



An Analysis on Motivation of International Students Who Come to China for Higher Education

Jiawen Lyu¹(✉), Yixiang Wei², and Xifan Zheng³

¹ School of Foreign Languages, Qingdao Agricultural University, Qingdao 266071, China
20190204243@stu.qau.edu.cn

² College of Literature and Media, Dongguan University of Technology, Dongguan 523000, China

³ International Department of Guangdong Experimental High School, Guangzhou 510375, Guangdong, China

Abstract. In order to promote the internationalization of higher education in China and attract more talented international students, it is important to study which factors are highly motivational for international students. This paper analyzes the academic, employment, and cultural factors that motivate international students to come to China for higher education. Results show that academic reputation and quality are considered by many international students as one of the most critical factors influencing their choice of university, while the quest for international qualification is the basic motivation and schooling support that help them subsist in a foreign country. From the perspective of employment, international students are attracted by the fast growth of China's economy, foreign-friendly employment policy as well as the international economic cooperation with its attendant business opportunities. Culturally, China's internationalization and multicultural development, and Chinese culture's attractiveness and inclusiveness are also contributing factors that motivate international students to come to China for higher education.

Keywords: International Education · International Students in China · Motivation · Higher education

1 Introduction

Under the background of globalization, international cooperation in different fields between countries has been strengthening. Since the Chinese authorities put forward the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) and other policies that are friendly to foreign friends, international students studying in China, as a popular phenomenon has been widely observed and studied by both domestic and international researchers and scholars. For decades, popular research ideas on groups of international students in various

J. Lyu, Y. Wei and X. Zheng—Contributed equally.

© The Author(s) 2023

Z. Zhan et al. (Eds.): SEAA 2022, ASSEHR 675, pp. 844–852, 2023.

https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-05-3_103

fields, for example, cross-cultural communication and adaptation, the quality of overseas education, international Chinese education, and international student management are highly focused on by researchers. However, there has been less previous evidence on the motivations for international students who receive higher education in China and mostly concentrated in recent years, which has revealed that, with the adjustments of the policies for international students in China and the increase in the number of international students studying in China, more and more researchers have begun to pay attention to this issue.

The main objective of the essay is to investigate the realistic and potential motivations that drive foreign students to attend Chinese universities from academic, employment, and cultural, three different major perspectives, along with the corresponding background provided for international students in China.

2 Academic Motivation

2.1 Quest to Obtain an International Qualification

The quest to obtain an international qualification is one of the most basic determinants for students to study abroad. The research conducted by P.A. Biney and M.Y. Cheng showed that 89.5% of international students agree that they choose to have higher education abroad to meet their desire to obtain an international qualification [1]. According to the Chinese Ministry of Education's statistics, from 2013 to 2020, the number of international students studying in China showed an upward trend year by year. In 2016, 442,773 international students from 205 countries came to Mainland China and studied in Chinese universities and colleges, representing an increase of 11.35% from 2015. In 2018, the number increased to 492,185 [2]. Moreover, 48.45% of these foreign students were enrolled for liberal arts degrees, while the number of students majoring in engineering, management, science, art, and agronomy increased by 20% year on year. This indicates that China is attracting more and more international students with its rapidly growing economy and internationalization trend.

In addition, the quest to obtain an international qualification is closely related to their desire to meet new faculty members with rich international experiences, to have a change of environment and new experiences, and the presence of well-equipped universities and learning environments with good global ranking [1]. Moreover, some respondents mentioned that they would have a competitive edge over other applicants when applying for jobs requiring proficiency in Chinese.

In summary, many students go for international education in order to obtain international qualifications. This is one of the most basic determinants for students to study abroad.

2.2 Academic Reputation and Quality of Chinese Universities

Academic reputation and quality are considered by many international students as one of the most critical factors influencing their choice of university [3]. It is also the main deciding factor when choosing a university within a given country. It is a relatively

complex factor, which includes reputation and quality of the institution, faculties, and research, infrastructures as well as the flexibility and variety of available programs.

