

An Investigation on Intercultural Adaptation of International Students in China: Based on the Perspective of Qualitative Research

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Abstract: *With the method of qualitative research, this article investigated the current situation of five international students' intercultural adaptation in China from the perspective of economic development, public administrative environment, culture and traditional customs, and ecological environment. Through in-depth interviews, it was found that online shopping in China is convenient and fast, but high cost of transportation prevents them from travelling; Although some administrative agencies at all levels in our country are not familiar with foreign-related procedures, they all try their best to provide international students with high-quality services; International students generally identify with Chinese culture, enjoy Chinese music, Chinese cuisine, and Chinese festivals, but they feel such behaviors as "keep staring, greeting without response, avoiding intimate contact" uncomfortable. It is recommended to provide social support for international students in China from three levels: schools, teachers, and students, in the purpose of promoting their intercultural adaptation.*

Keywords: *International students in China; Intercultural adaptation; Qualitative research; Promotion Strategy*

1. Introduction

With the internationalization of China's higher education and the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, the number of international students in China increased steadily before the epidemic. According to data from the Ministry of Education, the number of international students in China reached 492,200 in 2018 [1]. However, the epidemic has brought certain obstacles to cross-cultural communication, and the study life of hundreds of thousands of international students in China has changed, and their cross-cultural adaptation has become more complicated. This paper adopts qualitative case study method and in-depth interview to study cross-cultural adaptation of international students in China. This is of great significance for promoting cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese students in the post-epidemic era and promoting the sustainable development of Chinese students' education.

2. Analysis of Research Status at Home and Abroad

Cross-cultural adaptation refers to the process of a group or individual changing themselves in order to adapt to the needs of the social environment [2]. Since the process of cross-cultural adaptation is a complex and dynamic development process, early scholars divided it into several stages. The Oberg stages, which have been cited most frequently, are honeymoon period, frustration period, recovery period and adaptation period [3]. Lysgaard expressed this process as a "U-curve", which is convenient and intuitive to understand the process of cross-cultural adaptation [4]. On this basis, Ward & Kennedy proposed a two-dimensional theoretical model of cross-cultural adaptation, which divides cross-cultural adaptation into two dimensions: socio-cultural adaptation and psychological adaptation [5].

Searching CNKI, it is found that relevant researches on "cross-cultural adaptation of international students in China" mainly focus on the period from 2016 to 2019, which coincides with the rapid growth of the number of international students in China. The research content mainly involves the study of cross-cultural adaptation model, the study of influencing factors of cross-cultural adaptation, and the cross-cultural adaptation of specific groups, such as the cross-cultural adaptation of Central

Asian students in China and the cross-cultural adaptation of medical students in China. In view of the model of cross-cultural adaptation, Enron's viewpoint is relatively representative. She proposed the cross-cultural adaptation model of "sandwich culture layer", believing that cross-cultural people use sandwich cultural characteristics to deal with cross-cultural problems. Through the "sandwich culture layer", cross-cultural people will "assimilate various new cultures, adapt to mainstream culture in depth, and return to the original culture in a transcendental way" [6]. The influencing factors of cross-cultural adaptation mainly include the following aspects: residence time, gender, cultural distance, social support, etc. [7].

The above studies discussed the cross-cultural adaptation of international students from different angles, enriched the theoretical system of cross-cultural adaptation of international students, and laid the foundation for further theoretical research and practical exploration. Based on the reference and reflection of previous research results, this paper adopts the case study method and in-depth interview to explore the current situation of cross-cultural adaptation and the social support received by international students in China. This aims to promote cross-cultural adaptation and sustainable development of international students' education in China.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Object

