

Chinese and Taiwanese Immigrant Wives' Assimilation in the United States

Ya-Wen (Melissa) Liang

Don Jones

Texas A&M University - Kingsville

Author Note

Ya-Wen (Melissa) Liang, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Counselor Education and Leadership at Texas A&M University-Kingsville.

Don Jones, Ed.D., is an Associate Professor in the Department of Counselor Education and Leadership at Texas A&M University-Kingsville.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Ya-Wen (Melissa) Liang via ya-wen.liang@tamuk.edu.

Abstract

This phenomenological qualitative research study investigated Chinese and Taiwanese immigrant wives' assimilation in the United States. Participants shared their lived experience and ways of promoting their psychological wellness during assimilation. The research results would increase researchers' and counselors' knowledge on helping these wives successfully cope with assimilation.

Keywords: Chinese and Taiwanese wives, assimilation

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Introduction

Asian immigrants increased 43% in the United States from 2000 to 2010; the population is expected to double from 2010 to 2050. (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2012a; 2012b). With a population of four million, Chinese are the largest Asian ethnic group in the U.S.; researching their lived experiences of assimilation after immigration is paramount (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012c). According to Park (1928), migration includes situational collisions, influences, habits, and changes impacted by existing cultures. Further in Park's study (1928), he asserted that individuals often experience stress or distress in the process of cultural exchanges. According to Berry (2010), it is not uncommon that immigrants tend to adopt cultures and positive orientations from mainstream society, which is the stage of assimilation. Berry (2013) noted that assimilation involves a process whereby individuals turn aside from their culture of origin and adopt the mainstream culture from other groups, which is described as "Melting Pot". Berry (2010) suggested that researchers make attempts to understand immigrants' adaptive contexts, psychological phenomena, and cultures as well as their incorporated components into the mainstream. A linguistic program to a specific ethnic group tend to establish a relaxed and safe environment to help minority individuals feel comfortable to divulge their concerns (Deng, Liang, LaGuardia, & Sun, 2016). This study is the first research to address the assimilation from Chinese and Taiwanese wives' perspectives with their choices of dialects.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate (a) Chinese and Taiwanese wives' lived experience of assimilation in the U.S. and (b) their ways of promoting psychological wellness in the assimilation stage. We were curious to explore Chinese and Taiwanese wives' assimilation

experiences from their unique perspectives. Our goals were to advocate for these wives and inspire researchers and counselors to address their assimilation and wellness issues.

Research Questions

We attempted to investigate Chinese and Taiwanese wives' lived experience regarding assimilation through following research questions.

1. What is Chinese and Taiwanese immigrant wives' assimilation experience in the U.S.?
2. How do Chinese and Taiwanese wives promote their wellness during assimilation?

Interview Questions

Open-ended interview questions provide opportunities for participants to open sharing and for researchers to explore the in-depth data of the participants (Creswell, 2007). The interview questions designed based on Berry's assimilation stage follows:

1. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 is low and 10 is high), indicate how much you continue to follow the Chinese culture. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 is low and 10 is high), indicate how much you have adapted to the U.S. culture.
2. Please describe U.S. cultural aspects and customs that you find the easiest to accept and follow.
3. In what ways have you changed culturally, behaviorally, emotionally, and financially after you move to the U.S.? Provide examples.

Research Design and Approach

A phenomenological qualitative research design and the participant observation approach were employed in this research study to investigate the lived experience of Chinese and Taiwanese wives' assimilation from their unique perspectives. The focus of a phenomenological method addressed participants' conscious experiences and existing ethnographic essentials

(Moustakas, 1994). As proposed by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007), a phenomenological method is used as a vehicle for researchers to investigate participants' underlying meanings, lived experiences, and worldviews. Malinowski (1922, 2012) proposed participant observation as a direct observation research approach that allows researchers to take notes of participants' responses, environmental factors, and aspects. Researchers' field notes and reflections about the participants increase the trustworthiness of data collection. (Malinowski, 1922, 2012).

