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Undergraduates' Awareness and Perceptions of Globalization:
A Comparison of U.S. and Chinese Students

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Abstract

Assessing current awareness of and attitudes toward predominant globalization processes among undergraduate students is helpful for future course design, particularly courses about globalization or those with substantial globalization components. Such assessments also provide research opportunities for understanding changing levels of awareness and attitudes among undergraduate students over time. This paper reports research about the knowledge and perceptions of globalization concepts and trends among undergraduate students. The analysis compares findings among U.S. undergraduates at a Midwestern university (Midwest U.) with those among Chinese undergraduates at a university (China U.) in an east-central province of the country. Findings from two years of research (i.e., 2012 and 2013) are reported.

Keywords: Globalization; Undergraduate

Introduction

Assessing current awareness of and attitudes toward predominant globalization processes among undergraduate students is helpful for future course design, particularly courses about globalization or those with substantial globalization components. Such assessments also provide research opportunities for understanding changing levels of awareness and attitudes among undergraduate students through time. In this study, Steger's (2009) globalization dimensions are used to organize findings. In addition, Scholte's (2005) concept of deterritorialization as the definitively new characteristic of longstanding conceptualizations about trends and processes commonly grouped as types of globalization is used in presenting findings.¹ In a later work, Scholte (2010) defines his conceptualization of globalization as the growth in transplanetary social connectivity.

Methods

During the spring 2012 and 2013 semesters, face-to-face *Introduction to Sociology* students at Midwest U. were invited to participate in a voluntary, in-class, self-complete survey. Students in these courses are overwhelmingly traditional-age college students. Response rate to the survey exceeded 90% based on known class enrollment sizes. At Midwest U., 101 students participated in 2012 and 104 in 2013. The cover letter and instrument were translated into Chinese for purposes of self-complete, voluntary participation at Chinese U. At Chinese U., response rates neared 100%, yielding 152 Chinese U. students participating in 2012 and 113 participating in 2013. The Chinese student sample comprised traditional-age college students. Administration of the survey to Midwest U. students occurred about five weeks into the spring semester, while administration at Chinese U. occurred during the second week of its spring semester.

Sample Characteristics

While academic majors across the U.S. samples varied significantly (not shown), 25% in 2012 and 15% in 2013 were nursing students, which is higher than the representation of these majors in the total student population at Midwest U. All students in the Chinese sample were in the same major in 2012 (i.e.,

¹ The authors thank fellow 2012 Midwest Sociological Society Annual Meeting workshop presenter Paige Miller for her suggestion to use and her summary of Scholte's (2005) schema.

business English). In 2013, most Chinese U. students (83%) were majoring in finance, with the remaining 17% majoring in international trade. Among Midwest U. students, a notably higher percentage (45%) reported having traveled to a foreign country in 2013 compared to 2012 (26%). Also, at Midwest U., there were notably higher percentages of students in 2013 who would have either considered a job in another country or liked to take a job in another country compared to 2012. There was a notably higher percentage of males in the Chinese sample in 2013 (58%) than in 2012 (20%). Other background characteristics of the two samples in both years are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Characteristics of Samples

		Midwest U. Students		China U. Students	
		2012 (N=101) %	2013 (N=104) %	2012 (n=152) %	2013 (N=113) %
Ever taken college course discussing rapidly increased global connectedness of countries?	Yes	24.2	16.2	9.7	3.0
	No	75.8	83.8	90.3	97.0
Ever traveled to a foreign country?	Yes	26.0	44.7	6.6	5.5
	No	74.0	55.3	93.4	94.5
Parents or other close family members ever lived in another country	Yes	31.0	35.3	22.4	27.4
	No	69.0	64.7	77.6	72.6
Which best describes your own interest in working in another country?	I Have No Interest in Taking a Job in Another Country	47.3	30.1	9.6	18.4
	I Would Consider a Job in Another Country	41.9	49.5	35.3	53.1
	I Would Like to Take a Job in Another Country at Some Time in My Career	10.8	20.4	55.1	28.6
Gender	Male	35.6	35.9	19.7	57.5
	Female	64.4	64.1	80.3	42.5

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College classification	Freshman	37.6	35.0	3.9	2.7
	Sophomore	38.6	45.6	94.1	93.8
	Junior	17.8	11.7	0	2.7
	Senior	5.9	7.8	2.0	0.9

Note: Differences of 10% or greater in response between survey years are highlighted in yellow.

