

# Chinese teachers' perceptions of the roles and functions of school psychological service providers in Beijing

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China, roles and functions, school psychological services, school psychology, teacher perceptions

Historically, theories and practice of school psychology have been developed predominantly in Western countries, which often endorse individualist values, competition, and action taking (Oakland & Saigh, 1987). However, the needs, unique features, functions, and ways of providing school psychological services vary in different countries (Hatzichristou, Lampropoulou, & Lykitsakou, 2006). For example, Chinese culture endorses collectivistic values and Chinese children are socialized to be compliant and obedient towards teachers from an early age (Jia et al., 2009), which would present very different school contexts for Chinese students, teachers, and school psychological service providers (SPs) in comparison to their counterparts in the US. China, as one of the collectivist East Asian countries, values education highly and high academic pressure is common in schools (Yang et al., 2013). In addition, there is a strong emphasis on the development of moral character in Asian schools (e.g. China, Japan). For example, a good student as conceptualized by Chinese teachers is one who has moral character, makes an effort, and learns well (Ni, Jones, & Bruning, 2012). On the other hand, with the fast developing economy and the rapid importation of Western values, considerable societal changes have brought increasingly challenging mental health problems and stress to families, children (e.g. increased competition and academic stress), and schools in many Asian countries (e.g. China, Vietnam, India; Le, Hagens, Powers, & Hass, 2011; Ramalingam & Nath, 2012; Yu, 2009). However, due to the stigma related to seeking help and a chronic and serious shortage of psychologists in those Asian countries, students with mental health struggles have difficulties accessing professional psychological help (D'Amato, van Schalkwyk, Zhao, & Hu,

have daily interactions with students; they are the professionals who usually refer students for school psychological services and collaborate with SPs in providing the services. It is important to study teachers' perceptions of the roles of SPs in China because the role of the SP is relatively new and unfamiliar to Chinese parents, and the use of psychological services is largely dependent upon teachers' knowledge about the services SPs provide and their willingness to make referrals or access SP services. When teachers and other consumers do not understand the role of SPs, it negatively impacts the use of services (e.g. students may not receive the services in a timely manner or access the quality services that are available) and the development of school psychology, and may lead to increased stress among school psychologists (Bell & McKenzie, 2013; Zucker, 2010). A better understanding of teachers' perceptions of school psychologists' roles can benefit school psychological service delivery (Bell & McKenzie, 2013).

### *Roles of SPs*

Although school psychology is a more mature profession in many Western countries (e.g. US, Australia), the roles of school psychologists remain unclear and misunderstood by parents, students, and other stakeholders (Bell & McKenzie, 2013). The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2006) has suggested other roles (e.g. providing mental health services) in addition to traditional assessment for school psychologists in the US; however, school psychologists in Western countries continue to spend most of their time conducting assessments and less than one-quarter of their time providing direct intervention such as counseling and consultation (Bramlett, Murphy, Johnson, Wallingsford, & Hall, 2002; Curtis et al., 2008; Jimerson et al., 2006). Compared to many Western countries, school psychology is in its infancy in Asian countries such as China, Thailand, South Korea, India, and Vietnam (Ramalingam & Nath, 2012; Tangdhanakanond & Lee, 2014). Due to the difference in economic development and cultural values, it is very likely that the roles of SPs in Asian countries are different from those in the US. For example, research has shown that students in Thailand and Korea rated the assessment role as the least important role of school psychologists compared with other services (Tangdhanakanond & Lee, 2014). Currently, there is no empirical study examining teachers' perceptions of the roles and function of SPs in mainland China.

School psychology remained a foreign concept in China until the central government promoted 'quality education' (i.e. schools should provide education to foster academic development, physical development, and mental health) in the 1980s to 1990s (D'Amato et al., 2013; Ding, Kuo, & Vandyke, 2008). Public schools were encouraged to provide mental health education to all students with the goals of enhancing students' mental health quality and helping students reach their full potential (The Ministry of Education, 2002). In general, school psychology as a profession developed slowly in China (Ding, Kuo, & Vandyke, 2008). This notion

concluded with standards held by the 2003 International School Psychology Survey (ISPS) in which researchers stated that 'Hong Kong was the only city in China that had established a profession in school psychology' (Jimerson et al., 2006, p. 9).