Data Collection and Selection of Participants

The approved IRB protocol and procedures, including demographic questionnaire, interview questions, and semi-structured interviews, were introduced to the participants to enhance the credibility of data collection. A phenomenological research study focuses on in-depth interviews and achieving comprehension of participants' lived experience (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Pseudonyms were employed for reporting research results. The primary researcher who is fluent in Chinese and Taiwanese dialects interviewed participants individually and transcribed audio recordings of interviews. Credibility was enhanced by inviting participants to review individual transcripts to ensure accuracy of transcripts and solicit feedback.

Creswell (2007) proposed that researchers choose a purposeful sampling to target participants with the essential phenomena in a qualitative research design. Three participants with essential experiences would be sufficient samples for a phenomenological research study (Creswell, 2007; Dukes, 1984). The interviews continued till the participants' sharing of the phenomena reached the saturation of data collection (Creswell, 2007). The participants with dissimilar occupations would have diverse assimilation experiences. The primary researcher used purposeful sampling to recruit six participants with a variety of occupations to enrich data

collection. The participants resided in a Southern state. Five were originally from Taiwan, and one was from China. Their lived experiences achieved saturation of data collection.

Data Analysis

Moustakas (1994) asserted that using a phenomenological tradition increases the accuracy of examining participants' experiences through their worldviews and backgrounds. Credibility of research was enhanced by emic coding, open coding, three members coding triangulation, and member checking (Creswell, 2007). Emic coding was used to define meanings from participants' narratives and analyze data from their perspectives and worldviews (Creswell, 2007). Open coding allowed researchers to uncover categories from data (Creswell, 2007).

Results and Discussions

Levels of Assimilation

Assimilation signifies that individuals adopt the dominant culture in a multicultural society (Berry, 2013). Individuals increase their knowledge and assumptions during the stage of assimilation (Berry, 2013). Participants described their levels of assimilation as following:

On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being high, Chi, a counselor, rated 6 for her assimilation to the U.S. culture. Chi expressed that living in a small town and in-laws being all Americans, she became to adopt the U.S. culture. After 27 years living in the U.S., Hue, a house wife, rated 8 for her assimilation. Zhen, a chemist, rated 6 for her assimilation. Zhen explained because her research career requirements, interactions with colleagues, and living in the U.S. over 27 years, she accepted the U.S. culture more than her culture of origin. Fen expressed that her introverted personality and cultural shyness reduced her assimilation; therefore, she rated 5 after 20 years of immigration. Fen further explained that being a mail-woman, she is not required to interact with people, which reduced her assimilation opportunities. Mei rated 7 for her assimilation. Mei stated

that being a residential nurse, she had plenty of opportunities to communicate with patients, which enhanced her adaption to the U.S. culture. Bao stated that being an artist who attended art exhibitions and classes promoted her assimilation. She rated 5 even though she had only lived in the U.S. for three years. Bao believed she would assimilate more of the U.S. culture in the future.

It appeared that opportunities to interact with Americans, whether through career, families, or individuals, affected participants' assimilation. Participants' responses supported Berry's (2013) research that in the stage of assimilation, individuals absorb the mainstream culture based on their knowledge, assumptions, and experiences of challenges. The participants considered their personal preferences influenced what they adopted from the mainstream culture.

Assimilation of Social Interactions and Casual Style

All participants expressed that adopting social interactions was easy for them. Chi felt content with her interpersonal relationships. She stated, "The relationship with my in-laws is very simple and easy. They don't have a lot of expectations of their daughter-in-law. In Taiwan, you have to serve your in-laws." Both Bao and Hue stated that they liked the American way of focusing on friendships rather than the monetary value of gifts. Fen who reported herself as an introverted person expressed she felt happy when people gave her smiles as greetings, which boosted her confidence to greet colleagues. Hue, a house wife, also described her happy feelings to adopt the U.S. style of greetings in grocery stores. All six participants smiled and stated that they like American interaction styles and relationships. Zhen stated, "Interpersonal relationship is different [in the U.S.]. When people reach out to me, I can take it or reject it. If I don't want to be your friend, I can have a choice." Additionally, three participants came to adopt the respect for privacy in the U.S. They felt less struggled between having privacy and maintaining harmony. Chi shared, "In Taiwan, you do have privacy, but it's enmeshed. Everyone gets into

your business [personal issue]. But here, Americans do not get involved with others' personal issue." Mei mentioned that she appreciated that "Americans do not intrude on other people's family time." Fen described that she felt relieved that Americans respect people by allowing more physical space, which allowed her to enjoy having personal space in a public place.

