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The Invisibility of Chinese International High School Students: Perceived Support and Wellness during a Pandemic

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Abstract

Asian youth in the US during the pandemic had the highest self-reports of poorer cognitive and emotional health during the COVID-19 pandemic. With Chinese international high school students comprising one of the top three sending countries in the US, understanding the offerings and utilization of school support during the pandemic is less known. This qualitative study addresses Chinese international high school student perspectives of the identified in- and out-of-school supports, along with in depth interviews to understand how these supports are being leveraged. Results indicate a range of identified offerings in- and out-of-schools—with social networks being the largest source of connectivity. Re-examination of current structures, in-school support, and communication with international students and families are needed. Recommendations include private schools leveraging cultural assets to provide greater connections between students and schools.

Introduction

Tumultuous ties between the US and China are associated with the rising anti-Chinese, xenophobic, Sinophobic, and anti-Asian sentiment during the COVID-19 pandemic. This issue is rooted in the long, racialized history of Chinese immigrants in the US that have led to an escalation of COVID-19 attacks on Asians in English speaking countries (Litam, 2020; Saito & Li, 2022; Viladrich, 2021; Wang, 2020). With over 9,000 reported incidents of anti-Asian hate between March 2020-June 2021, the spotlight on this issue has dimmed in spite of continued attacks (Stop AAPI Hate, 2021)

Further, challenges to Asian American invisibility in recent years have highlighted the accomplishments of Asian American communities and at the same rate, have masked the populations of Asian Americans that are less visible in society. For Chinese international students, this held true until COVID-19 when they were made hypervisible. Pre-pandemic, China served as the largest sending country for international high school students in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2020). Yet little is highlighted on Chinese international high school students' (CIHSS) experiences in the US altogether and even more so during COVID-19 (Nicola, 2021). Despite the availability of resources in K-12 schools, the use of such supports and rationale for why these supports are underutilized through Chinese international student voice is less explored. In raising this awareness, it is critical to leverage these perspectives and reflect on the effectiveness of current social emotional structures

while also identifying the types of support students utilize and value. Works surrounding the topic are often measured in quantitative studies with little that examines CIHSSs' voice and understanding how they navigate and develop systems of social emotional support in a host society.

Purpose

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to 1) provide background on CIHSSs in the US, 2) identify challenges with Chinese international student support and wellness, 3) offer a framework that addresses international student support, 4) provide a snapshot of current high school student experiences with social emotional support and needs during the COVID-19 pandemic through a qualitative lens. 5) Offer suggestions and recommendations for middle/high schools in supporting Chinese international youth.

Context of Chinese International High School Students

Visa Status & Enrollment

China comprises one of the top three countries of origin for international high school students in the U.S. According to the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (2020), visa status to study in US high schools include two options: (1) J-1 visa, which affords students a cultural exchange in a partner public or private school for up to one year. This option is more affordable but includes time limitations. (2) F-1 visa, which allows students to attend private middle and high schools. Tuition and living expenses for a private middle or high school under an F-1 visa are typically more costly and limit educational opportunities to those from wealthy families (Mason & Andrejko, 2020). However, approximately 98% of CIHSSs in the US are F-1 visa students enrolled in private schools, with less than 2% holding a J-1 visa (Mason & Andrejko, 2020). International student enrollment in US K-12 schools in 2020 dropped by 24% from the previous year alongside a 72% drop in new enrollment (SEVP, 2020). In addition to COVID-19 as a possible reason for students returning home and a decline in enrollment, changes in the economic tide and an increase of international middle/high school offerings across China, afforded parents to seek education closer to home (Mason & Andrejko, 2020).

Beyond Parachute Kids and Sea Turtles

Previous research on CIHSSs began as a phenomenon in the early 1980s and 1990s with the term “parachute kids” to describe children from wealthy families primarily from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and later, mainland China being sent overseas to places like the US on an F-1 visa to receive an American education (Zhou, 1998). Attending middle/high school in an English-speaking country aligned with the belief that their children would have an increased chance to attend ivy league universities in English-speaking countries and in some cases, avoid military service (Lee & Friedlander, 2014; Tsong & Liu, 2009). With the intention of academic opportunity, students were often sent to the US to live with distant relatives, host families, older siblings, or alone— while parents remain overseas (Tsong & Liu, 2009). However, the experience these middle and high school students receive is far different from the adult international students in higher education due to the adjustment and developmental process adolescents are facing alone and often without the guidance of family

members.

The prospect for many of these students is to continue through university and return home after graduating to pursue social mobility. Labels for such students became known as “sea turtle”, which continues to shift in meaning and the long-term effects due to acculturative family distancing for CIHSSs is less known, with previous studies on unaccompanied youth studying in the US facing increased psychological maladjustment as adults due to communication breakdown between family and student (Lee & Friedlander, 2014).

Asian Youth & Mental Health in Schools

The need for mental health for Asian youth is evident as suicide rates among Asians in the U.S. between the ages of 15-19 account for 33% of their deaths, exceeding those in other minoritized groups (Louie, 2020; Wang et al, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian youth between the ages of 13-18 years old, had the highest report of feeling disconnected from peers and school. Similarly, 44% of Asian youth self-reported poor emotional and cognitive health (Margolius et al., 2020). In China, youth between the ages of 12-18 reported increasing risk of anxiety, depression, or a combination. Mental health is of particular importance as Asian youth in the US between 13-18 years old, had the highest self-reports of feeling disconnected from peers and school. Similarly, 44% of Asian youth self-reported poor emotional and cognitive health (Margolius et al., 2020).