The academic reputation and quality of Chinese universities have been increasing steadily in recent years. According to the survey by Chen Yan, 28.3% of respondents regard “the level of Chinese universities is higher than that of our country’s” as a very important factor that motivates them to come to China, and 34.2% of students think it’s important [4]. Firstly, findings show that students refer not only to the overall reputation of the destination institution but also, more often than not, to the reputation of a particular scientific area or researcher, irrespective of the global reputation of the university [5]. While the overall ranking is still the most basic and reliable reference for international students, some students would pay more attention to the ranking and quality of a specific scientific area. As for the reputation and quality of subjects, according to QS World University Rankings in 2021, subjects of architecture, environmental studies, and civil and structural engineering at Tsinghua University ranked top 10 in the world. But in 2015, civil and structural engineering only ranked 20, and environmental sciences 17 [6]. This indicates the improvement in the reputation and quality of the institution, faculties, and research of Chinese universities. Moreover, some international students come to China to study subjects that originated in China. For instance, subjects related to Traditional Chinese Medicine, tea art as well as Chinese operas are welcomed by international students, especially those who are motivated by interests in Chinese culture. Furthermore, some respondents mentioned the flexibility and variety of available programs. They want to choose the courses and projects that they are interested in, which are related to their internal motivation. And some students with a lower level of language ability would prefer projects taught in their native language.

In this section, it is concluded that the most frequently mentioned factors are academic reputation and quality. Since the quality of international education in China is on the rise, many respondents regard it as highly motivational.

2.3 Schooling Support for Foreign Students

A large proportion of international students mentioned that the opportunity to have a scholarship is highly motivational because it would help them subsist in a foreign country [5]. In order to attract and retain outstanding international students, the most common way adopted by countries around the world is to provide various types of schooling support such as scholarships, and China also does the same, who takes government scholarships as its main funding type [7]. According to the China Scholarship Council, which is entrusted by China’s Ministry of Education to be responsible for the admission, enrollment and administration of scholarship recipients, the Chinese Government Scholarship covers tuition fees, free university dormitory or accommodation subsidy, stipend, and comprehensive medical insurance [8]. There are also ASEAN-China Young Leaders Scholarship, Trade Unions Silk Road Scholarship, MOFCOM SCHOLARSHIP-CSC Program, and plenty of scholarships offered by universities. Moreover, there are policies that further raise funding standards. The Chinese government issued the Notice on Improving the Government Scholarship Funding System and Raising Funding Standards in 2015. For instance, undergraduate international students would at most receive 66,200 yuan annually [9].

In addition to the opportunity to get scholarships, low tuition fees, living and accommodation expenses are also contributing factors. On the basis of the survey conducted by Chen Yan, 51.1% of students strongly agree that “winning scholarships” motivate them to come to China for higher education, and 40.8% of students regard “low tuition fees” as an important factor [4]. 71.3% of overseas students agree with the statement that they choose China because of the “relatively low cost of obtaining a degree”, and 57.8% of them agree that “relatively low cost of living” is motivational [5]. They stated that these subsidies and supports relieve their economic burden, and encourage them to come to China.

In summary, the opportunities to get scholarships, and the relatively low tuition fees and living expenses greatly motivate international students to come to China for higher education.

3 Employment Motivation

3.1 The Fast Growth of China’s Economy

China’s economy is a significant motivation that drives international students to study in China. One of the significant characters of China’s economy is openness. In March 2015, the Chinese authorities put forward the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI), which marked a greater opening-up to the world. Provided by BRI, nowadays countries and regions along the Belt and Road have more opportunities to enhance a further understanding of current China and strengthen win-win cooperation in investment, trade, agriculture, tourism and other fields with China, which undoubtedly inspire international students to study in China and attract more talents to learn and work in China.

There is also another crucial feature of the Chinese economic environment— stability. The financial crisis of 2008 led to a long-term economic downturn in some major developed countries in the world, while during this period, China’s economy continued to develop at a medium-high speed. China’s economy grew steadily over these years, even in 2020, China’s GDP grew by 2.3% year-on-year, made it the only major economy in the world to achieve positive growth in the outbreak of COVID pandemic [10], which could also be viewed as an international vision of the era why more and more international students choose to study in China and seek job in China.