This study was conducted from April to May 2024. In order to facilitate the case analysis of cross-cultural adaptation of international students in China, the selected survey objects are all from the same provincial university. Considering the gender, origin country and language exchange degree of the international students, this study finally decided to select 5 international students in China, named Zhao Xia, Li Ya, Ma Bin, Su Hua and Kong Jet Jie, all of whom came to China to learn Chinese. Except for Ma Bin who has been in China for 14 months, the rest of the students have been in China for 9 months.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The data in this study mainly come from questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The questionnaire mainly investigates the basic information of international students in China, including nationality, gender, age, time in China, length of stay in China, study method and Chinese language level. In-depth interview is an important way to explore the inner thoughts of international students in China. One-on-one in-depth interview with international students in China can obtain more authentic information about social and cultural adaptation of international students in China. The interview language is mainly Chinese, supplemented by English. The interview time of each international student is about 2-3 hours. The interview is recorded in the whole process, and the content is related to various aspects of the cross-cultural adaptation of international students in China.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Reason for Coming to China and Graduation Plan

Of the five international students in China, except for Zhao Xia who studied at her own expense, the other four studied at public expense. They were more or less familiar with China before coming to China. Zhao Xia had a "very good understanding" of China before coming to China because she majored in international relations in Russia. As for the "reasons for studying in China", the five students agreed that they came to China to study in order to "obtain high-quality education", followed by "gain international life experience" and "yearning for Chinese culture". One student cited "the right political and economic environment" as one of the reasons for coming to China. 4 students chose "Return to China", 1 student chose "other countries", and no international students chose to work in China. According to the interview, international students working in China face practical problems such as "language barrier", "cultural differences" and "employment competition". As for "the degree to which studying in China will help you find your ideal job in the future", the four students all think it is "very helpful".

4.2 The Perception and Adaptability of Foreign Students to China's Economic Development Level

International students in China have the same macro feeling about China's economic environment, that is, "China's economy is developing too fast!" Kong mentioned that "it is very convenient to buy things online", which is also the most satisfying place for him after studying in China, Taobao and Pinduoduo are his frequent shopping websites. Li Ya also said that "online shopping in China is convenient and fast, and I often buy things on Taobao." Online shopping provides great convenience for international students, so that they are not subject to the restrictions of communication language, shopping time and shopping place, which greatly improves the flexibility and efficiency of shopping. Compared with the convenience and speed of online shopping, the problem of transportation costs is quite a headache for international students. Ma and Zhao both agree that China's transportation costs, including train and air tickets, are too expensive. Traveling is an effective way for international students to learn about and understand China. However, the high travel cost has become a major obstacle to inhibit the travel of international students. Although prices and transportation costs are a bit expensive, Ma said he still prefers the city because life here is more convenient, a mobile phone can solve everything, and the Chinese government tries to let every citizen live the life they want.

4.3 The Adaptability of Foreign Students to China's Political Environment

In response to the question "Does China's administrative institutions at all levels provide convenient services for international students?" Ma Bin from Burundi said: "I admire the leadership of the Chinese government, which is very excellent, especially high efficiency, and it is very smooth when applying for schools." The same bank card, two students from Russia feel the opposite. Li Ya said that when she applied for the bank card, the bank staff was very patient and meticulous because she was a foreigner and could not communicate fluently in Chinese. Many people cooperated with her to provide services, which she was very satisfied with. In contrast, Zhao said, "the bank card business is too slow here. In Russia, it may only take 30 minutes to apply for a bank card, but in China, it takes 2-3 hours. Many staff members are not familiar with the process of applying for a bank card for a foreigner with a passport, and they will ask many people to help, which takes a long time."