Mei expressed her happy feelings to adopt casual dress when shopping. Mei mentioned she disliked that she "had to dress up all the time" when she lived in Taiwan. Zhen also articulated her comfortable feelings of not wearing makeup in the U.S. Zhen expressed if she did not wear makeup in Taiwan, she would feel as if she were not wearing clothes. Bao further stated that she enjoyed dressing casually without worrying social expectations in the U.S.

Adopting the simple social interactions and casual style in daily life appeared to ease participants' stress regarding complicated interpersonal relationships and social expectations. An introverted participants came to feel comfortable adopting friendly greetings. The analysis of results indicated that adopting easy social interactions, respecting privacy, dressing casually were easy and comfortable for the participants. The participants appeared relieved to adopt social interactions and casual dress based on personal preferences instead of social expectations.

Assimilation of Direct Communication and Positive Attitude

All six participants stated that they felt content adopting the direct communication, which eased their worry about assumptions. They felt comfortable to vocalize genuine viewpoints and feelings in the U.S. Bao and Chi expressed difficulties and stress in comprehending underlying meanings and indirect non-verbal communication in China and Taiwan. Zhen shared, "In Taiwan, I have to be very polite, never say no. Here, I can say no genuinely." Fen also enjoyed adopting the direct communication such as saying "no" to refuse gift exchanges. Bao declared, "I liked the way Americans directly expressed their feelings and thoughts." Zhen also articulated, "I

can boldly express my opinions, and people [in the U.S.] will appreciate it. I can be myself.” All six participants came to enjoy adopting a positive attitude, which was evidenced by their smiles and a positive tone when they shared their adjustments. Zhen shared, “We [my spouse and I] want to make America our home.” Mei expressed in a pleasant tone, “I adjusted to the U.S. culture pretty well, and I never felt I’m a second class citizen.” Chi stated, “It was good and easy to receive a praise. Here [U.S.], they do a lot of praises instead of criticisms.”

Based on research of Lau, Fung, and Yung (2010), Chinese individuals become more receptive to emotional expressions over time. Five of the six participants in this research responded it was easy for them to adapt to the direct communication and a positive attitude. The analysis indicated when participants received a positive attitude from the mainstream group, they were happy and comfortable to adopt the mainstream influences.

Assimilation of Christianity

Four participants expressed they felt content converting to Christianity. Chi smiled and acknowledged, “Here, most people are nice Christians. That’s much easier for me to hang out with nice people, and I like it a lot.” Mei confidently expressed, “Emotionally, I feel less stressed after converting to Christianity. Culturally, I became more considerate. I learned to volunteer through church ministry.” Zhen smiled when she mentioned that she has many church friends. Hue stated, “Religion is a culture to me.” Hue acknowledged her satisfaction and joy. She stated, “Through religious guidelines, I know what to do.”

The findings indicated that attending church activities and having a faith helped four participants adapt to living in the U.S. Four participants revealed the support from church members helped them adapt to living in the U.S. Religious support from churches positively influenced immigrants to release their stress by trusting God to help them with their problems

(Rojas–Vilches, Negy, & Reig–Ferrer, 2011). Four participants revealed that having a faith and being involved in church ministries allowed them to gain confidence in their adjustments.

Assimilation of Egalitarianism

Unlike the dominant patriarchal society found in China and Taiwan, individuals in the U.S. value egalitarianism. Egalitarianism involves the respect of equality, social welfare, and fairness (Abásolo & Aki, 2014; O'Neill, 2013). Four participants shared their appreciation of egalitarianism. Bao stated, “I like equality in America. Americans don’t compare to or look down on others.” Her example was, “Nobody in my country valued my art works and sculptures because of my young age. I feel my work is more respected here.” Hue mentioned that she appreciates that staff at stores greet everyone regardless of whether or not the person purchases anything. Fen appreciated that “Americans give respect to everyone during their first contact.” Fen who described herself as an introverted person described with a smile, “I began to greet my colleagues.” Chi stated, “Here, the culture is more individualized.” Zhen validated, “In Taiwan, we rank and classify people. People here are equal. I can call my boss by name. People here are equal on a social level.”

