

The Adaptation Levels of Mainland College Students in Hong Kong and Macao From the Perspective of National Identity

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Abstract: The current study aims to make a comparison of adaptation levels between HKMCS (mainland college students in HK) and MCMCS (mainland college students in Macao) and explore the reasons behind the results from the perspective of national identity. Since the return of Hong Kong and Macao to China, there has been a massive outflow of students to higher education institutions in Hong Kong and Macao. Due to the various historical and cultural backgrounds in Hong Kong and Macao, students studying these two Special Administrative Regions might experience a different life. A sample of 63 mainland students studying in HK and Macao, 31 and 32 respectively, enrolled in the academic year of 2018-2019, were recruited to the questionnaire survey of this study. The result shows that their adaptation levels are not significantly different. This paper reveals the factors that affect adaptation and cognition between mainland college students in Hong Kong and Macao, laying the basis for the later research.

Keywords: Mainland college students; Hong Kong; Macao; Adaptation levels; National identity

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1. Introduction

Due to the attraction of policies, ethnic identity, geographical and cultural similarities, and excellent universities in Hong Kong and Macao, mainland Chinese students have become the mainstream of universities in Hong Kong and Macao. Since the surge in the number of mainland students studying in Hong Kong and Macao, the adaptation of college students has been a concern. It is necessary to study the intercultural adaptation of mainland Chinese students and the challenges they may face in adapting to a new environment. In the existing studies, most of the students in Hong Kong and Macao are regarded as homogeneous groups^[1]. Hong Kong and Macao are geographically adjacent, having similar systems and sharing the exact cultural origin. Therefore, it is natural for the researchers to categorize them as "a whole" when studying the young people of Hong Kong and Macao.

Many studies have shown that in terms of economic structure, residents' sense of belonging and social environment and the status of adaptation levels of mainland college students in the two places cannot be generalized. Adaptation refers to the psychological, physiological and behavioral changes people make to survive better in society and achieve a harmonious state with society. Adaptation can influence their ideological and behavioral trends. Young people are gradually changing from novices to main forces in many fields. Due to the cultural differences between the mainland and Hong Kong, and Macao, the adaptation level of mainland students should be paid attention to. This study aims to identify the national identity and whether the adaptation levels of HKMCS and MCMCS are different. Mainland college students in Hong Kong and Macao will not only be relevant to development of Hong Kong and Macao but also will dominate the form of integrated development of the Greater Bay Area and ultimately affect the implementation and development of

"one country, two systems".

2. Background

The commonality between Hong Kong and Macao

Before being colonized by Britain and Portugal, Hong Kong and Macao maintained an inseparable administrative relationship with the Pearl River Delta for a long time under the direct jurisdiction of Guangdong. This history of the administrative organizational system prevented the culture of Hong Kong and Macao from appearing and developing independently, so there were practically no differences in cultural characteristics. However, since Hong Kong and Macao fell into the colonies of Britain and Portugal, western culture landed and spread on a large scale, colliding, blending and innovating with local culture. Because Britain and Portugal seldom adapted the cultural policy of assimilation in Hong Kong and Macao, Chinese and western cultures could coexist with each other. Western culture could spread, took root and developed unimpeded at that time. These two cultures absorbed each other and formed unique Hong Kong and Macao cultures. In 1997 and 1999, Hong Kong and Macao returned to China, and Special Administrative Region (SAR) governments were established. They eliminated the colonial system and maintained the capitalist system, namely, "one country, two systems". Under such historical background, new development conditions and features have emerged in Hong Kong and Macao. In 1978 Chinese mainland implemented the reform and opening-up policy, which created a new process and new pattern of relations between the Mainland and Hong Kong and Macao.

The variations in Hong Kong and Macao

The background of Macao is quite different from its neighboring Hong Kong. Macao is a tiny city with a population of less than 600,000. Unlike Hong Kong, a relatively larger international city with a high-quality and advanced global financial market, shipping hub, service industry, and other traditional and modern diversified industries. Moreover, Macao lacks natural resources, and its economy relies heavily on the gambling industry.

