

Chinese Students in the Far Eastern Universities

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Abstract—On the basis of data of empirical research conducted in four educational centers of the Far East (Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, Blagoveshchensk, Yakutsk) in 2017 this article analyzes major social and demographic as well as value and motivational features of Chinese students. The research has shown that recently there is a general improvement in the quality of migration flow in comparison with the early period of Chinese student migration to Russia. Chinese students come from families with high social and educational status, and good income. The majority of them upon graduation plans to return to China, but about 15-20% can integrate into the Russian environment, and that is important considering future anticipated growth of student migration from China to Russia.

Keywords—Chinese students, university, student migration, Far East.

I. THE PROBLEM AND IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

Internationalization and globalization of higher education recently have become priority directions of universities' activities. However, for the majority of the Far Eastern universities going global and joining the processes of internationalization is a new experience.

Foreign students' statistics in Russia shows that the biggest number of students comes from China, about 22 thousand people [15, p. 44]. This is the most multiple group from so called "far abroad", taking the second place in the rating after Kazakhstan citizens. At the same time these are the Far Eastern universities that are actively moving now to the leading positions in the Chinese direction. For example, in the list of top-ten universities with the biggest number of Chinese students in Russia there are eight Far Eastern universities, and the Far Eastern Federal University is the unconditional leader in this direction. The importance of the Far Eastern universities for the Chinese direction underlines the fact that the share of Chinese students in the total number of foreigners in the Far Eastern universities reaches 90%. These tendencies clearly growing stronger recently have been noticed several years ago, when due to increasing cost of education services and accommodation in the capital regions starting from 2008-2009 "more and more Chinese citizens get reoriented for receiving Russian education for more modest money in provincial universities, in the Far East and Siberia in the first place". [1, p.57]. Nowadays the Far Eastern universities enroll about 40% of Chinese students coming to study in Russia. They are taught in almost all universities of the region [10, p. 13].

Meanwhile social researchers often do not pay attention to this group, and all we know about it consists of fragmentary data from single papers about Chinese students in different regions, written in 2008-2012 [1, 2, 5, 8, 9]. The texts written

on this topic can be divided into two groups. The first group is represented by preliminary research papers devoted to studying separate social and value features of Chinese students enrolled in one or another region [13]. The second group – the most multiple one – includes the research on social and psychological adaptation and education barriers [3; 5]. Because there are quite many of such papers, one might think that the topic is actively studied. However, against this background we can clearly see lack of papers, which would consider Chinese students as statistically meaningful social group, well-defined in its borders and present in the Russian universities for quite a long time, changing in quality as well as in social characteristics. Probably, the only work of this kind was done within the framework of the research done by the Center of Sociology of the Ministry of Education of the Russia Federation under supervision of A. L. Arefiev [1]. They show the dynamics of quantity of Chinese students and their education preferences over a long period of time on the basis of data of the Ministry of Education. However, in this general picture it is impossible to spot regional differences between separate subgroups of Chinese students choosing a certain region for education. This is the problem that the author of this paper is trying to solve in respect to Chinese students enrolled in the Far Eastern universities.

Despite fragmental character of existing works, they provide approximate features of the social portrait of Chinese students enrolled in Russia, which were taken for a basis, confirmed and supplemented by empirical research conducted in the Far Eastern universities in 2017. The results of this research are presented in this article.

The goal of the research was revealing value and motivational features of Chinese students enrolled in the Far East as well as their career and migration plans for short and long-term prospective. The research was conducted in four cities of the Far East, namely Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Blagoveshchensk and Yakutsk. The total number of respondents was 255 people aged from 19 to 28, including 52% of female and 48% of male respondents. The research was conducted by the method of formalized interview in Russian and Chinese languages (at respondent's choice). In any case in order to lower the language barrier respondents received list of questions (questionnaire) translated into Chinese language, but the questionnaire sheet was filled in by the interviewer.

II. CHINESE STUDENTS: GENERAL SOCIAL FEATURES

As expected judging from the data of different authors [1, 9] the majority of Chinese students enrolled in the Far Eastern universities arrived from the North-Eastern provinces. On the one hand, it confirms already mentioned in scientific articles phenomenon of cross-border attraction vector between the Far

Eastern education centers and geographically close to them Chinese provinces [4] and explains growing popularity of the Far Eastern universities by territorial proximity. However, it must be noted that in comparison to what the authors show based on the data of 2008-2012, in the modern picture of migration regional variety became more obvious. For example, even in our small sample almost all of China is geographically represented (although not proportionally, but nevertheless). There are 18 out of 23 provinces, two autonomous regions and two municipalities (Beijin and Shanghai). Naturally, the biggest number of students comes from border provinces of so called "the first belt", meaning are they directly adjacent to the Russian territory, namely Heilongjiang, Liaoning, Jilin and Inner Mongolia, which together with the provinces of "the second belt", also formally having border status, give us ¾ of out sample - 78 %. However, we also must take into consideration another 22%, although they are represented by 1-2 people. First, this is the majority of central and southern provinces of China, second, there are the furthest from the border among them, like Hainan, Guangdong, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region etc.

Let us consider now some social features of respondents, which are important for understanding the quality of student migration from China to the Russian Far East.

The majority of students from China (70%) are privately financed, others receive various scholarships. Among the sources of scholarships double-diploma programs supported by partner universities and scholarships received within quotas of the Ministry of Education of Russia are popular. As for social, demographic and value features we did not find any substantial differences between students financed publicly or privately.

Almost all of our respondents come from families with two parents. Only several students have one parent. 60% of students are the only children in the family, about 30% have one brother or sister, and 10% come from families with three or more children. This distribution in general fits demographic structure of Chinese society [12, pp. 264-265].

