The Journey of Undergraduate PRC International Students at U.S. Higher Education Institutions

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PRC Students Definition

- PRC students are defined as students whose place of origin is the People’s Republic of China.
- The term Chinese students and China in this presentation will refer to PRC students and the PRC respectively.
Presentation Focus

1. What are Chinese views on education and the experiences of Chinese undergraduates at Chinese undergraduate institutions?
2. Why do Chinese international students come to the US?
3. What do Chinese international students do after graduation?
4. What are this population’s needs at US higher education institutions and what can higher education institutions and individuals at higher education institutions do to serve this population?
Chinese Undergraduate Student Background and Navigating Chinese Undergraduate Institutions
Chinese Student Background

- Chinese society is a collectivist society where family and social goals are more important than personal goals.
- A Chinese culture core value is students striving for personal academic and professional success; achievement of these goals leads to honor for the family.
- Confucius beliefs highly influence Chinese education with higher education being seen as means to a better status in life.
- Parents are willing to invest in their children’s education.
Navigating the Chinese Undergraduate System

- The national college examination *gaokao (高考)* is essentially the one admission factor to get into PRC universities.
- Chinese students take classes together as a cohort and course selection is limited.
- Classes are taught in lecture style and students are taught to stay quiet, attentive, and respectful of the instructor. Speaking up and voicing your opinion is seen as rude and disrespectful.
- Memorization is a respected learning method and intellectual property is not greatly respected.
- In addition external guidance for academic study is provided and students do not have many opportunities to define their own academic goals and be self-directed.
- If students miss class or are receive low grades they are immediately notified by the class monitor *banzhang (班长)* or staff class advisor *banzhuren (班主任)*.
- In short, students are not involved in their education; rather they need to listen and do what they are told.
Why Chinese International Students Come to the United States
Theoretical Framework 1

Motivation is defined as factors that “drive a person to obtain satisfaction from a class of stimuli” (Sánchez, Fornerino, & Zhang, 2006, p. 29).
Theoretical Framework 2

Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) “push-pull” model

3 Stage Process

1. Students decide to study in another country (“push” factors).
2. Students decide which country to study in (“pull” factors).
3. Students decide which institution to study at (“pull” factors).
“Push” Factors From Country of Origin

- Lack of postsecondary enrollment options in China
- A sense of filial nationalism among Chinese undergraduate students and the desire to serve their motherland through studying abroad and bringing back new skills to help China develop and prosper
- With the opening of China and rising middle class and standards of living, more families had the financial resources to finance their students education abroad
- Perception that overseas study is better
- Study abroad may lead to a future immigration opportunity
“Pull” Factors To A Country

- Wanting to learn from the “West”
- Improving English language skills
- Learning a foreign culture
- Helping with future job prospects
- Not being at a disadvantage
“Pull” Factors to an Institution

- Environment’s safety
- General facilities
- Scholarships/Tuition
- Alumni
- Location
Chinese Student Study Abroad History in the US

- 1950s-1975 no Chinese students came to the US
- Starting in the 1980s the number of students grew dramatically
- 1988-1989 China temporarily became top sending country in the US
- Since 2009 Chinese international students have been the largest group of international students in the US
- Recent rapid growth in Chinese undergraduate enrollment
China* is the top place of origin for international students in the US
304,040 Chinese international students in the US
31.2% of the total international student population
39.6% were at graduate level, 41% at undergraduate level, 14.2% in “Optional Practical Training,” and 5.3% “Other”
For the first time the number of Chinese undergraduate students were more than graduate students
42.4% of Chinese international students study in STEM fields and 26.5% in business and management
$9.8 billion was contributed to the U.S. economy by Chinese students
* does not include Macau or Hong Kong
Chinese International Students Experiences at U.S. Higher Education Institutions
Theoretical Framework 1

Kim (2008) acculturation

- Acculturation is defined as learning new cultural practices and a new language.
- Acculturation is a process which is controlled by a certain extent by individuals and thus can vary from person to person.
- Furthermore, when acculturation occurs, its counterpart deculturation, or unlearning some old elements, occurs simultaneously.
Theoretical Framework 2