Currently, there is no independent certification system for school psychologists in China. In 2012, the Ministry of Education required each school to hire at least one full-time or part-time SP to provide mental health education. To meet this demand, some teachers became SPs by obtaining mental health teacher certificates issued by the Ministry of Education (He & Huang, 2005) and/or mental health counselor certificates issued by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (Li, 2011). No practicum hours or supervision, nor a bachelor's degree in psychology, are required in order to take the mental health counselor certification exam at the entry level. In comparison, to become a Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) in the US, one has to complete 60 graduate semester hours in a school psychology training program and complete a 1200-hour internship in school psychology under the supervision of a credentialed school psychologist (National Association of School Psychologists, NASP, n.d.). Clearly, the trainings and requirements of SPs in China are not as systematic, structured, and specialized as school psychologists in the US. Researchers have concluded that there are negative consequences related to the low training standards and lack of supervision for mental health service providers in China, including consumers' lack of trust in counselors and counselors' low efficacy in solving difficult cases (Gao et al., 2010). To examine the preferred qualities of SPs, Xu (2007) surveyed Chinese principals and high school students, and found that they expected SPs to have positive mental health qualities (e.g. emotional regulation) and strong aspiration for the career (e.g. love working with students).

The school context in China, as in other Eastern Asian countries (e.g. Japan, Korea), is very different from that in the US or other Western countries. Due to the large student population, class size tends to be large in Chinese schools (e.g. 40–70 students in a regular classroom). However, Chinese students have been found to be more on-task and less disruptive (Teddlie & Liu, 2008), and have more positive relations with their teachers than American students (Yang et al., 2013), which is considered to be related to the collectivist cultural values of respect for authority (e.g. teachers) and emphasis on social harmony. Students usually stay in their homeroom all day with the same group of classmates and core subject teachers for multiple years, which allows more interactions and a strong bond with the same group of peers and teachers (Kenney, 2007). In addition to subject teachers who teach corresponding subjects, each class is assigned a classroom lead teacher, who is the main person in charge of students' daily activities, moral education, and overall development. Researchers have argued that classroom lead teachers' responsibilities may include students' mental health (e.g. Zhao, 2012) because they have the most interactions with students and their parents. Due to the recent increase in social and economic development in China, Chinese schools are facing more challenges to student psychological well-being (World Health Organization [WHO], 2003). Chinese schools need school psychological services

that not only meet students' needs but also fit in with their culture and school context. A good understanding of the current state of school psychology practices in China from the teachers' perspective is an essential first step for future planning and strengthening of the field for school psychology.

In this article, participating teachers were from Beijing, China. Beijing, with a population of 21.15 million, is the capital of China and the second largest city in China (Xu, 2014). Beijing is also the educational center of China with the most higher education institutions and high quality public school systems, which usually plays leading roles in the field of education in China (Beijing, CN, 2012). Information about the roles and functions of the SPs in Beijing would be a good starting point for further understanding of school psychological services in Chinese schools due to its importance as the capital city and the educational center in China.

The current study used a qualitative design to examine teachers' perceptions of: (a) the roles, functions, and training experiences of SPs; (b) the challenges that SPs face; and (c) teachers' satisfaction with SPs' services. This information will benefit SPs and school stakeholders in China by highlighting the status and challenges of school psychology practices and providing suggestions on how to overcome those challenges. In addition, we compared school psychology practices and trainings in US and China, which will help SPs integrate the Chinese cultural context and the Western models of school psychology practice to strengthen school psychology in China. The findings will also help guide future planning, training, and policy making in school psychology in China and other Eastern Asian countries with similar culture and school context.

