

CULTURAL ADAPTATION OF CHINESE STUDENTS AS THE NEED OF THEIR EDUCATION ABROAD PROCESS

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Abstract. *The article is devoted to a sharp problem of educational practice: ways of cultural adaptation of foreign (in particular, Chinese) students in new host society as a condition of their successful education abroad. Chinese students now form the largest abroad students` community in main countries of the world. As the Chinese way of living and the education traditions differ a lot from the countries` they usually would like to continue their education at, cultural adaptation is seen in the article as the need for a comfortable education process both for the students came and the University host them. The Main methods of Chinese students` cultural adaptation process are under consideration of the research, paying attention to the period (stage) a student finds himself / herself at that also can be seen as the aim of the research. As to the methods, the ones traditionally used in social studies and general research work were used: ethnographic descriptions and census data, scientific method to collect empirical evidence, method of analysis, etc. As the result was presented a set of methods that can be used by a host University on condition of the Chinese students` cooperation to level down the cultural shock period for the student and to speed up his/her entering the host culture society.*

Keywords: *Chinese students, host culture society, native culture society, cultural adaptation, University, educational process, cultural shock.*

Introduction

The Modern world gives young people wide educational opportunities including abroad education. State governments and local authorities stimulate young people to get education abroad in different reasons: some countries and

educational systems consider it to be a normal and obligatory practice for their students to have abroad educational experience (Central European countries, USA, Canada etc.), some try to encourage the best ones by proposing them grants and financial support to gain new knowledge and skills at abroad educational institutions (Ukraine, North European countries, former USSR countries), some try to solve the problem of own educational systems' gabs by the sources of other countries' ones (Mongolia, Brazil, African countries), etc.

It's a fact that many students (regardless of maturity, disposition, previous experience abroad, or knowledge of the country in which they will be living) experience some degree of culture shock while studying abroad. This feeling of being lonely and overwhelmed in a new culture is both a normal and predictable experience (Hui, Sheng, & Min Zh, 2003). On the other hand, the shock period can become quite long blocking a foreign student's emotional and mental perception of the educational process and reducing both the effectiveness and expediency of his/her stay at a foreign university. The only way to overcome the negative trends of a cultural space's sharp change is the process of a student's cultural adaptation to a host culture. The sooner the active perception of the host culture begins (not rejection or suppression), the sooner a foreign student will be able to begin high-quality education. It should be mentioned that this process is individual for every person, depended on his/her self-motivation, adaptation abilities, personal aims, but can be regulated and speeded up by the host University in cooperation with the student (Li & Li, 2013). The readiness and orientation of the student to cultural adaptation as a necessity can be seen as a prerequisite for the process mentioned.

The aim of the paper is to present the main methods of Chinese students' cultural adaptation process in different periods (stage). The stages are recognized not by a student's psychological and emotional state principle (that is quite typical for researches on the problem chosen), but the period of physical stay at a host University one. Methods typical to social studies and general scientific research methods were used: observation, data matching, cross-scientific research (as the problem is seen in other sciences, such as psychology, medical science, and behaviorism), ethnographic descriptions and census data (in particular for the Chinese students studying abroad), scientific method to collect empirical evidence, method of analysis, etc.

General Problematic

Finding themselves in a different cultural space people (and the Chinese students as well) usually have to choose one of two behavior algorithms to be used: cultural self-isolation or cross-cultural adaptation:

Cultural self-isolation - a situation of deliberate non-inclusion of the person into the cultural space different from his/her native one even while living in it for a long period. In light variant, it means not taking part in social (university) activities, limiting himself/herself in food or clothes stick to native cultural space traditions and requirements, forming an enclosed cultural space. In a hard variant, it can bring to social problems and appearing of uncontrolled units and territories (like so-called «fawells» in Rio-De-Janeiro - districts with independent criminal culture, law, traditions, values etc uncontrolled by Brazilian government). Countrywide the practice of Chinatowns all over the world shows the ability of the Chinese to live successfully in cultural self-isolation. As to the Chinese students, traditionally they try to become members of the host cultural society as soon as possible, but sometimes use the cultural self-isolation way especially when they come for short-time courses or the host cultural space already has a strong Chinese Diaspora and the University is not quite active in including the Chinese newcomers into the local cultural space (Zhang, Zhan, & Xie, 2017).