Awareness of and Attitudes toward Common Conceptions of Globalization

Awareness of Common Meanings of the Term

Students were asked to respond to a number of common conceptualizations of globalization on a metric measuring the extent to which they agreed with the introductory statement, “I believe ‘globalization’ includes....”

Table 2

Awareness of Common “Globalization” Meanings

“I believe ‘globalization’ includes:”		Midwest U. Students		China U. Students	
		2012 (N=101) %	2013 (N=104) %	2012 (N=152) %	2013 (N=113) %
1a. Increased trade between countries.	Strongly Agree	26	36.5	72.4	59.3
	Agree	64	56.7	26.3	38.9
	Disagree	2	1.9	1.3	0
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.0	0	1
	Not Something I Think Of	7	3.8	0	1
1b. Increased cultural transmissions between countries.	Strongly Agree	26	29.8	59.9	54.0
	Agree	59	49.0	37.5	39.8
	Disagree	5	8.7	2	3.5
	Strongly Disagree	1	1.0	0	.9
	Not Something I Think Of	9	11.5	0.7	1.8
1c. Increased communication between people	Strongly Agree	43.4	39.4	61.2	49.6
	Agree	48.5	51.9	35.5	44.2
	Disagree	3	3.8	2	3.5

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and groups across national borders.	Strongly Disagree	1	1.0	0.7	.9
	Not Something I Think Of	4	3.8	0.7	1.8
1d. Growing networks of people who join organizations for a common purpose (for example, Greenpeace, Amnesty International, etc.).	Strongly Agree	33	33.7	48	32.7
	Agree	52	49.0	45.4	46.9
	Disagree	6	3.8	4.6	10.6
	Strongly Disagree	0	1.0	0.7	1.8
	Not Something I Think Of	9	12.5	1.3	8
1e. Increased human-caused change to the environment that is cross-border or not specific to just one country.	Strongly Agree	21	23.1	34.9	27.4
	Agree	56	51.9	47.4	39.8
	Disagree	8	8.7	11.2	17.7
	Strongly Disagree	3	1.9	0.7	4.4
	Not Something I Think Of	12	14.5	5.9	10.6

Note: Differences of 10% or greater in response between survey years are highlighted in yellow.

Results reported in Table 2 show that among Midwest U. students, there was high awareness in general when measured by the combined percentages who selected “Strongly agree” or “Agree.” In comparing Midwest U. to Chinese U. students, three patterned differences in responses emerged. With the exception of “I believe globalization includes growing networks of people who join organizations for a common purpose” in the 2013 survey year, higher percentages of Chinese U. students chose “Strongly agree.” Combined strong agreement and agreement was higher among the Chinese U. students. The response “Not something I think of” occurred more frequently among Midwest U. students. However, the gap in awareness between students of the two countries declined from 2012 to 2013 due to lower percentages of Chinese U. students strongly agreeing or agreeing in 2013 compared to 2012.

Steger (2009) argues that globalization is a process. He outlines four dimensions of globalization processes: economic, political, ecological, and

cultural. Below, these four dimensions are used to organize the results of this survey (see Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6).

