

**The Self-Care Experiences of Chinese Music Therapy Graduate Students
in the United States: A Thematic Analysis**

by

Huan Ou

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THE SELF-CARE EXPERIENCES OF CHINESE MUSIC THERAPY
GRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Huan Ou

State University of New York at New Paltz

We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the
Master of Science degree, hereby recommend
acceptance of this thesis.

Kathleen M. Murphy, PhD, LCAT, MT-BC, Thesis Advisor
Music Therapy Program, Department of Music, SUNY New Paltz

Cecilia E. Burns, MMT, MT-BC, Thesis Committee Member
Music Therapy Program, Department of Music, SUNY New Paltz

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Science degree
in Music Therapy
at the State University of New York at New Paltz

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Abstract

This research aimed to explore the self-care experiences and emotions of Chinese graduate students studying music therapy in the United States. Through thematic analysis of interviews, the researcher identified various benefits associated with self-care. Participants reported a sense of pleasure, release, and venting during the self-care process, as well as feelings of support and vitality. Moreover, some participants were motivated to further develop their own self-care strategies through the interview process. The research also highlighted the stress and challenges faced by these students, including academic pressures, internships/fieldwork, and cultural and language barriers. The findings clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of self-care as a coping strategy, which can take diverse forms based on individual preferences. Engaging in self-care activities facilitated self-awareness, catharsis, and a sense of calm and support. Furthermore, participants found that practicing self-care enabled them to differentiate between their personal and clinical lives, allowing them to focus more effectively on their clinical responsibilities. Self-care also played a significant role in fostering personal identity and breaking cultural barriers, providing opportunities for self-reflection, personal growth, and progress. Recognizing international music therapy students as valuable assets to the profession, it is essential for the field to become more aware of their challenges and implement the research's recommendations for practical improvements. Collaboration and mutual understanding among international students, educators, supervisors, and administrators are crucial to achieving this goal. Overall, this study emphasizes the importance of self-care as a valuable tool for Chinese graduate students studying music

therapy in the United States, enabling them to navigate the challenges of their academic and personal journeys while promoting overall well-being and professional development.

Keywords: music therapy, self-care, international graduate students

The Self-Care Experiences of Chinese Music Therapy Graduate Students in the United States

As soon as I stepped foot on American land and visited the school where I would be studying music therapy, I became aware of how vastly different and clashing the cultures of the West and the East are. International students face different levels of multidimensional stresses and challenges in a foreign country. Music therapy is a helping profession. Music therapy students should therefore be skilled in self-care techniques and strategies. I have personally helped myself through the most difficult and helpless times by scheduling and processing self-care experiences. This is the impetus for the present study. I want to examine the experiences of fellow music therapy students in the United States who have used self-care to help themselves.

I am also inspired by the writings of Kim (2008) who points out:

Within Eastern culture, one's relationship to others or the community is considered important, whereas within Western culture, one's autonomy is highly valued. Culture shapes much of our experiences of others, and greatly affects our norms and expectations with regard to interpersonal behavior. (p. 1)

In this context of great cultural conflict, the self-care and adjustment of international students in music therapy is particularly important. We assume multiple identities as students, intercultural music therapists, foreigners, and interracial people. I am choosing to study the self-care strategies of Chinese music therapy students studying in the United States given the similarities in our cultural heritage.

Literature Review

The United States has attracted and welcomed a significant number of international students from many different parts of the world over the last several decades (Sandhu, 1995; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Students have varied purposes for studying abroad, including the opportunity to 1) discover different cultures, 2) learn new ways of thinking and behaving, 3) meet new people, and 4) improve cross-cultural understanding and expertise (Sherry et al., 2010).

Stress and Anxiety among International Graduate Students

International graduate students report coping with feelings of social isolation and stress, such as uncertainty and feeling overwhelmed about the program and its requirements, as well as miscommunication and confusion with their advisors (Ali & Kohun, 2006). Ali and Kohun (2006) also noticed the sense of confusion and stress starts when students begin to inquire or review brochures about master's programs because the handbooks and materials do not provide specific requirements about what needs to be done to complete the degree. Further, the process of obtaining a master's degree differs from the process of obtaining a bachelor's degree. Therefore, students are subjected to various intellectual and psychological demands.

In addition, international students inevitably face a range of adjustment stress due to acculturation (Kim, 2011). Reynolds and Constantine (2007) found that international students with higher levels of acculturative distress had lower levels of career outcome expectations. Further, Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994), perceived discrimination, homesickness, fear, guilt, perceived hatred, and stress due to change (culture shock) are the main factors that increase

the likelihood that international students will experience acculturative stress. International graduate students are found to have difficulty maintaining and building new relationships, creating a professional identity, and managing their socialization functions as they move into new roles (Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Lee, 2009).

Previous research suggests that international students may encounter many challenges due to language and cultural barriers, interpersonal issues, lack of social support, academic and financial difficulties, racial discrimination, alienation, and homesickness (Anandavalli et al., 2021; Yeh & Inose, 2003). International students also tend to feel very isolated in the new environment (Sherry et al., 2010). These stresses can affect students' mental and psychological health, especially if they lack resources or support systems and can have long-term effects on their professional careers (Reynolds & Constantine, 2007).

Gao et al. (2022) indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant negative impact on the wellness of international students, particularly their mental health and social support. Participants in this research study included 405 international undergraduate and graduate students from 65 different countries who were enrolled at a sizable public university. Through Qualtrics, a voluntary, anonymous online survey with 50 quantitative and qualitative questions was performed. The data analysis methods used were descriptive and frequency analyses. The majority of participants reported experiencing negative emotions, including anxiety, stress, and sadness, due to the pandemic. Many also reported feeling isolated and disconnected from their social support systems, both on and off-campus. In addition, this study also found that the pandemic had a significant impact on the academic experiences of international students, including disruptions to their academic plans and difficulties with

accessing resources and technology necessary for their studies. This, in turn, contributed to further stress and anxiety for the students (Gao et al., 2022).