Cross-cultural adaptation is a socio-psychological process of adopting by the person cultural patterns appropriate for the society different from his/her native one. It involves reviewing and changing the structure of a program or practice to the one more fitting needs and preferences of a particular cultural group or community. Put another way, cultural adaptation involves modifications to service delivery and/ or modifications to context, structure, and practice to meet the particular language, communication, spiritual, sexual identity, geographical, social and other needs of the population of focus (Booth & Lazear, 2015). Cross-cultural adaptation refers to the process of internal change in individuals to be able to function in an unfamiliar culture. Newcomers learn to make adjustments in their original cultural habits and can attain a level of efficacy in the new environment. Long-term and extensive experiences of cross-cultural adaptation may lead to the individual's assimilation into the mainstream culture of the host society (Kim, 2012).

The host cultural society uses all the sources to make a newcomer to choose the second one as it brings to the homogeneity of the community which in this case has an opportunity of predictable existence and evolutionary development. Self-isolation brings to the appearance of independent cultural units inside of the community and it may bring to local conflicts on the cultural ground or even disintegration of the community (Arasaratnam, 2006). Having such kind of «community in community» (no matter nationwide or university-wide) cost the host community additional expenses (in our particular case starting from the University staff able to speak Chinese and teach courses using

this language and up to adopting new behavior rules that fit the Chinese traditions) (Sun, Feng, Lin, & Huang, 2009).

The theoretical framework of the problem

The process of cross-cultural adaptation involves the deculturation of some of the original cultural habits and the acculturation of new ones. Both processes occur through communicative engagements between the individual and the host environment. (Gu & Dai, 2012). Usually, a person comes through cross-cultural adaptation passes several phases that can be determined as follow:

- analysis of a new cultural environment (usually in behavior it reflects as self-isolation for observation);
- comparing the new cultural environment with the patterns and algorithms formed by the native culture (in this period a person trying to enter a new cultural society needs supervision from the locals to explain the peculiarities and support him/her in cases where the native culture patters comes in conflict with the ones traditional for the new culture);
- making analogues between new and native cultural environment patterns;
- choosing the patterns from the native cultural environment can be used in the new one;
- adopting native cultural environment patterns to the new cultural environment (usually, this period is characterized by communication activity the person goes for to “practice” his/her new habits);
- blocking the cultural patterns can` t be adapted to a new cultural environment;
- making an unified behavior-value system appropriate for the new cultural environment based on host cultural environment and some native culture environment patterns adopted for the new one.

Sketchily the process mentioned can be seen as followed:

