

# Comparing Chinese and U.S. Perspectives on the Benefits of International Students

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**Abstract:** The local population may play an important role in the social integration of international students. This paper focuses on the study of local community members' attitude toward the benefits brought by international students. In addition, comparisons between the U.S. and Chinese data are made. Data were collected in Bemidji, a U.S. small city and Weifang, a Chinese small city respectively. The statistical analysis was applied using SPSS. The findings show both Chinese and U.S. local community members held positive attitude towards international students: generally, economically, and culturally. While the Chinese respondent's perspective towards international students was positive, the cultural and economic benefits are not statistically significant. Compared with Chinese respondents, U.S. community members held statistically significant positive attitude toward the general and economic benefits; however, the cultural benefit were positive but not statistically significant. U.S. respondents thought international students could bring more economic benefit than cultural benefit to the local community, but the Chinese respondents held the converse attitude. This research will both help international students adapt to the social environment (including social integration) and assist universities with strategies to enhance international education.

**Keywords:** international students; economic benefits; cultural benefits; general benefits; social integration

## I. INTRODUCTION

As education is becoming more globalized, the international education market has developed rapidly throughout, making studying abroad prevalent in many different countries of the world<sup>[1]</sup>. It is estimated that the most significant emerging industry in the 21st century is International education<sup>[2]</sup>. UNESCO projects that the global enrollments will grow to 7.2 million by 2025<sup>[3]</sup>.

According to the "Open Doors Report," for 2011-2012 academic-year, more than 764,400 students were attending U.S. colleges and universities. That represents an increase of almost 6% compared to one year earlier. According to a survey released by the Institute of International Education (IIE), more international students are studying at U.S. universities and colleges than ever before<sup>[4]</sup>.

According the news released by the Education department of china, the total number of sojourning international students was over 290,000 in 2013, and China will become the biggest learning destination country

in Asia in 2020 with hosting more than 500,000 international students<sup>[5]</sup>.

The competition for fee-paying students is increasing globally<sup>[6]</sup>. Universities have, over the years, developed increasingly sophisticated marketing tactics to attract international students. Yet, universities need to also consider issues that affect international students adjusting to the living and studying in another country<sup>[7]</sup>.

Many countries rely on the recruitment of international students to their higher education sector not just for their fee income but also the enrichment of the learning experience for all students<sup>[8]</sup>. In recognition of the economic and socio-cultural value of the international student cohort, as well as the significant challenge and risk of studying away from family and friends in a foreign community, some universities have focused on improving social integration<sup>[9]</sup>.

According to Bart Rienties, both individual and social attributes will influence the student's integration into higher education. Having friends, sharing accommodation with other students as well as contacts with the university staff positively influences social integration<sup>[10]</sup>. Tinto argued students not only need to persist in their study in order to graduate, but they also need to participate in the student culture, both within and outside the immediate context of the learning environment<sup>[11]</sup>. It is proposed that members of the local community could play important role in the social integration of international students. If members of the local community realize the actual and potential benefits of having international students, it would provide a more friendly and positive environment for international students. In addition, it would be much easier for international students to get social integration, improvement on academic performance and integrate into the local culture. There is also an inverse relationship between the local community members positive perception of international students and the degree of discrimination international students may experience. The part-time employment of international students would likely benefit both the students and the local community. In addition, the local community may better accept and understand multi-culture and learn more about the world.

This paper focuses on the study of local community members' attitude toward the benefits brought by international students. Comparisons are made between the U.S. and China. Data were collected in Bemidji, an American small town and Weifang, a Chinese small city. SPSS was applied in analysis. That research result will not

only help international students adapt to the social environment and gain social integration but also provide strategies to universities who focus on international education and so provide a better education environment for the international students.

