

Research on the Current Status and Policy Evolution of International Education Industry in China

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Abstract

The paper analyzed the current status and policy evolution of international education industry in China based on statistical data of the education market scale, source countries, education levels and study subjects. It is found that the international education in China has undergone three major stages, including the stage of “unified national management dominated by politics”, the stage of “exploration of the model for self-financed study abroad”, and the stage of “all-round open development”. The achievements of international education industry are closely related to the key policies in the 3 stages. The research shows that the scale of international education in China is basically the same as that in the developed countries but there exists a big import and export deficit since China has slightly smaller international market share. Asian and African countries are the main sending countries of international students, and students from these countries prefer to receive academic education in China than those from Europe and America. In terms of major subjects, Chinese language and literature are still the main subjects, but engineering, economics and management are becoming more popular. Finally, suggestions are made on how to further expand the international education market and optimize the international education structure in China.

Keywords: current status, international education industry, policy evolution

1. Introduction

The process of information revolution and globalization has accelerated the economic and cultural exchanges between countries, and the internationalization of higher education and the export of higher education services have also joined this historical tide. As higher education institutions are the pillars of a great power and the government takes the leading role, the higher education policy formulated by the government represents the great plan of a country. In some developed higher education systems, it is found that the state governments act as the steersmen (Teixeira, Jongbloed, Dill, & Amaral, 2004), or the managers thereof based on market rules (Jongbloed, 2003).

The level of the USA's higher education has been taking the leading position in the world for a long time. From 1919 in which the Association of International Education was established, through 1946 in which the Fulbright Act was enacted, to 1966 in which the International Education Act was enacted (Wu, 2008), all these policy adjustments were made by the USA to attract the elites worldwide, pass on its culture and values, maintain its soft power, and thus safeguard its national security, interests, and its position as a great power (Dai, 2009). In continental Europe, the birthplace of higher education, its higher education internationalization policy is more in favor of win-win cooperation among EU member states. Erasmus Plan and Bologna Process both aim to break down education barriers between countries and integrate higher education resources so as to promote the development of higher education integration in Europe (Chen, Zou, & Sun, 2019). These policies have greatly increased the appeal of higher education in European countries to students from other countries, especially from the Third World.

However, with the rapid development of opening-up in the past 40 years, China has become a major importer and exporter of higher education services after the US and the UK. Every year, hundreds of thousands of Chinese students go to other parts of the world, and hundreds of thousands of international students come to China, too. With China playing an increasingly important role, it is necessary to deeply study the Chinese market, which is of great significance not only for China, but also for the development of international education industry in the developing and less developed countries. The paper analyzed the current status and policy evolution of

international education industry in China in three different ways. Firstly the evolution of policies for the international education industry after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 was analyzed from three conceptual phases, with each phase defined by the key policies. Secondly the achievements of international education industry are summarized on how they correspond to the key policies in different stages. Thirdly, based on statistical data of education market scale, source country, education level and study subject, this paper provides a more empirical study on the current situation of international education industry in China.

2. Review of Relevant Studies

Since the beginning of the 21st century, with the vigorous development of overseas students' education by the Chinese government, the number of overseas students accepted by the country has been growing rapidly every year, and the type of education received has also changed from non-degree education to diploma education mainly focusing on college and undergraduate education. This kind of situation changes in a short period of time make the dilemma of overseas education in China focus on "the contradiction between the rapid growth of the number and quality of students and the relatively backward education management mode for overseas students". Some scholars think that the cause of this contradiction is the policy lag, and study abroad education policy in China should be held to serve the country to develop the study abroad education strategy (Zhang, 2011), prompting the research of China's study abroad education policy, Liu (2012) proposed that the study abroad policy should be time-effective, purposeful, functional, realistic and legal, and furthermore classified China's study abroad policy into four categories, namely, the form of expression, the subject of expense bearing, the direction of study abroad and political effectiveness. With a clear definition standard, more scholars focus on the characteristics of China's study abroad policy, especially its deficiencies. Liu and Zhang (2018) found that the evolution of study abroad policy has undergone great changes in five aspects: policy purpose, management system, school-running subject, management mode and policy orientation. Zhou and Luo (2015) concluded that China's policy of studying in China was still at the macro level and lacked specific targeted measures. Tan (2016) found that the reform of China's educational policy was subject to "path dependence", that is, "the stability of internal policies". The research of Jiang (2020) further clarified that the external governance of overseas students' education in China had policy inertia, which led to path dependence and thus affected the diversified governance development of education for overseas students in China.