Stress and Anxiety among Mental-health Professional International Students

English fluency and ethnicity have always been identified as important predictors of adjustment stress for international students (Kim, 2011). Certain fields of study or majors may pose additional challenges in terms of stress. For instance, gaining the ability to be successful in professions such as music therapy, psychology, social work, and education may require more complex language skills and cultural understanding than other fields (Hudson & O'Regan, 1994). These disciplines described above often require more interpersonal interaction than other majors such as computer science, math, chemistry, and finance (Dzlegielewski et al., 2004; Polson & Nida, 1998).

Woo et al. (2015) suggested international students in counselor education face a variety of challenges during supervision training. Language barriers were a common challenge, as some students struggled to communicate effectively with their supervisors and peers. Additionally, cultural differences and power dynamics between the students and their supervisors or clients were also identified as challenges. Chun & Poole (2009) found that Korean social work students experienced various stressors, including cultural differences, language barriers, financial difficulties, academic pressure, and social isolation. However, since that time, little research has been focused on the adjustment problems of international students, despite the development and demand for culturally acceptable methods in graduate college/university education (Chun & Poole, 2009).

The specific degree requirements for music therapy may be particularly demanding for international students (Kim, 2011). For example, clinical experiences demand that students be proficient in English, learn and be able to perform music appropriately for the U.S. population, and to understand the cultural background of their U.S. clients. In addition, international music therapy students may be under pressure to improve their musical skills on piano, guitar, and other non-pitched percussion instruments (Sternbach, 2008).

Swamy (2011) described the experience of a music therapy student working with clients from different cultural backgrounds. Music Therapy Intern "Wei" is from Taiwan. She has traditional Asian values, such as remaining emotionally reserved, communicating indirectly, and gaining knowledge through contemplative means. She is having difficulty mastering basic skills in preparation for her upcoming internship. This included her understanding and fluency in English, as well as the breadth and diversity of her musical language. Her teachers were concerned about her ability to interact with clients, communicate effectively about activities and interventions, and learn and perform traditional Jewish and Hebrew songs. Swamy noted that Wei felt unprepared as she lacked knowledge and understanding of the client's cultural background. This lack of understanding created several challenges in the therapeutic relationship, including language barriers, cultural differences, misunderstandings and misconceptions, frustration and anxiety. It is also what makes this case common to the experiences of other music therapy international students.

It is anticipated that many international music therapy students feel high levels of stress given that they go through both the acculturative stress of living abroad and the unique stressors related to their professional training. However, there has been no relevant research

addressing the adaptation stresses of this group so far (Kim, 2011).

Burnout and International Graduate Students

Rönkkönen et al. (2022) collected personal data from a total of 902 first-year graduate students from the fields of art, business, and technology via a self-reported questionnaire. Three different learning burnout risk profiles were detected using Latent Profile Analysis (LPA): No exhaustion or cynicism; Exhausted; Exhausted and cynical. Using theory-based qualitative content analysis, the following types of social support requirements were discovered: informational, instrumental, affective, and co-constructive support. The research also discovered that students with the lowest grade point averages (GPAs) were those who were found to be most at risk for burnout.

Jin et al. (2022) conducted a study to explore the relationship between self-determined motivation, acculturation, academic burnout, and psychosocial well-being among Chinese international students in South Korea. The study involved 673 participants who completed an online survey. The findings showed that controlled motivation decreased psychosocial well-being both directly and indirectly through acculturation and academic burnout. Autonomous motivation, on the other hand, was directly and indirectly linked to better levels of psychosocial well-being through reduced levels of academic burnout. The results suggest that interventions aimed at promoting self-determined motivation and facilitating acculturation may be effective in promoting psychosocial well-being and preventing academic burnout among Chinese international students in South Korea.

Yin et al. (2022) conducted a study to explore the associations between study-related burnout, perceptions of the teaching-learning environment, and approaches to learning among

international students. The researchers collected data from 162 international students using a questionnaire and analyzed it using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. The findings showed that higher levels of burnout were associated with negative perceptions of the teaching-learning environment and less effective approaches to learning. Students who perceived their teachers as less supportive and their learning environment as less conducive to learning reported higher levels of burnout. The study highlights the importance of creating a supportive and positive learning environment for international students to prevent burnout and promote effective learning approaches.

Saravanan and Subhashini (2021) conducted a systematic review to explore the prevalence of depression and its associated factors among international university students. The study reviewed a total of ten studies from various countries. The findings showed that the prevalence of depression among international university students was higher than that of domestic students and the general population. The review also identified several factors associated with depression among international students, including social isolation, acculturative stress, academic stress, English proficiency, cultural shock, burnout, distress, living alone, and lack of social connectedness. The study highlights the importance of providing mental health support and interventions to address the unique challenges and stressors faced by international university students.

Coping Strategies of Graduate Students in the U. S.

Ickes et al. (2015) found that sleep, exercise, and food were the most common coping strategies among college students, in both undergraduate and graduate groups. Additionally, graduate students were more likely to use social support, hobbies, pets, and alcohol (Ickes et

al., 2015) as a means of managing stress. Others may express their emotions by channeling them into activities that bring them peace, comfort, and control, including academics, journaling, performing/visual arts, and physical activity/sports (Perry & Cuellar, 2022). The most prominent coping mechanism for undergraduate and graduate students who experienced adverse or traumatic events in childhood or adolescence was the performing arts, particularly music and drawing (Perry & Cuellar, 2022).

Coping Strategies of International Graduate Students in the U. S.

Anandavalli et al. (2021) identified various resilience factors that contributed to the psychosocial strengths of the international graduate students of color in the United States, including social support, mentorship, spiritual beliefs, and cultural pride. These factors helped the participants to maintain a sense of identity and belonging in their new environment and provided them with the necessary resources to cope with the challenges they faced.

