

A Self-Report on the Factors Determining the Stress Levels of Chinese Graduate Students Studying Abroad in Thailand

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Abstract

An expanding corpus of research and data shows that stress, a contemporary pandemic and the most prevalent academic performance-related mental disease among all mental health issues, poses a possible challenge or danger to humanity. In addition, considerable evidence indicates that the prevalence of stress among college students is on the rise. In light of this, the current research aims to evaluate the degree of stress among Chinese college students in Bangkok based on the influence of demographic variables such as gender, age, academic level, and family background/region, as well as to identify possible stress-determining factors. For both quantitative and qualitative data collection and integration, a mixed-methods survey design was used, and semi-structured interviews were performed. According to the research findings, Chinese graduate students exhibited a significantly elevated and averaged level of stress ($\bar{X}=4.09$) about studying overseas in Thailand. In addition to eating ($\bar{X}=4.77$), academic concerns ($\bar{X}=4.56$), cultural difficulties ($\bar{X}=3.59$), and education-related administration management ($\bar{X}=3.44$), a number of other factors accounted for the majority of the stress-reduction factors. This research provides a comprehensive and in-depth assessment of stress levels from the perspectives of Chinese graduate students studying abroad in Thailand. Equally significant, the study findings create a framework for analyzing the external and internal stress-causing variables among Chinese graduate students.

Keywords: Stress Level, Chinese Graduate Students, Stressor, Culture Shock

1. Introduction

A substantial quantity of research and empirical findings indicate that stress poses a possible challenge or hazard to human behavior (Alexander et al., 2020). Among all mental health issues, feelings of stress are seen as a contemporary pandemic and most frequently as an academic performance-related ailment (Allen et al., 2022). Over the last several decades, it has been more difficult to deny the presence of a significant connection between psychology and education (Bano & Xia, 2020; Assana, 2017). The subject of stress has attracted a substantial amount of scholarly scrutiny. In addition, considerable evidence indicates that stress levels among higher education students are on the rise. Several efforts have been made to do substantial study on the academic stress and educational environment of students in an alien culture (Barden & Caleb, 2019; Bawa & Watson, 2017). Specifically, students experience mental stress while pursuing higher professional education abroad in a foreign country. Despite the relevance of psychological stress, there is indeed a dearth of trustworthy information on the stress conditions of Chinese graduate students in ASEAN nations, notably in Thailand, as shown by the current research. In light of this, the present study explores how much stress Chinese graduate students experience in Thailand as well as the underlying factors of that kind

of stress. Two significant objectives of this research study are: 1) to investigate the situation of stress levels among Chinese graduate students in Thailand; 2) to identify the stressors or causes that generate stress. In light of the previous research aims, this study's particular research questions attempted to give solutions to the following issues:

- 1) How much stress generally do Chinese graduate students in Thailand experience.
- 2) What would be the most often identified sources of stress among Chinese graduate students.

The major motivation for selecting this study issue includes personal interest and informal consulting experience with Chinese graduate students, which has led the development of this research project. This research aims to give an intriguing incentive to build our understanding of the mental health issues of Chinese graduate students studying abroad in Thailand. For the meantime, this survey significantly improves our knowledge of a number of direct stressors likely to affect higher education life in Thailand. Theoretically, the predicted findings would be crucial in providing the framework for an understanding of the stress levels and sources of stress among Chinese graduate students pursuing postgraduate studies in Thailand. Concerning applicability, the findings would demonstrate a substantial analytic framework that would serve as the deciding role of a facilitator for Chinese graduate students with mental stress troubles seeking further expert consultation in order to effectively manage emotional stress level for an academic achievement, interpersonal, and psychical life in Thailand.

