Understanding International Cultures: China

International Student & Scholar Services
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Agenda
- Reasons Why Chinese Students Come to the U.S.
- Chinese Parents' Role in Children's Education
- Chinese Students' Previous School Experiences
- Chinese Students' Experiences in the U.S.
- Tips for U.S. Faculty & Advisors

Reasons Why Chinese Students Come to the U.S.

Presenters
Qiongqiong Chen, Ph.D. Student, Social Foundations of Education
Xiaoyan Bian, Undergraduate Student, Management

Education System in China

- Educational System in China is Too Competitive
  - College Entrance Exams – given one time per year in China
  - Students who don’t pass may come to the U.S. instead of waiting another year
  - Students who were not admitted to first choice university may decide to study in the U.S. instead.
Reasons Why Chinese Students Come to the U.S. (cont.)
- U.S. Educational System Viewed as Flexible
  - Flexibility about majors
  - Chinese students' grade on College Entrance Exam determines university they attend and their major
  - Since all depends on one grade and competition is so fierce, many students must attend a university they don't want and study in a major that doesn't interest them

Reasons Why Chinese Students Come to the U.S. (cont.)
- U.S. Educational System Viewed as Flexible
  - Flexibility about majors (cont.)
    - Almost impossible for Chinese students to move from one academic program to another
    - Coming to U.S. is one option if they want to change their major
  - Opportunity to take electives
  - Possibility of graduating early

Reasons Why Chinese Students Come to the U.S. (cont.)
- U.S. Educational System Viewed as Practical
  - China - Emphasis on accumulation of knowledge
  - U.S. - emphasis on application of knowledge
  - U.S. education is "connected to society"
    - Emphasis on community service
    - Opportunity to do internships, etc.
  - U.S. educational system viewed as elite

Reasons Why Chinese Students Come to the U.S.
- U.S. is English speaking country
- Overseas experience gives Chinese students advantage when they return home
- Post-graduation opportunities in U.S. are more lucrative than those in China

Parents’ Role in Children’s Education
- Parents place great importance on education.
- “Parents are designers”.
  - Parents enroll their children in cram schools and take them to piano lessons, etc.
  - Parents may enroll their child in an expensive kindergarten so s/he “won’t lose at the beginning”.

Parents’ Role in Children’s Education
- Presenters
  - Qiongqiong Chen
  - Chenli Sun, M.S. Student, Mental Health Counseling
Parents’ Role in Children’s Education (cont.)

- They choose their children’s majors and careers.
- Chinese children do not question the fact that their parents plan their educations and careers for them.
- Since the children don’t have any “real life experience” and don’t know what they want to do in the future, their parents step in to ensure a better life for them.
- The children’s role is to study hard.

Influence of Confucianism

- Education is seen as a ladder. It’s the only way to change one’s social and economic position in society.
- Parents will try to motivate their children by:
  - mentioning a future of undesirable jobs
    - Ex. “If you hang out like that with your friends, you can all enjoy futures as waitresses.”
  - bribing them
    - Ex. “If you make progress, I will buy you Nike shoes.”
  - using corporal punishment

Influence of Confucianism (cont.)

- Chinese parents make tremendous sacrifices for their children’s education.
  - Ex. A mother will take a leave of absence from her job for one year to support a child who is preparing for the College Entrance Exam.
  - Ex. Both parents will quit their jobs to move to another city so the child will qualify for residency-based quotas and have the chance to attend a better school.

Influence of Confucianism (cont.)

- Chinese parents make tremendous sacrifices for their children’s education.
  - Ex. Parents will spend their life savings on their child’s education.
  - Ex. The entire family will quit watching TV when one child is preparing for an important exam.

Influence of Confucianism (cont.)

- Chinese children show their devotion and filial piety to their parents by studying hard.
- They are obligated to do well in school. If they don’t, they are disrespectful.
Influence of Confucianism (cont.)

- A child's educational success is a matter of family honor.
- If a child gets bad grades, both the child and parents are shamed.
- Parents keep quiet about their child's poor grades when talking to other parents.
- Parents shame their children into doing better by comparing them to other children.
  - "You're not as good as my colleague's daughter."

- Some children react to such parental pressure through rebellion or truancy.
- Others commit suicide when they fail.
  - Ex. when rejected by a top ranked school

Chinese Students' Previous School Experiences

Presenters
Xiaoyan Bian
Qilin He, Ed.M. Student, School Counseling
Qianwen Lu, M.A. Student, TESOL
Zongyuan Fan, Law Student (J.D.)

