visa (compared to 5 years)
- Go into a lottery to get h1b visa (around 20% chance), the visa that allows international student to work in the U.S post graduation.

Microaggression

- The term “microaggression” was coined in 1978 by Chester M. Pierce to characterize the phenomenon of subtle negative interactions targeting African Americans (Pierce et al., 1978).

KONICHIWA! NI HAO!

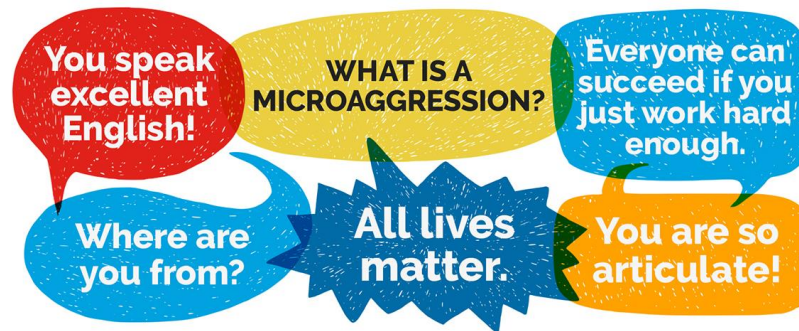
YOU SPEAK ENGLISH SO WELL!

NO, WHERE ARE YOU
REALLY FROM?

MY WIFE IS ASIAN SO...

Definition of Microaggression

- Everyday minor insults, putdowns, invalidations, and offensive behaviors that people experience in daily interactions (Sue et al., 2007).



Characteristics of Microaggression

- Target different identities
- Subtlety
- Intentional or Unintentional



Impacts

Depression

Anxiety

PTSD

Lower self-esteem

Hypertension

HPA axis dysfunction

Higher BMI

Substance abuse

Delinquency

Decreased academic
success

Suicidality

(Williams et al., 2021)

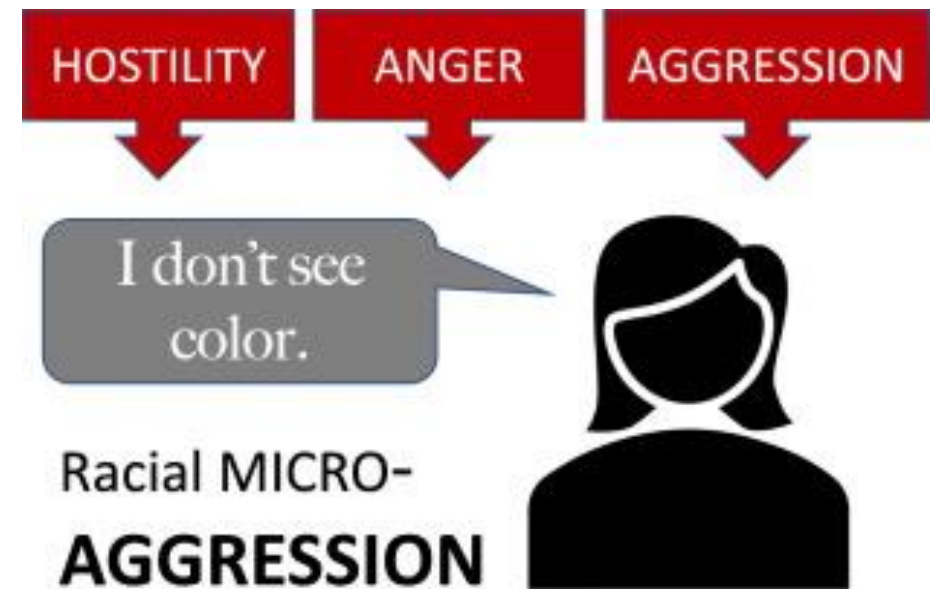
Three Roles

- Targets
- (White) Allies
- Bystanders

Sue et al., 2019

Targets

- “People of color who are objects of racial prejudice and discrimination expressed through micro/ macroaggressions.” (p. 131)
- Usually lack knowledge about how to react (Sue et al., 2019).
- Great anxiety, guilt, and self-disappointment
- First rule of thumb: taking care of yourself



(White) Allies

- Dominant social group members
- Actively combat prejudicial practices observed in both personal and professional settings (Sue et al., 2017)



Bystanders

- Anyone who becomes aware of or witnesses behavior or practices that worth commenting or acting against (Sue et al., 2019).
- Superficial understanding of racism, minimum awareness of “being a racial being”
- See themselves as being moral and just
- Highest proportion of the population

Microintervention

- Definition: everyday words or deeds, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicates to the targets of microaggressions (Sue et al., 2019).
- (1) validation of their experiential reality,
- (2) value as a person,
- (3) affirmation of their racial or group identity,
- (4) support and encouragement, and
- (5) reassurance that they are not alone.

Strategies

- Make the “Invisible” Visible
- Disarm the Microaggression
- Educate the Perpetrator
- Seek External Reinforcement or Support

Case Study

- Scenario: During the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian American female enters a bus occupied by a few passengers. The Asian American sat down on a seat beside a White woman. The White woman appears anxious, moves to the other side of the bus and pressed on her mask.
- Metacommunication/Assumption: Asian are dangerous because they all carry COVID-19 virus.

Disarm the Microaggression

- "Ouch!!"
- Shaking your head
- Looking down or away
- Covering your mouth with your hand to show surprise

Educate the Perpetrator

- “I know you didn’t realize this but that you just did was demeaning to me because you were implying I was danger to people around me.”
- “The majority of Asian people are very careful with wearing masks and do not carry COVID virus. How would you feel if someone assumed something about you because of your race?”

Seek External Reinforcement or Support

- Ask to speak to someone who is in authority.
- Seek counseling.
- Turn to your community leaders or members for support.
- Choose a friend with whom you can always check in and process.

Making the Invisible Visible

Indicate to the perpetrator that they have behaved or said something offensive to you or others

Force the perpetrator to consider the impact and meaning of what was said/done or, in the case of the bystander, what was not said/done

When those with power and privilege respond, has greater impact on perpetrator

Name and make the metacommunication explicit

Challenge the stereotype

“You assume I am dangerous because of the way I look.”

“I might be Black, but that does not make me dangerous.”

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