Asian International Students’ involvement in campus activities in U of I

Abstract:
Asian International students (abbreviated as “Asian students” in the following paragraphs), as minorities in American colleges, are less likely to be involved in campus activities and student organizations. The purpose of this research is focused on Asian students’ degree of involvement in campus activities and reasons why they are more or less involved in campus activities. The major research method applied is a survey composed of three categories of questions: Asian students’ involvement on campus, their satisfaction with campus activities, and their difficulties of being involved. The entire survey samples were obtained from Asian students. The result shows that Asian students in University of Illinois are less involved in campus activities and student organizations, particularly the multiracial organizations. The result also demonstrates that the four factors-language barrier, cultural difference, academic study, and indifference—are responsible for this phenomenon in different degrees. Among those factors, indifference has the largest influence. Although most of these factors were built up internally, and it is hard to change Asian students’ behaviors, college staff member are still able to provide some specific policies to alleviate the negative effect of those factors.

Introduction:
Every day when passing the Illini Union, people can easily notice that there are plenty of students conducting varieties of activities. If people pay more attention to those students, they will figure out that most of the students come from American families. In general, it is very difficult to see any students with Asian characteristics among them. Compared to local American students, Asian students are relatively less involved in this kind of public activities and organizations.

As the number of Asian students is increasing rapidly in University of Illinois, it becomes even more significant to provide Asian students a comfortable environment. On one hand, it is challenging for International Student Services to provide the best-fit study environment for Asian students because their cultural background influence their behaviors and distinguish them from American students dramatically. Essentially, it is necessary to create a different policy for Asian students. On the other side, most Asian students possibly have trouble acculturating themselves as well. The adaptation and acculturation seem to be one of most challenging task for them. Anything cultural, linguistic, or religious might be potential difficulties for them to overcome. As a result, they will have difficulty to get involved in campus activities and student organizations. This research topic is pertaining to Asian students’ campus lives and their opinions about campus activities. The result of this research might be helpful for college staff member to generate some efficient policies to take good care of Asian students’ campus lives.

**Literature Review:**
Nowadays, the number of international students in the United States is increasing dramatically. The difficulty of acculturation and adaption has become a noticeable concern. Particularly, students from Asian countries such as China, Korea, and Japan have even more trouble dealing with their campus lives because of their distinct economic and social backgrounds. This inconsistency naturally contributes to their less involvement in campus activities and student organizations at a certain degree. Uncountable inconveniences from any area can push Asian students away from the center of campuses. This issue has drawn many humanity and psychology experts’ attention as well. Having done a large amount of ethnographic studies, these researchers and experts summarize Asian students’ difficulties of being involved.

Averagely, experts discover that language barrier is the most explicit and common problem among Asian students. Since there are strong contrasts between Asian language system and western language system, it is even harder for Asian people to articulate and manipulate English. Wan demonstrates that Asian students should have trouble communicating with American students since the logics of these two categories of languages are too different (12-13). Another researcher Tsang also indicates that Asian students’ number of interracial friends is positively proportional to his or her language ability. Accordingly, they would like to talk to students from their own countries in order to avoid language inconveniences (2-3). At this point, experts suggest the high effect of language barrier.

Cultural differences and communication pattern are also supposed to be main causes. Nilsson points out that adaptation to American culture is a very difficult task to complete for Asian students. Furthermore, Asian students come to the United States alone without the
company of their parents and friends. This even renders extra difficulties (148-149). They feel uncomfortable when exposed in different lifestyle and interpersonal relations (153). Researcher Chen even proposes an implicit opinion. He focuses on the Asians’ way of communication and figure out that Asian students tend to express their idea relatively implicitly. This might derive from Chinese long tradition of Confucianism which emphasizes the implicit communication way (604-608). Compared to the language barrier, cultural differences seem to be the more essential difficulty.

The last point that interests researchers pertains to the academic course work. Wan discover that the academic altitude between Chinese people and American people are intensively different. Chinese student tend to treat academic in a more rigid and strict way. Everything pertaining to academic has to be formal and respectable (7). Students generally spend plenty of time on study. Similarly, Nilsson introduces the idea of “perfectionism” among Asian students. He explains that Asian student tend to perform perfectly on their course work. For them Academic are supposed to the symbol of personal ability (149). The serious mind about academic may also contribute their lower involvement on campus.