2. Literature Review

Generally speaking, stress study in terms of a broad term categorize stressors as life events, chronic stressors, and daily frustrations (Anisman, 2015; Duncan & Prowse, 2014). Life events are distinct, acute, obvious occurrences (e.g., parent's divorce, a birth of a child, etc.) that need considerable adaptations over a relatively short time and are self-limiting in character (Harkness & Hayden, 2020; Horowitz, 2020). Chronic stresses are long-lasting or recurrent demands, conflicts, risks, or concerns (e.g., physically-disabled situation, poorness)(McKay et al., 2021; Singh, 2021) while daily difficulties and uplifts (e.g., traffic delays and a beautiful supper) need minor behavioral (re)adjustments throughout the day (McKay et al., 2021; Harkness & Hayden, 2020). The bulk of research has focused on life events and chronic stress, with less on daily annoyances and positive feelings. On the other hand, life experiences were among the early methodologies in stress research, usually taking the form of a checklist of events taken from many domains and hierarchies and weighted either by standardized significance or subjectively by respondents (Slavich, 2019; Stoddard et al., 2018). In general, these checklists symbolize key life events (Harkness & Hayden, 2020; Horowitz, 2020). The universe of probable life experiences has not been sampled consistently by such checklists, with young individuals over-represented and women, minorities, and the impoverished under-represented (Slavich, 2019; Stoddard et al., 2018; Duncan & Prowse, 2014).

Furthermore, stress-related research has a lengthy history. What we understand about stress is mostly based on empirical research that examine the relationship between emotional concerns encountered and endured in the academic environment and critical outcomes such as academic adaptability and success, as well as the person's health and well-being. Nonetheless, tension may negatively impact academic performance in everyday life, particularly in a foreign environment. Several earlier research have examined the impact of stress on Chinese graduate students' pursuit of higher education in western and Asian nations (Huang, 2021; Gautier, 2019; Bista, 2018; Dervin, 2016; Guoqing, 2013) Alternatively, King and Bernardo (2015) present a thorough definition of stress as "a response to the environment in which there is either a) the

possibility of a net loss of resources, b) the net loss of resources, or c) the absence of resource gain after the investment of resources.” In another sense, resources may relate to or act as a tool of self-help, enabling people to achieve their objectives and assume control of their surroundings. The aims of Chinese graduate students pursuing higher education overseas in an exotic culture are to complete their academic missions while obtaining their diploma and to react to the cultural variety in order to “fill their demands” “socially” and “biologically” (Kommers, & Bista, 2020; Molina & Racial, 2018; MacLeod, 2017).

Alternately stated, in his foundational paper on stress, Molina and Racial (2018) characterizes stress as “a common characteristic of many diverse emotions such as anxiety, frustration, wrath, concern, dread, sorrow, and despair.” In other words, stress has been identified as “a ubiquitous facet of a variety of emotions” (MacLeod, 2017; Zhu, 2016). If these Chinese graduate students continue to pursue their study in another nation, they will almost probably be exposed to the previously stated psychologically stressful scenarios. If their level of stress and the related specific causes of stress were studied as the utmost priority, this would pave the way for future psychological factors that may have a significant impact on the student’s social and academic life abroad. In other circumstances, it is generally presumed that the variables that lead to stress are characterized as stimuli or stressor (Molina & Racial, 2018; Oborune, 2016). These stresses may emerge from a range of “interior” and “exterior” sources or appear in “physical” or “emotional” forms (West & Ramirez, 2016; Teh et al., 2013). When discussing the classification of stress, “exogenous” or “external” causes are those that come from outside the individual and over which they have no control (Molina & Racial, 2018; MacLeod, 2017). This encompasses the influence of an individual’s exterior living situation, cultural clash, cultural shock, cultural differences, and other related events (Lai et al., 2021). Similarly, “endogenous” or “internal factors” linked to one’s personal experience are highly sensitive to the feeling of “inferiority, inadequacy, and uncertainty” (Yoon et al., 2021; Zhu, 2016). This study focuses on the first investigation into the influences of stress on the mental wellbeing of Chinese graduate students pursuing higher education in a diverse context.