Baines et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with 15 international graduate students in the United States. During the interviews, participants were asked about their social media usage and how it supported their social support needs. The authors transcribed the interviews and conducted a thematic analysis to identify the key themes and strategies that emerged from the participants' responses. The authors found that coping strategies for international graduate students include sharing experiences with people they trust and understand their situation through social networking sites (SNS) or by joining online communities and using public and private SNS to seek social support and help (Baines et al., 2022). Park et al. (2017) also explored the adjustment challenges encountered by nine international graduate students from China, Korea, and

Taiwan while studying at a U.S. university and the protective factors most associated with successful adjustment through a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews. They identified social support, religious affiliation, and use of campus services as effective coping strategies for international students. Moreover, Altinyelken et al. (2020) drew their conclusions from a review of existing studies that suggest mindfulness as a coping strategy can provide effective support, reduce stress, and improve psychosocial well-being for international students. Although they did not conduct their own empirical studies, they argued that the existing literature provides strong evidence for the potential benefits of positive thinking for international students.

Coping Strategies of Music therapy International Graduate Students in the U. S.

Despite its importance, little research has been conducted on burnout and self-care strategies among music therapists (Clements-Cortes, 2013), let alone international music therapy graduate students. Therefore, this section will review coping/self-care strategies in mental-health professional international students in the United States.

Chun and Poole (2009) used concept mapping to gather data from 22 Korean social work students in the US about their stressors and coping strategies. The participants generated a list of stressors and coping strategies which were analyzed using concept mapping software, resulting in a visual representation of the data. The researchers then interpreted the concept map to identify the main stressors and coping strategies experienced by the students. Korean social work students studying in the United States reported using a range of coping strategies to deal with these stressors, including seeking social support, adjusting to the new environment, maintaining a positive attitude, and engaging in self-care

activities.

Woo et al. (2015) used semi-structured interviews to gather data from 13 international doctoral students in a counselor education program about their experiences in supervision training. The interviews were analyzed using qualitative content analysis to identify common themes related to the challenges and coping strategies experienced by the students. The authors found that seeking support from peers was an important strategy used by international students in counselor education to feel connected and less isolated in the new environment. Another strategy was adjusting to the new environment, including becoming more familiar with the language and cultural norms of the new country. The students also found it helpful to seek additional supervision to address their unique needs and challenges. Finally, developing cultural awareness was also identified as an important coping strategy, as it helped the students to better understand and navigate the cultural differences they encountered (Woo et al., 2015).

Epoché

I am a Chinese graduate student studying music therapy in the United States. My thoughts on this topic have been with me since 2020, a year of shared challenges for all humanity and an extremely difficult year for international students. The epidemic grounded flights and closed the country's doors. It cost me nearly \$10,000 to get a ticket home. I felt like every day was a gamble. During that time, I was in a period of anxiety and depression. I didn't want to do anything or talk every day. I also refused music because I felt as if it made me more sensitive and vulnerable. During that time, I had a weekly task to listen to music and write a log of what I was listening to. I remember finishing each log while crying. I hated

tears so much, but I have to admit that musical self-care kept me from breaking down during those extremely painful times.

In addition, many universities in the United States including my college have offered online or hybrid classes as a result of the pandemic. It has also increased pressure and difficulty for international music therapy students. Music therapy is a discipline that requires real listening, seeing, and feeling, but having classes online has created a disconnect between people and made some experiences more abstract. International students need to work harder than ever to understand and internalize the academic content and take on more disciplinary and mental stress.

Therefore, I chose to explore the self-care experiences of Chinese music therapy students to provide more spiritual support and self-care inspiration for future Chinese and international students.

Purpose Statement

Currently, there is little or no research or literature on self-care for international music therapy students. Some researchers have focused on native music therapists' burnout and various approaches to self-care. However, little attention has been paid to these experiences of international students, especially Chinese students. The purpose of this thesis is to understand and explore the self-care strategies and experiences of Chinese music therapy graduate students' experiences of self-care while studying in the United States based on the identified range of stresses they have been exposed to.

Method

Participants

The researcher contacted potential participants by email, all of whom are Chinese music therapy graduate students currently studying in the United States. All participants are known to the researcher. The researcher asked potential participants if they meet the study criteria and if they are willing to participate in the study. The inclusion criteria adapted from Kim (2008) include: 1) The participants must be music therapy students who have engaged in at least three musical self-care experiences within the past one year; 2) They must be willing to share their experiences openly; 3) They must be able to recall and articulate their experiences fully; and 4) They must be willing to take the time for an interview and telephone follow-up. After agreeing to participate in this study, all participants were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix I). Kim's (2008) inclusion criteria were selected as they fit my research needs and there are similarities between Kim's (2008) study and my study in terms of participant selection. I modified some subjects, nouns, and numbers in the first item. To protect the rights of the participants, the study was reviewed and approved by the Human Research and Ethics Board of the State University of New York at New Paltz.

Design

Inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) was used to gain an understanding of how Chinese music therapy graduate students engage in self-care while studying music therapy in the United States. Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data. It involves systematically organizing and interpreting textual data to identify recurrent themes

or patterns that represent meaningful units of analysis. The approach can be used with a range of data sources and types, including interviews, focus groups, and written documents, and can be used to explore a wide range of research questions. The approach is flexible, allowing for the incorporation of different theoretical perspectives, and can be used in combination with other qualitative or quantitative methods.

Procedure

Participants were asked to review their experience of self-care while studying in the United States and then described it in as much detail as possible. During the interview, the researcher asked participants open-ended questions to gain a comprehensive understanding of their experience. Participants responded in the language that made them feel comfortable, either English or Chinese, depending on their situation. In addition, the researcher also had email conversations with some participants to clarify what was said in the interview. The interviews were then translated, transcribed, and generated in English and Chinese (if participants were interviewed in Chinese). Interview summaries were sent to participants in advance to check for accuracy and completeness.