## II. LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESIS

Poyrazli and Lopez<sup>[12]</sup> propose international students bring great economic and cultural benefits to the universities. However, these international students still face high levels of discrimination than domestic U.S. students. Wang Kunchen studied Chinese students' cultural adaptation applying Ward's cross-cultural adaptation process model; he found that Chinese students' psychological and academic adaptation was generally good. Yet these Chinese students felt they had great difficulties in social integration<sup>[13]</sup>.

Naidoo<sup>[7]</sup> argued that international students should not be viewed solely as a source of revenue, but they should be seen as providing an additional contribution to the academic and cultural life of the University.

In recognition of the economic and socio-cultural value of the international student cohort, most universities now provide student services departments. Many universities also seek to engage international students in planned social and learning activities with other students, staff and the local community. These engagements promote a sense of belonging critical to the well-being of these students<sup>[9]</sup>.

As this questionnaire was developed by the authors, the scale's reliability and validity were tested initially. Then, the first hypothesis (H1) was developed:

H1: the internal consistency-reliability and the validity of scale are acceptable.

Peykov advocates International students represent a group of people who have clear advantages over other immigrant groups<sup>[14]</sup>. Sarah Nunes and Nancy Arthur found international students' influence extends beyond the university's academic environment<sup>[15]</sup>. These positions assisted in the development of the second and third hypotheses (H2) and (H3):

H2: Both Chinese and U.S. community members would recognize that international students could benefit the local community generally (including economic and cultural benefits); and

H3: Compared with Chinese local community members, U.S. community members hold more positive attitudes toward the general benefit brought by international students.

According to Nunn, international students contribute economically to organizational development and planning, which translates into commercial ideas and marketable products<sup>[16]</sup>. According to Institute of International Education's (IIE) analysis, between tuition and living expenses, international students and their dependents contributed \$24 billion to the US economy, which supported nearly 313,000 jobs<sup>[4]</sup>.

Brown and Holloway<sup>[17]</sup> argue that income from international students plays a vital role in the financial viability of the high education sector. They advanced that fees from international students represented almost one-third of the total fees income for universities. Yet, Dean argued this benefit should not be overshadowed by the

cultural enrichment and knowledge expertise that these students bring to the university's experience<sup>[7]</sup>.

Aside from the economic benefits, the presence of students from diverse cultures and linguistic backgrounds in the universities allows for intercultural interactions and learning as well as the development of global networks, which are so pivotal for successful engagement in the knowledge community<sup>[18]</sup>.

The rise in the number of international students, in the UK over the last decade, has led to a growth in the cultural diversity of many UK universities. Many recognize the cultural enrichment that these students bring to the University<sup>[7]</sup>.

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Across the globe, international students are valued, both as economic assets and as potential future immigrants who will be well-prepared to contribute to the developing knowledge-based economies<sup>[19]</sup>. However, career goals associated with permanent immigration involves a myriad of personal, cultural, and systemic influences<sup>[20]</sup>.

Based on the above literature, hypotheses 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 are proposed.

H4: Both Chinese and U.S. community members recognize that international students potentially bring economic benefit to the local community.

H5: Compared with Chinese local community members, U.S. community members hold more positive attitudes towards the potential economic benefit of having international students

H6: Both Chinese and U.S. community members recognize that international students bring potential cultural benefit to the local community.

H7: Compared with Chinese local community members, U.S. community members hold more positive attitudes towards the cultural benefit of having international students.

H8: International students could bring more economic benefit than cultural benefit in both countries.

## III. METHODOLOGY

Consistent with this research's aim to study local community members' attitudes toward the benefit brought by having international students, comparison between U.S. and China are made. The survey was used among the local community members from each university: Wei Fang and Bemidji State. In order to enhance the homogeneity of the samples, data were collected in Bemidji, an American small town and Wei Fang, a Chinese small city respectively. The cities were selected because the authors reside in the two cities. Both Bemidji State and Wei Fang are small cities, and there are international students studying at each of the universities. Though the samples cannot be viewed as nationally representative, they do constitute comparable populations in the two nations, which is a major concern in cross-national research<sup>[21]</sup>.

