



Conational Communities within Diverse Academic Environments: Safe Havens or Integration Obstacles?

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Theoretical basis

- "Ward's bi-dimensional acculturation model (Ward, 2000).
 - Maintain the culture of origin.
 - Integrate into the host culture.
 - Considering the multicultural academic environment:
 - Academic integration.
 - Preserve one's culture of origin.
 - Integrate into the multicultural academic environment."



Connational communities as the main pattern

- "A self-organized, informal network consists of individuals who share the same nationality or cultural background. They affiliate with each other within a larger, multicultural academic setting. These communities are characterized by a leader, shared learning habits and mutual supportive systems that modifies habits and behaviours, facilitate the adjustment to and navigation of educational and social life in the host country. While offering a comforting reference point for their members, conational communities may inadvertently create barriers to full integration with the broader and more diverse academic contexts."



Connational communities as the main pattern

- A spontaneous, self-organized, informal network

different from the Chinese Student Association
can be formed naturally, without guidance, instructions, or requirements.

typically has a small size and a loose structure,
connected by friendships or social relationships,
such as classmates, roommates, or those studying the same subject.

may exist for an extended period within a major, a class, or even an en-suite
flat.

temporarily exist for group assignments or group exams.



Connational communities as the main pattern

- Composed of individuals sharing the same language or cultural background,

two main factors:

minimal language barriers
allow free and comfortable communication.

zero cultural distance and small social distance,
minimal socializing barriers
a high willingness to contact and seek support."



Connational communities as the main pattern

- Characterized by shared learning practices, and mutual support systems

prefer to

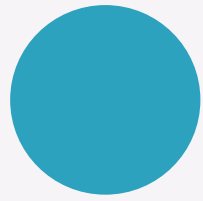
discussing individual essays with other members

inquiring about exam requirements and norms from fellow members

collaboratively writing essays based on shared experiences

sharing and seeking learning materials from other members,

rather than relying on resources provided by the host universities, teachers, and staff



Connational communities as the main pattern

- Often characterized with a leader.

who has the best English ability or former overseas studying experience.

serves as the speaker for the conational community involved
the representative to contact the host university.

members rely on the leader and seek support from.

Members prefer to seek instructions and support in the following order:

Leader

Other members

Teachers and staff from the host university



Impacts of conational communities in academic contexts

- Modify learning habits and behaviours.

feel pressure when collaborating with students from other cultural backgrounds.

prefer large classes where many conational students sit together.
preferring to have conational group members.

keep silent in class, as one student mentioned,
"the leader in our class would answer the teacher's questions and do it better than me."

often do simpler tasks in group assignments because
"the leader in our group would handle the hardest part."



Safe haven or Obstacles

- Common language

facilitates communication and understanding,
resource to get assistance
improve group learning efficiency.

- Limited language development:

most of the communications are inside the conational communities
a series of academic and social problems.
Issues with English writing and presentations.
a limited friend circle and support network.
losing a part of the meaning of studying abroad.



Safe haven or Obstacles

- Academic assistance:

resource sharing.

understanding different academic conventions.

collaborating in group works, sometimes even during exams.

reducing academic pressure,

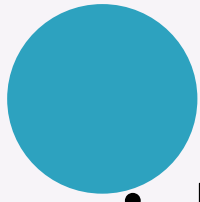
- Detachment from the diverse educational environment:

necessary communication with the teacher skipped.

a loose teacher-student relationship.

resistance to pedagogical adaptations.

reduce opportunities to interact with students from other backgrounds.



Safe haven or Obstacles

- Identity confirmation

emotional support

safety and sense of belonging

resilience against discrimination

- Social segregation

enough support from the conational communities

no need to get support from others

exclude students from other culture to join

exclude themselves from other groups

misunderstanding and stereotypes

in those communities and to them

Conclusions



The diverse academic environment

Connationa
communitie
s

- Like a nest
- Protect international students from some emotional, academic and cultural challenges
- Also “protect” them from contacting to the diverse academic environment



Core questions and implications

- For qualitative researchers and measurement designers:
- Does the quote from international students "I feel I adjust well to the multicultural academic environment" mean they adjust to the diverse environment well or they just feel good in the conational communities?

a subjective sense of comfort or confidence within the diverse academic setting

need to assess

the student's engagement with different cultural groups

participation in diverse academic activities

proficiency in the host country's language and cultural norms

outside the conational community.



Core questions and implications

- For universities and staff:
- Are international students studying in a diverse academic context, or are they mostly studying in a small "home country" within that context?

physically studying within a diverse academic context,
If mostly interacting within conational community,
missing out on the broader educational and cultural interactions
that a diverse environment features.

but the degree to which they study in a "small home country"
depend influencing factors.

comfort with the host country's language,
inclusivity of the university's culture
availability and approachability of cross-cultural engagement opportunities.



Core questions and implications

- For international student experience researchers and workers:
- How much diversity or multiculturalism do international students mainly relying on conational communities feel?

International students of conational communities may still be aware of the diversity and multiculturalism around them but may not fully experience or engage with it.

Their sense of multiculturalism may be intellectual rather than experiential

they know the diverse context exists around them but their daily interactions may not reflect that diversity.

They need a consistent, integrated experience that comes from diverse, everyday engagement.



Core questions and implications

For adaptation and acculturation researchers:

- Are international students relying on conational communities achieving "Integration in perception" but "isolation in reality" in multicultural academic contexts?

international students may feel they are part of the university community because they have feel good within their own conational groups.

the comfort and support provided by conational communities create a bubble that feels like integration

but broader connections and experiences with the larger multicultural community are limited.



Core questions and implications

- For anyone focusing on community building in an academic context:

Are forming conational communities and integrating into the diverse academic environment contradictory?

awareness of the existence

complementary functions

balancing identity and exposure

role of institutions and our efforts



Before Q&A

- Rise attentions
- Understanding
- Taking appropriate actions
- Thanks