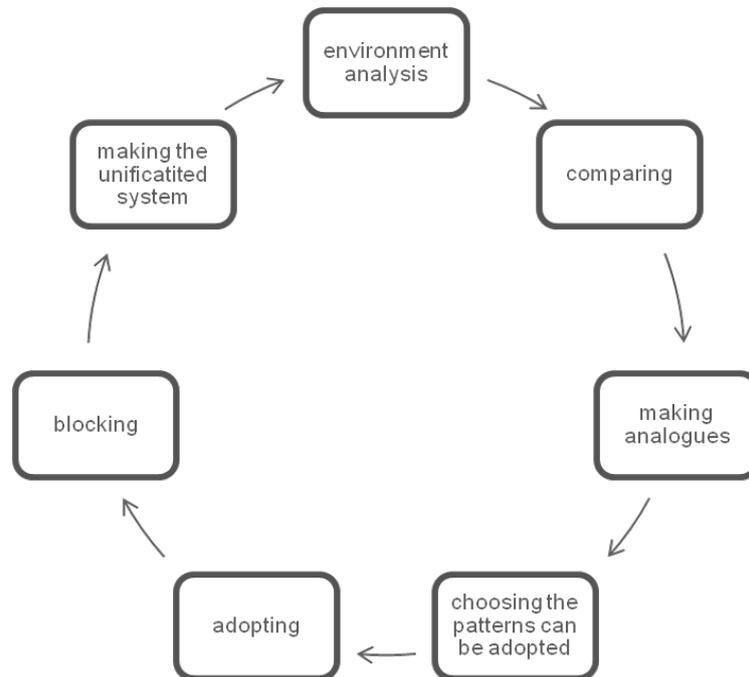


Figure 1 Culture adaptation circle

Some researchers add to the previously mentioned phases one more which is seen as “taking the new cultural environment patterns as own ones; complete replacement of a native value, behavior algorithm, pattern etc. by the one from the new cultural environment” (Zeng, 2017). In our mind, this phase more belongs to the process of cultural socialization and re-socialization and should be under consideration only in cases when the individual has to stay in the new cultural society for a long time or forever (marriage, migration, refugee, etc.) and has to fit the new cultural environment completely. Such cases are not under consideration in this particular article.

Also, it can be mentioned that during his/her life a person can make this culture adaptation circle many times depended on personal needs and changes in the ultimate reality developing universal cultural and behavioral algorithms (patterns) applicable to all cultural realities with which a person actively pushes and interacts. The universal patterns form a new value-behavioral system that a person combines from the cultures he has (had) an experienced of being involved. Sketchily the process mentioned can be seen as followed:

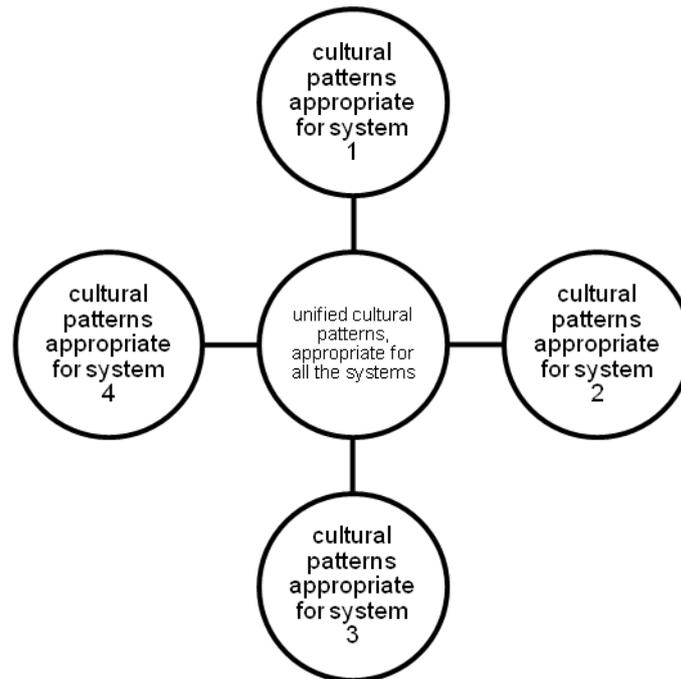


Figure 2 Developing universal cultural and behavioral patterns` process

The farther cultures are from each other, the more time a person spends for universal patterns` system developing, and the more unlike all the cultures used is the result.

Social framework of the problem

Today students from China form the largest group of students getting education abroad and can be met at the top Universities and colleges all over the world. By letting their young people go abroad for education, China aims several particular issues:

- 1) spreading Chinese values and world view for breaking stereotypes as to this county and its ideology (as the main task forced by the Chinese Government according to such kind of normative documents as «Compulsory Education Law of PR China» (1985), «Patriotic Concept of PR China» (2015), Final Decisions of 19th CCP National Congress (2019), etc.);
- 2) increasing of Chinese students` educational level and their specialization profiling (for such purposes the Chinese students have government support for MA degrees and post-graduate programs to famous abroad Universities which rank in QS World University Rankings is not lower than 130) (Yang, 2009);