The questionnaire was developed by Dr. Joyce, in English and was translated into Chinese by Professor Sui

by using the parallel translation method. The questionnaire included three parts, the first part detected participants' attitudes to the potential benefits of international students. The second part's goal was to determine the participants' attitude to the potential benefit by having specific nationalities of international students. The third part included information related to respondents demographic variables. In this research, only the people's attitude toward the potential benefit of international students was analyzed. The two items used from the questionnaire were, one, "I feel Bemidji could benefit culturally by having international students, in general, study at Bemidji State University;" and two, "I feel Bemidji could benefit economically by having international students, in general, study at Bemidji State University." The city in the questionnaire was replaced by Weifang while applied in China.

All items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The high score indicates that participants recognize the potential benefit of international students.

The samples consisted of 175 participants in Bemidji and 208 participants in Weifang.

The data were collected through random samples on streets, before supermarkets, in public parks and some shops and offices. Every participant was informed that the purpose for conducting the study was to investigate consumer ethnocentrism, the survey was voluntary and it would take no more than 5 minutes to complete. The information was completely confidential and anonymous. After the survey, all data was entered into a spreadsheet, and it was analyzed using SPSS to test the hypotheses.

#### IV. RESULTS

The Cronbach's Alpha of American samples was 0.877 and the Chinese samples was 0.738. Nunnally<sup>[22]</sup> advocates that 0.7 as an acceptable coefficient. Thus, this test result showed that the internal consistency reliability of this scale was acceptable. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.500, and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity result is 0 for both the two groups of samples. While the KMO was not large, it is acceptable. The scale's validity was determined to be acceptable. Thus, hypothesis 1 was accepted, and it was deemed valid to be used in order to make further analysis.

The general mean score of Chinese respondents was 3.8389 and the general mean score of U.S. respondents was 4.1657 (see table I). As a 5-point Likert-type scale was applied, both of the means were bigger than 3, so it is concluded that both Chinese and U.S. respondents recognized the potential benefit of having international students in the local community. While hypothesis 2 was accepted, the Chinese mean was lower than 4; this indicates that the Chinese local community could generally benefit from international students, but the benefit was not statistically significant.

The score of U.S. respondents had a higher positive value than the Chinese respondents with respect to the general benefit brought by international students. To test whether the difference was significant, an independent mean t-test was applied. At a 5% level of significance, the two tailed P-value was 0.000, and it was smaller than 0.05:

suggesting the means were statistically different. (See Table II). Therefore, hypothesis 3 was then accepted.

Hypothesis 4 is accepted: the mean scores were both greater than 3. The Chinese score was only, 3.72, and so it was not statistically significant. The U.S. respondents was 4.25 (see Table I), so it is statistically significant.

TABLE I. GROUP STATISTICS

Benefit type	respondents	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Economic benefits	American samples	175	4.25	1.064
	Chinese samples	208	3.72	.959
Cultural benefits	American samples	175	4.08	.991
	Chinese samples	208	3.96	.833
General benefits	American samples	175	4.1657	.96993
	Chinese samples	208	3.8389	.79962

As the score of U.S. respondents was higher than that of Chinese respondents on the item of economic benefit, this result indicates that the U.S. participants held more positive attitudes toward the economic benefit of international students than did their Chinese counterparts. This result was statistically significant as measured using the mean t-test at a 5% significant level and the two tailed P-value (see table II). Thus hypothesis 5 is accepted.

TABLE II. INDEPENDENT SAMPLES TEST

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of mean		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed) *
Economic benefit	Equal variances assumed	.538	.464	5.174	381	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			5.128	354.063	.000
Cultural benefit	Equal variances assumed	5.024	.026	1.271	381	.205
	Equal variances not assumed			1.252	341.091	.211
General benefit	Equal variances assumed	2.641	.105	3.614	381	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			3.555	337.206	.000

\* P-values, with independent mean t-test at 5%.