While mental health support is often available in schools, underage youth require parental authorization. Access for Asian youth in receiving mental health support are challenged for several reasons—that largely center on parental/guardian barriers to authorizing mental health support due to the limited mental health literacy and fear of stigmatization of their child having a mental illness (Wang et al., 2021). This is met with resistance by parents due to the cultural stigma and avoidance of those who are identified with a mental illness. Educating Asian parents to remove the stigma from mental health is being done to improve perspectives of receiving mental health support. However, challenges from theory to practice for parents are difficult.

Depression, anxiety, and suicide were three key areas raised as important health concerns for Asian youth. Further are the culturally specific concerns of Asian youth that include facing discrimination and “racial bullying” at school, parents coming from a largely homogeneous country and not experiencing or understanding the experiences their child is going through and how to handle these conversations (Wang et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2020). A cultural shift into adapting to US norms surrounding these conversations at home include being more open to discussing mental health and addressing culturally conflicting ideas. The risk and protective factors for Asian youth may differ from what is described as “typical” behavior, calling for a more culturally specific approach to addressing Asian youth mental health needs (Wang et al., 2021).

Chinese International Student Supports

Previous literature on Chinese international student support relies on the strength of familial ties, influenced by

Chinese philosophical traditions, cultural influences, and processes of acculturation. However, the current generation of youth have changed dramatically due to access to social media, leading to greater connectivity outside of familial units for support (Hamilton, et al., 2022). These technological advances have created a complexity of ways that youth internalize support based on “likes” by peers vs. parent or family validation. Further are the ways that CIHSS are even more distant from family members as they live abroad, oftentimes separated from their parents and live with distant relatives. More often are complete strangers willing to provide a room for CIHSSs to live in through a host family agency.

Culturally Sustaining Social Emotional Learning

Culturally sustaining pedagogy was developed from culturally responsive and culturally relevant approaches that raise currency in the ways communities operate as a lever to inform teacher praxis (Paris & Alim, 2017). Culturally sustaining social and emotional learning (SEL) is a recent exploration that started with the examination of the key skills in SEL: self-awareness, social-awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, and self-management and tying them into the culturally responsive areas for teachers to develop in the areas of mindset and commitment, building on students’ funds of knowledge, and developing strong relations (CASEL, 2022; Education Trust, 2022). Culturally sustaining SEL centers student well-being as an understood concept within the context of historically and linguistically marginalized youth and leveraging students’ backgrounds as an asset to student learning (Mahfouz & Anthony-Stevens, 2020). It pushes teachers to also consider and address biases, questioning commitment, beliefs, and attitudes towards their students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Acknowledging and engaging in these practices is a starting point in supporting CIHSSs. Considering the complexities of Asian adolescents during COVID and more specifically the supports offered and utilized by CIHSSs, the research question in this study is, “How do Chinese international high school students perceive and understand institutional support during COVID-19?”

Theoretical Framework

The *Systems of International High School Student Support* framework applied in this study is adapted from a social emotional and social capital lens that frames social interaction in academic (e.g., counselors, academic advisors, out-of-school classes) and non-academic networks (e.g., clubs, volunteering, social activities, social media, group chats) through structured and unstructured systems of support (CASEL 2022; Glass & Gesing, 2018). This is not tied to academic performance or outcomes per se, and instead centers on student well-being, identifying available resources and understanding how they are used in a host society. As much of adolescent socialization and influence occurs during this period of development, shifts within levels of engagement within these structured and unstructured spaces during a period of isolation can assist educators and administrators in allocating resources that are effective in supporting CIHSSs (Foulkes & Blakemore, 2021; Hamilton, et al., 2022).

In-school refers to the opportunities and resources provided by the school, not necessarily on-site. Due to COVID-19, some of the in-school resources were adapted in an online space. Out-of-school refers to the

opportunities and resources available outside of school and school hours. Non-academic networks include those that are outside of academic classes to support students. This includes in-school structures that offer a space for students to build connections and socialize—such as organized clubs, sports, or school events. Out-of-school, structured non-academic networks can include service opportunities to volunteer or membership in organizations. Unstructured networks in and out of school occur through informal interactions between students and teachers (in school) and communication with peers and social media (out of school).

Academic and wellness networks include structured supports provided in-school such as college counselors, advisors, and school psychologists. Out of school academic and wellness networks can include private tutoring or non-credit enrichment courses. Unstructured academic and wellness networks are largely the social supports found through peer interaction in school and out of school friends as well as social media. Figure 1 provides a visual to these types of support along with examples for both in and out of school supports.