- 3) fulfilling the needs of Chinese educational market as to high education and MA degree programs for Chinese young people who haven't pass the state academic exams there in China (and that's why do not have the right to continue education in the Chinese educational system), but have the financial opportunity to obtain education abroad (the leading places as to this market niche for the Chinese students belong to Ukraine, Belarus, Russia);
- 4) fulfilling the needs of Chinese New Universities (the ones appeared according to «211 Project» start 1985) and high education institutions of provincial and regional\city level as to teachers obtaining Ph.D degrees (the Chinese educational system can't fulfill the requirements of Ministry of Education of China as to academic level of teachers needed for a University or Institute that makes the education institution look for alternative opportunities for their teachers as to obtaining degrees. Usually, the education institute stimulates its teachers to go abroad to obtain Ph.D degree by cost recovery (including travel, host, education program and article publishing expenses) after providing diploma and passing the abroad diploma recognition procedure from the Ministry of Education of China. Also quite often the institution provides special bonuses for teachers obtaining PhD from abroad universities: it can be a one-time material reward, preferential mortgage, etc.);
- 5) providing the opportunity for MA (seldom - PhD) degree obtaining for those teachers who work in informal education sector (according to the Chinese high education practice as to obtaining academic degrees, teachers working in formal education sector (state colleges, institutes, universities) have privileges over those work in informal education institutions though informal education sector gives better financial conditions for teachers).

The reasons mentioned bring to a great increase in Chinese students' amount in high education institutions all over the world. In such a situation the problem of their cultural adaptation becomes really actual and up-to-date. In the article, only the practice of long-term residence (more than half a year) of the Chinese students in a different culture society is under consideration.

Analysis of the problem in the literature

Though the Chinese students form the largest abroad students' community all over the world, there is still a very small amount of the research pay attention to the problems of their cultural adaptation in the European and American

scientific space. Mostly the researches declare the gravity of the problem without giving ideas and methods of its solving for the Chinese (or even Eastern countries` students), trying to use the methods common for the cultural adaptation work with the European students (this way we find as the semiskilled one because the gap between the Chinese (or Taiwanese, Filipino, Cambodian, etc.) culture tradition is too far from the European or US one in comparison with, f.e. the US and British ones). Also, there is more research describing the process of cultural adaptation of foreigners to Chinese culture. The phenomena can be explained by the lack of researchers can speak Chinese and communicate with the Chinese students coming to abroad Universities with basic language proficiency. Also, about 90 % of the Chinese students going to European and US Universities (and about 60% going to former USSR countries) (Lu, 2015) for study have passed the elementary cultural adaptation while studying the language needed abroad and face the problem of readaptation or change of views while coming to the host culture country.

Results

All the Universities try to include the Chinese students in the host cultural society as soon as possible using various methods and sources. The following stages and methods correspond to each particular stage of the process that can be mentioned.

Stage one: Preparation

Self-preparation. It is started in China while the enrollee chooses the country and the particular University. Thanks to the Internet it is not a problem now to get information almost about all the issues the person is interested in: food, behavior traditions, leisure, clothes, etc. Also, the «word of mouth» method is widely used to spread the non-official and informal information about the particular place and this method is quite popular in China as they have a habit of relying upon informal information got from an associate more than upon the official information. but in the other hand, informational support got from the official sources (embassy, University sight, Ministry of Education of China ads etc.) is also very important. For making a positive decision the Chinese needs the information got from the formal and informal sources to match as much as possible. For this purpose, the University sight needs to have not only the official information (amount of students and teachers, books and dormitories, curriculum, etc.), but also some recommendation as to dress-code if the University has one, food, university traditions and the other for the student-to-be know what challenges to face and psychologically be ready for it (Ran & Yun, 2015). For example for Chinese students it is a great problem to have

classes between 11:30 a.m. and 2:00 (2:30) p.m. as in the Chinese education system this time goes to lunch and rest. So when they come to Ukraine they are expecting to have the same timing as well and often do not come for classes at first. If they have the information about the inner University timing beforehand it levels the problem down. So the University is to give the enrollees as much information as they can for students-to-be to prepare themselves;

