

Research on Cross-Cultural Adaptation of International Students from Countries along the Belt and Road Initiative Route

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Abstract: With the implementation of the Belt and Road (B&R) Initiative, China has deepened economic and cultural exchanges and dialogue with the countries along the Belt and Road Initiative route, which has a direct influence on a significant increase in the number of international students in China. Thus, it has become an urgent need for colleges and universities in China to solve the problem of cultivating international students. The huge difference in cultural background, ideology and language between Chinese students and international students, and even among the international students is an important obstacle to the education of international students. In this paper, 160 international students from countries along the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) route admitted by a Chinese university are selected as the objects to explore the cross-cultural adaptation difficulty confronted by international students. Additionally, this paper aims to put forward several measures in a bid to continuously improve the cross-cultural adaptation of international students and thus promote our economic and cultural exchanges with foreign countries. The B&R Initiative is a kind of global view that China puts forward beyond national and ideological barriers to conform to the historical development trend of human society. It is the inevitable by-product of economic globalization. With the deepening of the B&R initiative, China has deepened its economic and cultural exchanges with the countries along the Belt and Road initiative route, which has led to a significant increase in the number of international students in China. The *Annual Report on the Development of Chinese Students Studying Abroad (2017)* showed that among the top 15 countries from which international students in China came, most countries were those along the BRI route, among which Thailand, India, Pakistan, Laos, etc., showed a significant increase in the number of overseas students studying in China. This indicates the Initiative's big role in promoting China's educational cooperation with the countries along the BRI route. However, different language systems, education systems, talent cultivation systems and other barriers have caused an obvious cross-cultural adaptation of international students in China. To this end, this paper aims at promoting international students to better adapt to China's education mode, by exploring the cross-cultural adaptation of international students from countries along the BRI route.

1. Transcultural Identity of the B&R Initiative

With the deepening of cultural exchanges among countries, cultural borrow-in, imitation and hybridity have become the norm, which leads to the gradually blurred boundaries among different cultures. Thus, a diversified and cross-cultural survival condition comes into being. How to realize transcultural identity amid the violent conflict contradictions and conflicts during cultural exchanges has become an important issue for international students from countries along the BRI route. The purpose of the Initiative is to build a community of shared future for mankind. This does not only require wide recognition from Chinese people but requests people all over the world to break the language barriers and enhance international understanding. To realize the transcultural identity of the B&R Initiative, several measures are proposed as follows:

(1) Break the language barrier

Language, as an important tool for communication, is an important cultural carrier that is in sync with the development of human civilization. Currently, obvious differences among different countries in language system and language habit promotes the richness and diversity of human civilization while hindering the language exchange among countries. There are many countries along the BRI route, which use different language systems. In this context, China has actively constructed a multilingual bridge for cultural communication and vigorously promoted Chinese internationally to let

Chinese go out. In addition, through Sino-foreign cooperation in education and exchange programs, China has promoted the teaching of the Chinese language throughout the world. The Chinese language promotion agencies represented by the Confucius Institute have received an overwhelming response around the world, and more and more foreigners have begun to learn Chinese. As of 2018, 67 countries incorporated Chinese into their national education system, and more than 170 countries offered Chinese courses. There were more than 100 million foreign learners of Chinese language. All the above profit from China's vigorous promotion of Chinese as a foreign language. For international students from countries along the BRI route, breaking the cultural barriers between them is an important way to realize transcultural identity.

(2) Exhume cultural memory

From a cross-cultural perspective, cultural conflicts and interest deviations are important factors that cannot be ignored during the implementation of the B&R Initiative. To break through the cultural boundaries, different countries must rely on common cultural memory and reach a new value consensus. Countries along the BRI route should construct a shared cultural memory space and even a cultural consensus, by searching for mutual emotional resonance and digging out the common historical symbols. In recent years, China has organized cultural relics exhibitions, film and art shows, traditional national festival activities and so on in countries along the BRI route, and has become an important channel for enhancing understanding among different countries. China has reopened the cultural memory to cause the positive

cultural values advocated by the Initiative widely recognized by the countries along the Route, thus promoting the realization of transcultural identity.

(3) Expand the educational exchanges

Education is the only way that must be passed to achieve the development of human civilization, and an important measure of the level of human civilization. During the implementation of the Initiative, China attaches great importance to educational cooperation with the countries along the Route, and carries out collaborative research on educational laws and policies to provide a theoretical basis for educational cooperation in practice. Furthermore, China pays attention to language cooperation projects to achieve unconstrained language intercommunication. It does not only promote learning of the Chinese language in the countries along the Route, but encourages domestic learning of the others' language systems. Among them, Chinese language teachers who work in the countries along the Route provide an opportunity for these countries to learn Chinese. In addition, China is also committed to deepening the education cooperation among the countries along the Route, by developing the talent co-training mode, conducting an in-depth study of the "Silk Road" study abroad program and setting up the "The Silk Road" Chinese government scholarship.