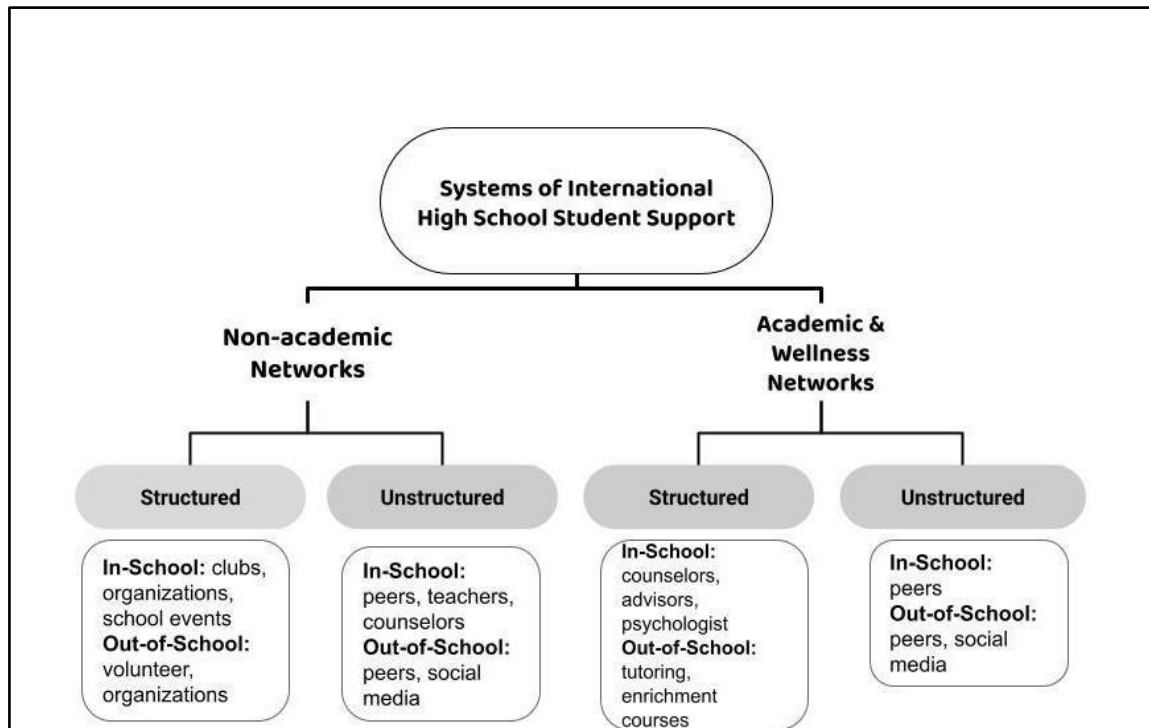


Figure 1. Systems of International High School Student Support

Method

Participants in this exploratory study identified as international students from mainland China, over the age of 18 and currently enrolled in English speaking institutions. Students did not need to be in the US during the time of the study due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Snowball and purposeful sampling were completed to ensure participant validity.

Using qualitative methods, an online survey link with informed consent was provided. Questions included demographic information and 10 checkbox and open-ended questions about their perceptions of social

emotional support within their institution. Participants remained anonymous. Data from the form was extracted into a Google spreadsheet and analyzed and hand coded for emerging themes centering the perceived needs and identifying current support systems. Voluntary follow-up interviews were conducted via Zoom, recorded, and transcribed. Interviews were structured and expanded on the survey questions. Questions in this survey were field tested by current CISs to ensure that questions are accessible, relatable, and edited or removed for any nuanced and ambiguous understandings.

Demographic information includes the current country of institutional enrollment, with all participants being enrolled in the US (100%). Six identified as male, two identified as female, and 0% identified as non-binary. As the study was conducted in spring of 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, seven attended courses fully online while one was enrolled in hybrid courses. Pseudonyms were provided. Institutional review board deemed this study exempt.

Results

Findings from the survey and interviews reveal interconnected ways CIHSSs navigate support that crosses between non-academic networks and academic & wellness networks. CIHSSs seek academic and adult guidance amid a pandemic, continue to build relationships through school clubs and advisors, continue out-of-school education, develop social networks as a resource for social support, and address the impact of COVID on their interactions in and out of school. While survey data provides a glimpse of the resources available, the interview responses provide depth and emotional ties to justify their responses in ways that cannot be captured within the survey.

Identifying Spaces and Networks

Social Media in Academic Networks

Staying connected using social media during COVID raised a range of applications usage (see Figure 2). While American based apps like Instagram were mentioned, the main mode of communication is WeChat, a Chinese social media app that allows for texting, sending files and images, translation, voice messaging and transcription, voice/video calling, group chats, and sharing posts only visible to selected contacts (WeChat, 2022). This app is mentioned within both interview and survey responses as a primary mode of communication with other CIHSSs. However, the type of app used is also based on the type of interaction and who the student is interacting with. Anson describes, “officially, I use email to contact my teachers. Somehow—recently I also use Discord to have a group chat—with my friends...I think that sometimes I will use Instagram if there's a bunch of you know, schoolmates. I'll usually use [Instagram] to chat—but not as much as WeChat.” Anson describes multiple apps to communicate based on the context and preference of students, adapting to individual students' modes of communication.