3. Methodology

In addition to gaining a comprehensive knowledge of the stress levels of Chinese graduate students, a mixed-methods questionnaire method was implemented in order to identify the major stress-determining factors. For the gathering and incorporation of both quantitative and qualitative data, semi-structured interviews and self-administered questionnaires were undertaken. The semi-structured interview questions comprised of a range of questions that acquired statistical profile, such as age, gender, academic level, academic profession/major and study-abroad experiences of the individuals; these were followed by a number of stress-related questions. Similarly, students were asked to indicate their individual stressors on a scale from 1 to 5. Appendix 1 provides a comprehensive representation of the interviews about levels of self-perceived stress. Also, This study targeted 378 Chinese graduate students (N=378) currently studying in Chinese graduate programs in Thailand (Male: N=178, 47%; Female: N=200, 53%), aged 20–25 years old, and majoring in Master of Business Administration (N=158, 41.8%) and Master in Educational Administration (N=220, 58.2%), respectively. This investigation employed convenience sampling as its sampling technique. In the following descriptive analysis table, Table 3.1 presents a breakdown of the participants' demographic information.

Table 1
Descriptive Analysis Participants' Demographic Information

Category	Subcategory	378	100%
Gender	Male	178	47.0%
	Female	200	53.0%
Graduate Profession	MBA	158	41.8%
	MEA	220	58.2%

To gather and evaluate data for this study, the research team delivered questionnaires to students in each class. The participants responded to the questionnaire by identifying and assessing the top five stressors they experienced while studying in Thailand on a 5-point scale based on their own judgments. After each student had completed the questionnaire, the responses were gathered and analyzed.

4. Findings

The degree of stress experienced by Chinese graduate students was the focus of the first study area. In response to the first research question, the study's findings indicated that the participants who pursued after their graduate studies in Thailand reported experiencing an averaged stress level score that was significantly high ($\bar{X}=4.09$). As shown in the following Table 4.1, the mean scores were collected from four different thematic-coding aspects and then averaged. These four aspects included food (mean score of 4.77), academic I—personal (mean score of $\bar{X}=4.56$), culture (mean score of $\bar{X}=3.59$), and academic II—administrative (mean score of $\bar{X}=3.44$). In summary, the average score for stress experienced by Chinese graduate students was 4.09.

Table 4.1
Summary of Chinese Graduate Students' Stress Level

Thematic Coding	Frequency	Mean
Food	N=352	4.77
Academic I—Personal	N=322	4.56
Culture	N=97	3.59
Academic II—Thai Administrative	N=102	3.44
	Average	4.09

The second research question aims to particularly find the determining factors of stress that are acknowledged among Chinese graduate students in Thailand. This question was posed in order to facilitate the first research question's answer. The results of the study demonstrated that one of the most significant contributors to stress was the shortage of Chinese cuisine ($\bar{X}=4.63$, N=352, 93.1%) while participating in the study abroad program in Thailand. In addition, the data revealed academic-personal ($\bar{X}=4.33$, N=289, 76.5%) as the second main source of stress among replies from Chinese college student participants in the study. According to the findings of the survey, the two components of culture ($\bar{X}=3.39$, N = 108, 28.6%) and academic II—administrative ($\bar{X}=3.21$, N=89, 23.5 %) were judged to be the least determining stressors. The results of the second research question were summarized in Table 4.2, which can be seen below.

Table 4.2*Summary of Chinese Graduate Students' Determinant Causes of Stress*

Thematic Coding	Frequency (interview feedback)	Stress Level
A. Food		
1. Availability of Chinese cuisine is quite limited	172 (48.8%)	4.71
2. Only a Small Selection of Pure Chinese Foods	100 (28.4%)	4.60
3. Restricted Access to Chinese Food	80 (22.7%)	4.58
Total	352 (93.1%)/Total 378	4.63
B. Academy I—Personal		
1. Overload academic work or assignment	147	4.65
2. Post-graduation employment	67	4.32
3. Unclear Study Goal & Profession Direction	45	4.23
4. Issues on graduation and academic diploma	30	4.11
Total	289 (76.5%)/Total 378	4.33
C. Culture		
1. Social Problem with Thai-Chi Lang. Comm.	52	3.57
2. Personal Annoyance Problem VISA	35	3.38
3. Personal Reasons/ Cultural Dissimilarity	21	3.21
Total	108 (28.6%)/Total 378	3.39
D. Academy II—Administrative		
1. University Low VISA Process/Work Efficiency	70	3.27
2. DPU Facility (Dormitory Management)	19	3.14
Total	89 (23.5%)/Total 378	3.21