Chinese Students' Previous School Experiences

- High school class schedule
  - 7:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m.
  - One half day off per week
  - Short summer break
  - Result: Solid educational foundation + strong motivation + good concentration
  - BUT
  - High stress + lack of time for outside interests + social, career, emotional and psychological development are neglected

10th Grade Fall Semester Class Schedule

Eye Massage Acupressure
Exercises to Music

Chinese Students’ Previous School Experiences (cont.)
- Teacher – Student Relationships (cont.)
  - Chinese students not viewed as customers. Instead, they have obligations they must fulfill.
  - Relationship between teachers and students - respectful, distant and authoritarian
    - Some professors do not like it when students disagree with them

Chinese Students’ Previous School Experiences (cont.)
- Teacher – Student Relationships
  - Elementary, middle and high school students stand up when teacher enters classroom or asks a question
  - While class is in session, students
    - rarely talk among themselves
    - never eat openly in class
    - never exit the classroom
  - On National Teachers Day, students give gifts to teachers

Chinese Students’ Previous School Experiences (cont.)
- Chinese Students’ Class Participation
  - Are afraid of losing face so think carefully before saying anything in class
  - See themselves through other’s eyes and don’t want to look stupid
  - Are afraid of interrupting the professor and wasting other students’ time
  - Result: Prefer to ask questions after class

Chinese Students’ Previous School Experiences (cont.)
- What Motivates Chinese Students
  - Peer pressure
    - Test results
    - Family background
    - Class rank
  - Point system
    - Grades are most important component
    - Can lose points for missing class, being noisy or late, having a messy desk, bringing one’s cell phone, not dressing appropriately, etc.

Chinese Students’ Previous School Experiences (cont.)
- Desire to pass College Entrance Exam
  - “One exam determines your whole life”.
  - Under tremendous amount of pressure
  - Adapt whole way of thinking and living to exam (“exam machines”)
  - Focus exclusively on school work
  - Do not allow oneself to be distracted by other matters (e.g. social life)
Chinese Students’ Previous School Experiences (cont.)

- Desire to pass College Entrance Exam (cont.)
  - Schools do not organize social events (e.g. proms)
  - Students who like sports are presumed to be weak students
  - Students’ existence is limited to going back and forth between home and school

Plagiarism

- In China, students understand plagiarism only in its most narrow sense—copying. They have no idea that paraphrasing is plagiarism.
- Rules concerning plagiarism in China are strict, but enforcement is lax. This results in collective misbehavior regarding plagiarism.

Plagiarism (cont.)

- Possible consequences to being found guilty of plagiarism (e.g. student suicide) are so dire that schools are reluctant to enforce its plagiarism policies.
- Other factors contributing to plagiarism:
  - Emphasis on quantity over quality
  - Emphasis on memorization

Life in Residence Halls in China

- 98-99% of university students live on campus
- They are required to live on campus for their personal safety
- Cost is approximately $200 per year
- Each room houses 3-10 students
- Each student has a bunk bed, small desk and chair

Chinese Residence Hall: Old Style

Chinese Residence Hall: New Style
Chinese Residence Hall: New Style

Life in Residence Halls in China (cont.)

- Girls’ dorms are typically quiet while boys’ dorms tend to be noisier. If one student is studying, all roommates remain quiet. There is no need for quiet hours.
- Lights are turned off at 11:00 p.m. as the power is turned off. They are turned on again at 6:00 a.m.

Life in Residence Halls in China (cont.)

- Person in charge inspects rooms for cleanliness and orderliness. There are also competitions for the neatest room. Students in the winning room get points which help them qualify for scholarships.
- Refrigerators, TV’s, stereos, blow dryers, etc. are not allowed in rooms because they will cause a power shortage. Students who violate this policy lose points.

Life in Residence Halls in China (cont.)

- Shower rooms are often in a different building so students have to leave their dormitory to go to the bathroom or take a shower.
- Shower times are scheduled. Students swipe their card to turn on the water. The maximum shower time is 15 minutes unless the student is willing to pay more.

Life in Residence Halls in China (cont.)

- Campus love used to be prohibited and campus lovers were expelled.
- Boys and girls had almost no private interaction with each other.
- Public displays of affection, sex and pregnancy were associated with moral degradation.
- Campus love is now common although intimate relationships are not as common as in the U.S.

Life in Residence Halls in China (cont.)

- Alcohol and drugs are not a problem on Chinese university campuses
- Alcohol is usually only used for celebrations
- Any student who is caught using or selling drugs is expelled
Chinese Students’ Experiences in the U.S.