2. Research on the Cultural Adaptation of International Students from Countries Along the BRI Route.

To improve transcultural identity among countries along the BRI route, China has actively sought many solutions to solve cultural differences, among which remarkable results have been achieved from an expansion of educational exchanges. As more and more international students begin to study in China, the efficiency of talent training is not high due to the cultural maladjustment that international students inevitably face while studying in China and is caused by different cultural systems. In this paper, a university in China is chosen as the research object to explore the cultural adaptability of international students from countries along the BRI route. In the study, 160 international students from countries along the BRI route are selected as the subjects, among whom there are 95 male students and 65 female students. These students mainly come from Afghanistan, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and major in national Chinese language education and Chinese language training. Through investigation, we find that their motivations to study in China mainly include the fondness of the Chinese language, the positive experience of studying in China to their future development, and a thirst for Chinese culture and customs, etc. Most of them have a certain degree of understanding of China before studying in China. During this study, the psychological adaptation scale and the learning adjustment scale are utilized for international students to investigate their cultural adaptability. The psychological adaptation scale (PAS) is a five-point scale prepared based on the Symptom Checklist(SCL90) and rating students' psychological symptoms including somatization, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, interpersonal sensitivity, depression and anxiety. Referring to the Emigrant Adjustment Inventory (EAI) and the Students Learning Questionnaire, the learning adjustment scale examines international students' class attendance, completion of homework on time, use of libraries,

and the other 7 items. The scale is a five-point scale [6]. The questionnaire results show that from the perspective of cultural adaptation, there are the following problems with international students.

(1) Language barrier and ineffective communication

According to the results of an investigation on the motivations of international students to study in China, some come to China to study Chinese, while the purpose of others is to study professional courses. First, those students who come to China to study Chinese will actively communicate with their classmates consciously in Chinese, while other students who come to China to study professional courses are mainly taught in English, and less involved in Chinese. This causes the preference of most international students for the English language as a primary tool for communication, resulting in the underutilization of the Chinese language. Language becomes an important obstacle limiting their communication. Secondly, the differences among different countries in customs, language, religious beliefs and other cultural factors make it difficult for international students to make friends with each other, and lack of psychological dependence during learning and daily life makes international students feel lonelier, which seriously affects their ability to communicate with each other and has a side-effect on their normal life.

(2) Boring campus life

First, China has an obvious difference in higher education system from other countries. College students in other countries have a richer campus life, and are willing to participate in various activities, regardless of study time or spare time. However, in China, college students focus on their academic results, and spend a relatively boring campus life. Especially under the influence of the Internet, most students spend more time on Internet activities in their spare time, and less on practical activities, which leads to the current boring after-school life of students in China's colleges and universities. Therefore, many international students feel unaccommodated to the boring school life in China, as they have to stay in the dormitory and cannot participate in collective activities during their spare time. Through investigation, we find that international students are not interested in going out and participating in activities, because they do not know where to go and can not find someone to hang out together. In addition, due to the difference in ethnicity and looks, international students tend to draw more attention when going out, which limits the richness of their after-school life.

Secondly, insufficient attention is paid to the management of international students. Lack of student management organization leads to poor communication among international students. Furthermore, because interventional students get less involved in the activities that colleges/schools organize due to the lack of a sense of belonging, and have no other recreational activities to join, they gradually become less motivated to study, which has become the main factor to hinder transcultural adaptation.

(3) Undisciplined learning behavior, and lack of motivation

First, investigation results of class attendance show that some international students can't even attend classes on time. They are often late for class or even miss a class, seriously affecting their studying efficiency. Through investigation, we find that such an undisciplined behavior is closely related to their habit of going to bed at usually 2:00 a.m., which is different from that of the Chinese students, and makes them

have no enough rest and thus affects class attendance, as classes in most of colleges/universities begin at 8 am. In class, only about half of international students can fully understand what teachers talk about, and few students can communicate with their teachers after class. Poor involvement in class and poor experience of learning are likely to arouse revulsion and disgust, leading to a greater impact on learning efficiency.

Secondly, the lack of motivation is also an important factor affecting the cultural adaptation of international students. Most of the countries along the BRI route are developing countries with poor economic conditions, and the lower learning costs and higher scholarships have become an important stimulus for international students to study in China. However, many international students said during the investigation that they had less chance to obtain the scholarship, because of the high requirement on academic results. A higher threshold of scholarships and fewer spaces for students makes them less motivated to study. Therefore, when establishing scholarships, colleges/universities can make an appropriate adjustment in the scholarship spaces for local students and international students, and appropriately increase the scholarship space for international students. Thus, international students can have more opportunities to get scholarships, which can improve their learning motivation and their academic performance.