To compare the attitude of the two-group samples to potential cultural benefits of international students, mean scores were calculated. The mean scores for the Chinese and U.S. questionnaires are 3.96 and 4.08, respectively (see Table I). The independent mean t-test was made and the result in table II. The P-value on Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was 0.026, which was smaller than 0.05: it is concluded the variances were not equal. At a 5% level of significant, the two tailed P-value was 0.211, which suggested there were not statistically different between the two means (see table II). This result indicates that while U.S. respondents showed a higher mean, the difference in means is no statistically significant. So hypothesis 7 is rejected. U.S. participants have no greater positive attitude towards the cultural benefit of international students. The means of the groups were near

4 which indicated though both of the two groups agreed the local communities could culturally benefit from international students, but the benefit was not statistically significant.

For U.S. respondents, the mean of economic benefits was 4.25, which is higher than that of cultural benefits 4.08 (see Table I). Thus, it is concluded that U.S. respondents thought international students could bring more economic benefit than cultural benefit to the local community. As for Chinese respondents, the mean of economic benefit was 3.72 which was lower than that of cultural benefits 3.96 (see Table I). The result showed that Chinese respondents thought international students could bring more cultural benefits than economic benefits to the local community. As a result, hypothesis 8 is rejected.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Enhancing interactions with local community members not only provides a friendlier and positive environment for international students but also it serves to make them gain a much richer cultural experience. In addition, the local community members would benefit by having their horizons expanded and be provided an opportunity to learn more about the world.

This research focuses on the study of local community members' attitude toward the potential benefits of international students. Comparisons between U.S. and China were made. Eight hypotheses were put forward and tested. The reliability and validity of this scale was tested and determined to be reliable, so it could be used to make further analyses. Hypotheses 2, 4, 6 tested the general, economic and cultural benefit of international students from American and Chinese perspective. Hypotheses 3, 5, and 7 compared Chinese and American people's attitude toward the general benefit, economic benefit and cultural benefit could bring by international students respectively. Hypothesis 8 compared the economic benefit and cultural benefit in each of the two countries.

The finding showed: both of Chinese and American people held positive attitude toward the general benefits, economic benefit and cultural benefit could bring by international students. But the Chinese respondents thought though Chinese local communities could economically and culturally benefits from international students, but the benefit was not large. Compared with Chinese respondents, American people held more positive attitude toward the general and economic benefits. But, on the cultural benefit, both of the two groups showed similar attitude. After comparing the economic benefit and cultural benefit in each of the groups, we found American respondents thought international students could bring more economic benefit than cultural benefit to the local community, but the Chinese respondents held reverse attitude and they thought the local community could get more benefit culturally than economically.

## VI. LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Both of Chinese and American local people agreed that the local community could benefit economically and culturally by having international students, in general, study at the local universities. Thus we could say the local people have realized the significance of international students, especially American people. But the low score

depicted more effort need to do to expand the benefit that could bring by international students to the local community.

The research result will not only help international students gain more friendly social environment and adapt to the social environment but also provide implications to the universities who focus on international education and are trying to provide better education environment for the international students. To American universities and the sojourning international students in America, try to further expand cultural benefits and make the local community more culturally beneficial from international students is helpful. To Chinese universities and the adjourning international students in china, expand both economic and cultural benefits are positive and significant.

As international students are more readily accepted in a community, they enhance their cultural experience. It is important for international students to be actively involved in community activities. Local communities gain exposure to different cultures when interacting with international students. While it's important for universities to continue to provide excellent academic environments, universities should consider providing an excellent cultural experience as well. If universities increase the cultural opportunities for international students, there will be potentially increased understanding and appreciation of international educational programs. As the importance of global economics continues to increasingly expand, cooperative cultural relations become even more important in the future.

Both the U.S. and China are large countries in terms of both population and economic resources. Future research should consider expanding the samples to more and larger geographic locations. In addition, future research should address why Chinese participants perceive the benefit of international students is less than that of their U.S. counterparts.

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