

Comparison of Mental Health Education Between Chinese and American Universities

A Field Study Based on 6 Universities

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Abstract—This paper compares the mental health education between Chinese and American universities based on field visits to 6 universities. As shown in the investigations, the differences lie in 4 aspects. Firstly, the working mechanism of mental health education is horizontal in America but three-dimensional in China. Secondly, American universities focus on problem students while their Chinese counterparts concentrate on the entire group. Thirdly, American psychological counselors are only in charge of counseling services, whereas in China psychological counselors shoulder extra responsibilities. Fourthly, American universities have standard crisis management procedure while Chinese universities attach importance to pre-crisis warnings. The conclusion is that Chinese universities should maintain their characteristics and strengths, and at the same time, draw inspirations from their American counterparts.

Keywords—Chinese and American universities; mental health education; comparison; inspiration

I. INTRODUCTION

The mental health education in Chinese universities combines psychological consultation with health education. Over three decades of development, it has become mature and distinctive, positively influencing students' all-round growth. Globalization and digitalization also provide convenience for Chinese faculty members working on psychology to draw inspirations from the experience of universities in developed countries like US as well as summarizing their own strengths. To figure out the differences between Chinese and American mental health education, the author visited 3 American universities (University of Maryland, University of Delaware, and San Diego State University) and 3 Chinese universities (Xiamen University, Sun Yat-sen University, and Fujian Normal University). By means of field study and comparative analysis, the paper may contribute to the development of mental health education in Chinese universities.

II. DIFFERENCES ON MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION BETWEEN CHINESE AND AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

The survey indicates that the differences lie in working mechanism, focus on students, and quality of faculty members and crisis management, which can be recognized

from the two countries' authentication and evaluation to mental health education. In America, mental health education is evaluated at three levels: evaluation to consultation centers of Chinese universities and third parties, evaluation to consulting, teaching and examining technologies and their applications, and evaluation to the quality of counselors and faculty members working on psychology. By contrast, Chinese mental health education has been authenticated in Standards of Mental Health Education for Students in Regular Institutions of Higher Education (Trial) published in 2011. It attaches more importance to teaching, organizing activities and constructing the system of crisis prevention and intervention, and its evaluation is primarily carried out by home universities.

A. Difference in Working Mechanism: Horizontal Mechanism vs. Three-dimensional Mechanism

Research shows that the working mechanism of American mental health education is horizontal, in which consultation centers (CC) stay close to departments in universities so as to respond quickly to urgent incidents occurring on students. "Table I" lists the 3 surveyed universities as examples:

On the contrary, Chinese universities exhibit a three-dimensional mechanism. Apart from seeking advice from consultation centers, Chinese mental health education is, for most part, fulfilled within universities. Almost every university has a manageable network consisting of "university-college-class". Every college in a university shall appoint one psychological director and every class in a college shall select one commissary supervising his or her fellow's mental state. With the support of these two persons, psychology clubs or voluntary groups are founded. Some universities laying more stress on psychological education even establish special office where students can have heart-to-heart talking and use assistant tools like sand table to let off negative emotions. This self-reliant mechanism can cover far more students than the American approach.

TABLE I. COOPERATIVE DEPARTMENTS IN THE 3 UNIVERSITIES AND THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES

Name of universities	Cooperative Departments or Directors	Responsibilities
<i>University of Maryland (UMD)</i>	Mental Health Service	Serving as a place from which students with problems beyond the scope of psychological consultation can seek advice
	Department of Resident Life	Promptly recognizing and handling students' mental problems occurring in dormitories
	Assistant/Associate Deans of Various Colleges	Promptly recognizing and handling students' mental problems occurring in colleges
	Faculty and Staff	Recognizing students' mental problems and giving feedback to CC
	Office of Student Conduct	Punishing students in breach of laws or disciplines (CC will intervene if needed)
	Campus Police Department	Handling crisis in collaboration with CC
	Behavioral Evaluation and Threat Assessment	Handling crisis in collaboration with CC
<i>University of Delaware (UDEL)</i>	Department of Resident Life	Regularly training dormitory supervisors on mental health knowledge and instructing them to make prompt crisis warnings
	Career Center	Giving guidance in career development in collaboration with CC and required to have adequate personal recognition
<i>San Diego State University (SDSU)</i>	Collaborative Incident Management Team, CIM-T	(Consisting of all departments that deal with student affairs) holding weekly meetings on how to handle urgent incidents occurring on students
	Alcohol and other Drug Task Force	(Consisting of all departments that handle student affairs) interfering in alcohol and drug abuse and having devised ASPIRE Program to help students having substantive alcohol and drugs on a one-to-one basis