Economic Dimensions

Table 3

Economic Dimensions Awareness and Attitudes

Awareness items		Midwest U. Students		China U. Students	
		2012 (N=101)	2013 (N=104)	2012 (N=152)	2013 (N=113)
		%	%	%	%
2. China and India are widely considered the two developing countries whose national economies have grown the most by international trade during the last 20 years or so.	Strongly Agree	18.8	23.1	17.1	11.5
	Agree	60.4	59.6	46.7	54.9
	Disagree	2.0	3.8	20.4	12.4
	Strongly Disagree	0	0	1.3	2.7
	Don't Know	18.8	13.5	14.5	18.6
3. In developing countries (like Brazil and India) whose economies have grown substantially from selling goods to developed countries (like the U.S.A. and Germany) for the past 20 or so years, there has also been dramatic increase in income inequality among citizens within these developing countries.	Strongly Agree	11.9	15.4	35.5	29.2
	Agree	45.5	47.1	48	49.6
	Disagree	10.9	9.6	9.2	14.2
	Strongly Disagree	0	1.0	0.7	1.8
	Don't Know	31.7	26.9	6.6	5.3
4. With increased international trade between countries, the quality of life improves for the majority of citizens in the trading countries. [disagreement shows higher awareness, (Steger, 2009, p. 69)]	Strongly Agree	5.9	10.6	19.9	15.9
	Agree	65.3	60.6	52.3	46.0
	Disagree	19.8	15.4	19.2	22.1
	Strongly Disagree	1	2.9	5.3	5.3
	Don't Know	7.9	10.6	3.3	10.6
6a. On a world-wide scale in the 21st Century, increasing income inequality within countries is occurring.	Strongly Agree	14	16.3	52	48.7
	Agree	52	51.0	44.7	33.6
	Disagree	13	8.7	1.3	8.0
	Strongly Disagree	1	0	0	.9
	Don't Know	20	24	2	8.8

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	Disagree Don't Know				
Attitude item					
6b. [IF STRONGLY AGREE OR AGREE ON 6a.] Increases in economic inequality within countries is a major social problem.	Strongly	23.9	23.9	61	50.5
	Agree	56.3	57.7	34.9	34.4
	Agree	14.1	11.3	3.4	6.5
	Disagree	2.8	1.4	0	1.1
	Strongly	2.8	5.6	0.7	7.5
	Disagree Don't Know				

Note: Differences of 10% or greater in response between survey years are highlighted in yellow.

The first item in Table 3 suggests that Chinese U. students are less aware that their own country and India are widely considered the two developing countries whose national economies have grown the most as a result of international trade (see Steger, 2009, p. 135) during the last 20 years; however, a higher percentage of Midwest U. students answered “Don’t know.” Chinese U. students expressed more agreement with every other item in the table. Notably lower percentages of Midwest U. students realized that developing countries whose economies have grown substantially over the past 20 years have also experienced dramatic increases in internal income inequality (see Steger, 2009, pp.135-138); however, among the Midwest U. students, 12% more in 2013 strongly agreed or agreed that this has occurred. Chinese U. students were more aware of the increasing inequality on a worldwide scale in the 21st century. Further, Chinese students who strongly agreed or agreed that this is occurring tended to express higher agreement that this increasing income inequality is a major social problem; yet, 10% fewer Chinese U. students strongly agreed with this in 2013 compared to 2012. There was a tendency across the awareness items in Table 3 for a higher percentage of “Don’t know” response among Midwest U. students compared to Chinese U. students, but the percentage of Chinese students who answered “Don’t know” in 2013 was higher on every item compared to 2012.