According to a questionnaire survey conducted in 2020, which selected international students who studied in a university in Beijing as research samples, over 70% of respondents expressed their willingness to stay in China after graduation. Regarding the reasons for choosing to work in China, 65.38% of respondents explained that “China’s economy continues to grow, along with good job prospects” [11].

3.2 International Foreign Friendly Employment Policy

Currently, the Chinese authorities are increasingly attaching importance to the introduction of talents and the problem of employment difficulties of college graduates. These years, the Chinese government are introducing favorable policies to attract more bright foreign talents to settle in and work in China, including international graduates who has completed a university degree in Chinese universities.

In August 2015, Shanghai government unveiled a new overseas talent introduction policy. Shanghai government decided to launch a pilot project for foreign students to stay in Shanghai directly after graduation. Foreign students who obtained a master's degree or above in a university in Shanghai could apply for employment procedures for foreigners with the certificate issued by the Shanghai Pilot Free Trade Zone and the Management Committee of Zhangjiang High-tech Zone. This measure broke through the restriction that foreigners need to equip with two years of work experience to obtain employment in Shanghai [12].

Subsequently, the Chinese authorities continued to reduce barriers for foreign students to hunt jobs in China. In January 2017, Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as Minister of Education released an announcement which facilitated foreign college graduates to obtain employment in China again. Not only in Shanghai, foreign students who had obtained a master's degree or above in a Chinese university and graduated within one year but without work experience were all accepted to this policy. Nevertheless, these foreign students should meet some conditions as well, including at least 18 years old; no criminal record; excellent academic performance, with an average score of not less than 80 points; enrollment at a job position which is corresponding to the major and so forth; holding a valid passport or other international travel document that can replace a passport and so forth [13].

3.3 Economic Cooperation with Its Attendant Business Opportunities

From the perspective of the international students in China, who have international perspectives naturally and equipped with bilingual or multilingual ability, are rare compound talents resources under the background of current trend of global economy and play a crucial role in boosting domestic and international circulations progressing smoothly.

The Chinese government spared efforts to strengthen cooperation and provide job opportunities for international students in China. Since 2016 so far, the Study Abroad Service Center of the Ministry of Education had held several recruitment fairs for talents studying in China to provide channels of job-hunting for international students to work in China. The Chinese authorities not only invite large enterprises related to the "Belt and Road Initiative" to participate in the job fair, but also provide help and support for international students who are willing to start a business in Beijing in business incubation and residence permit application [14].

4 China's Internationalization and Multicultural Development

With the rapid development of the global economy, more and more countries and cultures are integrated into the general trend of integration, so that individuals have more channels to contact foreign cultures that are completely different from their own cultures. This process is bound to have multiple impacts on individuals, collectives, and countries.

In order to enhance the ability of international cultural communication, the cultural appeal and credibility of foreign discourse, and to enhance the influence of China's foreign cultural discourse in the international community, China has created a multi-dimensional development.

Since the beginning of the 21st century when China put forward the “going out” construction policy of Chinese culture, it has launched various foreign cultural projects. Among them, represented by the “Greater China Library” national major publishing project in 1995, the “Confucius Institute” project established since 2004, and the “Chinese Academic Translation Project” in 2010, China’s foreign cultural dissemination, through the use of platform culture, academic, language exchange and other advantages, has attracting batches of international students to China.

Teaching Chinese as a foreign language is an important channel to ensure the status of the Chinese language in international dialogue. While expanding the enrollment of undergraduate, master’s and doctoral students majoring in Chinese language, Chinese universities should promote Chinese language teaching to the world through multiple channels. Cultivate more people friendly to China to enhance the international influence of Chinese [15].

4.1 Attraction of Chinese Culture

In today’s world, culture, economy and politics are intertwined, and their status and role in the competition of comprehensive national strength are becoming more and more prominent. Under the new situation of economic globalization and world multipolarization, technological progress by leaps and bounds, and mutual agitation of various cultures, only by focusing on the frontier of world cultural development and continuously promoting cultural innovation can continuously enhance the attraction of socialist culture. It has continuously enhanced the overall strength, international influence and competitiveness of Chinese culture.