There might also be some other factors. My research is focused on the similar points above. As far as I see, Asian students are not quite likely to participate in campus activities and student organization. It is not common to see many Asian students interacting with students in multiracial group. Because of the increasing number of Asian students in University of Illinois, it is necessary to figure out at what degrees those Asian students are involved on campus, how they usually do after class, and what difficulties they have. Consequently, this research could provide the international students’ coordinators general profiles about Asian students’ campus
lives in UI, and at the same time, the administrators and coordinators will be able to propose more advanced and appropriate special policies. Asian students, accordingly, can recognize and know more about themselves and solve the problems they may concern.

**Research Method:**

In order to study Asian students’ campus lives and the difficulties they might have, a survey was conducted to obtain data from Asian students. The entire questions on the survey can be categorized into three groups: Asian students’ involvement and satisfaction with the public activities of the same race/ethnicity, Asian students’ involvement and satisfaction with the multiracial public activities, and Asian students’ difficulties of being involved.

Since the subjects of this ethnographic research are Asian undergraduate students, the entire samples are collected in the undergraduate library and undergraduate residence halls. In the undergraduate library, the students with Asian characteristics were invited to complete the survey. For the most part, their appearance such as skin color, hair color, and eyes color were being observed to determine their Asian identities. In the undergraduate residence hall, the name tags on each door were used to determine students’ nationalities. Because Asian people’s name-spelling grammar differs from westerners’, it is efficient to identify Asian students from other native ones through this way. Since this research is not pertaining to the issue of gender and age, all the samples are randomly selected in proportion to age or gender. Basically, this selection does not contain obvious biases.

**Result:**

There are 50 samples collected. After the surveys are collected back, some questions are
rescaled, relabeled and eliminated because they are repeated and redundant. Based on the first question of the survey, all students come from Eastern Asian countries. More specifically, there are 27 Chinese, 19 Korean, 2 Taiwanese, and 2 South Asian students. This distribution is fairly representative because the populations of Chinese and Korean students are supposed to be larger than any other Asian students’ populations.

The first part of the survey asks about Asian students’ attitude toward the activities and organizations of their race/ethnicity. Figure 1.1 shows that 38% of them only spend less than half an hour on these activities. However, there are also 30% of them spending more than 5 hours. The rest of the samples spread from 1-5 hours equally. Although this distribution seems weird, averagely they spend about 1-2 hours per week on these activities. Figure 1.2 shows Asian students satisfaction with these activities. 42% of the students agree that they are medium satisfied with the activities of their race/ethnicity. The rest 58% almost equally distribute at both sides of medium. The average value tends to show their medium satisfaction.

The second part of survey is pertaining to Asian students’ opinion toward multiracial activities. In Figure 2.1, 58% of the students agree that they hardly spend time on multiracial
activities. More than 82% of them spend less than 2 hours per week on these activities. This reveals their low involvement. Figure 2.2 indicates Asian students’ satisfaction with multiracial activities. 38% of the students are medium satisfied with these activities. The percentage of those who are less satisfied is slightly higher than the percentage of those who are relatively more satisfied. However, the difference is not significant. In average, they are medium satisfied with those multiracial activities.

The third part of the survey asks Asian students to rate four kinds of difficulties that might potentially prevent them from being involved in campus activities and student organizations. Figure 3 shows the rating score and percentage of each factor. Rating scores range from 1 (low) to 5 (high). The overall distribution is fairly close to bell-shape which means normal distribution. In pattern of normal distribution, most of the samples stay at the medium, and the relative percentages will go down as the rating score goes either higher or lower. The shape of the “language barrier” bar is a little right-skew, and its average score is 2.82 which is close to but slightly lower than medium level score 3. The shape of “cultural difference” also applied right-skew; correspondingly, its average is 2.88 which is very slightly lower than 3 as well. The shape of “academic study” bar is actually more right-skew rather than normal distributed. The average of this bar is 2.66 which is significantly lower than medium
level 3. The shape of “indifference” bar is the only one that tends to be a slightly left-skew. Accordingly, its average score is 3.12, higher than medium level 3.