Although Macao and Hong Kong are both SARs of the People's Republic of China, and both cities have attracted many mainland students pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, they have entirely different employment policies for mainland students after graduation. So far, the Macao government has not launched relevant policies to support non-local students to stay in Macao after graduation. In neighboring Hong Kong, mainland students can legally stay one year and look for work after

graduation. While Macao stipulates that mainland students cannot extend their stay after the expiration of their student visa, they had to leave Macao after graduation.

Geng believes that there are five reasons why mainland students are interested in studying in the higher education institutions (HEI) of Hong Kong^[2]. Firstly, the period of Master's study in Hong Kong is shorter than that in mainland China and Macao. The one-year-study saves time and money. Secondly, fresh non-local graduates are allowed to unconditionally stay in Hong Kong to find jobs within 12 months. Thirdly, degrees obtained from HEI of Hong Kong are highly recognized by mainland employers. Fourthly, education in Hong Kong is a blend of the East and the West, which means students have a chance to experience the western learning atmosphere and culture in this unique eastern city. Lastly, compared with Macao, the validity of visa to Hong Kong is longer, which is convenient for students' relatives and friends to visit Hong Kong.

There are four main reasons for mainland students to study in Macao's HEI^[10]. First of all, the annual tuition fee in Macao is about MOP 70,000, which is much lower than that in Hong Kong or studying abroad. Moreover, with the opening of high-speed railways and the increase of airport flights, the geographical gap between mainland and Macao is gradually narrowing. What's more, in terms of language, although Cantonese is the official language of Macao, the vast majority of Macanese can understand and speak Mandarin (Ji, 2013). Lastly, with international faculty reserves, students have more opportunities to get in touch with cultures from all over the world. The differences between Hong Kong and Macao in the above aspects inspire us to think about the differences in the adaptation level of mainland students studying in these two areas.

There is another aspect to note, in the 2019–2020 Hong Kong protests, also known as the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement, a series of protests in Hong Kong in response to the introduction of the Fugitive Offenders amendment bill by the Hong Kong government have shocked the world, which had a huge impact on mainland students stayed in Hong Kong. This is the most severe political event and the biggest challenge that Hong Kong has encountered since its return to China and implementation of "one country, two systems". Therefore, the current research, conducted in the period of 2019–2020, concerning mainland students' adaptation levels in Hong Kong and Macao, is significant for stakeholders to understand the situations of mainland students and adjust relevant policies to help with their life and study.

3. Related Works

National Identity

Identity is self-awareness of a person or a group. It is the product of self-awareness, the psychological process by which a person is emotionally or religiously connected to other objects (Ruan, 2005). National identity is considered to be an important factor affecting the level of adaptation (Li, 2006; Zheng, 2011; Lina, 2018). National identity refers to "the psychological activity of a person that identifies which country he belongs to and what kind of the country it is"^[8]. On the micro-level, many scholars believe that the national identity has a complex psychological structure, and the elements of individual identity in this structure affecting the psychological process from cognition to emotion. Firstly, national identity is the individual psychological activity that can affect personal adaptation levels. Secondly, national identity interacts with the whole social environment. The national identity of the local Hong Kong and Macao residents can also affect the adaptation levels of the mainland students. According to the classification of elements of national identity by academics and the actual social and cultural conditions of Hong Kong and Macao, the psychological adaptation elements of the national identity of mainland college students in Hong Kong and Macao can be divided into three categories: political adaptation, cultural adaptation, and interest adaptation.

Political Adaptation

Political adaptation is not only contained by national identity in the content but also an important part of national identity (Zhao, 2005). Political adaptation is a two-way shaping process between the state and the individual. It is an interactive process between practice and consciousness, sensibility and rationality. In the past practice of "one country, two systems", the connection between Hong Kong and Macao residents and mainland China was more formalistic, and the citizenship under it led to incomplete civil rights and obligations^[12]. Therefore, the political adaptation of Hong Kong and Macao residents who grew up in this environment was weakened. The selective weakening of patriotism education in schools of Hong Kong and Macao and the tendency of public opinion propaganda and the information blocking of various exchange activities in the society, etc., strengthen the "psychological barrier" in Hong Kong and Macao, which indirectly affects the mainland students studying in Hong Kong and Macao.