## Methods

### *Participants*

A convenience sample of 94 teachers (female = 72, male = 19, missing = 3; mean age = 32.64,  $SD = 8.37$ ) from 92 elementary and secondary schools in Beijing participated in this study from 2007–2008. Six (6.4%) teachers had master's degrees, 62 (66%) had bachelor's degrees, 24 (25.5%) had associate's degrees, and two (2.1%) had high school degrees. Approximately 80 research assistants, who were part-time students in psychology at a university in Beijing, recruited the teacher participants through their personal relationships, interviewed the participants, and transcribed the interviews. However, the authors did not have any previous relationships with the participants. All the research assistants were given training on interviewing skills in their psychology education, and were trained specifically for this project for about one hour prior to the study.

The sample size of a qualitative study can be affected by multiple factors, including data saturation, the purpose of the study, the heterogeneity of the population, the number of selection criteria, etc. (Charmaz, 2006; Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003). The purpose of the current study was to gain an exploratory knowledge

about Beijing elementary and middle school teachers' perceptions about school psychologists. The fact that all teacher participants were from Beijing made the sample more homogenous. For data saturation, although there are different opinions about when data saturation is reached in qualitative research, there is little practical guidance regarding sample size for the purpose of saturation. For grounded theory methodology, Creswell (1998) suggested 20–30 participants and Morse (1994) suggested 30–50. We believe, considering the purpose of the study and the relative homogenous participants, 94 teacher participants could ensure us to reach data saturation. In fact, the coding process later confirmed this as we found reoccurring themes in the data.

### *Procedures*

Research assistants interviewed the participating teachers at a convenient location identified by the participants. Interview questions were related to teachers' perceptions of the roles and functions of the SPs at their schools, professional training needs, reasons for referrals for psychological services, and satisfaction with services provided (see Supplemental Material). Interviews were conducted, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim in Chinese and were coded by the first two authors. The first three authors are native Chinese who received higher education degrees in the fields of psychology, sociology, and educational psychology in China and received PhDs in the US in school psychology and educational psychology. The educational backgrounds of the authors give them the appropriate knowledge base to understand and interpret Chinese teachers' answers in a way that is closest to the original meaning of the content relevant to the research purposes.

### *Data and analysis*

The data of the current study are Chinese teachers' answers to the interview questions. In organizing these qualitative data, we first created an Excel spreadsheet with an assigned participant number for each participant in the left column and with demographic variables and interview questions in the top row. Next, we copied and pasted the transcripts of each teacher's answers to the cell that corresponded to the interview questions. This organization not only ensured that no information would be lost but also provided a structure for the raw data. As this was an exploratory study about a topic that has not been studied before, we did not adopt a theoretical framework in data organization and interpretation.

There were two types of data in the current study. The first type was descriptive including teachers' demographic information and their answers to close-ended questions. The second type of data were teachers' answers to the open-ended questions, which required coding. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative coding is a process that involves organizing the raw data

into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to the information. Following Creswell's (2009) recommendation, before initiating the coding process, the first and second authors carefully read through the interview transcripts to obtain a general sense of the information and its overall meaning. Next, we applied the grounded theory analytic process to the teachers' interview data. However, the goal of the current study was not to develop a theory out of the data but to identify the distinct themes or analytic schemes within the data that were elicited by the interview questions. Although the interviews were semi-structured, the interview questions targeted specific topics. There were also few follow-up questions to teachers' answers once the interview question was answered. Thus, in data analysis, we only followed the coding process in grounded theory approach, using Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Harry, Sturges, and Klingner (2005) as models in the coding process. No further theme interrelating or theory development was conducted. Specifically, we applied a three-step coding procedure. First, we highlighted coding segments in the teachers' answers. Second, descriptive codes were developed based on the segments. Descriptive codes involved minimal interpretation by researchers and were primarily summaries in short phrases (Saldaña, 2009). For example, segments of 'conduct individual counseling' and 'counsel individual student if s/he has a problem' were summarized under the descriptive code of counsel individual students. This step corresponds to open coding in the grounded theory approach. The majority of the descriptive codes used the original phrases of the teachers' answers and thus were *in vivo* codes. Then, the descriptive codes were further summarized to form theme and subtheme codes (see Supplemental material) or axial codes based on the conceptual commonalities. This step involved the researchers' judgements regarding the relations among the discrete descriptive codes. The educational background of the first two authors (e.g. their understanding of teachers' perspectives and the school systems in China) facilitated this step of coding. Unfortunately, there was not an opportunity to conduct member checking or theme testing after this step because the participant sample was a convenience sample that was only accessible by the individual interviewers who could not be tracked down at the time the themes and subthemes were developed. Lastly, the first two authors used the coding schemes developed from the previous two steps to code the existence of teachers' references to the themes and subthemes. If a specific subtheme was mentioned, it was coded '1'; if not, a code of '0' was entered. Thus, only the existence (Yes or No) of the theme or subtheme was coded. To ensure reliability and avoid researcher biases, the first two authors practiced coding using the first five interviewees' transcripts to secure a consensus on basic coding procedures. They also used randomly selected data of ten teachers to check inter-rater reliability before moving to coding the rest of the data. Inter-rater reliability was between 92% and 100% for the subthemes. This high reliability was partially due to the design of the interview questions and the nature of the data that were relatively more directive; it could also be due to the fact that there were limited follow-up questions by the interviewers.



