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Influence of Cultural and Socioeconomic Factors in American and Chinese College Students' Perceptions of Aging

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Abstract

Population aging is a global phenomenon (Ghimire, 2019). The United States and China have both reached the “aged society” status and are facing countless challenges in their efforts to help their older citizens achieve physical and psychological well-being. The traditional cultural hypothesis suggests that Asians value old age and older adults more than the individualistic Westerners, and therefore hold more positive perceptions of aging. The modernization theory of aging posits that modernization affects the status of older adults in society. New technology and formal education render the aging sagacity less relevant, reducing dependence on older adults’ wisdom. Therefore, within the same culture the higher SES population holds less positive attitudes toward aging and older adults than lower SES people. The current study sought to test both the cultural value and socioeconomic hypotheses by examining American and Chinese college students’ perceptions of aging. Three groups of college students were included: 346 Americans and 551 Chinese (higher and lower SES). Attitudes toward aging and aging anxiety were examined. Results show the American students hold more positive attitudes toward aging than the Chinese and have lower aging anxiety than the Chinese, not supporting the traditional cultural hypothesis. Between the two Chinese groups, the higher SES tier show more positive aging attitudes than the lower SES tier and less aging anxiety, not supporting the modernization theory of aging. The implications of these findings will be discussed in this presentation.

Keywords: Value Perspective; East-West Comparison; Aging Attitudes; Aging Anxiety; Within the Culture