With the improvement of China’s comprehensive national strength, international popularity and recognition, more and more foreigners like Chinese culture and life. China has preferential policies for foreign students, who can enjoy better study conditions, and they can study abroad after their admission scores meet the standard.

Many foreigners want to stay in China for development. There is no discrimination against foreigners here, the society is stable and harmonious, and the prices are relatively low. Moreover, there are many employment opportunities here, it is easy to find a job, and the salary is relatively high. However, the employment situation in some countries is relatively tense. It is better to stay in China for development and have a good future [16].

In recent years, the “Chinese craze” has caused more and more countries to join the “army” of Chinese language learning. The successful “going overseas” of Chinese film and television works and online literature has also allowed more foreigners to come into contact with and like Chinese culture. The international influence of Chinese culture has grown significantly this year. Most international students are attracted by Chinese culture. With their yearning and love for Chinese culture, more and more international students choose China as their destination.

4.2 Inclusiveness of Chinese Culture

A factor that cannot be ignored is that the national spirit of the Chinese nation has played a great role. There are two main aspects to discuss the inclusiveness of Chinese culture from the perspective of ethnicity:

First, the inclusiveness of Chinese culture means seeking common ground while reserving differences and being inclusive. Seeking common ground while reserving differences means being able to live in harmony with the cultures of other ethnic groups; being eclectic means being able to absorb and learn from the positive elements of other ethnic cultures in cultural exchanges.

Second, the inclusiveness of Chinese culture is also reflected in the continuous communication with the cultures of various ethnic groups in a harmonious relationship, enhancing the recognition of one's own culture and the understanding and cognition of other ethnic cultures [17].

The tolerance of Chinese culture to foreign cultures is premised on its strong assimilation power. It uses this powerful assimilation force to influence and transform foreign cultures and make them have Chinese characteristics. The inclusiveness of Chinese culture is an important psychological and cultural basis for absorbing foreign cultures. Without such a foundation, not only will foreign cultures not be digested and absorbed, but they may also be assimilated by foreign cultures, thus losing their own national cultural characteristics.

However, because of China's inherent traditional culture, it has a deep foundation and a spirit of tolerance, and as a result, it constantly absorbs and assimilates foreign cultures. The entry of foreign cultures enriched Chinese culture, but it did not make Chinese culture lose its unique character. Once all foreign cultures enter China, they begin the process of Sinicization [18].

Chinese culture has always advocated that tolerance means greatness, and greatness means longevity. Cultural inclusivity enables Chinese social thought and culture to form a colorful and lively situation internally, while externally it is open to the world, constantly accepting the stimulation and nourishment of heterogeneous cultures, so that it has stronger vitality. As Mr. Ji Xianlin said, both bring and send, bring good things from foreign countries and send your own good things. This is called the combination of bring doctrine and send doctrine. Promote the cultural construction of our country and cultivate a national spirit with high spirits and high character. This is the proper meaning of the title of today's promotion of the spirit of tolerance in traditional culture [19].

5 Conclusion

On the basis of the findings, it is concluded that academic reputation and quality are considered by many international students as one of the most critical factors influencing their choice of university, and a large proportion of international students choose to have higher education abroad to meet their desire to obtain an international qualification. Meanwhile, the opportunities to get scholarships, and the relatively low tuition fees and living expenses relieve their economic burden. Apart from academic factor, future employment is also highly motivational owing to the openness and stability of China's economy, foreign-friendly policy, and economic cooperation. Currently, the Chinese

authorities are attaching more importance to the introduction of talents and the problem of employment difficulties of college graduates, and are continuing to reduce barriers for their job hunting by putting forth multiple policies and providing business opportunities. In addition to employment, international students are attracted by the multiculturalism, attractiveness, and inclusiveness of Chinese culture. As more and more countries and cultures are joining in the general trend of integration, international students have more channels to experience foreign cultures in China. And Chinese traditional culture has become the only uninterrupted cultural system among the four major cultural systems in the world. These three factors are considered by many international students as highly motivational. Analyzing the motivations can provide guidance for promoting the internationalization of higher education in China. Future research may analyze the changes in motivations before and after they come to China for higher education.