## Results

### *Descriptive data*

Eighteen (19.6%) schools did not have an SP, 22 (23.9%) schools had only one part-time SP (specific subject teachers who served as SPs with or without training), and 45 (48.9%) schools had at least one full-time SP. On average, the SP to student ratio was 1:1360, which is lower than the recommended ratio of 1:500–700 (NASP, 2010). Based on teachers' estimates, 32 schools (34.8%) had SPs who were certified as mental health counselors or had degrees in psychology. Forty-six teachers (48.94%) reported being satisfied with the work provided by the SP; however, ten (10.64%) teachers reported being dissatisfied because the SPs were not professionally trained (40%) and/or were not effective in delivering the services (50%), seven (7.45%) teachers had answers that were in between regarding the SPs' work, 13 (14.1%) said they were uncertain mainly because they had no contact with SPs, and 18 (19.15%) did not answer the question because there was no SP at their schools.

### *Themes and subthemes*

The findings were organized around the themes including the knowledge and skills Beijing teachers thought the SPs should have, their roles, the differences between SPs' and teachers' roles, and the challenges SPs face (see Supplemental Materials for the themes and subthemes and examples of descriptive codes and coding segments).

*Desired knowledge, skills, and character.* Teachers believed that SPs should have ten areas of knowledge, three areas of skills, and three areas of character and quality. The most frequently referenced themes in knowledge included psychology in general (55.32% teachers referenced this theme), developmental psychology (28.72%), education knowledge and experience (25.53%), mental health (11.70%), professional knowledge (unspecified, 10.64%), knowledge range and structure (9.57%), counseling knowledge and experience (8.51%), social knowledge and experience (7.45%), educational psychology (4.26%), and other areas of knowledge (9.57%) such as management, medicine, philosophy, and history. The top four most frequently referenced themes in skill areas were communication skills (15.96%), problem solving skills (4.26%), counseling skills (4.26%), and professional skills (unspecified) (4.26%). The most frequently referenced themes regarding the qualities SPs should have included good personality such as being patient, outgoing, and personable (8.51%), mental health-related quality (4.26%), and professional ethics (4.26%) (see Supplemental Materials).

*Roles.* Teachers reported that SPs engaged in services for students (69.15% teachers referenced this theme), teachers (45.74%), parents (5.32%), and school

administrators (4.26%). The answers mostly were related to the services for students, including individual and/or group counseling (35.11% teachers mentioned this theme without specifying whether SPs provided the service for individual students or a group of students or both), individual counseling (23.4%), and service for all students (36.17%, such as psychological screening, teaching mental health classes, providing public lectures on topics related to mental health, and providing psycho-education through school bulletin boards, school radio station, and flyers). Results suggest that services for students, particularly, prevention-based services for all students, is clearly a priority for the SPs in China.

