

International students
in a faith-based institution:
An intra/interpersonal
spiritual framework

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1,043,839

international students
enrolled in U.S. institutions

(IIE, 2016)

2016 - 2017

Common stressors international students experience

Intrapersonal;
cultural identity

(Jung et al., 2007)

Interpersonal;
social support

(Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002)

Spiritual?



expectations versus
reality of religious
individuals

(Wang & Yang, 2006)

religious support

(Hsu et al., 2012)

religious coping

(Chai et al., 2012)

Faith-Based
Institutions

Specialise in
Higher Education

+

Publicly identify with
a specific religion

58,989

international students enrolled in
faith-based institutions

(National Center for Statistics Database, 2017)

Research Aim

We sought to address the gap in the international student literature by qualitatively investigating the experiences of international students in faith-based institutions using an intrapersonal, interpersonal and spiritual framework.

- » **Data Collection site:** a Christian university located in the Pacific Northwest
- » **$N = 15$** (12 female, 3 male; $M_{age} = 21.13$, $SD = 1.64$)
- » **Country of Origin:** 2 from: South Korea, Vietnam, 1 from: Australia, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Peru, Taiwan, and Taiwan/England/Hong Kong
- » **Religion:** 11 with a Christian background, 1 agnostic, 1 Buddhist, 1 Muslim, and 1 unknown
- » **Years lived in the United States:** $M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.63$

Participants

Consensual Qualitative Method

(CQR; Hill et al., 2005)

- » Identification of **domains**
- » Identification of
- » **core ideas** within those domains
- » **Cross-analysis** for finding common themes across cases

Identification of domains

A Religion & Spirituality

B Reactions Towards International Students

C Cultural Differences

D Social Support & Acceptance

E International Student Identity

F Cultural Adaptation

G Hopes & Expectations

Religion & Spirituality

Expectations versus reality of Christianity

Some core ideas:

- » Expectations that Christians are liberal
- » Experienced many Christians as conservative
- » Expectations of conflict with strict Christians
- » Positive experience with a strict Christian
- » Half of people at their institution fulfil expectations

“there’s a percentage that are Christians but I don’t really think they are, and there’s about half that are actually Christians, in my opinion.”

Religion & Spirituality

Positive views of and experience with Christianity

Some core ideas:

- » Experienced the love of Christ
- » People react to their Catholic identity positively, and do not try to convert them
- » Christian friends are inspiring because of their strong beliefs
- » There are good Christians on campus

“we get to feel the love of Christ you know, so I kind of felt that, and it was very respectful, so I kind of enjoy that.”

Religion & Spirituality

Negative views of and experience with Christianity

Some core ideas:

- » People are imposing of Christianity/ faith
- » People ignore you unless you are an elite Christian
- » Fellow students do not talk about their faith
- » Some people do not go to church or keep the Sabbath
- » Not very involved in Christian community at their institution

“[school is] a Christian school, but people were making fun of Christianity... it was a little bit shocking to me.”

Reactions Towards International Students

Interest in international students

- » Medium interest because international students are in America

“at the end of the day we’re still in America... it’s more like “What’s your favorite ice cream flavor?” kind of question. It’s not really like they care too much”

Preference for one culture over another

- » People show more interest in Japan or Korea compared to her country

“why don’t people ask me more about my country, but why do they... show more interest in Japan or Korea”

Social Support & Acceptance

International student community

- » Does not see a large international student community

“I don’t feel as if though, there’s a big enough international student community where I feel very at home or connected?”

Faculty and staff support

- » Professor helped her a lot

“every time she was asking me how do I feel, and she also tried to pronounce my name in the right way... She let me take my final exam with a Google translator.”

Cultural differences

Topics of interest

- » Differences in humour

“sometimes we don’t understand their jokes”

International student identity

Contributions

- » International student identity contributes to the diversity of school community

“I think I am important to [the school] in a sense because I have some contributions to the table. Like my background and who I am.”

Cultural Adaptation

Behavioural adaptation

- » Nervous when talking to domestic students because she has to speak carefully and clearly

“I need to process and translate.”

Hopes & Expectations

Hopes for institutional change

- » Hopes that the school will fully fund the international student office and not receive extra payment from international students

“if we have the international office, then I feel like the school should pay, just like the academic service for the domestic students.”

Preliminary Findings

We found **shared experiences** with the broader international student experience

e.g., language barriers serve as an obstacle to social support

Preliminary Findings

However, our study also revealed **culture-specific** experiences of international students in faith-based institutions

e.g., several participants perceived Christianity in America to be less structured as compared to Christianity in their home country

Future Directions

- » Future studies should continue exploring the experience of international students in unique contexts
- » We hope to provide a voice for international students and better advocate for their needs

THANK YOU

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International student participants

SPFC