It exists differences in political adaptation between Hong Kong and Macao, in essence, cause of the differ-

ence of basic national rights in the two places (Wang, 2020; Fu, 2020). Since the Chinese government is not directly involved in the specific governance of Hong Kong and Macao, the governance mechanisms of the two special administrative regions have different regional characteristics. Due to the different governance mechanisms formed in Hong Kong and Macao during colonial rule, the degree of integration of the central governance mechanisms is also different after the return of the two regions. There would inevitably be a process of adjustment and breakthrough between the fundamental national rights and the governance mechanism of Hong Kong and Macao, which leads to the difference of political adaptation between the two places.

Cultural Adaptation

Cultural adaptation is a process of individuals coping with culture shock and gradually adapting to the new cultural environment when they integrate into the new community (Zheng, 2011). In cultural adaptation, individuals are constantly carrying out activities of self-identity and social identity and dealing with the relationship between themselves and the outside society (Li, 2006). For mainland college students in Hong Kong and Macao, how to adapt to the study and living environment and find their own belongings in the society is not only a process of acculturation but also a process of identification.

The identity of mainland students in Hong Kong and Macao shows the characteristics of individual differentiation, but there are also some significant commonalities (Ji, 2013). Due to the differences in language, educational mode, social environment, and interpersonal interaction among the places, mainland students face a huge culture shock when they first arrive in Hong Kong or Macao. Some of them can adapt to the new life quickly, but most of them need a longer time to integrate into it, especially the barriers in language and interpersonal interaction. Mainland college students have also formed their understanding of Hong Kong or Macao's culture. Although the recognition and adaptation degree of them varies, with the growth of time, most students will not wholly abandon the motherland culture and values. They will identify with the values of the mother culture more.

Interest Adaptation

Interest adaptation is the premise of political adaptation. Interest adaptation means that, in a certain region, due to the homogeneity of geography and society, people have a clear awareness of the interests, ideals, and habits of the particular region and distinguish it from other regions^[9]. Anything that people strive for is related to peo-

ple's interests. Mainland students chose to study in Hong Kong and Macao in favor of the advantages of Hong Kong and Macao, and they hope that the employment choice and salary package after graduation can meet their own development needs. Driven by interests, some students will stay to work and live in Hong Kong and Macao after graduation.

Interest adaptation plays a fundamental role in individual national identity, and it plays an important role in the overall adaptation of mainland students in Hong Kong and Macao. However, young people in Hong Kong and Macao cannot feel the interest brought by the national economic development and cannot find a sense of belonging in mainland China, which leads to a low sense of national identity. With the development of China, a "community of interests" with great energy is taking shape. Through in-depth economic exchanges and people-friendly policies, the Hong Kong and Macao communities will realize the benefits of the return, and the interest adaptation of the residents of the three places can be improved quickly.

Adaptation of mainland college students

Previous studies have shown that international students generally face more challenges when adapting to the new life and study in a new culture side, including initial transition, academic life, social life, and psychological experience (Fu, 2020). In the literature which researching in international students, these challenges are referred to as acculturative stress sources^[7]. These stress sources may have an impact on students' academic success and mental health. In fact, students' cultural background will influence their adaptation experience, so international students with different cultural backgrounds may have various perceptions of the adaptation^[3]. The difference is the reason for the adaptation problem. Therefore, the discussion of adaptation requires us to understand the complex process of the formation of differences, which will help us to understand the specific context of adaptations. According to the theory put forward by Huang Xinxian in 1995, the adaptation conflicts which Chinese students faced in foreign countries mainly include language adaptation conflicts, value adaptation conflicts, communication adaptation conflicts, marriage customs adaptation conflicts, and dietary adaptation conflicts.

Language is to blame for these conflicts. As a symbol, language plays a very important role in social life. People use it to communicate, exchange ideas, and express feelings. For mainland college students who are en-

tering the new cultural environment, they are not familiar with the symbolic meaning of language, so the first thing they faced is the problem of language barriers. Language barriers not only prolong students' acculturation process but also affect their effective communication with local students and teachers (Zheng, 2011). The language barrier could affect daily life, understanding, and expression. It makes it difficult for mainland college students to integrate into the mainstream of Hong Kong or Macao, leading to the estrangement between mainland students and Hong Kong or Macao students.