I interviewed each participant individually. Interviews were conducted online. Prior to the interview, they were asked to reflect on the self-care strategies and experiences they have used during their studies and life in the United States. I ensured that the settings for our interviews were quiet and private. The total interview time for each participant was approximately 30 to 45 minutes. In order to record the interviews and securely store the data, I used my iPhone13 Pro which is password protected to record and ensured that I didn't upload to iCloud. Participants were asked to describe their cultural, educational, and

professional backgrounds and their demographic data including age, gender, and length of time in the United States. During the interview, I also observed their nonverbal expressions, including facial expressions, gestures, and body language, and took notes on them.

The following are questions that I prepared in advance:

1. Please take a moment to consider one of your most recent or impressive experiences of self-care with music in the United States. Try to recall this experience as clearly as possible and relive it as often as you can. Please begin by describing in detail your feelings, physical reactions, and thoughts prior to doing this self-care. Then what exactly did you do? Please describe your feelings, body reactions, and your thoughts in the moment and after you did these things.
2. Are there any other things you think are relevant that you would like to share?

Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The researcher removed any redundancies as needed and any repetitive statements that are not directly related to the experience. The researcher prepared a translation of the completed interview within one week of the interview and sent the document to the participant to confirm accuracy. After receiving all confirmations and corrections from the participants, the researcher began analyzing the data.

Audio recordings and text files were stored in a secured storage space with a password, to which only the researcher and her supervisor, Dr. Murphy, have access. The recordings were destroyed as soon as the researcher finished transcribing.

Data Analysis

Each interview was transcribed verbatim from the recorded interview. An inductive approach to thematic analysis was used for the initial analysis of the transcripts. A deductive approach then be taken to determine similarities and differences between what has been reported in the literature and participant responses (Bruan & Clark, 2006). A six-step thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clark (2006) was used to analyze each transcript:

1. Familiarizing oneself with the data: This involves reading through the data repeatedly to become familiar with its content and identify initial ideas or patterns.
2. Generating initial codes: This involves identifying and labeling meaningful units of text that relate to the research question, which are called codes. Codes can be descriptive, interpretative, or both.
3. Searching for themes: This involves grouping codes together based on similarities and differences and exploring the relationships between codes to identify potential themes.
4. Reviewing themes: This involves reviewing the identified themes to ensure that they are coherent and internally consistent, and that they accurately represent the data.
5. Defining and naming themes: This involves defining and describing each theme in detail, using data to support the interpretation, and giving each theme a clear and concise name.
6. Producing the report: This involves writing up the analysis, including relevant quotes and examples, and presenting the findings in a coherent and organized manner.

Results

The authors contacted three eligible potential participants, all three of whom agreed to participate in this study and signed informed consent forms. All three participants are Chinese students currently enrolled in music therapy graduate programs in the United States.

Demographic data of the participants can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants and Demographic Data

Case	Age	Gender	Length of time in music therapy graduate program in the U. S.
A	29	M	19 Months
B	23	F	7 Months
C	25	F	18 Months

The results section is divided into three main sections: before self-care, during self-care, and after self-care. Each main section contains different themes. Table 2 lists the themes that came up during our research team's study and analysis of the interview transcripts.

Table 2

Themes

Before Self-care	During Self-care	After Self-care
Experiencing Stress	Self-awareness	Relief from pressure & fear
Cultural/language barrier	Release & catharsis	Found personal identity & broke cultural barrier
Confused about personal identity	Feeling calm & supported	Self-reflection

Before Self-care Experiences

During the interview process, participants were first asked about their feelings and thoughts prior to engaging in self-care. The three themes of this phase are: 1) experiencing stress, 2) struggling from cultural/language barrier, and 3) feeling confused about personal identity.

Experiencing stress

All participants described a variety of stresses and challenges that they were experiencing. Participants A and C were both doing internships, and A, who was in a period of transition where he felt confused by everything crammed together, expressed that

Recently I have been faced with two quite difficult and challenging events. In mid-January, I had to switch my fieldwork site from a children's field, which I had been doing for a semester and was relatively familiar with, to a geriatric field. I had to resubmit a lot of documents, go for physical examination, and other things that made me anxious. By February, as I had to think about a full year of internship for the next year. There was an audition at the beginning of February for a therapy interview at the Nordoff – Robbin's Center, and they needed to know if I could attend, so these two things were suddenly intertwined. It was a very stressful time for me because everything was new to me.

Participant C has been at her internship setting for some time, but still feels stressed:

... I felt that my studies were very heavy, and my internship was very exhausting. I could feel a lot of stress and some of the things I had piled up in the session that I hadn't been able to digest.

Participant B is not yet in an internship, but she shared the stress and physical sensations associated with her studies and fieldwork:

I felt tight in my head, mentally tense, and felt a chill in my back. This is physical. Emotionally, I was very frustrated and this time I felt more strongly that I needed to do this, to ground myself, not to run, not to let my emotions fly all over the place. I feel that if I let it go, it may be a little uncontrollable and I need to pull it down and stand firm.

Participant C also shared physical sensations and learning stresses:

... My diet was not very good, for example, I would take a lot of sugar, and a lot of greasy things. In addition, the weather was unstable at that time, so I felt that I was very greasy and could not get rid of a lot of things. In addition, there was a large backlog of many, many dues and logs every day, so I felt I was in a state of imbalance.

Participant A expressed the stress reflected in his physical condition from a traditional Chinese perspective*:

My significant feeling is that I feel like I sigh a lot. This is what my roommate told me. He said that I had been sighing for a while. From a Chinese perspective, parents don't want their children to sigh. I think I sigh because I'm nervous and sometimes I don't breathe very naturally when I'm not thinking. So I think this is a big state of my body at that time.

(* Author's note: In Chinese tradition, some elderly people believe that people exhale good luck when they sigh, so they always unwillingly see or prevent their children from sighing.)

