

# *Ingroup Bias and Collective Self-esteem of Chinese International Students*

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the psychological transformation among Chinese students studying internationally in the U.S., focusing on ingroup bias and collective self-esteem. Grounded in the "minority stress theory," we hypothesize that international students display a higher ingroup bias and collective self-esteem, serving as a coping strategy to perceived unwelcome experiences and cultural shifts. The experimental approach compared Chinese students studying abroad in the U.S. and domestic students in China, using tasks centered around the minimal group paradigm, and assessed their group identification, resource allocation, and collective self-esteem. And the results revealed that international students displayed a notable ingroup bias and heightened collective self-esteem when compared to domestic students in China. This suggests that international students might utilize their ingroup affiliation as a buffer against cultural adversities and a source of self-esteem.

**Keywords:** Ingroup bias, Collective self-esteem, Minimal group paradigm

## 1. Introduction

Worldwide, many students choose to study abroad for a different experience, personal development, academic advancement, and cultivation of intercultural skills. American educational institutions have been particularly attractive to students worldwide [1]. In 2020, the Institute of International Education reported that more than a million students from overseas were studying in American colleges and universities [2]. Immersed in an unfamiliar culture, these students often experience changes in their attitudes and behaviors, with significant influence coming from their host country's local culture. However, along with the significant benefits of studying abroad, there's also a downside: international students occasionally report feeling unwelcome on campus [3], which can lead to significant psychological impacts. Cultural disparities, the challenges of academic life, and discrimination are factors that often drive international students to identify with particular groups.

In low-status groups, a more evident ingroup bias is observed compared to those in high-status groups [4-5]. This bias is reflected in the behavior of international Chinese students who, as a minority group in their host countries, hold a lower social status, much like the Welsh in a study involving distribution of shillings [6]. However, in their home country, these students are part of the dominant group. Consequently, it's plausible to suggest that Chinese international students exhibit more ingroup bias than their domestic counterparts.

While discussing the impact of local culture on international students, it is crucial to note the students' origin. Much of the existing literature on international students tends to aggregate them as a

single entity, neglecting the diversity of their home cultures. This approach can oversimplify the complex psychological processes at play. More nuanced research suggests the need for culturally specific studies, recognizing that students' reactions to the host culture and their psychological mechanisms can significantly vary based on their cultural background. For instance, students hailing from collectivistic cultures might exhibit stronger ingroup bias and collective self-esteem compared to those from individualistic cultures when faced with similar challenges abroad in the US [7].

Given these factors, we propose the hypothesis that international students from China studying in the US display a greater bias towards their in-group and possess heightened collective self-esteem compared to domestic Chinese students.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Participants**

The recruitment strategy aims for 200 participants, split equally between two groups: students from China attending their universities in the United States and their counterparts in Chinese institutions. The recruitment will target juniors and seniors in college in the US, as they are likely to have adapted to the environment, reducing potential bias from language barriers and acclimation issues. After enrollment and socioeconomic status verification, these students will be matched with domestic students in China, creating a fair comparison between the two groups. This match-up will help control variables that may influence our results. To reward their contribution, participants will be compensated: 1 USD for international students in the US and 6 CNY for domestic students in China.

### **2.2. Procedure**

The experiment process is to be carried out within a controlled lab environment, demanding the physical presence of all participants. Participants will be individually ushered into the lab and randomly placed into one of the two categories, either the "White Group" or the "Black Group", thereby ensuring objective sampling and minimizing any undue influence of preexisting biases. Central to this procedure are two assignments based on the minimal group paradigm, presented in the form of questionnaires. These assignments – Group Identification and Resource Allocation – are instrumental in shedding light on ingroup bias. The final stage of this research procedure involves participants completing an additional questionnaire focused on collective self-esteem. This phase is critical for understanding the ways in which group membership can bolster or undermine self-esteem within the context of a collective identity.

## **3. Measure**

### **3.1. Group Identification**

Participants' association with the in-group and out-group was assessed using a six-question survey adapted from an 18-question survey used in previous MGE studies [8-9]. Next, responses were measured using a Likert scale, with 1 indicating low identification and 7 denoting strong identification.

### **3.2. Resource Allocation**

Using an approach by Bornstein et al. [10], participants were introduced to a "cash bonus" scenario where they'd determine the bonus for other participants. They were tasked with choosing from seven payment distribution options, three favoring the in-group, three favoring the out-group, and one equal for all. All options are presented in yuan for both Chinese international and domestic students. Prior

research utilizing this method found that framing allocation as a "bonus" heightens intergroup discrimination [11].

### 3.3. Collective self-Esteem Assessment

The collective self-esteem is evaluated using Huston and Alexia's [12] designed scale.

## 4. Data Analysis

**Group Identification:** We expect that international Chinese students would score higher than Chinese domestic students in this task.

**Resource Allocation:** Out of the 7 options, we expect that Chinese international students would choose to favor ingroup more than their domestic counterparts.

**Collective Self-Esteem:** We predict that Chinese international students would get a higher score on the scale.

**Alternative Result:** Domestic students could show more ingroup bias and collective self-esteem. In this case, the propaganda and other materials distributed by the government that evoke nationalism among the citizens could be one explanation. Besides, domestic students also have a stronger sense of cultural identity due to their continuous and direct exposure to their home culture, language, traditions, and history. This could also lead to higher ingroup bias and collective self-esteem.

## 5. Conclusion

The in-group provides a crucial support system in a foreign environment, which positively impacts ingroup bias and collective self-esteem. The threat of discrimination could further draw international students to their in-group for self-protection and solidarity, reinforcing their collective self-esteem. However, these are preliminary explanations requiring more comprehensive research to fully understand the underlying mechanisms.

Our study does have some limitations. The minimal group paradigm, while robust, may oversimplify real-world group dynamics and overlook certain cultural and social influences. Also, our correlational design does not confirm causal relationships, and potential confounding variables may affect our results.

In summary, our findings offer valuable insights into how cultural factors affect the in-group bias and collective self-esteem of international students. These insights could inform the creation of support programs for international students adjusting to new cultures. Future research should consider longitudinal studies and real-world group dynamics to provide a more in-depth understanding of cultural assimilation among international students.

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