B. Difference in Focus: Problem Students vs. the Entire Group

American universities give special attention to problem students. The teaching method is not limited to individual consultation, group assistance or class attendance. They often organize psychological programs or workshops in collaboration with communities or other departments in their university to help students give up smoking and drug habits and back to normal life.

In contrast, Chinese universities give full play to all students. Apart from adopting the same methods (individual consultation, group assistance and class attendance), Mental Health Consultation and Education Center in universities

examines every student's mental health conditions every year and runs compulsory courses to make psychological education universal. Some universities even set a month as Psychological Month when events are held to develop students' positive personality, such as competition in drama performance and team-working social practices.

C. Difference in Duty of Faculty Members: Merely Consultation vs. More Extra Work

Faculty members in Psychological Consultation Center (PCC), particularly psychological counselors, lay the foundation for the university's mental health education. "Table II" demonstrates the PCC personnel makeup in the surveyed 6 universities.

TABLE II. PCC PERSONNEL MAKEUP IN THE 6 CHINESE AND AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

Name of universities	Full-Time Counselor	Part-Time Counselor	Intern	Special Personnel	Total	Student Number	Ratio of Personnel to Students
<i>UMD</i>	16	0	PhD 4 Common 2	Confidential 2 Coordinator 4 Academic assistant 4 Researcher 4	56	37631	2352:1
<i>UDEL</i>	16	0	PhD 4	Post-Doc Research 3 Supporting 5 Others 1	31	21800	1363:1
<i>SDSU</i>	14	0	PhD 6	0	20	28600	2043:1
<i>Sun Yat-sen University</i>	9	0	0	0	9	50039	5560:1
<i>Xiamen University</i>	5	52	0	0	57	39979	7996:1
<i>Fujian Normal University</i>	2	9	0	0	11	27600	13800:1

The data show that American universities outperform Chinese universities in both the number of full-time counselors and the ratio of personnel to students. Except the personnel listed in the table, the following members must be included in psychological consultation departments in American universities: psychological counselor, social welfare officer, clinical psychologist and psychiatrist. Most of them are at master's level and some of them are PhD specialists having received special training.

In Chinese universities, only a few full-time counselors have obtained PhD. Most of them have to shoulder extra responsibilities, namely besides teaching and psychological

consultation, they have to assist student clubs (Psychology Association) in organizing activities. Furthermore, most of them have not received strict clinical training before graduation.

D. Difference in Crisis Management: Standard Procedures vs. Pre-crisis Warning

In terms of crisis management, American universities follow standard procedures in handling students with violent tendency. "Fig.1" illustrates the crisis management procedures in University of Delaware.

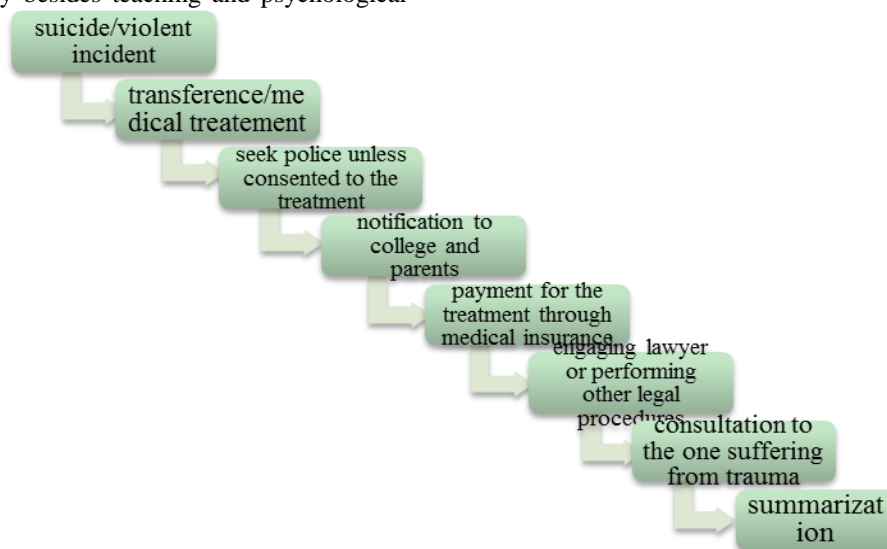


Fig. 1. Crisis management procedure in University of Delaware.