4. Investigation and Analysis

Sample

A total of 63 students were recruited from the Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK) and the University of Macao (UM). Background information of respondents from both groups is shown in Table 1. The ages of our samples converged on the range of 21 to 25 years old, and 73% of respondents are female. The largest number of them are from South China (including Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hainan) which is the nearest area from the mainland to Hong Kong and Macao.

Independent Variable

Place of study (i.e., Hong Kong or Macao)

Groups: 1. Mainland college students in Hong Kong (HKMCS)

2. Mainland college students studying in Macao (MCMCS)

Manipulate: We sent questionnaires to two different study places (i.e., Hong Kong and Macao).

Dependent Variable

Adaptation Level

Measurement: Adaptation Level Scale (It is a self-developed scale with well reliability and validity according to pilot study)

Procedure

The questionnaire consisting of the Adaptation Level Scale and items of background information were transferred to an online version and delivered through the internet by snowball sampling method.

Date Collection

This study collected, analyzed, and interpreted the quantitative data so that "the researcher makes inferences across the quantitative databases".

Statistical Analysis

For comparing two group's adaptation levels, an independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the mean values of two groups' adaptation levels.

Table 1. Background information of respondents (N = 63)

	HKMCS (n1 = 31)	MCMCS (n2 = 32)
1. Age		
16-20	9	6
21-25	20	22
26-30	2	3
>30	0	1
2. Hometown in Mainland of China		
South China (Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan)	10	10
East China (Shandong, Jiangsu, Anhui, Zhejiang, Fujian, Shanghai)	5	6
Northeast China (Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang)	5	5
Southwest China (Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, Tibet, Chongqing)	3	4
Central China (Hubei, Hunan, Henan, Jiangxi)	3	4
North China (Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shanxi, Inner Mongolia)	4	1
Northwest China (Ningxia, Xinjiang, Qinghai, Shanxi, Gansu)	2	0
3. Gender		
Female	22	24
Male	9	8

5. Results

T-test results

As shown in Table 2&3, the observed mean adaptation level for HKMCS (M = 7.6195, SD = 0.92) was lower than that of MCMCS (M = 7.7655, SD = 1.0677).

However, the result of the independent-sample t-test was not significant, $t(61) = -.581, p > .05$ (two-tailed). There was no evidence showing that the adaptation level of HKMCS is different from that of MCMCS.

G-power results

Using the post hoc function of G-power to compute the achieved power of this study, it is found that the power is low (0.0882, refer to Figure1&2). Therefore, the researcher carefully reconsiders whether the study's design is powerful enough to detect the effect. And then, the priority function of G-power was used to decide the sample size required to detect an effect given the level of desired power. The result shows that both group 1 and group 2 need 1,215 participants, respectively, for achieving a power of 0.8.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Group Statistics

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Adaptation Level	HKMCS	31	7.6195	.92000	.16524
	MCMCS	32	7.7655	1.06771	.18875

Table 3. Independent-sample t-test results

		Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Adaptation Level	Equal variances assumed	.501	.482	-.581	61	.564	-.14603	.25145	-.64884	.35679
	Equal variances not assumed			-.582	60.192	.563	-.14603	.25088	-.64778	.35573