John explains his connections prior to COVID:

Since I came to [name of high school] before the current affairs (COVID) started, I was able to meet

and make friends. We did form a group chat of our own grade. However, it doesn't really solve anything, though. So we would have to reach out to some of the older friends in school. During an icebreaker, I was able to join several group chats that helped me a lot throughout the process. John describes the networks created with grade level peers through group chats and separately, relying on older or upper grade students for support. School hosted activities, prior to the pandemic, such as an icebreaker activity, provide opportunities for students to socialize and in this case, make connections outside of school.

A follow-up question asked how social media and apps are used (see Table 1); participants described its role in developing friendships from school and a resource for support on school related topics that include assignments, classes, and issues arising within school—highlighting the development of online capital that is not visible or accessible to teachers or administrators. John later describes the different ways social media and apps are used:

I've received help from school and also from my friends by using group chats and my advisor's system specifically...through Zoom, through email, and also through some other apps— like WeChat and also on Instagram. We talked about how I should plan for my college and how I should prepare. For example, when it was the second month of [12th grade], my advisor sent me a message—to take a look and be aware of my grades, since I will need to submit them soon for colleges. Although transitioning to remote learning altered the format of instruction, students in this study were largely focused on communicating with their advisors, counselors, and people that can assist them in the college application process. Although data on grade level was not collected, students described their college application process.

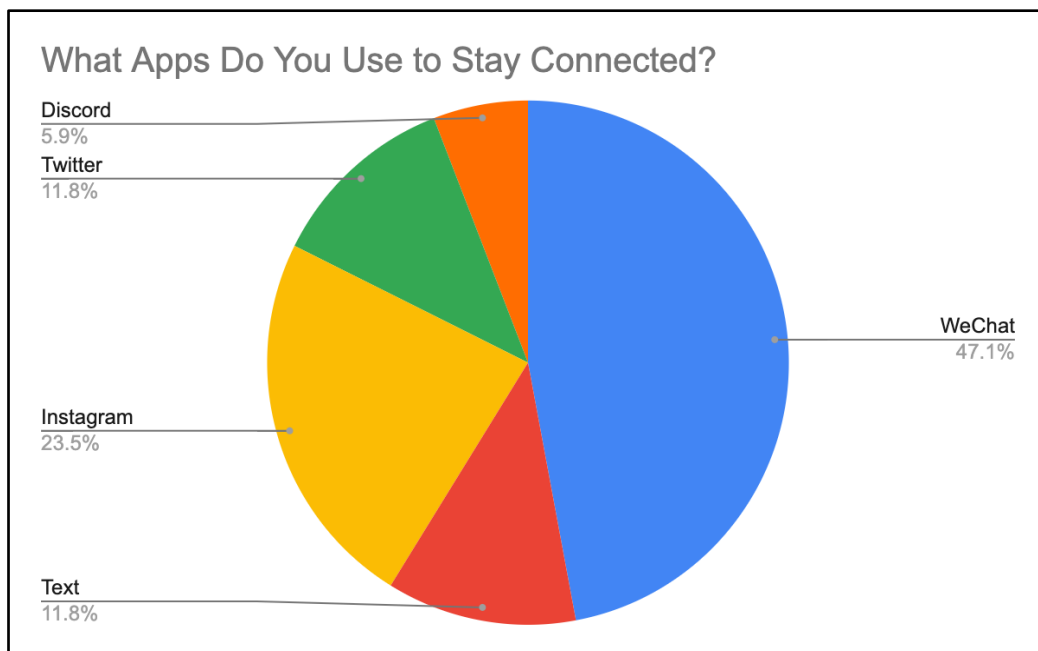


Figure 2. What apps do you use to stay connected?

The apps identified in Figure 2. are primarily used to seek help or ask questions on assignments as well as socializing as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. How Apps are used

Student Responses
Ask for help on assignments.
Homework and chatting.
Usually asking for help or asking questions.
Ask to hang out or ask questions.
We'd make the group chat based on either courses or our friend zones. Chatting and sharing some necessary information is what we often do.
I use group chat to ask for homework or their daily life on WeChat.
Ask what's the homework that day.

The Need for School-based Mental Health and Wellness

As a whole, participants identified academic and social support systems that included in-school academic counselors and clubs, with less knowledge of access to school psychologists, or spaces and opportunities that allow for casual socialization during school hours—inclusive of online settings (see Figure 3). Most participants identified academic counselors and school clubs as a valued resource; yet one participant was not aware of any in-school support being offered, while another participant recommended that a health center and an academic advisor be added to her high school.