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The outcomes of this survey reveal definite evidence that “exogenous variables” or “external influences” are the major causes of stress (Zhu et al., 2021; Lai et al., 2021; Parker & Parker, 2017). It is conceivable for Chinese graduate students to undergo a “distress stage” (O'Neill & Cullingford, 2017; Ibrahim, 2015) of culture shock when confronted with Thai-related themes, such as Thai cuisine or the Thai approach to social and academic concerns, in comparison to Chinese culture. This is a potential explanation for the questioned phenomena. At this time, they would appreciate being able to feel self with Chinese-style cuisine; nevertheless, Chinese restaurants or Chinese food are not prominent or ubiquitous across the Thai-dominated institution in Thailand, which is the issue of their concern. Therefore, more theories may be explored. It is likely that the distinctive preferences of Chinese graduate students should have been our sole wellspring of data and knowledge about the flavor profile of Chinese food. On the other perspective, “Identity” is seen as a chronic problem and a “social and personality psychology construct” (Baltes et al., 2015; Fei, 2015;). This relates to the perspective or inspiration of Chinese graduate students concerning their studies and pursuit of education in Thailand.

It is probable that the sources of stress that are triggering emotional breakdowns among Chinese graduate students are also the reasons why they appear indecisive over their own future or desired career path. In conclusion, the outcomes of this research would hardly offer a conclusive answer to the following questions issue. Is there a propensity among Chinese graduate students to study in Thailand, and if so, is this ambition the result of a decision made by their families, or is it the result of other factors? In summary, the outcomes of this research have already widened our awareness of how stress may perform a substantial role in disturbing the educational pursuits of Chinese graduate students in Thailand. This survey's contribution would have been to give additional insight into the achievement of learners of Chinese graduate

students under stressful conditions, as well as a solid construction of a stress-relevant framework for future consulting usage (Student Consultation Service, DPU-CIC). This would have been done to enable Chinese graduate students studying in Thailand to manage their mental stress issues so that they may live a richer, wealthier, and more satisfying life in Thailand.

6. Suggested Future Research

Considered as a whole, the present findings contribute to the field's understanding of the major relevance of the pressures encountered by Chinese college students studying abroad in Thailand. On the basis of the findings of the present study, a number of concerns need further investigation, and it is suggested that they be explored in the following ways: 2) How Much Stress Chinese University Lecturers Suffer in Bangkok, Thailand, and the Determinant Causes of Stress; and 3) A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Stress Conditions Among Chinese College Students, Thai College Students, and Taiwanese College Students.

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APPENDIX



Self-Perceived Stress Interview

This interview has been conducted by the research group for the General Education (GE) Department at DPU-CIC in order to investigate the stress levels of Chinese graduate students studying in Thailand. The conclusion of this study will aid GE researchers in gaining a deeper knowledge of the stress levels and probable sources of stress among Chinese students (stressors). Your aid in completing this assignment is very valued, and we appreciate your efforts and cooperation.

Interview questions

❖ **Demographic—Self-Introduction of Participants**

- 1) How old are you specifically?
- 2) What is your current academic level?
- 3) What is your academic profession at the university?
- 4) Where is your hometown in China specifically?
- 5) How long have you been staying in Thailand?
- 6) Before coming to study in Thailand, have you ever been living in other foreign country? And for how long?

❖ **Stress-related**

- 1) During your study abroad in Thailand, what makes you stressed, tensioned? Please think about it carefully and if possible, make a list of 3-5 causes of stress and have them ranked in sequence. You are able to write them down on the paper provided.
- 2) Describe in detailed about these causes of stress on how/why they affect you?

In terms of **STRESS DEGREE**, can you respectively number it from 1 to 5?

1: Much lower than Average 2: Slightly lower than Average 3: Average
 4: Slightly Higher than Average 5: Much Higher than Average

Cause of stress	Degree
Stressor 1	
Stressor 2	
Stressor 3	
Stressor 4	
Stressor 5	

3) Any other causes of stress beside those you mentioned above?