Political Dimensions

Table 4

Political Dimensions Beliefs and Attitudes

Belief items		Midwest U. Students		China U. Students	
		2012 (N=101) %	2013 (N=104) %	2012 (N=152) %	2013 (N=113) %
14. In producing goods and services businesses have come to rely so much on the ability to obtain resources from around the world that governments are unable to implement policy that will hamper international business dealings.	Strongly Agree	3	4.8	4	4.4
	Agree	34.7	51.0	9.9	32.7
	Disagree	29.7	14.4	63.6	39.8
	Strongly Disagree	3	4.8	13.2	15.0
	Don't Know	29.7	25	9.3	8
17. In my lifetime, being a world citizen will become more important than being a citizen of a country.	Strongly Agree	6.9	13.5	26.3	16.8
	Agree	18.8	33.7	38.2	25.7
	Disagree	44.6	21.2	22.4	26.5
	Strongly Disagree	14.9	10.6	7.9	18.6
	Don't Know	14.9	21.2	5.3	12.4
Attitude items					
11. International cooperation through organizations like the United Nations is something that I hope increases during my lifetime.	Strongly Agree	19.8	19.2	26.3	26.5
	Agree	49.5	48.1	59.9	49.6
	Disagree	5	5.8	8.6	12.4
	Strongly Disagree	3	2.9	0.7	2.7
	Don't Know	22.8	24	4.6	8.8
12. It is good to have worldwide nonprofit organizations aimed at meeting needs of citizens regardless of country borders.	Strongly Agree	29.7	34.6	48.7	39.8
	Agree	53.5	50.0	38.2	38.1
	Disagree	3	3.8	7.9	14.2
	Strongly Disagree	3	1.9	0	.9
	Don't Know	10.9	9.6	5.3	7.1
13. In producing goods and	Strongly	5	3.8	8.6	13.3

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services businesses have come to rely so much on the ability to obtain resources from around the world that governments should not implement policy that will hamper international business dealings.	Agree	49.5	34.6	24.3	19.5
	Agree	14.9	25.0	51.3	45.1
	Disagree	3	3.8	11.2	13.3
	Strongly Disagree	27.7	32.7	4.6	8.8
	Don't Know				
16. Citizens in developing countries have a right to expect improved quality of life for the majority of citizens the more their government allows foreign companies to do business in the country.	Strongly Agree	16	16.3	9.9	10.6
	Agree	52	51.0	40.4	39.8
	Agree	15	16.3	30.5	29.2
	Disagree	1	1.9	4	3.5
	Strongly Disagree	16	14.4	15.2	16.8
	Don't Know				

Note: Differences of 10% or greater in response between survey years are highlighted in yellow.

Among both Midwest U. and Chinese U. students, majorities agreed that they would like to see international cooperation increase during their lifetimes and that it is good to have worldwide nonprofit organizations aimed at meeting the needs of citizens regardless of country borders.

In 2012 a majority and a much larger percentage of Chinese U. students expressed agreement that in their lifetimes, being a world citizen will become more important than being a citizen of a country. This changed in 2013, with fewer than half (43%) of the Chinese U. students strongly agreeing or agreeing, and nearly half (47%) of Midwest U. students strongly agreeing or agreeing with this statement. This is a marked change among students in each country when compared to 2012 results, suggesting a convergence between Midwest U. and Chinese U. students in this belief.

Compared to Midwest U. students, Chinese U. students expressed much less agreement with the belief that “businesses have come to rely so much on the ability to obtain resources from around the world that governments are **unable to implement policy** that will hamper international business dealings.” Interestingly, the percentage of both Midwest U. and Chinese U. students who agreed with this statement increased and the percentage who disagreed decreased between 2012 and 2013. Compared to Chinese U. students, Midwest U. students

in 2013 still expressed slightly more agreement with the belief that “governments **should not implement**” such policy, but the distribution among Midwest U. students on this item moved more toward the Chinese U. students between 2012 and 2013.

In both 2012 and 2013, a majority of and a larger percentage of Midwest U. students expressed agreement that “citizens in developing countries have a right to expect improved quality of life for the majority of citizens the more the citizens’ governments allows foreign companies to do business in their country.”

Across these political dimensions of globalization items in Table 4, there is a higher percentage of “Don’t know” responses among Midwest U. students.