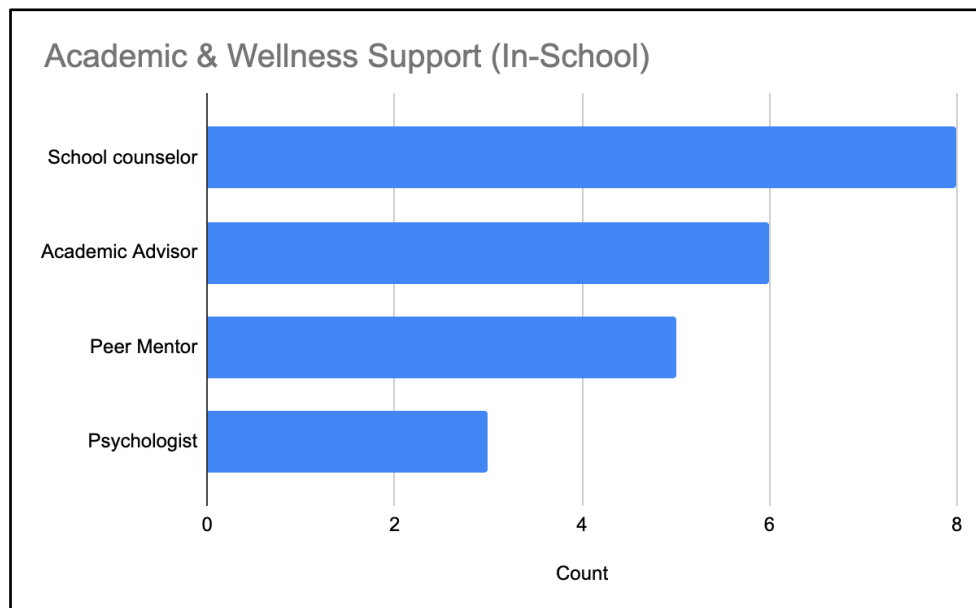


Figure 3. Academic & Wellness Support (In-School)

Although some students identified wellness support at their school site, most did not identify a school psychologist for mental health concerns. The focus for in-school adult support was largely guided by academic

related advisors and counselors.

Developing Supportive Spaces in Schools

Access to academic counselors and student participation in clubs were seen as the most helpful resources during the pandemic. In spite of the pandemic and added stress as a result of the experience, CIHSSs in this study included their academic counselors as a helpful resource to guide them through the college application process. The focus on academics may be a shift to distract students from the undue pandemic-related stress. Separately, clubs provide a structure and inclusive, safe space that welcomes students to meet and collaborate with peers under teacher supervision. In addition, clubs develop and support shared interests as well as relationship building, in spite of being under a pandemic that would often stray or limit people’s online participation. Teachers, counselors, and advisors needed to think of creative ways to reach and communicate with students, particularly seniors in the 2020-2021 academic year, who were largely remote and applying for colleges in the fall of 2020.

Table 2. Helpful Resources for Chinese International High School Students

Student Responses
None.
I guess the counselor part really helped me to find a way to apply to college.
Clubs. They give me more opportunities to make friends with other people who have the same hobbies as me.
Advisors.
Counselors have helped me the most in the college application seasons. They helped me in picking colleges as well as giving me some suggestions on my PS.
Clubs, I have a lot of time to make connections with students in [school].
Counselor, helpful for college application.

Seeking Out-of-School Education & Social Support Systems

All eight of the participants receive out-of-school academic services that include: private tutor, courses for enrichment, or taking additional extra-curricular classes during COVID. Seven continued to participate in sports and six found ways to volunteer for non-profit organizations. Additional out-of-school social connections include internet searches for answers as well as connecting with strangers online. John describes an example of online help with his computer, “people just on the internet are able to help me to solve my problems where usually I will have to go to the store– where they have to physically examine the computer”. Separately, John also describes the internet as a resource for making new connections “I’ve got Discord which is kind of like Instagram where we mostly use voice chat and where we meet new friends that I can play with online”. Online gaming was another way students passed time and interacted with people outside of school.

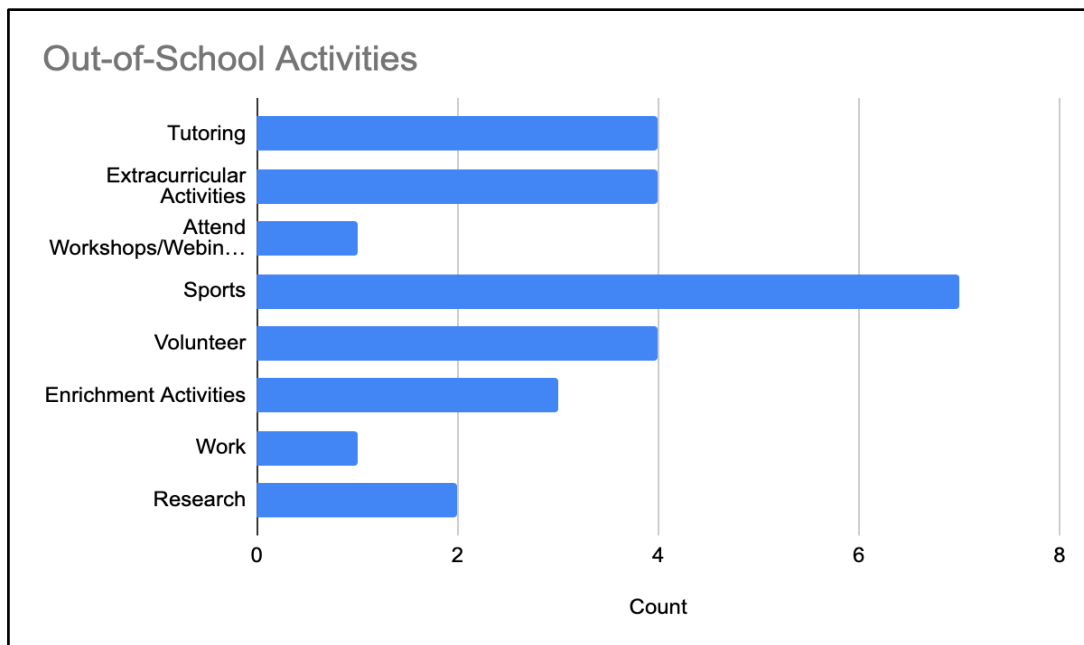


Figure 4. Out-of-School Activities

Navigating Relationships During COVID

Reflecting on COVID's Impact on Relationships

COVID impacted in-class socialization due to being online and having less communication overall--particularly with meeting new students at their schools. For new students starting in the fall of 2020, they were placed in online classes within little interaction. Some participants (see Table 1) described not being able to see friends in person or being physically distant.

