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**UNTOLD STORIES, SILENT VOICES: UNDERSTANDING OF THE
PLIGHT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS****Abstract:**

As the proportion of international students from the Asian region continues to grow, it is critical for universities to understand the challenges of adjustment facing these students and to assist them to cope with the many demands of studying in a foreign country. There is much empirical support in the literature suggesting a higher incidence of psychological morbidity amongst international students from the Asian region compared with students from European, or more “Western” countries. These students appear to experience greater difficulty acculturating to life in Western countries, and this has been shown to affect their academic performance. This problem is further intensified by the fact that traditional Asian cultures place a strong emphasis on academic success and as such, academic factors may be a large contributor to the psychological health of these international students.

Universities have a duty of care to address the incidence of psychological morbidity amongst international students. Current approaches appear to be failing students from Asian cultures. This may be due to the cultural stigma attached to mental health issues in these societies, or to trust concerns around the disclosure of personal information to College counsellors or other health practitioners, who are often perceived as “untrusting strangers”.

This study examines the experiences of negative psychological morbidity within a group of Chinese international students at a major Australian University. Specifically, the study adopts a “story-telling” approach to a number of case studies depicting quite alarming mental health struggles experienced by these students after their arrival in Australia. This narrative approach provides this group of students with a “voice”, one that must be heard by educators and university administrators alike, in order that this disturbing phenomenon be understood and addressed.

The study offers suggestions as to alternative approaches to psychological support services in universities, including culturally specific counselling and academic support, which must be personalised and reinforced throughout the semester as stress and anxiety accumulate.

Keywords:

international students; mental health in education; Chinese culture; academic performance; story-telling

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