Struggling from cultural/language barrier

All participants were more agitated to express themselves in this theme. This should be the part that makes them struggle and stress the most. Participant A shared that

I always felt that I am in America, as a Chinese person, I want to speak very much and want to be heard, but my language is not good enough and at the same time I suffer from nervousness and tension. That stayed for a long time, and I think the last year or two gave me the same feeling. All my worries come from the fact that I'm not quite as bold as I am at home to say things. ... Sometimes I actually feel angry when I'm playing (the piano), I think it's (because of) the depression during the last year or two, I really feel a little bit annoyed. Sometimes because it's not that easy to say things or, you know, if it's in a Chinese context, I don't think I would be afraid of anything in an interview. Because I actually had working experience in China, I was confident that I could behave very well in a Chinese interview. But the moment it changed to a different venue, I would just hold my breath ... and I didn't have the chance to express anger or rage in America.

Participant B separated culture and language. She felt that the language barrier affected her learning more:

... now the language environment has changed, and I am not so good at this language yet. So, in my study and life, I would feel very frustrated. Many times I want to say something, but then it takes a lot of process in my head. So, a lot of times it leads to the stuck, stuck in that brain... a lot of times can not come out. So I did not catch that time to answer the words. So quite often because of this reason, and then with classes,

writing assignments, readings are all in English, compared to the time that my classmates are spending on studying, I probably need double and triple of that, right? So it's even busier and more tiring. And then there's the frustration and the discomfort of communication that can cause anxiety.

The influence of cultural barriers, on the other hand, was more evident in her fieldwork:

Another thing I want to share is the NR center community's Christmas party, which is everyone gathering to celebrate the end of the year. The whole environment was actually very supportive, but for me there was a little bit of cultural isolation because they sang, you know, a lot of Christmas songs that I had never heard before. They didn't sing any of the ones I knew. There's also Hanukkah, so they also sing some Jewish songs, and Beatles songs, well, also the kind I haven't heard before. The overall atmosphere was actually supportive, but on the other hand I felt so lonely. I didn't know what they knew. I just had to be there, silly giggling and playing kabasa.

Participant C share that

.... A while ago, I didn't feel like I belonged. I feel like a wallflower when the culture is broken down boundaries. ... A lot of my work is with a community that I don't really have knowledge of, and I don't even have the capacity to empathize with some of the sufferings that this community endures, and their trauma. Sometimes I really can't share some common perspectives with people of different colors and cultures. She further mentions the connection to her home country and native language: Sometimes I find that I have started to move away from the Chinese context, and even I consciously avoided speaking Chinese, because my English will regress when I

speak more Chinese, and I will not be able to understand (my clients and professors), I am separating myself from my own culture, and it's a point that makes me very uncommitted. I feel that I am separating from my mother culture, like a baby from its mother, which makes me very uncomfortable.

This quote also brings up the next theme - personal identity.

Feeling confused about personal identity

Following on from what C shared above, she said that

In fact, I think I may have a lot of things that have not been released, so this is also why I think self-care is important. At the same time, self-care is also a boundary to distinguish my personal life and clinical life. ... Sometimes I feel like I'm self-caring about my identity, not just my professional work, because a lot of what I do is not really part of my own culture. Every time I do self-care, I actually give myself a chance to validate myself. In this very multicultural place, how to maintain my perspective and value, and then constantly reassess.

Participant B also mentioned that

If I let it (the frustrated and uncontrollable feelings) develop, I would feel very insecure and confused because I would not be able to find my own identity. Since this thing is not a part of my original identity, it will serve more as a mirror to reflect who I truly am.

During Self-care Experiences

The second stage is the feelings and thoughts of the participants during the self-care process. There are three themes in this phase: 1) develop self-awareness, 2) release and catharsis, and 3) feeling calm and supported.

Develop self-awareness

Participant A shared that

the song is one that really touches me. I spent a long time on this song, about 40 minutes on this song. There were times when I just played the harmonies and didn't sing, just to get a feel for it. ... The first line of the song is "Tell Me Something Boy...", and I think it's a kind of self-questioning. I didn't switch between male and female voices because I felt like I didn't want to focus so much on the gender, the relationship, but I wanted to ask myself. I just wanted to ask myself. Yeah.

Participant C said that

my self-care can also be to arrange some things into order, arranging them into a certain sequence. I'm not a multi-task person, I must finish one thing before I do the next. This kind of thing makes me think "Well, I'm focusing on myself, I'm caring for myself". Your interview today made me realize for the first time that maybe I'm sharing yoga with you today, but then I'll probably keep changing the way I care for myself. But I think it is more important for me to find a sense of order.

She also developed the awareness that self-care and work are closely linked, but also a boundary to distinguish personal and clinical life:

I used to have an attitude towards self-care just like “I need to relax, I need to make myself happy”, but now it's not, because I think self-care and my work is becoming more and more integrated, and the state of my life, in general, is very closely affecting my state in the session. I have to take responsibility for my own body, mind and spirit, otherwise, I feel that because my own state is not good, it will affect the state of my client, and even the state of the whole session will be affected.

Release and catharsis

Participant A mentioned:

I think one of the things that this song does for me is that it allows me to release my voice. I chose this song, it has a lot of tension, and at least it gets me to sing out loud.

I think this thing is very important to me. I'm actually quite a talkative person by nature. Coming here is like being trapped in a strange situation for me, and at the same time it makes me feel a bit nervous and rushed. So it's important to me that this music has the power to make me really speak at the piano. So it's IMPORTANT TO ME. ... The chorus of that song had a shouting part throughout, and I would play that part very aggressively. I felt I needed to shout, so I chose to come to the practice room. Because my house is not soundproof, the practice room is a relatively private place. I felt a comfortable feeling of release, including the moment when I focused on the music itself. I felt like I had released some of my stress and tension by the end of the playing.

Participant B shared:

From listening to the song to the part I want to sing, I think it has been a lot of catharsis out. In the process of listening, the emotions have flow, and then to the time of singing, in fact, has made those things out, yes. So basically, it probably didn't take very long, less than an hour, it's just a flow of emotions, flow, flow, flow, flow, and then venting out.