Table 3. Changes in Relationships Due to COVID

Student Responses
Everything online.
Less connection with a lot of people I met before. Especially from school.
Not much, except we can't hang out together we still can use WeChat to connect.
Less physical connection.
We no longer hang out, which sometimes could be a good thing. My extra spending become less although I'd spent much less time with my friends. Covid only changed some of my relationships with others, such as classmates and teachers, but it didn't change my relationships with my close friends.
I don't have a chance to make relations in my junior year because we have online classes.
Less contact with classmates.

Importance of Peer Relations

Six of the participants described at varying levels, the limited opportunities to connect with other students during COVID (see Table 3). While schools are a primary setting for learning and delivery of content, high schools are also a space to build relations with their classmates and friends. The heavy reliance on friends during COVID was described by John as he shared the depth of having a close friendship:

One of my friends, which I met [friend], is also one of the Chinese international students... during the entire process of high school, we were able to talk to each other a lot. So throughout the process of where I got very frustrated for a specific thing, like homework or a specific event, I was able to talk to him and to express my feelings and we can share our thoughts and usually at the end, the frustrated thought of the idea was just gone...

While participants described friendships for support, there are also challenges with developing new friendships during COVID. Anson describes some of these limitations in communicating with peers during COVID:

I didn't have enough conversations with schoolmates, especially people who don't have the same class with me, so... I don't have the chance to know [them] more solidly. If someone is new to our school, even if we have the same class, I still can't [interact] with them.

To develop peer relations, spaces and opportunities need to be available to students. Anson further describes the space created by the school to support student interaction through organized clubs. His response aligns with students' responses as being the most helpful resources provided by the school (see Table 2).

The most helpful way for me to help know each other is the club's fair actually— it's a really good chance, you to know and join my clubs... and I can have more chances to talk with them. Some huge clubs, I can't come into new relationships with, and make a group chat. We also have WeChat. It is really good social media to contact with each other, it is really simple.

Peer support, friendship, and peer socialization became a central focus area for CIHSSs. Although all of the questions were open-ended, including the ways COVID changed relations with others, participants rarely described the people outside of the peer group. Further, the ways communities, such as the CIHSSs are developed, requires culturally responsive and culturally sustaining approaches to understand how CIHSSs navigate within their community. Educators can learn from the resources used to build relations that include technology.

Results indicate high rates of support at the high school level. Some students expressed communication challenges in moving remotely. Despite institutions having resources to support students, some felt the non-counselor, personal approach through mentors who shared the same first language benefited them the best. Results from this study can assist in secondary schools in developing culturally responsive support for Chinese international students. Student awareness of available resources within high schools are overwhelmingly centered on academic advisors and school counselors, while mental health resources and support were less known.

Challenges in Developing Relations

One of the challenges of online instruction as an CIHSS is meeting new people and creating authentic relationships. For returning students, they empathize with new students as they see them alone and disengaged. Part of this is due to the limited opportunities in an online space to just socialize during their online classes. Anson describes the 2020-2021 academic year, “When you come back from China and meet some new students—some of them actually already came during last year, so it's like—oh I don't have enough ways to make new relationships with new students from last year you know.” Anson points out that some of the new students joined mid-year in 2020—right at the brink of the COVID-19 pandemic and entered their second year, 2020-2021 completely online, without meeting anyone in person.

Online Challenges and Student Support

Considerations in Synchronous and Asynchronous Online Formats

A challenge as well as a consideration for secondary educators is whether synchronous attendance is required when students are overseas. Having live classes during Pacific, Central, or Eastern time zones while students are living in China raises the issue of access, wellbeing, and equity. Anson states, “I'm quite lazy. Our class time...you know, like in the morning for you, is 3 a.m. in China. I'm literally not going to join the activities and obviously for this year, I will say no.” Anson initially deflects the blame of the time difference onto himself as “lazy” rather than addressing the root of the issue of the school requirements. However, he takes the stance on his own limitations and not compromising his well-being. He asserts this position of creating boundaries of what is doable within his own terms.

John describes the limitations in being abroad during live courses:

We have a pretty large percentage of international students; however, I think the school should still improve on the understanding of the time difference. Some of the students' email that we received—most through Gmail—which is our school email. And as a student who is in China, we are not able to access Gmail. And also, I think the school should also email a secondary email, for example, my personal email.