Ecological Dimensions

Table 5

Ecological Awareness and Attitudes

Awareness item		Midwest U. Students		China U. Students	
		2012 (N=101) %	2013 (N=104) %	2012 (N=152) %	2013 (N=113) %
5a. On a world-wide scale in the 21st Century, global climate change from human activities is occurring.	Strongly Agree	15.0	18.3	62.7	64.6
	Agree	57.0	56.7	34.7	28.3
	Disagree	13.0	10.6	2	3.5
	Strongly Disagree	2.0	1.0	0	0
	Don't Know	13.0	13.5	0.7	3.5
Attitude item					
5b [IF STRONGLY AGREE OR AGREE ON 5a.] Such world-wide global climate change is a major social problem.	Strongly Agree	14.9	18.5	82.4	72.4
	Agree	47.3	54.3	16.9	20.0
	Disagree	25.7	22.2	0	5.7
	Strongly Disagree	4.1	1.2	0	1.0
	Don't Know	8.1	3.7	0.7	1.0

Note: Differences of 10% or greater in response between survey years are highlighted in yellow.

Results reported in Table 5 show that Chinese U. students expressed extremely high levels of awareness that “global climate change from human activities is occurring,” with combined percentages who “Strongly agree” or “Agree” nearing 100% in both 2012 and 2013. A majority of Midwest U. students also at least agreed with the statement in 2012 (72%) and in 2013 (75%); however, the percentage of Midwest U. students that strongly agreed was far lower in both years than among the Chinese U. students. Attitudes about whether “such ... climate change is a major social problem” were also markedly different, with nearly 100% of Chinese U. students at least agreeing in 2012 and 92% in 2013, compared to only 62% of Midwest U. students at least agreeing in 2012 and 73% in 2013.

Cultural Dimensions

Table 6

Cultural Attitudes

Attitude item		Midwest U. Students		China U. Students	
		2012 (N=101)	2013 (N=104)	2012 (N=152)	2013 (N=113)
		%	%	%	%
8. I would prefer to see cultural boundaries between countries (which limit flows of values, beliefs, ideas, and preferences) reduced in my lifetime.	Strongly Agree	11.9	10.6	28.5	20.4
	Agree	22.8	26.9	31.1	30.1
	Disagree	38.6	44.2	30.5	33.6
	Strongly Disagree	14.9	8.7	7.3	11.5
	Don't Know	11.9	9.6	2.6	4.5

Chinese U. students were more interested in seeing cultural boundaries between countries reduced in their lifetimes, with a majority (60%) agreeing with the statement, while only 35% of Midwest U. students agreed. However, the percentage of Chinese U. students at least agreeing declined by approximately 9% from 2012 to 2013.

Deterritorialization

Scholte (2005) suggests that deterritorialization or supraterritorialization is the distinctive defining characteristic of modern globalization (also see footnote 1). Several items on the survey are reasonable measures of this concept. All of the items are reported in various tables above: 1c, 1d, 1e, 11, 12, and 17. Items 1c, 1d, and 1e show very high agreement among both types of students in meanings of “globalization,” suggesting that the concept at least has a supraterritorial aspect. Chinese U. students consistently demonstrated higher “Strongly agree” levels, though the difference between Chinese U. students and Midwest U. students declined from 2012 to 2013. Responses to items 11 and 12 suggest that strong majorities of both types of students hope to see increased international cooperation and appreciate the presence of worldwide nonprofits that address social needs. In 2012, Chinese U. students expressed far higher agreement (65%) than Midwest U. students with the belief that being a world citizen will become more important than being a citizen of a particular country during their lifetimes; only 26% of Midwest U. students in 2012 agreed with this belief. This changed in 2013, with less than half (43%) of the Chinese U. students strongly agreeing or agreeing, and close to half (47%) of Midwest U. students strongly agreeing or agreeing with this statement. Again, this is a marked change among students in each sample, suggesting a potential convergence in belief between Midwest U. and Chinese U. students.

