

The Challenges of Cross-cultural Adjustment: Homestay Situation

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03/12/ 2008

Introduction

性相近，习相远

- Basic human nature is similar at birth;
Different habits make us seem remote.

Wang Yinglin's (1223-1296) *Three-Character Classic*

The Central Question

- What are the Mainland Chinese students' perceptions of living and learning in South Australia?

Three Specific Questions

- What are the challenges faced by Chinese students while they are studying at educational institutions of South Australia?
- What are the underlying norms and values that cause these challenges to Chinese students learning at educational institutions of South Australia?
- What strategies do Chinese students use to cope with their challenges in the process of adjusting to Australian culture while studying at educational institutions of South Australia?

Qualitative Method

- Research sites: Three government schools &
One non-government school
- Participants: 19 boy students &
17 girl students
- Data collection: Focus group &
Individual interviews
- Data analysis: Recurrence, repetition & forcefulness

Challenges in Homestay

- Food at homestay.
- Students' English capability.
- Relationships with hosts.
- Homestay requirements.
- Sharing household chores.

Challenges in Food

Tasteless

- *"I don't have the least appetite for the tasteless boiled vegetables, bread with canned beans and noodles with just cheese and tomato sauce."*

- *"I feel food is the most obvious problem at homestay. Australians do not put salt in cooking. They always put the meat in the oven and then eat with tomato sauce..."*

Features of Chinese Dishes

- Look good
- Smell good
- Taste good

Quantity & Quality of Food

- *"...the bread and meat they had in some homestays were sometimes a couple of weeks or even months later than the dates suggested on the label."*
- *"...in some homestays families there was only one dish of food being provided at a meal. I often went hungry shortly after the meal."*

Positive Expression on Food

- *My homestay is very, very good. They treated me like their own child. For example, they are very happy when I eat more and I am free to take anything to eat at home. I can eat as much as I like to, or, the more I eat, the happier they are. Certainly, I eat at a normal amount. I mean they are not mean.*

Challenges in English

- Speed
- Pronunciation
- Negative transfer
- Straightforward expression

Too Fast

- *"Before you knew it, they completed the talking and were waiting for your response."*
- *"My mother told me, again and again, that I should take the advantage of living in homestay and try to learn more English. But that is a fantasy. They speak too fast and I have no idea what they are talking about."*

Negative Transfer

- *"Yeah, we really didn't mean to say something bad to offend her. Sometimes, the way we are expressing ourselves are not right. For example, when we don't understand them, we are used to the Chinese response 'shemo?' (what?) instead of the polite English 'pardon'."*

Too Straightforward

- *"I feel it is very difficult to communicate with my homestay. It is really the most difficult thing for me. She is a very kind-hearted woman actually! But sometimes you were not good at using English or your expression was too straightforward, in that case she would be very angry. But I did not mean to hurt her."*
- *"In my communication with the homestay hosts, I often forget to say "thank you" when they offered me something or to say "please" when I asked for something. I know it is not good. But I just kept repeating these mistakes at the beginning. Sometimes they were not happy."*

Challenges in Relationships

How to Come Closer to the Family

- *"I did not know how to come closer to the family. So I sometimes stayed in my own room in order not to disturb the homestay family. I don't like to be considered as a troublemaker."*

Straightforward Criticism

- *"I didn't mean what my host said was wrong. But when she talked to me like that, I had a very uncomfortable feeling and my face would be flushed immediately, thinking she was too serious. If she changed her attitude I would probably do better."*

Positive Relationships

- *"The relationship between my host and me was just like the one between mother and daughter. She treated me like her own child. She could peel off the peach first and took them to my room."*

Challenges in Homestay Requirements

Rules Beyond Students' Understanding

- *"I never broke the rule. Each time I had a shower, I did it as if I was in a competition with someone else. I was feeling very uncomfortable. I think one has to give in if she / he is in other's hands."*

Rules Keeps Appearing As Time Goes on

- *"when I was using computer at night, my hosts would be unhappy, saying that my typing made them unable to get into sleep. So they required me to go to bed by ten o'clock at night. But ten o'clock in Australia was the prime time (8pm) in China. There was no reason to deprive me of contacting my families and friends in China."*

Challenges in Sharing Housework

No Experiences

- *"I had no housework experiences at all before coming to Australia. As the only child of the family, I even had no ideas about making beds or cleaning the dinner table. My mother always told me to go straight to my study after each meal and would not allow me to do any housework even if I offered to."*

Too Much

- *"It took us a long time to do all this (cleaning). We had to clean five big rooms, vacuuming the carpets in each room, cleaning all the cupboards. After the cleaning we felt very tired and we had no time to do school work."*

Conclusion

- Food
- English language
- Relationships
- Homestay rules
- Household chores

"Good" Homestays

- Older couple or older single families.
- Hosts with good/tertiary education.
- Host families that belong to middle class in Australia.
- Homestay families with interests in Chinese culture.
- Chinese immigrant homestay families.

"Bad" Homestays

- Single parent families with small children.
- Hosts with no tertiary / good education.
- Families with no long-term work experiences.
- Hosts with no knowledge of Chinese culture.

Recommendation

- Homestay providers
- Homestay hosts