Students arriving to receive education in the Far Eastern universities represent families that can be in general characterized by rather high status and level of education.

For example, as respondents said, professionally (Table 1) over 40% of fathers and 30% of mothers are top and middle managers or highly qualified specialists (the first three lines in the table). These positions connected to intellectual labor can be supplemented by those who represent families of private entrepreneurs (21%) in order to call all of them provisionally "middle class".¹ It is interesting to note that a quarter of mothers are housewives, and that can also be considered as indirect confirmation of family welfare. 18.7% of the respondents said they come from workers' families.

¹ Discussions about the criteria and methods of defining middle class, which are present since the moment of the problem appearance, in our case are not particularly important. It matters that the above-mentioned status positions completely match comprehension of the middle class in China [12, pp. 264-265].

TABLE I. PROFESSIONAL STATUS OF PARENTS

Professional status of parents	Mother	Father
top manager	4,6	9,8
middle-level manager	8,1	13,3
highly qualified specialist (doctor, teacher, economist, lawyer etc.)	16,7	17,9
middle-level service sector employee (shop assistant, barber, secretary etc.)	9,2	8,1
industrial worker	14,8	18,7
private entrepreneur	12,9	20,9
retired	2,4	2
housewife/housekeeper	25,9	0,5
unemployed	4,9	7,3
military	0,5	1,5
TOTAL	100	100

At the same time in the social and professional structure of the Chinese society the share of employed in the primary sector of economy is much higher than in our sample, and the share of labor force in intellectual professions is not so big [6, pp. 41, 44]. All of this means that education in the Far Eastern universities is chosen by Chinese families, which considering specific social structure of Chinese society appear to have rather high social status, which is further confirmed by parents' level of education (Table 2).

TABLE II. PARENTS' EDUCATION

What is your parents' level of education?	Mother	Father
High school or professional college	59,4	52,4
University	32,1	35,6
Scientific degree	8,5	12
TOTAL	100	100

In papers of 2007-2010 there was a popular opinion that students enrolled in the Far Eastern universities come from poor families and they do not have an opportunity to enter good universities in their home country [1, 9, 14]. The data of our research allow us to think that the situation is changing, so that with the growth of quantity of student migrants most probably their quality changes as well.

III. CHINESE STUDENTS: WELFARE AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

How it was noted earlier students coming from China represent families have high status and good level of parents' education. Let us consider now welfare of the families and basic level of children's education.

Estimating the welfare judging from subjective assessments of the respondents is quite difficult, because answering questions about income and financial situation the respondents can often be insincere. Nevertheless, the majority of the respondents estimated their families' welfare as rather good. Almost 2/3 of the respondents (Table 3) said that their families can

afford rather high level of consumption. For example, 56% represent families where only very expensive purchases can cause problems and 17% come from families without any financial problems.

TABLE III. FAMILIES' WELFARE

How would you estimate your family's welfare?	Answers chosen	%
Enough money only for food	9	3,7
Enough money only for food and clothes	12	4,7
Enough money for food and clothes, but buying durable consumer goods (refrigerator, TV) is a problem	46	18,1
Enough money for durable consumer goods, but very expensive purchases (apartment, car) are a problem	143	56,3
Can afford almost anything	44	17,3
TOTAL	254	100

An important factor explaining the choice of Russia for education is the level of school education. For Chinese students it is defined by the results of the state graduation examination gaokao, which is the most important number for entering the universities of their home country. Accordingly, the research of Russian authors often mentions low level of education among Chinese students coming to the Far Eastern universities and their inability to compete within their own education system. Our research shows that this is not so simple. On the one hand, the procedure of entering Russian universities is extremely simplified, and there are no requirements for basic preparation of Chinese students. In 95% of cases the applicants pass only Russian language test or interview. This actually creates conditions for unfavorable selection and makes the process of recruiting and enrollment easier for the universities. Nevertheless, among the Chinese student the majority has high grades of gaokao, above 500 (Table 4), and they could enter their country's universities.² Although our sample had a small number of students with very high grades, it would be unfair to claim that all Chinese coming to study in Russia are outsiders in their home country.

TABLE IV. GAOKAO RESULTS

What is your result of gaokao?	Answers chosen	%
Above 690	0	
600-690	12	5%
500-600	136	59,3%
400-500	63	27,5%
Less than 400	18	7,8%

Therefore the social and demographic portrait of Chinese students enrolled in the Russian Far Eastern universities presents a young person from highly educated family of public

² The highest grade in gaokao is 750. Top-5 Chinese universities put their entrance level at 660-680 [7].

servants or highly qualified specialist, not rich but with stable average income, having average or above average level of basic school education, who quite consciously made a choice in favor of studying in Russia while having other education opportunities including ones in his/her home country.

IV. CONCLUSION

Our research has shown that in the last years there was a general improvement in the quality in migration inflow in comparison to the early years of Chinese student migration to Russia. Nowadays we cannot confidently state that education in the Far Eastern universities is chosen by students from not very rich families who could not get good grades to enter home country universities. As a rule, they are children from families with high social and educational status and good income, often with not outstanding but rather decent results of internal examinations, which allow them to consider different enrollment alternatives. The majority of them returns home upon graduation, and about 15-20% can integrate into the Russian environment.

For the Far Eastern and in general Russian universities the students from China make rather important resource supporting the "far abroad" direction in the process on internationalization of the Russian higher education. Judging from internal dynamics of this process and existing external political conditions, this is the direction that has all chances for the future successful development. For example, even in our research 40% of respondents said that upon competing their current level of education they have intentions to continue studying in Russia, and 20% of them showed their loyalty to the same university, where they are studying now. Thus, possible consideration of further intentions of students concerning the place of enrollment, university and country of residence could substantially correct management strategies of universities working with these students.

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