Making small accommodations like adding a non-Gmail account for school communications is one way to provide access and equity to students who are unable to login to their Gmail account. Students may miss important information regarding class schedules/assignments, school announcements, and school-parent communication which can impact student grades. Further is the school's need to consider how synchronous classes are delivered with up to a 16-hour time difference (including daylight savings in the US) between students in China and teachers in the US.

Supporting New Students in Remote and Transitional In-Person Spaces

Another area of conversation that arose from the interviews were considerations of new students who began the

academic year during remote instruction. To this, John expressed ways to help new students:

Group chats can help the student and for example, where to find an online e-book as well as where we can do the homework, or how to submit homework directly, without making some mistakes– that would cost them a bad grade. Also, for new students, I would also suggest they reach out to those students who are older, who are like, there before them to get access to those group chats– who are able to help them.

Creating a group chat as a resource and serves as an inclusionary space to openly communicate, and connect new students to current students, is one way that students have navigated school. Social capital is developed through this collective process that bridges formal and informal communication between CIHSSs in out-of-school and in-school communication.

Identifying Students in Need

Prior to the pandemic, students were aware that social and emotional needs were a challenge for new CIHSSs. Anson describes the differences between pre-COVID and during COVID:

Most Chinese students, I saw this year, will find the rules by themselves, so schools don't have to intentionally do something to change us– but more likely to help those who don't have friends. I saw some new kid[s] before, like someone who obviously they don't have friends and eat lunch by themselves. You know [teacher] can help those kids more...you can clearly see who it is that needs much more [support] to change them, but you know some people don't have friends, so the school can provide more help or support for them.

Having social and emotional support prior to the pandemic were more physically obvious because students were visible. During the pandemic and being online however, Anson assumes that new CIHSSs can navigate the school with little support. This may be due to the fact that access is only online and there may be less stress and fear when reaching out to teachers and staff over email vs. speaking face-to-face with someone in English (Wang et al., 2017). These same stressors of communication translate into CIHSSs experiences in addressing and dealing with their social and emotional health. Anson shares his perception of the social and emotional support provided at his school:

The advisor at our school, besides the one that helps us to apply for college–the one that is checking us for our social emotional health, and they also check during online I think this is a little bit useless. Being online– we cannot really tell...what we are feeling right now and what we would like what's frustrating us right now. We can only describe through words–which sometimes can be described a lot better by using physical language. So, this is one of the most... I don't think I should call it a useless– at least, it helps me during process, but it does not work.

Separately, John describes his opinion of his own mental health and the difficulties of CIHSSs expressing their issues or feelings:

I think I'm personally psychologically healthy. Also, I think, since the percentage of students who

actually have psychological problems is lower than we expected, or this might be a misunderstanding. People who have psychological problems most likely do not want to be noticed. So, in my opinion, when they are met by those teachers, they will most likely hide their problems, so I don't think this is useful. The one who has the problems won't show it and the one that don't have the problem is just thinking it is useless... I think one of the problems is for my understanding. Americans are most likely more open, compared to some Asian countries and for me Chinese *Americans* are definitely more open. So, for us if we have a psychological problem and as a Chinese–like some of us do not believe in psychological problems, they just think that they are just sad, for that day. They do not believe in this, like the existence of psychological disease and even if they know they have this disease, they will feel very ashamed by talking about this. They think they are weird– like they are not like normal compared to others, which can cause them to be isolated by other classmates or isolating themselves from the entire student group.

John raises a few challenges that educators and administrators are grappling with in their schools with addressing the mental health needs of students in ways that are culturally sustaining. Understanding the cultural background of students and ways they express their needs and seek support may differ from US-centered approaches provided by schools (i.e., school counselor, school psychologist) and may turn towards their peers as a trusted resource. Similar findings by Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer (2016) indicate that international students in undergraduate programs seek peers with a similar cultural background as their first resource. John also distinguishes the difference between Chinese American and Chinese national perspectives on mental health for adolescent youth, which is completely remiss in comparative international secondary studies. Added to this is the stigma of seeking professional help for mental health (Betram et al., 2014). Towards the end of the interview, John states, “We usually wanted to keep [mental health and personal problems] inside our house– like keeping it inside our family, we do not want to tell anyone else.” This raises an important question–how do US private schools respond to students whose ideas and perception of mental health culturally conflict?

Discussion

This study highlights the perceived support of CIHSSs during COVID as well as sharing their challenges and insights in attending private secondary schools during remote instruction. An important area to note is the depth of knowledge within interview responses vs. the open-ended survey. The open-ended survey provided surface level, oftentimes one-line responses. Both Anson and John's survey responses were anonymously included in the results which contrast the length and content of their oral responses in the interviews. Both provided detailed, lengthy examples with little prompting. Support and outreach for Asian students, particularly those who are international students, require mental health/wellness support and services in high schools and in colleges. The following recommendations and future implications are provided based on the results of the study.

Home-School Communication

With US private school settings being the only avenue for middle and high school international students,

schools need to consider a global perspective. For international students, the home-school connection may be experienced and understood differently. Lines of communication may rely on students being open and willing to share information with family members that are oftentimes translated by students into their home language. Home-school communication should be accessible in languages that are understood by family members. Rather than dismissing language as a barrier, leverage language as a strength to communicate and create a parent network if there are other parents who share the same language. Traditional communication may not work for international families. Finding apps that are used to communicate and teachers adapting to students' needs may turn into a more positive result. Developing lines of communication between home and school is necessary for student connection, sense of belongingness and wellness (Bhatnagar & Many, 2022). An investment in developing these relationships through lines of clear and accessible paths to communicate will develop greater community.