Experiencing respect and egalitarianism positively influenced five participants to adopt egalitarianism. They feel respected in their careers and not worry about being judged by their ages or backgrounds. The equality at work allowed the participants to feel being respected and have confident in pursuit of their career choices and adopting egalitarianism.

Assimilation to the Primary Culture and English Language

All six participants shared their efforts in absorbing knowledge of the U.S. culture and enhancing English proficiency. Chi noted that she put efforts in comprehending American jokes and culture, which positively influenced her to “have a topic to discuss with people.” Zhen made

efforts to “understand and learn American cultural activities.” Zhen gave her examples of learning cultural differences such as valuing achievements, opening gifts right away, and sending a thank you card after receiving a gift. Zhen also mentioned, “Definitely there is a big difference between Chinese and American cultures in terms of communication. Zhen disclosed that as a minority, she had to make efforts to learn and adapt to the dominant tradition and language. Mei also describe herself as “working hard at comprehending English conversations”, and “it is challenging to understand American humor. Fen specified that she attended an English program to enhance her English proficiency. Fen shared, “I began to express my viewpoints. Americans don’t think beyond what you said, so you have to express clearly.” Hue mentioned that she adopted the American culture of greeting strangers. Bao expressed that she enjoys learning “American traditions.” Bao conveyed, “I like the American salad bowl of cultures.”

According to Berry (2013), individuals in the stage of assimilation choose to absorb the mainstream culture, and they expand knowledge and assumptions about the mainstream. The responses from five participants revealed they considered learning the dominant language, traditions, and communication styles was necessary after an immigration. All participants viewed it essential to learn the direct communication style. Hence, the participants did not hesitate to practice the dominant language to enhance their interactions with individuals in society.

Conclusion and Implication

In summary, five out of the six participants expressed that they felt comfortable adopting the U.S. cultures. According to Berry (2013), the stage of assimilation involves a process whereby an individual turned aside from the culture of origin and adopted the mainstream culture (Berry, 2013). All six participants reported they felt content to adopt the U.S. communication styles, easy social interactions, egalitarianism, and English language. Participants expressed that

their assimilation was their choice, which validated the acculturation model of Berry (2013) that individuals' personal preferences affected their assimilation. The findings indicated participants felt comfortable adopting most mainstream cultures and social interactions. Hence, they did not experience stress or psychological conflicts during their assimilation. However, participants expressed their stress and putting significant efforts in practicing the English language and understanding American jokes. When participants felt content during assimilation, they felt it enhanced their psychological wellness and that they adjusted better to the mainstream culture. When participants felt stressed, they would have to make more efforts in overcoming stress and challenges during assimilation. The participants' positive attitude appeared to enhance their wellness and achievements of assimilation, accepting the dominate culture.

Researchers asserted that Chinese clients, from a collectivistic culture, often are reluctant to disclose issues and concerns in counseling (Wei, Liao, Heppner, Chao, & Ku, 2012). It is important that counselors acquire the necessary cultural knowledge and backgrounds before counseling minority clients of a different culture (Deng et al., 2016). This phenomenological research study contributed to the research by identifying issues faced by Chinese and Taiwanese wives in their stage of assimilation. Participants in this study revealed a phenomenon that they are resilient in overcoming assimilation challenges. When minority clients feel they are respected and accepted, they would have a positive attitude and happy feelings to experience and adjust to the dominate group and culture. The findings and discussion of this research benefit counselors and researchers to understand and advocate for Chinese and Taiwanese wives when addressing wellness and counseling issues of assimilation.

Recommendations for Future Research

A result of the research of Deng et al. noted that 85.4% of their 63 participants expressed that a monthly ethnic support group helped improved their quality of life and social/family well-being. Stress resulted from immigration often negatively impacts immigrants' adjustments (Deng et al.). We suggest that counselors help Chinese and Taiwanese wives (a) facilitate a community group to explore their counseling issues and concerns, (b) explore their personal preferences for decision-making after immigration, and (c) discover how cultural traditions and language differences influence their adjustments and stress.

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