**Discussion**

This survey generally reveals the expected problem. Part 1 of this survey indicates Asian students’ involvement in the activities and student organizations of their own races/ethnicities. Averagely, these students are medium involved in these activities, and they are medium satisfied with these activities and student organizations as well. However, to be more specific, about half of the students participate in these activities frequently while another half does not. It is hard to explain this bi-polar distribution scientifically. This irregular shape might be due to Asian students’ differences in ethnic background. For example, Korean students might be more willing to participate in the activities of their own ethnicity than Chinese students do. Overall they are averagely medium involved in and satisfied with the activities of their races/ethnicities.

The result of Part 2 reveals low involvements of Asian students in multiracial activities.
Compared to their involvement activities of their race, their involvement in multiracial activities seem to be much lower. Figure 2 shows only 18% of them believe they are more than medium high involved in multiracial activities. Even though most of them agree with the points that they are medium satisfied with campus multiracial activities, Asian students are still pretty far from these activities. This phenomenon is not surprising. It implicitly tells people that Asian students’ satisfactions with those multiracial activities do not necessarily decide the degree of involvement. In other words, there have to be some other potential factors that directly contribute to this phenomenon.

There are four potential causes that might be responsible to Asian student’ behavior. Accordingly to experts’ perspectives, language barrier is one of the most challenging causes. However, the result is slightly beyond the expectation. Those sample students instead of rated language barrier at a high level, they treat their language weaknesses as minor causes. The blue bar in Figure 3 does not support the significance of language barrier as well. Statistically, the average score is 2.82 which is slightly below the medium level 3. Although language barrier might not be the major cause, its score of 2.82 still states a somewhat medium important status.

The relation between “interracial communication”/”cultural difference” and Asian students’ involvement is also supposed to be an important factor. According to the red bar in Figure 3, the significance level of this factor is not that emphasized too much. The sample is normally distributed. Most students believe that this factor has a medium effect on their involvement. The average score for this factor is 2.88, a little higher than the language barrier, but still lower than the medium level 3. Since the average score is very close to 3, the significance is also valid.
The “academic study” factor seems to be the least significant one. It is anticipated that Asian students usually spend plenty of times on academic study. However, Figure 3 shows that the percentage of students is decreasing as the rating score increases. The total size of the first two green columns is obviously larger than the total size of the last two. Most students rate this factor within medium low to medium range. Furthermore, the average rating score of 2.66 is also the lowest among these factors. But anyhow, this factor is still valid since 2.66 is not really meaningless. It is just less effective than the previous factors.

The last factor “indifference” is most impressive in this survey. The total number of students who rate at high or medium high is greater than the students who rate at low or medium low. Therefore, the average score for this factor is 3.12 which is greater than medium level 3. Students tend to treat it as the most significant factor among these four. The effect of “indifference” is highly valid as well. At this point, a reasonable guess is that the reason why Asian students are reluctant to participate in campus activities is because they are indifferent with those activities. Possibly, this is induced by their different backgrounds.

Overall, the result shows Asian students low involvement in multiracial activities and their relatively high involvement in campus activities of their races/ethnicities. The four potential causes do work at different degree. Both language barrier and cultural difference are considered to be medium significant factors. They are overestimated essentially. Academic study are relative the least important among these four. Asian students’ indifference toward campus activities contributes to their low involvement most.

Conclusion:

Generally speaking, the experts share the opinion that Asian student are far from
multiracial campus activities. Moreover, the reason why they don’t participate in these activities attributes to their Asian backgrounds which create some difficulties for their adaptation. There are four potential difficulties that are very likely to prevent them from getting involved: language barrier, cultural difference, academic study and indifferences.

Based on the result of survey, all the previous assumptions seem considerably within expectation. That simply means Asian students are very low involved in multiracial activities and student organizations. Although below average rating score, the language barrier and cultural difference are playing two medium important roles, and their effects are overestimated. Although the degree of the effectiveness of these two factors are not as strong as experts’ expectation, but it still seems reasonable. Since this research and the research done by the experts are 10 years apart, during these years young Asian students might have developed stronger English abilities than their previous generation did. Similarly, cultural difference might not be that serious because these countries are even more exposed to western culture than before. Academic study does not seem to be a very important factor even though some students rate it high. The average students believe that academic study does not really influence their participation in campus activities. According to the result, indifference is the most effective factor. However, the term “indifference” is not accurately defined and explained. In other words, why are Asian students indifferent with campus activities? Is it pertaining to something cultural, religious? To what aspects of the activities are they indifferent? This leaves some spaces for further study.