Feeling calm and supported

The participants' feedback shows that the ultimate effect of self-care, regardless of its form, is that it is calming and supportive. Participant A said:

When I played it, I felt that the song soothed me because it fit my state of mind at that moment. ... The pressure seems to be gone at the moment, because after facing these two things, it's smoother now.

Participant B also mentioned:

In the process of singing, I think I'm close to the ending of my good care, the whole person began to stabilize. Singing would slowly bring me back to a calm state. So the emotion and feeling at the end should be the companionship and catharsis and match and resonance in the candle and music. And then in the process of singing the emotions were released, calmed down, and felt supported, so it was more stable. ... Because it happens to be the melody that I like, I think this would also support me.

Participant C shared:

Her (the coach of bedtime yoga) guide is very slow and very comfortable. The gaps between her switching movements fit my bedtime habits. She doesn't push you excited;

she's totally soothing you to calm down. so I fell asleep after about 15 minutes of doing it. The next day I felt very relaxed because my body was stretched out and I slept very heavily, so I woke up very early the next day, and I didn't stay in bed, and I didn't feel like wondering.

After Self-care Experiences

The third stage is the participants' feelings and thoughts after self-care. This phase also contains three themes: 1) relief from pressure and fear, 2) found personal identity and broke cultural barrier, and 3) self-reflection.

Relief from pressure and fear

As participant C shared:

*I would also read books to understand why we have this difference in thinking (with American people). I would feel like it was a process of input, and it kept me relief pressure and fear. But my identity really has no way to connect with different communities sometimes, because we do have boundaries, we have barriers, and we don't have a way to cross that fences. So I think self-care is also about letting it go. She further shared that *Help yourself to constantly self-acknowledge, like “you are really hard working on this, and you don't need to push yourself”. you can just encourage yourself like “oh, I'm doing good, I'm doing good”. And give yourself permission to relax and rest.**

Participant B, who turned off the lights and lit the candles during her self-care session, described that

The light was not the kind of stable light, but the flash flickering kind, so there would be a sense of life, is the feeling of living. So there is a feeling of companionship.

Found personal identity and broke cultural barrier

Participant B shared:

Because I was learning something new, I would feel, "Oh, this is not something I originally had." So then I would feel, "OK, now I know where I came from, what my language is like, how I used to celebrate this holiday in my culture when I was experiencing it, and then where the difference is to here, oh, so this is how this culture originated to do this thing." So on the one hand, it's to make myself realize what my identity is, and on the other hand, it's to help me better understand the cultural environment I'm in now, how their people are, and it goes both ways.

Self-reflection

Participant C seems to have undergone more reflections in the interview. She shared that

your interview today made me realize for the first time that maybe I'm sharing yoga with you today, but then I'll probably keep changing the way I care for myself. ... I also think that self-care is something that needs to be practiced constantly, it is not a specific activity, like practicing mindfulness, making it a subconscious reflex to take action on your own. I appreciate this conversation with you, it made me realize that I actually have a lot of resources in my life. And I also found that maybe self care can be shared with different people. Like you can share self care your way of caring yourself with different people to see if others have same or different methods. And you

can share like how you feel, how you experience, and then you can say “oh, there are so many (methods)” and you can find your community. So you can develop self-care strategies.

Discussion

The purpose of this thematic analysis was to learn more about the self-care experiences and feelings of Chinese graduate students studying music therapy in the United States. The results of our interviews indicated that some reported feeling a sense of pleasure in release and venting during the self-care process. Others felt life-giving and supportive. In addition, some were inspired to keep reflecting and developing their own self-care strategies during the interview process. These descriptions varied, but each statement emphasized, to varying degrees, the various benefits of self-care.

Participants encountered their own stress and challenges connected to their studies, internships/fieldworks, and cultural and language barriers prior to their self-care experiences, as demonstrated in the literature review section of this article. International students may feel lonely, depressed, anxious, or angry as they deal with these issues of their own, all of which are inevitable in the study abroad experience.

From the results of this study, it is clear that self-care is an effective coping strategy. Self-care can take many different and unique forms. Each individual can discover what they enjoy and what works best for them. In the process of self-care, participants can gain self-awareness, release and catharsis, and feel calm and supported.

After completing self-care, individuals are able to distinguish between their personal and clinical lives, so they can focus more on clinical matters at work and learn more

effectively. Through self-care, individuals will find personal identity and break cultural barriers, and they will have more opportunities for self-reflection, in which they can grow and progress.

Limitations

There are some inherent limitations to the results of this study. First, the participant group could have been more diverse in terms of cultural background. In addition, the sample size of this study was small, so the findings are not yet generalizable or representative. Therefore, this study only represents the participants' perceptions of this particular experience.

As participants preferred to communicate in their own language, translation was necessary. Although the content of the interviews was confirmed by the participants, the translations may not be accurate in terms of their intentions.

Methodological Considerations

In order to gain a clear understanding of Chinese music therapy students' experiences of self-care while studying cross-culturally, a thematic analysis approach was used. For me, it was an interesting experience and it really fascinated me. Every time I listened to the recorded interviews and read the transcripts, I found new information. I needed to chew on this information over and over and digest it fully before I could summarize the themes. As the experience unfolded, there were common themes as well as unique themes among the participants. Although the experiences described by the participants occurred in the past, once they revisited the experiences, they recalled many details and the good feelings would once again be comforting to them.

Conclusion and Implications for Future Research and Practice

The results of this study support the importance of doing self-care for international music therapy graduate students studying in the United States. Doing it when needed, or as a routine activity, will help reduce study stress, promote venting, bridge cultural barriers, maintain personal identity, and gain self-awareness for international students, thereby maximizing learning state and quality and achieving positive outcomes.

While it is primarily the responsibility of international students to learn and adjust to American classroom culture and working methods, educators should also take into account various teaching methods and strategies (for example, experiential approaches, psychosocial supervising), and need to be sensitive to the specific needs and learning preferences of international students (Kim, 2011). It would be advantageous for the kids to have additional time to learn about the new culture, therefore allowing flexible educational years would be one option (Kim, 2008). With the addition of English as a Second Language (ESL), American cultural studies, or independent study courses, international students can finish the degree in one additional semester or year while still enrolled full-time.