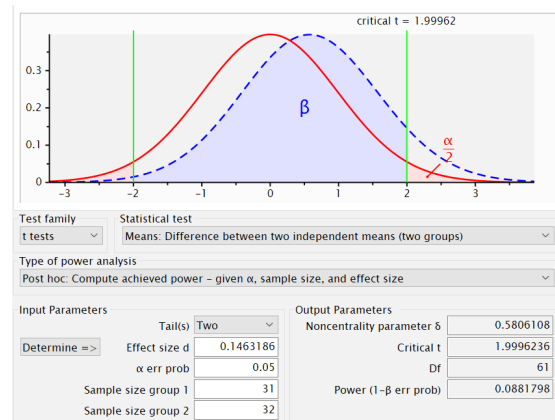


Figure 1. Power Analysis I

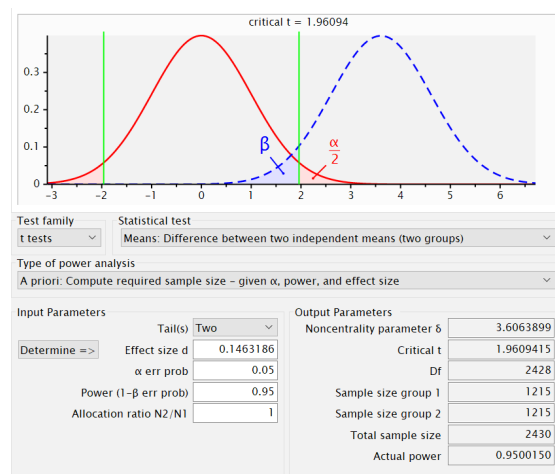


Figure 2. Power Analysis II

6. Discussion and Conclusions

By collecting data from 31 Mainland college students in HK and 32 Mainland college students in Macao and conducting an independent sample t-test, the result indicates that HKMCS and MCMCS's adaptation levels are not significantly different $t(61) = -.581, p > .05$.

This situation might be because of the similar social backgrounds of HK and Macao. Although HK and Ma-

cao are two different SARs of China, they share several things in common. For example, they share similar traits in terms of historical development, colonial status, and relationship with mainland government. Hong Kong was a British colony, while Macao was a Portuguese colony. These two cities were close in location proximity. Though Hong Kong and Macao have been returned to China for around 20 years since 1997 and 1999, their governmental system, legal system, and Capitalistic economy system were maintained under the “one country, two systems” framework.

Moreover, Hong Kong and Macao are two similar cities with similar language (i.e.: Cantonese), cultural custom (i.e.: Yue culture), and geographical appearance (i.e.: islands of East south China). In addition, both Hong Kong and Macao are two important destinations for mainland students to pursue their higher education (Li, 2006). Therefore, it is reasonable that Mainland college students both in HK and Macao have similar adaptation levels. Future studies can be involved a larger sample of students coming from different higher education institutions in Hong Kong and Macao and abroad so that more conclusive findings could be generalized to a broader population. Also, in the future, the study can further investigate students' adaptation with specific life areas such as school life and social relations, exploring the differences between overall life adaptation and domain-specific life adaptation in the development trend.

Moreover, this study has important implications for the integration of groups in the mainland and Hong Kong and Macao. Due to the differences in historical factors between the Mainland and Hong Kong and Macao, the corresponding social identity problems still exist objectively and need to be faced. However, such social identity does not necessarily affect inter-group relations. We have some psychosocial mechanisms to deal with these problems, such as the mechanism of de-categorization. In other words, we should try to transform the social interaction between the Mainland students in Hong Kong and Macao from intergroup interaction to interpersonal interaction. Students should appear in social interaction as specific individuals rather than as members of the groups they belong. As mentioned above, the difference is the preceding issue of adaptation. Therefore, the implementation of this de-categorization mechanism requires both parties to "seek common ground in differences" in specific practices. For example, the Association of Mainland Undergraduate Students should consciously strengthen the common exchanges and activities with local students and reinforce

a sense of community rather than a sense of small group. Mainlanders need to enhance their understanding of Hong Kong or Macao's history and culture. At the same time, Hong Kong or Macao people also need to improve their understanding of the history and culture of the mainland and the whole Chinese nation. On the one hand, it requires the governments to promote the exchanges, institutionalize and normalize such communication consciously, and it also involves the substantial adjustment of the educational content of three places (such as Hong Kong's national education) and language learning. On the other hand, the three places should work together to build a more inclusive national identity, which requires the construction of collective memory narrative and the reaching of social consensus^[8]. In addition, we should not underestimate the initiative of actors in the face of problems. To adapt to the new environment in Hong Kong and Macao, mainland college students need to adjust themselves more frequently and arrange their social contact and study plan according to their own goals.

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