Summary

In this study, Chinese U. students had a higher preference for and expectation to live and work in a foreign country. They demonstrated high awareness of the common conceptualizations of globalization, and their awareness was higher than Midwest U. student awareness. Chinese U. students were more aware of economic processes of globalization, particularly patterns of increased wealth inequality in developing countries that have experienced substantial economic growth in the past 20 years. They were also much more

likely than Midwest U. student to strongly agree that increasing inequality is a major social problem. Chinese U. students were more likely to see government intervention in international business dealings as feasible, and they were much more likely to disagree that such intervention is inappropriate. Chinese U. students were far more aware that global climate change from human activities is occurring, and among those who agreed or strongly agreed compared to Midwest U. students who agreed or strongly agreed, Chinese U. students expressed much higher agreement that such climate change is a major social problem. Finally, majorities of both Chinese U. and Midwest U. students expressed a preference that cultural boundaries between countries be reduced during their lifetimes and that it is good to have worldwide nonprofit organizations aimed at meeting needs of citizens regardless of country borders. The differences between Chinese U. students and Midwest U. students on most of these items narrowed between 2012 and 2013. Most often this was due to a tendency for less agreement among Chinese U. students in 2013 compared to 2012. However, on some items the narrowing gap is due also to Midwest U. student response distribution moving toward Chinese U. distributions. On one item (6a shown in Table 4) the narrowing is only due to the Midwest U. student distribution moving toward the Chinese U. student distribution.

Limitations

This study relies primarily on convenience samples at only two universities, one in the United States and one in China. Drawing generalizations from either sample to larger categories of similar students at a nation level would be inappropriate. With respect to college major and classification, these samples are not even representative of the university student populations from which they are drawn. The Midwest U. student sample is more representative with respect to the distribution of majors among its university's student population, as the questionnaire was administered anonymously in a popular general education course, *Introduction to Sociology*. Yet, because it was administered in this way at Midwest U., the sample has higher preponderance of freshman and sophomores than in the full population of students. The Chinese U. students are tracked into particular course sections by declared major, which explains the non-variance in college major within the Chinese U. sample. The Chinese students' major in 2012, business English, is one with a transnational application, which is likely a product (at least in part) of a preexisting orientation among these students toward

transnational working and living situations. In 2013, most Chinese U. students (83%) were majoring in finance, with the remaining 17% majoring in international trade. This may explain the lower levels of agreement in the Chinese U. students in 2013, as compared to 2012. The 2013 Chinese U. sample may be somewhat less transnationally oriented to the extent that self-selection into the finance major occurred. Chinese U. students are also matriculated through curricula in a more regimented fashion as a cohort, which explains why the vast majority of them are classified as sophomores.

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Author Biographies



Dr. Brett Zollinger is Professor of Sociology and Chair of Sociology and Social Work at Fort Hays State University. He also serves the Docking Institute of Public Affairs at FHSU as a Senior Policy Fellow, and is the past Director of the Institute. He teaches *Sociological Theory, Methods of Social Research, Survey and Field Research, Applied Sociology, and Introduction to Sociology*. Brett's work has been nationally recognized. He received the Rural Sociological Society's Dissertation Award in 1997. He has published in the journals: *Rural Sociology, Journal of the Community Development Society, Research in Community Sociology, Economic Development Quarterly, Complimentary Health Practice Review*, and the *Online Journal of Rural Research and Policy*. He also has a book chapter in the edited book, *Mad about Wildlife*.



Mr. Fu Runfeng is an instructor at SIAS International University located in Henan province China. He earned his Master's degree with a concentration in Social Entrepreneurship at Fort Hays State University. FHSU has a partnership with Sias International University in China, and Fu Runfeng teaches in that international program. With the support of Dr. Keith Campbell from the Department of Sociology and Social Work at FHSU, Fu introduced the course "*Social Entrepreneurship*" to Chinese students at Sias in 2011, and he became one of the first teachers of social entrepreneurship in China. He believes that the third sector or grass-root NPOs will boom in China shortly, and NGOs will become a driving force for the social development of China. He teaches other courses at SIAS, which include *Cultural Anthropology, Global Forces in a Changing World*, and *Sustainability and the Future*.



Dr. Keith Campbell is Professor of Sociology at Fort Hays State University. He has traveled to China 22 times since 1999, when he began assisting with course delivery at SIAS University in Xinzheng, China. Keith's primary areas of study are global change, cultural diversity, and social entrepreneurship.