Educators should consider site complexity and difficulty levels, as well as individual student factors (e.g., level of acculturation, stress tolerance, English proficiency, personality) when placing them on any type of fieldwork. Because a lack of resources and social support may make it more difficult for students to adjust to their new environment, educators should offer a variety of support resources. (e.g., peer support). International students' acculturation may benefit from the "face validity" of hiring professors and administrators from a variety of cultures (Nilsson & Dodds, 2006).

Because some international students are unlikely to actively look for help, an active approach is suggested as well. Due to their cultural values and personalities, some international students might be reluctant to disclose their concerns. Or it could be because failure to fully comprehend the U.S. culture may additionally lead to confusion in supervision and reluctance to bring up concerns to supervisors (Nilsson & Dodds, 2006).

International music therapy students are a great asset to the music therapy profession. In the near future, it is expected that they will become more noticeable and that the profession of music therapy will become more aware of their problems. The field of music therapy is experiencing fast societal change. A more fulfilling training and academic experience for international music therapy students in the United States is also hoped to arise from the study's recommendations, which are expected to make a lot of practical changes to the area. Only by working together toward mutual understanding can all of our international students, educators, supervisors, and administrators achieve this goal.

Due to the limitations of the researcher's own cultural background, in this article I have considered only the graduate student population studying music therapy in the United States. Future research could expand the sample size as well as explore and compare the self-care experiences of music therapy students from different countries and ethnicities within the United States.

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Appendix A Informed Consent

The Self-Care Experiences of Chinese Music Therapy Graduate Students in the United States

Summary of Key Information

As part of my graduate studies, I am currently researching the self-care experiences of Chinese music therapy graduate students who have stayed in the United States. You are a composite of the participation criteria known to the researcher. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. The purpose of this study is to understand the self-care strategies of Chinese music therapy international students. By participating in this study, you can gain insight, promote personal growth, take better care of yourself and better serve your clients. In addition, university faculty and supervisors will gain information about cultural issues that will help them develop better training programs for international students in music therapy with culturally diverse backgrounds.

Name and title of Researcher:

Huan Ou, Music Therapy Graduate Program, SUNY New Paltz

Department/Room Number: Music Department

Telephone Number: (845) 668-0279

Email: ouh1@newpaltz.edu

Study Location(s):

The in-person interview will take place in the participant's home and online interview via Zoom.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research study is to understand and explore the self-care strategies and experiences of Chinese music therapy graduate students studying in America based on the identified range of stress they had been exposed to.

Participants

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

You are eligible to participate in this study if you:

- Are at least 18 years or older, Chinese citizens, and enrolled in a graduate music therapy program in the United States

- Have had at least three musical self-care experiences within the past one year

- Are willing to share their experiences openly

- Are able to fully recall and articulate the experience

- Are accessible and willing to take the time to be interviewed and followed up by phone

Approximate Number of Participants

The approximate number of people who will participate in this study is three.

Procedures

The following procedures will occur: Prior to the interview, you will be asked to recall your experience with self-care. During the interview, first, you will be asked to describe your feelings, physical reactions, and thoughts prior to doing this self-care in details. Then describe exactly what you did. Finally, describe how you felt, how your body reacted, and what you thought at the time and after you did these things. After I have transcribed the interview, I might follow up with a phone call to further clarify the interview, if necessary. The telephone follow-up conversation will take approximately 15 minutes and will be recorded. The transcript will then be sent to you and you will be asked to confirm or change the content. This process will take approximately 15 to 30 minutes.

Risks and Discomforts

Risks are minimal and no greater than those encountered in everyday life. There is no inherent physical danger in this study. You may experience some discomfort during the interview as you reflect on thoughts and feelings experienced before and after engaging in a self-care method. I will provide support and assistance if you have any discomfort with the interview process or questions.

Benefits

The possible benefits you may experience from the procedures described in this study include gain insight, promote personal growth, take better care of yourself and better serve your clients. In addition, university faculty and supervisors will gain information about cultural issues that will help them develop better training programs for international students in music therapy with culturally diverse backgrounds.

Compensations:

N/A

Confidentiality

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In addition, the Human Research Ethics Board, the sponsor of the study (e.g. NIH, FDA, etc.), and University or government officials responsible for monitoring this study may inspect these records.

Data will be recorded anonymously, which means no one, including the research team, can identify you from the study data.

Data Storage

Your research records will be stored in the following manner:

All electronic data will be stored in a dedicated encrypted folder on a secure web server, OneDrive. The folder will be accessible only to the researcher and her instructor.

This information will be protected and kept confidential in the following manner:

All data stored electronically will be stored on a secure network server, or on portable devices, such as a laptop with encryption (special software) and password protection. Any hard copies

will be shredded and disposed.

If You Have Questions

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research, please contact the researcher at 845-668-0279.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the State University of New York at New Paltz Human Research Ethics Board (which is a group of people who review the research to protect your rights) at 845-257-3282.

The Human Research Ethics Board of the State University of New York at New Paltz has determined that this research meets the criteria for human subjects according to Federal guidelines.

Voluntary Participation Statement

Your participation in this project is voluntary. Even after you agree to participate in the research or sign the informed consent document, you may decide to leave the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise have been entitled. I will retain and analyze the information you have provided up until the point you have left the study unless you request that your data be excluded from any analysis and/or destroyed.

SIGNATURES

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

Signature of participant

Date

Printed name of participant

I certify that the nature and purpose, the potential benefits and possible risks associated with participation in this research study have been explained to the above individual and that any questions about this information have been answered. A copy of this document will be given to the subject.

Signature of researcher

Date

Printed name of researcher

Consent to Audio/Video Record Interview

Interviews will be recorded over Zoom. The audio/video file will be saved to a dedicated encrypted folder on a secure web server, OneDrive.