Education from the recruiting agency. Mainly the Chinese enrollees come to Ukrainian, Russian, East European countries' universities through recruiting agencies that are authorized by the country's and the Chinese Ministry of education to make recruiting work, draw up exit documents and help the Chinese yang people to go abroad for education. Abroad Universities often send their representatives to such recruiting agencies to China to meet with the enrollees while they are still in China to support them with the information. During such visits, the enrollees can ask the representatives any questions they like and get any additional information they need. In cases the University has no opportunity to organize the representative visit to China such meetings are held online. Also, the language problem can be seen as one of the biggest ones that raises and slows down the cross-cultural process. To solve it abroad universities organize language courses for the Chinese enrollees during the last year before they come to the University (or at least half-year courses because half of a year is a normal time needed for a Chinese enrollee to make all the documents ready to go to get education abroad). The language courses from an abroad university can be made full-time (a teacher goes to China) or distance (Internet education) format. When the students-to-be come to the University even with very low language level it levels down their state of nervousness and shock caused by finding themselves in new circumstances and facilitates their entry into different cultural space.

Internet chat and "word of mouth". In the Internet world, there are no borders and no privacy neither for a person nor for a University. The students-to-be before choosing the higher education establishment today have the opportunity to get not only the official information but also receive real-time one from the people from their country and other foreigners who are at the university, undergo a training course and have their vision over internal university processes and share it actively through the Internet. Such information lets the enrollee be ready for the day-by-day reality faced at the particular University.

Stage two: Active phase

In-University Activities:

Local language and culture education course. When a student comes for education, he\she obligatory takes a local language and culture educational

course. Traditionally it can be organized in two ways: an additional one academic year language course or additional lessons added to the standard educational program. This problem is solved by each University according to own educational strategy and the current legislation of the country.

Patronage from students: Most Universities use other students as cultural adaptation agents for newcomers. As an Agent, both local students and foreign students (senior ones) are used. When a student has just arrived in a country, communication with senior students from his country (or a country whose culture is as close as possible to the student's native one) is invaluable for his/her cultural adaptation: no language gap, no cultural misunderstandings or distortion, common perception of a host culture. After a while, students from the local society can join this process widening newcomer's information and correcting his/her views over the host culture. This method is quite effective for the Chinese students in particular as it correlates with the Chinese social and educational tradition of collectivism and mutual assistance.

In-class activities: Over this method is commonly seen the idea of including the foreign students into the cultural and social life of the University through additional activities such as cultural activities (concerts, sharing information about their native cultures activities, and sport activities, posting, etc.)

Out-University Activities

Culture Adaptation Agencies` work: Such things as society, reality, city, media, etc. can be seen as culture adaptation agencies for a foreign student even if his/her local language level is rather low. A students` life out of the University campus brings him/her a lot of information and practical skills helping and forcing the cultural adaptation process. Shopping, eating at a café or restaurant, using public transport etc. make a foreign student compare his/her behavior traditions with the local ones, adopt and gain skills needed for the host cultural society as well as feel himself/herself a part of this new society. A great role in the cultural adaptation process can play a religious organization or a social community (such as a club) if the student visited the same one in his/her country (it can be seen as a bridge from the culture the student is adopted to – such organizations all over the world have the same basic principles and behavior algorithms with some peculiarities traditional to the particular territory) and the new host culture). Through media, pictures, ads, urban architecture, anything a student meets outdoors he/she gets information and emotions. That helps him to find the place and adapt to the new cultural reality as it is.

Travelling: usually, students have a lot of opportunities to travel and it helps them in the emotionally positive way to see the new country and adapt to the new cultural reality.

Conclusions

The list of the methods used for the Chinese students` cultural adaptation is not limited can be widened. In our mind the main criteria for choosing the method should be seen in the following: the method should force the Chinese student to face and interact with the new cultural reality as soon as possible and should correlate with his/her education, social and behavior patterns (skills and algorithms) gained in the native culture. In this case a Chinese student being self-motivated and quite adaptive can overcome a cultural shock faster and start his/her full-fledged education.

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