When talking about the type of students that an SP can help, teachers provided a variety of answers, including students with behavior problems (44.68%, e.g. noncompliance, hyperactivity), emotional disturbances/problems (46.81%, e.g. mood swings, anxiety, depression), social problems (37.23%, e.g. relationship difficulties with peers), learning problems (26.6%, e.g. bad grades, lack of motivation), and students from at-risk environments (28.27%, e.g. single-parent households, poor families) (see Supplemental Materials). The fact that 28.27% teachers said that SPs should work with students from at-risk environments suggested Chinese teachers' emphasis on prevention. This finding aligns well with the prevention focus of the SP's services in teachers' perspectives.

About half of the teachers (45.74%) reported that SPs in their schools also provided support/consultation for teachers ranging from once a semester to once per week. The support included consultation with teachers on general issues (unspecified, 27.66% of the teachers referenced this theme), providing teacher professional development workshops (10.64%), and consultation on how to help students with specific concerns (7.45%), including alleviating students' stress related to exams, how to better communicate with students, and how to increase students' motivation in learning certain subjects. In addition, SPs also provided counseling to teachers on how to manage their work-related stress and cope with negative moods (4.26%) (see Supplemental Materials).

Because the profession of SPs is relatively new in China, and some teachers become SPs with or without additional training, we were interested in how teachers perceived their roles to be different from the roles of the SPs. Teachers reported that the roles of SPs were very different from theirs and there were both challenges and advantages. The main differences were regarding the specific aspects of student development that these two professions address (23.4% teachers referenced this theme). For example, teachers reported that they were mainly responsible for helping students with their intellectual development and moral development through teaching knowledge and skills; however, SPs were responsible for helping students with their mental health (e.g. mood, thoughts, mental character) and behavior (e.g. habits). Twenty-two percent of teachers reported that the job of SPs was less stressful because SPs had more flexible schedules, and lighter workloads (e.g. SPs didn't have to prepare for classes, or manage student achievement and behaviors). Additionally, teachers believed that SPs had almost no pressure from teaching, students' performance on high-stake exams, or performance evaluations. Some

teachers (13.83%) felt that SPs had better relationships with students, were more easily involved in students' lives, and were more likely to be accepted and liked by students. Six teachers (6.38%) felt that SPs had a better understanding of students' needs than teachers. In comparison, teachers were able to be more proactive since they had more daily interactions with students, while SPs tended to be more reactive, to have less interaction with students, and to wait for students to seek help (8.51% teachers mentioned this theme). Eight teachers (8.51%) suggested that both SPs and teachers needed to collaborate to help students in need.

**Challenges.** Teachers reported that SPs faced many challenges, including: (a) having low status at school and in society (10.64%); (b) lacking training, skills, and effective methods which limited SPs' ability to deliver services effectively (8.51%); and (c) work-related stress due to large case load and work difficulties (10.64%). Specifically, SPs lacked support from the administrators because schools and the general public valued students' academic performance rather than their mental health. In addition, SPs also lacked support from parents and the public because there was a lack of overall awareness of the importance of mental health in China and stigma related to seeking mental health services.

**Teachers' willingness to seek services from SPs.** Sixty-three teachers (67.02%) reported that they were willing to seek services from SPs. Eleven (11.7%) teachers said 'No', two (2.13%) said 'maybe', and 18 (19.15%) did not answer this question mainly because their schools did not have an SP. Among the 63 teachers who were willing to seek help, the top four reasons were: (a) beliefs that SPs are professional and can solve the problem (19.05%); (b) student problems being too challenging for teachers to handle (11.11%); (c) having time to consult (1.59%); and (d) knowing and trusting the SPs (1.58%). Reasons for not seeking help from SPs provided by 11 teachers included: (a) wanting to solve the problem independently (18.18%); (b) the lack of time and energy (9.09%); (c) the lack of trust towards SP (9.09%); and (d) concerns about students' privacy (9.09%).

## Discussion and implications

This study appears to be the first empirical study to provide information regarding teachers' perceptions of the current status of SPs in Beijing, China, including SPs' roles and challenges and teachers' satisfaction with SPs. The findings will help guide future planning, training, and policy making in school psychology in China and other Eastern Asian countries with similar culture and school context.