3. Countermeasures for Cultural Inadaptation of International Students from Countries Along the BRI Route

(1) Improve the management system

To realize the cultural adaptability of international students, China should attach great importance to the construction of relevant systems including the responsibility system of counselors and class advisers for international students and the special management system designed for international students in a bid to realize scientific and orderly management. Colleges/universities, as an important place for accepting international students, should pay attention to the management of international students. Relevant management departments should be established to make specific arrangements for the cultivation and management of international students, while behaviors of international students should be constrained under the corresponding reward/punishment system to avoid any breach of the school's rules and regulations and improve their learning engagement. Despite the obvious difference in education mode, there are the same requirements for the behaviors of international and local students. Colleges/universities should treat them equally to improve the teaching quality of international students. In addition, as many international students meet difficulties in sleeping and diet at the early stage due to their different cultures, colleges/universities should strengthen the construction of service facilities such as special canteen windows for international students to improve their appetite, and create a good living environment to help them make academic progress.

(2) Provide more humanistic cares

When studying in a foreign country, people may feel isolated, and can not smoothly communicate with their fellows due to different languages and cultural ideologies, which aggravates the cultural inadaptation. Thus, colleges/universities must provide more humanistic care so

that international students feel at home. In addition, staff and other Chinese students should be encouraged to provide appropriate humanistic care to international students, and welcome ceremonies should be organized to make international students feel warm. Meanwhile, as most countries along the BRI route have their own religious beliefs, colleges/universities should respect the respective religious beliefs and cultural customs of international students, setting up special psychological counseling centers according to possible psychological problems and hiring psychological counselors to relieve their negative emotion and make them hold a positive attitude towards study and life. Furthermore, colleges/universities should respect the personality rights of international students and advocate to manage their daily lives by themselves so that they can feel the humanistic care from the schools.

(3) Implement homogeneous management

Separated management of international students and local students leads to a great reduction in daily communication, and is not conducive to the improvement of international students' cultural adaptability. Therefore, when it comes to improvement, it is necessary to implement a homogeneous management system, where both Chinese students and foreign students are included, to provide opportunities for mutual exchanges. Foreign students who are taught in Chinese can sit in the same classroom with Chinese students of the same major to learn the knowledge, as they have already understood Chinese culture, and find it less difficult to understand what the teacher says in class. They can be unified according to the student number, and complete the specialized courses at the same time with local students. Chinese and foreign students can also be encouraged to share the same dormitory so that they can communicate in their daily lives. The results of this study show that many international students find it difficult to engage in social practices, mainly because of the differences in language and behaviors. Colleges and universities should actively create opportunities for international students to engage in social practices, which can help them have an in-depth understanding of the local culture, to improve their adaptability to the Chinese culture.

(4) Increase the scholarship spaces for international students

Most of the countries along the BRI route are developing countries, and have a big economic gap with China. Therefore, the low tuition fee has become an important factor that affects the choice of international students to study in China. The study finds that all international students attach importance to scholarships, regardless of age, education, nationality, Chinese language proficiency, etc., and all think it difficult to win a scholarship. Colleges and universities should appropriately increase the scholarship spaces for international students according to their actual needs so that more international students can win a scholarship. Due to limited financial resources, colleges and universities should actively attract social capital and encourage social organizations to offer scholarships, when setting up scholarships. The government can provide some policy support for relevant organizations such as tax reduction and exemption to improve the enthusiasm of enterprises to construct foreign cultural exchanges and help international students solve the difficulty in winning scholarships.

(5) Strengthen training and assessment of Chinese language

Differences in language and language system among countries along the BRI route cause the language to be an important obstacle affecting the learning efficiency of international students. Therefore, international students should be examined for Chinese language proficiency before being admitted to a Chinese university. Only students with satisfying Chinese language proficiency can be allowed to study professional courses, which can guarantee the learning efficiency of international students. In addition, international students should be requested to attend the Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK) to test their Chinese proficiency. By making use of Internet technology, international students can learn Chinese anytime and anywhere from the web-based online courses that can be downloaded and provide an effective channel for the improvement of Chinese proficiency. International students who have passed the HSK test should be encouraged to apply the theory to practice and communicate with their classmates and teachers in Chinese. Teachers should guide international students to continuously improve their ability to use Chinese, which can provide a language foundation for them to engage in various social practices.

4. Conclusions

To sum up, when exploring the cultural adaptation of international students from countries along the BRI route, we find that language barriers and different cultural ideologies are important factors for cultural differences. The research findings show moderate performance of international students in both psychological adaptation and learning adaptation. In other words, they can adapt to school life in China to some extent, and will have adaptation problems caused by different factors. To solve the problem of cultural adaptability of foreign personnel, this paper puts forward several suggestions. First, the government should work with colleges/universities. The state should create a good policy environment for international students, while colleges/universities should improve the school life of international students and provide humanistic care to reduce their cultural discomfort, increase their recognition of the Chinese culture, and improve the learning efficiency of international students in China.

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