The audio/video recording will be destroyed once the transcription is complete. Statements from your interview may be included in conference presentations, education/classroom settings, or publications. However, you will not be identified in the statements that are made.

You may discontinue participation in the study if you are uncomfortable with your interview being recorded.

You will be reminded not to mention the names or identifying information about any other persons. If identifying information is mentioned, the recording will be stopped. The identifying information will be erased, and the interview will continue.

SIGNATURES

Please sign below if you are willing to have this interview audio recorded.

Signature of participant

Date

Printed name of participant

Appendix B 知情同意书 (Informed Consent Chinese Version)

在美国的中国音乐治疗研究生的自我关怀经验

关键信息摘要

作为研究生学习的一部分，我目前正在研究留美中国音乐治疗研究生的自我关怀经验。你是研究者已知的符合参与标准的人。你对这项研究的参与完全是自愿的。本研究的目的是为了了解中国音乐治疗留学研究生的自我关怀策略。通过参与本研究，你可以获得洞察力，促进个人成长，更好地照顾自己，并更好地服务来访者。此外，大学教师和主管将获得有关文化问题的信息，这将有助于他们为具有不同文化背景的音乐治疗国际学生制定更好的培训计划。

研究者的姓名和头衔

欧欢，纽约州立大学新帕尔茨分校音乐治疗研究生项目

部门：音乐系

电话：(845) 668-0279

电子邮件：ouh1@newpaltz.edu

研究地点

面试将通过 Zoom 进行。你将能够从你的家中登录到 Zoom 会议室。

研究目的

本研究的目的是了解和探索在美国学习的中国音乐治疗研究生基于所承受的压力而进行的自我关怀策略和经历。

参与者

纳入/排除标准

如果你有资格参加这项研究，你将是：

至少 18 岁或以上，中国公民，并在美国就读音乐治疗研究生课程；

在过去一年中至少有三次音乐自我护理的经历；

愿意公开分享你的经历；

能够充分回忆和阐述自己的经历；

愿意接受采访，并愿意花时间参加后续电话联系。

参与者人数

参加这项研究的大约人数为三人。

程序

在采访之前，你将被要求回忆你的自我关怀经历。在访谈中，首先，你将被要求详细描述你在做这次自我关怀之前的感受、身体反应和想法。然后准确描述你做了什么。最后，描述你的感觉，你的身体反应，以及你在当时和做完这些事情后的想法。在我转录完访谈后，如果有必要，我可能会通过电话跟进，进一步澄清访谈内容。电话跟进谈话大约需要 15 分钟，并将被录音。然后，笔录将被发送给你，你将被要求确认或更改内容。

这个过程大约需要 15 至 30 分钟。

风险和不适

风险很小且不比日常生活中遇到的风险大。在这项研究中没有潜在的身体危险。在访谈过程中，你可能会遇到一些不适，因为你会反思经历自我关怀方法前后的想法和感受。如果你对访谈过程或问题有任何不适，我将提供支持和帮助。

益处

你可能从本研究描述的程序中获得的好处包括：你可以深入了解你的自我关怀训练及其效果，促进个人成长，更好地照顾自己，并更好地服务来访者。此外，大学教师和主管将获得有关文化问题的信息，这将有助于他们为具有不同文化背景的音乐治疗国际学生制定更好的培训计划。

报酬

不适用

保密性

本研究中获得的所有信息都是严格保密的，除非法律要求披露。此外，人类研究伦理委员会、该研究的赞助者（如 NIH、FDA 等）以及负责监督该研究的大学或政府官员可以检查这些记录。数据将被匿名记录，这意味着只有研究的主要成员才能从记录中识别你。逐字记录本将不包含任何识别信息。

数据存储

您的研究记录将以下列方式储存：

所有的电子数据将被储存在安全网络服务器 OneDrive 上的一个专用加密文件夹中。该文件夹只有研究者和她的指导教师可以访问。

这些信息将以下列方式得到保护和保密：

所有以电子方式存储的数据都将存储在安全的网络服务器上，或存储在便携式设备上，如带有加密（特殊软件）和密码保护的笔记本电脑。录音将被储存在主要研究人员的加密笔记本电脑，并放在一个受密码保护的文件夹中。一旦完成逐字记录本，录音将被销毁。

如有疑问

如果您对这项研究的进行有任何意见、担忧或疑问，请致电 845-668-0279 联系研究人员。

如果您对作为研究参与者的权利有疑问，请联系纽约州立大学新帕尔茨分校人类研究伦理委员会（这是一个审查研究以保护您的权利的团体），电话是 845-257-3282。

纽约州立大学新帕尔茨分校人类研究伦理委员会已经确定，根据联邦准则，这项研究符合人类研究对象的标准。

自愿参与声明

您对本研究项目的参与是自愿的。即使在您同意参与研究或签署知情同意后，您也可以在任何时候决定退出研究，而不会受到惩罚或失去您本应享有的利益。我将保留并分析您所提供的信息，直

到您离开研究为止，除非您要求将您的数据从任何分析中排除和/或销毁。

签名

您的签名表示您同意参与本研究。

参与者签名

日期

参与者打印姓名

我证明已经向上述个人解释了参与本研究的性质和目的、潜在的好处和可能的风险，并回答了有关这些信息的任何问题。本文件的副本将提供给参与者。

研究者签名

日期

研究者打印姓名

采访录音/录像知情同意书

访谈将通过 Zoom 录制。音频/视频文件将被保存到（指出你将保存录音的地方转录完成后，音频/视频记录将被销毁。你的采访发言可能会被纳入会议发言、教育/课堂设置或出版物中。然而，你的身份将不会陈述中被披露。

如果你对你的访谈被记录感到不舒服，你可以停止参与这项研究。

我们将提醒您不要提及任何其他人的姓名或识别信息。如果提到了识别信息，录音将被停止。识别信息将被删除，访谈将继续进行。

签名

如果你愿意对这次采访进行录音，请在下面签字。

参与者签名

日期

参与者的打印姓名