Presenters
Xiaoyan Bian
Zongyuan Fan
Qilin He
Chenli Sun

Surprises for Chinese Undergraduates
- So many options – can choose classes, set schedules, etc.
- Professors have office hours
- Volume of assignments and heavy reading load
- Must learn by oneself—professor doesn’t teach everything
- High cost of textbooks
- Consequences to plagiarism

Initial Experiences with English Language
- English education in China focuses on grammar and vocabulary
- Chinese students therefore tend to have difficulty understanding and expressing themselves in English.

Initial Experiences with English Language (cont.)
- They also have difficulty with class participation.
  - Surprised that professor did not only lecture
  - Felt bad because U.S. students were so talkative and expressive
  - Could not understand anecdotes and jokes because of lack of background information
  - Felt it would be rude to interrupt, but had no opportunity to say something

Initial Experiences with English Language (cont.)
- Chinese students do not find it easy to talk to U.S. students
  - They cannot easily engage in small talk with them because they are not familiar with U.S. movies, TV shows, songs, etc.
- They find it easier to talk to other international students because
  - The pace of the conversation is slower
  - The vocabulary is understandable (e.g. no “ten bucks”)

Interactions with U.S. Students
- Initiating conversations with U.S. students during class breaks
- Having a hard time at parties in the U.S.
- Being challenged by classmates about Chinese leaders, economy, politics, etc.
Social Problems in China

- Difficulty making friends
  - Effects of one-child policy
    - Only child is his/her parents' and grandparents' treasure
    - So afraid of losing child that they tend to overprotect him/her
    - View others as possible threat and communicate to child that it is dangerous to meet others
    - Child who is sheltered from others tends to lack social skills and become isolated

- Excessive dependency ("Little Emperor" syndrome)
  - Overprotected child lives with parents, who do everything for him/her
  - As a result, child can't face any difficulties on his/her own
  - Media features stories about adults who are financially and psychologically dependent on their parents

Mental Health Problems in U.S.

- In China, people view mental health as a foreign concept.
- They also tend to equate psychological problems with psychiatric problems.
  - As a result, people are afraid of ending up in the hospital.
  - Mental health issues are also stigmatized and the family is shamed.
- Depressed individuals are told: “Swallow it. Don’t talk about it. It will go away.”

- Some students can’t cope with family pressures and loneliness in U.S.
- Their mental health problems are expressed by anxiety, depression and family stress.

Tips for U.S. Faculty

- Discuss the expectations outlined in the class syllabus in detail. Remind the students about those expectations from time to time.
- Make clear your policy of academic integrity and how it will be enforced.
- Encourage students to ask questions about the syllabus during office hours or by e-mail.
Tips for U.S. Faculty (cont.)

- Discuss overall expectations about the work in detail.
  - Try not to assume that students know how to use lab equipment and software, as well as which writing style to follow.
  - Try to provide step-by-step instructions at first.
  - Since Chinese students may not be good at taking initiative, try to be explicit about how independently you expect them to work.

Tips for U.S. Faculty (cont.)

- Understand that Chinese students have difficulty understanding lectures and taking notes due to pronunciation differences.
  - If possible, try to speak more slowly at the beginning of the semester.
  - Try to reduce the use of slang and colloquial expressions or at least explain them.
  - Try to use transitions to make it clear when you change topics.
    - Ex. “Now I’m going to discuss . . .”

Tips for U.S. Faculty (cont.)

- Understand that silence in class does not mean that Chinese students are not paying attention or have no problems in the course.
  - Silence and few questions may mean that the students are showing you respect.
    - Some students are also not willing to answer “easy questions”.
      - In China, teachers only ask challenging questions.
      - Therefore, when U.S. teachers ask easy questions, Chinese students may reason that the teacher doesn’t need the answer so conclude that the only reason to answer the question is to show off (which is not good)
      - see the questions as an insult to their intelligence.
      - think they are being trapped

Tips for U.S. Faculty (cont.)

- Encourage students to ask questions and actively participate in class discussions.
  - Tell the students that it is their responsibility to ask questions if they don’t understand.

Tips for U.S. Faculty (cont.)

- When illustrating concepts in class, try to use examples that are understood by everyone. If using examples that are U.S. specific, please provide more explanation so everyone can understand.
  - In group work, try not to let international students self-segregate by nationality or ethnic group. Mix them up instead and encourage them to discuss in English.
Tips for U.S. Faculty (cont.)

- When needed, refer Chinese students for assistance with future plans and adjustment
  - Academic advisors
  - International Student & Scholar Services
  - English Language Institute (all students), Writing Center & Blake Center (undergrads only), Academic Writing Institute (graduate students only)
  - Career Services
  - Counseling Center

Thank you for coming to our workshop!