There are some limitations in this research. For example, the statistical result and experts’ opinion toward the language barrier are not exactly consistent with each other; the reasons for
the exact indifference are not well explained yet. Accordingly, it yields plenty of spaces for other researchers to explore. For instance, researchers might build up a sample mostly composed of students from a single country to see any differences; they might also explore why Asian students are indifferent with activities; they might even be interested in the experts’ overestimation of language barrier and cultural difference.

Because these factors are fairly related to something internal and personal, universities cannot change Asian students’ behavior completely. However, the effect of these factors can be weakened to some degree. For example, Asian students’ indifference to campus activities might be alleviated if coordinators’ are able to provide more opportunities for them to fully understand local communities. As long as they realize more advantage of being involved, they might be interested in those activities instead. Coordinators can even provide special language classes for these students to take in order to localize Asian students’ spoken language and localize their logic of speaking. Basically, there are plenty of measures that college stuff member can to help. The essence is that universities should be willing to pay more attention to these minority groups and provide corresponding treatments.

Work Cited:
Appendix A: Rescale and Rearranged Survey:

*Survey of Asian Students' Involvement on Campus in UIUC*
Before you start, please check the box:

I have read and understood this consent statement and voluntarily agree to complete this online survey. I have read and understand the description of this research project, including information about the risks and benefits of my voluntary participation.

Yes, I agree________

**Part 1**

1. What country(s) are you from?
   - a) China  
   - b) Korea  
   - c) Japan  
   - d) south Asia  
   - e) mid Asia

2. How many hours per week do you spend on campus activities or student organizations with students primarily of your race/ethnicity?
   - a) < 0.5 hours  
   - b) 0.5-1 hours  
   - c) 1-2 hours  
   - d) 2-5 hours  
   - e) > 5 hours

3. Activities or student organizations of your race/ethnicity:
   How satisfied are you with your involvement in these activities/organizations?
   Low  Medium Low  Medium  Medium High  High

**Part 2**

4. How many hours per week do you spend on campus activities and student organizations with students in different racial/ethnic background? (Multicultural or Multiracial activities and student organizations)
   - a) < 0.5 hours  
   - b) 0.5-1 hours  
   - c) 1-2 hours  
   - d) 2-5 hours  
   - e) > 5 hours

5. Multiracial/ Multicultural Activities and student organizations
   How satisfied are you with your involvement in these activities/organizations?
   Low  Medium Low  Medium  Medium High  High

**Part 3**

6. How would you rate the following difficulties for Asian students to participate campus activities and student organizations? (check a box in each row)

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<th>Difficulty</th>
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<td>Indifference</td>
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Appendix B:

The Summary of Survey
Appendix C: Original Survey

Survey of Asian Students' Involvement on Campus in UIUC
Before you start, Please check the box:
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Yes, I agree________

7. What country(s) are you from?
b) China  b) Korea  c) Japan  d) south Asia  e) mid Asia

8. How many hours per week do you spend on campus activities or student organizations with students primarily of your race/ethnicity?
   b) < 0.5 hours  b) 0.5-1 hours  c) 1-2 hours  d) 2-5 hours  e) > 5 hours

9. How many hours per week do you spend on campus activities and student organizations with students in different racial/ethnic background? (Multicultural or Multiracial activities and student organizations)
   b) < 0.5 hours  b) 0.5-1 hours  c) 1-2 hours  d) 2-5 hours  e) > 5 hours

10. Activities or student organizations of your race/ethnicity:
    How satisfied are you with your involvement in these activities/organizations?
    Low  Medium Low  Medium  Medium High  High

11. Multiracial/ Multicultural Activities and student organizations
    How satisfied are you with your involvement in these activities/organizations?
    Low  Medium Low  Medium  Medium High  High

12. How would you rate your English Ability (Particularly Spoken English)?
    Low  Medium Low  Medium  Medium High  High

13. How many hours do you spend on study after classes in each week?
    <5  5-10  10-15  15-20  >20

14. How is your average academic performance?
    Low(<2.0) Medium Low(2.0-2.75) Medium(2.75-3.50) Medium High(3.50-3.75)
    High(>3.75)

15. Do you like to interact with people in different racial and ethnic background?
    Low  Medium Low  Medium  Medium High  High

16. Are you indifferent with those campus activities and student organizations?
    Low  Medium Low  Medium  Medium High  High

17. How would you rate the following difficulties for Asian students to participate campus activities and student organizations? (check a box in each row)

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