### *Knowledge and competencies*

Some of the knowledge (e.g. psychology, education, social), competencies (problem solving, communication, and counseling skills), and quality (mental health-related quality, and good personality) Chinese teachers reported that SPs should have are

consistent with the competencies proposed by NASP (2006) and the American Psychological Association (APA) (Fouad et al., 2009), including competencies in scientific knowledge and methods, interpersonal/relationship and collaborative skills, and ethical responsibilities. These findings are also partially consistent with one study showing that Chinese principals and high school students expected SPs to have positive mental health qualities (e.g. emotional regulation) and strong aspirations for the career (e.g. love working with students; Xu, 2007). The expectation for other areas of knowledge (management, philosophy, and history) is not explicitly mentioned by NASP or APA. Currently, Chinese SPs are expected to play a role in moral education (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2012). We found that some moral education teachers (in seven schools) as well as other specific subject teachers took on the role of the SP without sufficient training. Considering that teachers expected SPs to have specific knowledge, skills, and character, it is important for SPs with specific training in school psychology to serve this position. When SPs lack those skills, teachers are less likely to trust them and become dissatisfied with their work, and hence, are unwilling to seek future services. On the other hand, SPs should collaborate with moral education teachers and classroom lead teachers who have frequent interactions with students, especially for school/class-wide preventions. This may be a way for SPs to increase buy-in to overcome the challenges they face.

## Roles

In general, SPs in Beijing, China work with students with similar problems (behavioral, emotional, and social problems) as in the US, but with a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention for all students. For example, 36.17% of teachers mentioned that SPs provided service to all students at their schools, including psychological screening and providing psycho-education through teaching mental health classes, giving public lectures, or through school bulletin boards and school radio stations. In addition, Chinese teachers (28.74%) identified students who experienced environmental risk factors (e.g. parental divorce, low income) as appropriate candidates for school-based mental health services. This finding aligns well with the prevention focus of the SP's services in teachers' perspectives. SPs in the current sample did not attend eligibility meetings, or conduct IQ or achievement tests because they were not the gatekeepers for special education services in China. Some of them conducted school-wide screening for students' behavior and mental health difficulties. This is especially important because epidemiological studies indicate that about 11% of Chinese children and adolescents experience mental health difficulties (Ma, Yao, & Zhao, 2013), but access to mental health services outside of school is very limited. Focusing on primary prevention appears to be a strength of SPs' practices. On the other hand, students with physical disabilities (e.g. deaf, blind) and severe intellectual disabilities usually attend special schools (Ding, Yang, Xiao, & Van Dyke, 2008), and SPs at those special schools may have different roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, regional

differences also exist. For example, school psychologists in Hong Kong reported that they spend most of their time conducting psychoeducational assessment, possibly reflecting British influence (Jimerson et al., 2006).

Chinese SPs tend to regularly deliver school-wide psycho-education through teaching mental health classes to students. Considering the stigma related to mental health and the lack of awareness of the importance of mental health in China (identified as the challenges SPs face), those classes should be used strategically to promote awareness, decrease stigma, teach social emotional learning or coping strategies, and build rapport with students, instead of focusing on memorizing the facts. In addition, mental health classes should not be used solely for moral education or for preaching, which will negatively impact the school psychological service delivery.

Some teachers commented on the importance of the collaboration between teachers and SPs. However, considering that 14.1% of teachers reported they were uncertain about SPs' ability mainly due to having no contact with SPs at their schools and 11.7% of teachers were unwilling to seek services from SPs, it is important for SPs to inform teachers and other consumers (e.g. parents, school administrators) about their roles and abilities, and to proactively provide consultation by identifying specific goals and plans for students in need. In addition, the role of classroom lead teachers seems very important in Asian countries (China, Japan, Korea) since they have the most interactions with students in areas ranging from learning, moral development, and daily life. SPs should respect classroom lead teachers (and other teachers) for their expertise and actively seek collaboration with them to address both individual student's difficulties and classroom climate issues and other general concerns. Obtaining collaboration with and acknowledgement from classroom lead teachers would greatly facilitate SPs' services and will help improve SPs' status at school as well.