References

1. Biney, P. A., & Cheng, M. Y. (2021). International students' decision to study in China: A study of some selected international students from universities in China. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 9, 305–325. <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation.aspx?paperid=111258>
2. Ministry of Education (MOE). (2018). Growing number of foreign students choosing to study in China for a degree across multiple disciplines. http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press_releases/201804/t20180403_332258.html
3. Simões, C., & Soares, A. M. (2010). Applying to higher education: Information sources and choice factors. *Studies in Higher Education*, 35, 371–389. <https://www.tandfonline.53yu.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03075070903096490>
4. Chen, Y., An, W., Wei, Z. X., & Ma, H. X. (2019). Motivation analysis of International students studying in China under the Background of “One Belt and One Road”: Based on an empirical study of two universities in Guizhou Province. *Heihe Journal*, 6, 110–112. <https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2019&filename=HHXK201906045&uniplatform=NZKPT&v=lfZ-8z11MM8JXyDHOCEIThBd9-XNcEOs6d2tPpmJ-ICMtwZix31Vh1GJATR1Atf>
5. Oliveira, D. B., & Soares, A. M. (2016). Studying abroad: developing a model for the decision process of international students. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 38, 126–139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2016.1150234>
6. QS World University Rankings by Subject. (2022). <https://www.qschina.cn/en/subject-rankings/2022>
7. Zheng, G., & Ma, L. (2016). “One Belt and One Road” strategy and Education for International students in China: Based on data analysis from 2004 to 2014. *Education and Economy*, 4, 77–82. <https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2016&filename=JYJI201604010&uniplatform=NZKPT&v=-AP1u60ZPR5cHWg6GKO AavnHiP7dhK2zVBRuiknxV8KSVtboOhxTyIwcDGkV0gsn>
8. China Scholarship Council. Application guide for Chinese government scholarship. https://www.campuschina.org/content/details3_74776.html
9. Study on employment Guidance strategies for International students in the New Era. (2020). Shandong Education News Network. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1686252437920424896>
10. National economy and social development statistical bulletin. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). (2020). http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/202102/t20210227_1814154.html

11. Lu, Y., & Wu, D. (2020). Research on employment guidance work strategies for international students in China in the new era. *Journal of World Education*, 33, 28–34. https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFDLAST2021&filename=JYXI202012006&uniplatform=NZKPT&v=1Cnf38ufsDacp9JMCXSPi-WJCFHXY_WT71NYy9OtMH1tDIEyBPiAoa4ZcRTNLSA
12. Notice on Issuing the “Implementation Measures (for Trial Implementation) of Serving the Construction of Science and Technology Innovation Centers with Global Influence and Implementing a More Open Policy for the Introduction of Overseas Talents”, Shanghai Pudong New Area Talent Service Center. (2015). <https://www.pdrcfw.com/ServiceDetail.aspx?id=526>
13. Notice by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education on matters related to allowing outstanding foreign college graduates to work in China. (2017). http://www.mohrss.gov.cn/SYrlzyhshbzb/jiuye/zcwj/201701/t20170111_264214.html
14. Li, F., & Wang, L. (2017). “I Want to Stay and Work in China” - The way for foreign students to find employment in China. Guangming Net. https://news.gmw.cn/2017-11/29/content_26942104.htm
15. The openness and inclusiveness of Chinese civilization state council information office website. (2014). <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zhzc/10/Document/1375046/1375046.htm>.
16. Enhancing the Attractive Power of Socialist Culture with Chinese Characteristics through Innovation People’s Daily. (2007). <https://news.sohu.com/20070629/n250820845.shtml>
17. Great changes unseen in a century Government affairs: One Belt One Road Forum. (2019). https://m.thepaper.cn/baijiahao_4091791
18. The relationship between multicultural experience and creativity in the context of Chinese culture. <https://cdmd.cnki.com.cn/Article/CDMD-10028-1014322259.htm>
19. Yan, Z. Z. (2005). On enhancing the attraction and appeal of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics. *Party Construction Research*, 1, <https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFD2005&filename=DJYJ200501005&uniplatform=NZKPT&v=qheUjCG3Xj4FowtTzVCZf4awXigLi4PQGoOHoSWEdDJLycYtRdRzDt7Sycr3O8C>

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

