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Comparing Aging Anxiety among American and Chinese Young People

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ABSTRACT

Population aging is a global issue. For example, the United States has joined many countries in the “aging society” category as 15.2% of its population are 65 years old and over (United States Census Bureau 2017). Similarly, China has the fastest growing aging population with almost 100 million people aged 65 and over (The World Bank 2018). Like many aging societies, the US and China are facing a multitude of challenges in trying to take care of their older adults. It is important to examine aging anxiety because it affects people’s attitudes toward aging and older adults. A higher level of aging anxiety is related to more negative attitudes toward older population. Likewise, a reduced level of aging anxiety is correlated to more positive aging attitudes. The current study compared aging anxiety among college students in the United States ($N = 346$, M age = 19.47) and China ($N = 551$, M age = 20.23). The Chinese sample has two sub-groups, one from an economically well-developed coastal city ($N = 434$) and the other from a less developed area in Guangxi Province ($N = 117$). Overall, the Chinese participants showed a significantly higher degree of anxiety about aging than the American participants, indicating differences in how aging is viewed in each culture. Between the two Chinese samples, there are significant aging anxiety differences in the social and psychological aspects of aging, and anxiety about aging parents, suggesting that socioeconomic and other environmental factors also affect perception of aging.

Keywords: elderly; population; students; cultural; values.