Standard crisis management procedures ensure a clear division of responsibilities for consultation centers, hospitals, police offices, colleges and parents, thus avoiding disputes between parents and universities.

Chinese universities perform better in pre-crisis warning. Taking Xiamen University for example: it pays heed to cultivating professional skills of psychological directors and student assistant groups, and based on this group, it established four systems: Graded Early Warning Response System, performed by psychological center at the university level, psychological workshop at the college level and commissary at the class level; Multilayered Early Warning Evaluation System to examine mental health conditions of students; Document recording each student's mental health conditions; Pre-crisis Warning Bank, which ensure special emphasis on, timely interference to and regular examination to students with potential mental health problems; Monthly Report System reporting students' mental health conditions each month. It also held working sessions on a regular basis, carried out activities of psychological consultation and education. All of these measures provide guarantee for the prevention of students' mental health problems.

III. CHARACTERISTICS AND STRENGTHS THAT CHINESE UNIVERSITIES SHOULD MAINTAIN

A. Keeping the Comprehensive, Three-dimensional and In-depth Working Mechanism of Mental Health Education

In 2011, Chinese Ministry of Education issued Standards of Mental Health Education for Students in Regular Institutions of Higher Education (Trial), introducing new requirements for universities in terms of comprehensive, three-dimensional and in-depth development of mental health education: incorporate mental health education into the university's talent training program; establish leading group directed by the university's presidents or senior officers, in which psychological consultation organizations outside the university, departments and colleges within the university can jointly launch educational activities; establish three-dimensional working mechanism at the university, college and class level. Many universities have implemented these requirements. For instance, Fujian Normal University carried out mental health training program for each dormitory's psychological commissary and held contests for all students participating in mutual psychological assistance. These activities approve of the indispensable role of mutual assistance, laying a solid foundation to the three-dimensional working mechanism.

B. Covering the Entire Student Group and Cultivating Active Mental Health Conditions

On the one hand, in terms of curriculum system, Chinese universities should continue to implement curriculum education and maintain the education system with compulsory courses as its main focus and optional courses second. For example, Xiamen University set up a graded curriculum system consisting of "compulsory courses for specific majors, psychological courses for different colleges and optional courses for the entire university" to provide students with a multilayered mental health education platform as well as ensuring basic psychological education. On the other hand, regarding system for student activities, universities should motivate students to conduct self-recognition, self-teaching and self-growth by mature and innovative methods, thus creating a sound atmosphere for mental health education.

C. Training Student Instructors to Complement Psychological Faculty Members

Student instructors are in charge of students' ideological and political education. They completely understand students' learning and living conditions and know well students' psychological development and possible mental disturbances, so they can instruct students in a specific and timely manner. Chinese universities should organize a group of qualified student instructors who are enthusiastic about psychological education, and enhance their theoretical and practical abilities to offset their shortage of psychological faculty members. To this end, Xiamen University held trainings for student instructors that were high-quality, systematic, practical, applicable, efficient and effective to enhance their psychological professionalism. This action gained support from all the colleges, which were encouraged to invest in more persons, fields and money to carry out distinctive activities on mental health education.

D. Maintaining Multilayered Pre-crisis Warning System

Chinese universities should maintain their multilayered pre-crisis warning system. They should concentrate on students' mutual assistance and make them acquire basic psychological knowledge by lectures, optional courses or other methods, so as to ensure the implementation of Graded Early Warning Response System, performed by psychological center, psychological workshop and commissary.

IV. DRAWING INSPIRATIONS FROM AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

A. Developing Distinctive Programs and Serving Specific Student Groups

In collaboration with other departments, psychological consultation centers in American universities developed programs fit for specific student groups, such as "paper assistance group" for paper writing and "international students group" helping international students adapt to the environment in University of Maryland, "community integration program" empowering students with practical

skills gained out of the campus and "ASPIRE program" providing one-to-one assistance for students beset with alcohol and drug abuse in San Diego State University.