4.4 The Adaptability of Foreign Students to Chinese Culture and Customs

Before coming to China, foreign students have more or less a good understanding of Chinese culture and customs, and come to China with a yearning for Chinese traditional culture and folk customs. In terms of greeting and physical distance, compared with Chinese students, African students are more active and enthusiastic in meeting. But what made Ma Bin feel uncomfortable was that when he met a Chinese friend he had not seen for a long time and took the initiative to shake hands, the Chinese friend chose to avoid and avoid close contact with him, and he felt very aggrieved at that time. What Li Ya doesn't feel comfortable with is that someone will keep staring at her. In terms of food, Su Hua said that he likes the way of cooking in China, and thinks that Chinese food is very diverse and delicious. Ma Bin usually does not cook, basically eat in the canteen, rice and noodles will eat, especially like covered rice. Zhao Xia, from Russia, thinks the food here is too sweet, such as bread, the dishes are too greasy and salty, and the cheese is not particularly fresh. The differences between Chinese and foreign diets and their own dietary preferences make overseas students have different feelings about Chinese food. It is very important for them to choose the food suitable for themselves to promote their cultural adaptation and psychological well-being. In terms of traditional festivals, overseas students are active. Su Hua said: "I like Chinese festivals very much. Last Mid-Autumn Festival, I rode a motorcycle for more than 40 minutes with my friends to the beach to enjoy the moon. I did not expect that many locals had gathered at the beach."

5. Strategies for Improving Cross-cultural Adaptation of International Students in China

The optimization of cross-cultural adaptation of international students can be started by improving the social support for international students [8]. The campus support system provided by the school can greatly improve the psychological adaptation and psychological happiness of international students, and therefore can actively promote the adaptability of international students in all aspects of China [9].

5.1 School Management Level Support

First of all, schools should provide high-quality teaching resources and advanced teaching equipment for international students, strive to improve the learning effect of international students, and ensure that international students can succeed in their studies, gain from their studies, and make use of their studies. Secondly, the university should constantly improve the management mechanism and governance system of international students in China, innovate the working methods and skills of international students, and effectively improve the management level of international students in China. Finally, schools should pay attention to and improve the accommodation and eating conditions of international students, including whether the heating facilities in winter work normally, whether the canteen provides students with meals suitable for their tastes and so on. Schools need to improve the study and living conditions of international students in China not only from the macro level, but also from the micro level, so that they can successfully complete their studies.

5.2 Teacher Management Level Support

Teachers who have close contact with international students in China include lecturers and teachers in charge of international students' work. The instructor is responsible for the teaching of a course for international students. In addition to teaching, teachers should also pay attention to the cross-cultural adaptation of international students, develop cultural empathy, respect and understand the cultural differences of international students, create a tolerant and respectful teaching environment, guide and encourage international students to express their views, so that they can integrate into and adapt to the learning environment here as soon as possible. The teachers responsible for the work of international students should give more care and help to international students in terms of accommodation, diet, life and travel, give practical and effective help and support to international students, reduce their psychological anxiety, and promote their adaptation to the living environment here.

5.3 Student Community Level Support

The student club can organize Chinese and foreign exchange activities, such as bilingual corner, English corner, basketball game, friendship between Chinese and foreign students, etc., to strengthen the exchange and interaction between Chinese and foreign students, so that international students can feel the warmth and hospitality of Chinese students, and enhance the friendship between Chinese and foreign students. In addition, Chinese and foreign students can voluntarily form study partners, learn from each other, draw on each other's strengths, and promote academic progress and cultural exchanges. Considering that the use of WeChat by international students has a positive impact on their cross-cultural adaptation in terms of language, communication and learning adaptation [10], Chinese and foreign students can also use social media such as WeChat and QQ to make friends, answer and discuss questions, know and understand culture, learn and improve language ability, narrow the psychological distance between each other, and promote the cross-cultural adaptation of international students in China.

6. Conclusions

This study adopts the qualitative case study method to investigate the problems faced by five international students in cross-cultural adaptation. The results show that: Overseas students find it convenient and fast to shop online in China, but high transportation costs hinder their travel. Although Chinese administrative agencies at all levels are not familiar with foreign-related work procedures, they do their best to provide quality services for international students. International students love Chinese food and festivals, but "staring, greeting without response, avoiding intimate contact" is what makes international students uncomfortable. Cross-cultural adaptation is a long and complex process. Schools and teachers should pay more attention to international students in China and provide them with practical and effective social support to promote their cross-cultural adaptation. International students themselves should also take the initiative to know and understand Chinese culture, and actively participate in extracurricular recreational activities, so as to continuously improve cross-cultural adaptability.

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