- Stress: “kind of identity conflict rooted in resistance to change, the desire to retain old customs in keeping with the original identity, on the one hand, and the desire to change behavior in seeking harmony with the new milieu, on the other” (Kim, 2008, p. 363)

- Adaptation: find a means to adapt or “fit” “between their internal conditions and the conditions of the new environment” (Kim, 2008, p. 363)

- Growth: can handle increased complexity internally
Theoretical Framework 3

*Figure 1.* Kim’s (2008) stress-adaptation-growth dynamic (p. 364)
Chinese Students Stressors 1

*English Language*

- Some Chinese international students had an English language barrier that lead to problems in the American classroom, including taking more time to complete academic assignments and keeping up with coursework.
- English language barrier difficulties also occurred in social spheres.
Chinese Student Stressors 2

Plagiarism

- Chinese students may not understand the American idea of plagiarism and how to cite and write papers in US higher education classrooms.
Chinese Student Stressors 3

Socialization 1

- US and China have a maximum sociocultural difference.
- In China indirectness is valued and friendships based on trading of favors and having a “close friendship” (Yan & Berliner, 2013, p.72).
Chinese Students Stressors 4

Socialization 2

- Chinese students find it difficult to interact with other American students because there are different expectations for friendship in each culture.
- Chinese students can find it difficult to interact with faculty and staff because of the US education values self-direction and autonomy.
- Some Chinese students feel they have too much freedom because they are not closely monitored in the classroom and do not feel they have one person to go to for help.
- Chinese students have stated that they do not feel welcome in the United States after interacting with students, university staff, and faculty.
Chinese Student Stressors 5

F1 Student Visa and Immigration Restrictions

- F1 Student Visas limits work on campus and greatly restricts students’ abilities to find work post-graduation.
- International students cannot apply for US student loans and have limited scholarship opportunities.
A Return to “Home” Culture

- Students may in the stress component return to the “home” culture and isolate from the culture they currently live in.
- Examples can include finding social support through a network of peers or primarily eating and shopping in establishments by the home culture.
- Research has show that Chinese international students find social support through a network of peers.
Chinese Student Adaptation

Social adaptation
- Chinese students participated in a variety of social organizations such as churches and religious organizations, professional organizations, and international and Chinese organizations.

Visa restriction adaptation
- Chinese students choose an institution based on financial aid and total costs of attendance.
Chinese Student Growth

- My survey of the academic literature did not find much on student growth.
- The sole exception could be Chinese students engagement in social organizations and the friendships and growing social network they found there.
Hypotheses for Limited Chinese Student Growth

- First, although adaptation and growth might have occurred in the Chinese international student population, the articles only focused on stresses in this population.
- The second hypothesis is that since Chinese international students have been a rapidly increasing section of the international student population with a nearly 40% annual growth since 2007, universities are still studying the population and slowly implementing changes. Thus there has not been enough time to research and publish Chinese international students’ adaptations and growth.
What Chinese International Students Do Post-Graduation
Post-Graduation Options

- Returning to China for work or further study
- OPT
- Graduate programs
- Work in the United States
Suggestions for Serving Chinese International Students
Suggestions for Serving Chinese Students 1

1. Chinese students in the PRC are used to being instructed what to do and being monitored by a class monitor *banzhang* (班长) and a staff class advisor *banzhuren* (班主任). Thus it is important for institution staff and others to talk to first year Chinese international students and explain how the university is structured and that student proactivity is needed in the US higher educational system.

2. Dissemination of practical information about life in America including student life and local area information would be beneficial for this population.
Suggestions for Serving Chinese Students 2

3. Higher education counselors and other administrator staff should obtain a basic understanding of Chinese collective values and the population’s background.

4. Fostering relationships between international students and university personnel would help Chinese international students feel more connected at and more knowledgeable about an institution. This could be accomplished through seminars on a monthly basis or specific university-based social media sites targeted toward Chinese international students.
Suggestions for Serving Chinese Students 3

5. Annual interviews with Chinese international students would allow for an institution to learn about this population’s needs and concerns. Interventions to address these needs should follow.

6. Support groups for Chinese and other international students would be helpful.

7. Since English language ability may be limited for Chinese international students it is recommended when meeting with students to avoid speaking quickly. For students with very limited English it is helpful to write down the main points of the meeting for the student to read over later.
References 1


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Questions?

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