Psychological consultation centers in Chinese universities can learn from their American counterparts, that is, to develop long-term, stable and distinctive programs assisting specific groups together with other departments. The author lists the following examples: developing programs offering financial assistance for students from poor families together with Student Management Office in Student Affairs Department; providing training programs to enhance students' strengths and confidence in employment together with Employment Guidance Center; carrying out programs aiming at increasing students' learning motivation, taking right attitudes toward learning and raising grades together with Academic Affairs Office; promoting programs helping students resolve dormitory conflicts and establish harmonious relationship between roommates together with Dormitory Office in Student Affairs Department; implementing programs that can help international students know more about Chinese culture and adapt to Chinese campus life, and can instruct them to know how to help themselves or seek help from others when confronted with emergency.

B. Establishing Working Mechanism Involving Wider Groups

Apart from the above-mentioned intra-campus cooperation, American universities also collaborate with society. On the one hand, they gain wide support from student families and social communities, exemplified by "Action Plan for Youngsters" in New Jersey, "healthy life starts from initiative" in California and "Lighthouse Project" in New York State. On the other hand, they cooperate with professionals. For instance, in New York, almost every university has an assistance group consisting of psychologists, social officers, educational evaluation experts, student instructors and language correctors, offering regular psychological training, diagnosis, consultation, evaluation and prevention for local students. Chinese universities should learn from the experience of American universities, exploiting available resources by establishing a network connecting campus, dormitories, medical institutions, academic research centers and psychological education centers, so as to ensure the healthy growth of students.

C. Paying Attention to the Access of, Growth of and Protection for Psychological Counsellors

American universities pay attention to the access of, growth of and protection for psychological counselors. At the process of the survey, the author is deeply impressed by the supervision and protection for the counselors by the psychological consultation center in San Diego State University. There are 3 supervisors having obtained national certification who are responsible for the prompt supervision and instruction to 15 counselors and interns. The consultation, if examined by a supervisor, will go on in a specific consultation room. With the consent of his clients, the supervisor can observe the counselor through a one-way

mirror in the outer space of the room, or record the whole process through video-recording devices. The center is also planning to install a camera inside every consultation room to record worthwhile cases. Besides, to protect psychological counselors in case of emergency, an emergency button has been equipped in an inconspicuous place of the reception center and of every desk of counselors. Once being touched upon, the threatening person will be isolated, and the button will send rescue signals to the whole center and even 911, thus rescuing and protecting counselors.

However, among the 3 surveyed universities, only counselors in Sun Yat-sen University can receive face-to-face, one-to-one assistance by supervisors outside the university for several times every year. In other two universities, supervisions can only be made in case study meetings or by mutual assistance within the consultation group. It is advisable for counselors in Chinese universities to participate in regular training to become more professional under the supervision and instruction of experts. It is also suggested to install devices in the office of consultation center to protect counselors.

D. Ensuring All-staff Participating in Crisis Management

San Diego State University provides training of psychological crisis prevention for all faculty members. Training contents include how to identify suicide tendency and how to persuade suicide-inclined persons to abandon the idea. Meanwhile, it issued a manual entitled Questioning, Persuasion and Transference for Saving Suicide-inclined Students whose contents include the perception of suicide, and three important procedures for identifying suicide clues and conducting rescue (question, persuade and transfer). Even specific operating methods for every procedure have been clearly stated in the manual. The official website "U life line" of mental health education and leaflets have all mentioned how to help others, how to identify suicide crisis, and have provided the telephone number of its psychological consultation center and the hotline for crisis of the community. Walking on the campus, one can usually see posters telling students how to prevent suicide. Chinese universities can learn from these measures to involve more people into the process of crisis management.

V. CONCLUSION

The mental health education of university students in China and the United States differs greatly in aspects of practitioners, contents and ways of implementation. While drawing lessons from the successful experience of the United States, the mental health education of university students in China should focus on three aspects: namely building a specialized, professional and expertise team, setting up mental health education scientifically, and broadening the implementation path of mental health education.

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