Interestingly, some SPs in China also delivered mental health services to teachers. This may be confusing for some readers regarding the roles of SPs; however, the lack of mental service providers for teachers in China leaves SPs as the reasonable profession to provide those services. Arguably, this is a limitation for SPs' practice due to a possible lack of sufficient training in counseling adults and potential conflict of interest imbedded in such a dual relationship.

### *Training and supervision*

It was alarming to discover the lack of comprehensive training for most SPs in this sample. Based on teacher report, only 34.8% of schools had SPs who were certified as mental health counselors or had degrees in psychology, and the lack of training was identified as one challenge SPs face. This is consistent with the severe shortage in specialty training in psychology in China (Gao et al., 2010). In fact, only 82 universities in China offer degree programs in psychology compared to about 4000 universities in the US. In addition, about 3500–4000 bachelor's degrees in psychology were conferred in China (Yang Guang Gao Kao, 2013) compared to 108,986

bachelor's degrees in psychology in the US between 2011–2012 (US Department of Education, 2013). There is a lack of graduate training programs for school psychologists in China. In comparison, there are 188 NASP-approved school psychology graduate programs in the US (NASP, 2014). Due to the severe trainer shortage of qualified SPs and a demand for their services, currently many teachers who are not well trained in psychology served as SPs in Chinese schools, which, as shown in this study, negatively impacted SPs' credibility, teachers' confidence about their abilities, and school psychological service delivery.

Considering the fact that the profession of school psychology is still developing in China and other Asian countries (D'Amato et al., 2013; Ramalingam & Nath, 2012; Tangdhanakanond & Lee, 2014), it is important for professional associations in school psychology in China and other Asian countries with an under-developed school psychology profession to develop their own certification systems to ensure that only qualified candidates serve as SPs. For example, the Division of School Psychology under the Chinese Psychological Society can establish minimal training requirements in course work, supervision, internship, and continuing education for SPs (D'Amato et al., 2013; Gao et al., 2010). Policy-makers should also establish regulations to ensure that schools only hire SPs who meet those minimal training requirements to ensure they can provide high quality services to students (Gao et al., 2010). In addition to the traditional full-time training programs, trainings for current SPs or teachers may include summer or weekend classes or online workshops focusing on specific knowledge, competencies, and qualities teachers expect SPs to have. Considering that there are very few qualified SPs to provide supervision, and existing training/workshops/supervision are only offered in very few large cities in China, instead of relying solely on individual face-to-face supervision, supervision/consultation by phone, online, or group supervision should also be considered. Continuing to build university training programs and international collaboration with other professional organizations such as NASP and the International School Psychology Association (ISPA) for possible training and supervision opportunities may help alleviate these challenges (D'Amato et al., 2013).

## Conclusion

This study used teachers' perceptions as a window to investigate the state of school psychological services in the Chinese context. In general, based on teachers' perceptions, SPs' roles are consistent with the major roles as delineated by NASP (2010). It also appears that Chinese SPs emphasize prevention and early intervention with students. About half of the teachers interviewed were satisfied with SPs' services, but others were dissatisfied or uncertain partially due to the lack of interaction with SPs or concerns about SPs' lack of training and skills. SPs face many challenges including low status at school and in society, lack of training/skills, stigma, and work-related stress. To overcome those challenges, SPs need to inform teachers and other consumers about their roles and abilities, and

collaborate with them to serve students. East Asian countries such as China, Japan, Korea, and India are more collectivist in terms of their cultural values (Oakland & Saigh, 1987) and, as previously reviewed, share more commonalities in their school systems than with schools in the US or other Western countries. More importantly, compared to Western countries, the profession of school psychology in East Asian countries is young and underdeveloped (D'Amato et al., 2013; Ramalingam & Nath, 2012; Tangdhanakanond & Lee, 2014). Thus, based on our findings, professional associations in China and other East Asian countries should collaborate with international school psychology organizations to gain access to training/supervision opportunities, and develop their own certification systems to ensure that only qualified candidates serve as SPs. SPs in East Asian countries may also adapt US models of school psychology practice (e.g. evidence-based interventions, specialized training and supervision) to fit their cultural context.

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