Family Support

Surprisingly students in the study have understood support in terms of the directly connected networks between school and friends. A missing piece that is acknowledged in literature but was not mentioned by any of the participants in the survey or within the interviews was family as a source of support (He & Hutson, 2018). This study contrasts the strength of family bonds and role of social support from previous studies (Wu & Webb, 2017). Participants focused on in-school support through teachers, peers, and counselors with out-of-school support consisting of friends and group chats (friends and sometimes complete strangers). Social media for CIHSSs is a primary source of interaction, particularly during COVID. Part of this could be the developmental age of students being in their adolescence that have a heavier reliance on peers for social support.

Aligning Culturally Responsive Mental Health Frameworks

During a period of rising Asian youth self-reports of poorer emotional and cognitive health during the pandemic, it is imperative that CIHSSs are aware of how to access school psychologists and other mental wellness resources (Margolius et al., 2020). Current mental health frameworks need to be adapted to culturally reflect the population being served along with service providers with similar cultural knowledge. Having instructors with cultural competency of language is limited. Further, cultural conflicts with the types of offerings and communication may be a factor in connecting with students and reaching them (Litam, 2020).

On-site Student Emotional Support

Having student supports available vs. actual usage of student supports are two separate areas of concern. School sites may offer a host of wellness services to students that are not known to them. Schools need to provide transparent and accessible information that reaches students in ways that are warm and inviting and remove the stigma of mental health services. Separately, student support may take shape through social activities that are structured through school clubs and school hosted events. These offer time and space for students to develop relations with students, students, and adults, guided by mentorship.

School administrators and teachers should check-in with international students and ensure they are able to access available resources tied to social emotional well-being. The high school students in the study rely on a system of support--whether it is provided by the institution or found elsewhere in extra-curricular activities or self-created in group chats. Therefore, having a system in place can alleviate the anxiety and feelings associated with shifting cultures, languages, and climate. This raises a need for private schools hosting CIHSSs in seeking ways to include them in conversations of student support rather than assuming traditional schooling communication methods are accessible. Fostering CIHSS agency through student-initiated and student-led activities through clubs and activities for associated student body and other leadership opportunities is a starting point. An advantage of private schooling is the autonomy within the decision make process. Bringing in student voice in an advisory capacity for what works best for each school site can create a positive learning environment for CIHSSs.

Considerations for Instructional Practices

CIHSSs in this study raise an area of concern with instructional practices. Clear communication of alternative methods for delivering content as well as demonstrating content mastery is needed. The challenge is in synchronous attendance with time differences that disrupt effective learning. Practices such as shortened recordings of live sessions or lectures, asynchronous discussion boards, shortening the length of live sessions for office hours and flipped teaching during times that are amenable for US and China-based students can allow for more efficiency in synchronous time. Being creative rather than sticking with the current schedule out of convenience and accountability for teacher time withdraws the additional efforts teachers are making in online instruction and professional development.

Student interviews did not provide a description or mention of teacher-student relationship building, school climate, or effective teaching practices. Exploration of what works within a specific population is needed, particularly from the perspective of students. Teachers perspectives of their intentional practices are often highlighted in the literature during COVID to promote a positive climate and how they build trust and empathize with students (Bhatnagar & Many, 2022). Yet the way students receive these messages and internalize the teacher-student communication may contrast the initial intention.

Rethinking Private School Standards

While private schools have the ability to create and define their own principles for learning and expectations, consideration of developing national accreditation standards that address the diversity and cultural context of international students can guide schools in supporting all students. Further, private schools should have standards for teacher expectations and professional development to support students. Although teaching credentials are often not required in private school settings, some level of certification should be required that includes cultural competency, international education, or diversity, equity, and inclusion, to provide private school teachers perspective. Accrediting bodies should not only consider evidence of student learning in content areas, but also areas that address middle and high school international students' needs--as they can only attend

private schools. Should schools hosting international students be required to have a translator on site to communicate with parents/guardians? How are non-credentialed teachers being properly trained to teach international students and avoid student biases? These some of the questions that arise as private schools are autonomous and at the same time responsible for the well-being of overseas adolescent students. Additional consideration is how the private school responsibilities carry over into CIHSS pathways and experiences into US colleges and universities.

Closing Remarks

As private school educators consider the challenges faced during COVID with accessing students and families remotely, it raises a critical issue of equity and access in private education. Moreover, within the attempts to foster trust and motivation in the classroom, student perspectives are needed to fully understand how these best practices support CIHSSs or if they are causing unintentional harm. Researchers interested in seeing the broader scope of SEL through large-scale assessments are not able fully capture the disparity between how international students respond to Likert-scaled items about well-being and how students actually feel. Additionally, is the context surrounding student responses through interviews which offers greater insight to inform and shape policies and practices for international students within private education. Future research should examine private K-12 institutions hosting international students and finding ways institutions develop CIHSSs' agency to transition successfully into higher education spaces.

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