Based on the existing domestic research results, it can be seen that the current research on China's study abroad policy has made a great breakthrough. The characteristics of policy coherence determine that the policy of studying abroad in a certain period evolves from the policy of the previous period and is also the cause of the policy of the next stage. Therefore, it is necessary to systematize China's study abroad policy from an overall and developmental perspective.

3. Education System and Policy for International Students Studying in China

Currently, China is the world's third largest country receiving international students, second only to the USA and the UK. However, China's internationalization of higher education has undergone a process full of challenges and difficulties. The scale of international students studying in China has been enlarged from tens of students in 1949 to more than 0.5 million students in 2018, and from only three socialist source countries in Eastern Europe at the beginning to more than 200 source countries and regions at present. The growth of international students in China is closely related to the evolution and development of China's policies on the education of international students over recent decades. The evolution has undergone three stages since 1949, including the stage of "unified national management dominated by politics", the stage of "exploration of the model for self-financed study abroad", and the stage of "all-round open development", which respectively correspond to the period from the initial stage after the founding of new China to the time before the "Cultural Revolution", the period from the time of the reform and opening-up to the end of the 20th century, and the period from the beginning of the 21st century to the present. During the Cultural Revolution, all international students studying in China were dismissed due to political reasons, and the development of international student's education came to a standstill.

3.1 Evolution of the Education Policy for International Students Studying in China

3.1.1 Education Policy for International Students at the Initial Stage After the Founding of the People's Republic of China

Under the influence of international diplomatic relations and political situation, China, at the initial stage, explored with hardship the ways to introduce international students mostly by means of signing bilateral agreements, such as the Memorandum of Understanding on the Matters Regarding the Exchange of Students (signed with Romania), the Agreement on North Korean Students Studying in Chinese Tertiary Educational Institutions and Secondary Vocational Schools (signed with the North Korea), the Protocol on the Exchange of

Postgraduates and Graduates (signed with the former German Democratic Republic), and the Protocol on Cultural Cooperation (signed with Vietnam). The aforementioned agreements included provisions that determined the quantity of international students, criteria for acceptance, receiving schools, the content and duration of study after the arrival of international students in China, expenses to be provided to international students during their study in China, the time of enrolment and other related aspects. Despite their bilateral nature, these agreements laid a solid foundation for China to independently formulate the subsequent education policies for all international students from multiple countries studying in China. As of 1965, 128 institutions in 21 cities across China received various international students from 70 countries, most of whom came from the members of the Socialist Camp, national independent states in the surrounding areas and African countries that had established friendly relations with China.

In the subsequent year, due to the launching of the “Cultural Revolution”, all international students studying in China were repatriated, and the related educational activities came to a long-term standstill. In 1973, with the improvement of diplomatic situation, the recruitment of international students was reinstated, but in 1978, the scale of international students studying in China still did not reach the level before the “Cultural Revolution”. During this period, China imposed strict restrictions to the nationality of international students and implemented stringent controls over the majors and disciplines for international students. For example, for the students from African countries that had established friendly relations with China and from socialist countries, the governments of these source countries and the Chinese government would make the decision through mutual consultation as to whether or not to grant international students the right to choose their majors; while for the students from capitalist countries, the Chinese Central Government implemented strict control, review and approved of the majors open for international students (Ji, 2016). In addition to the above, the education of international students during this period also had several other characteristics: firstly, all international students studying in China were selected and sent at the expense of their countries, and there was no self-financed student studying in China; secondly, all international students studying in China were directly managed by the Chinese Central Government, and local higher education institutions did not have independent decision-making power; and thirdly, the institutions receiving international students were concentrated in municipalities directly under the Chinese Central Government and the capital cities of various provinces, the regional distribution of which was non-uniform. In summary, the education policies for international students studying in China at the initial stage after the founding of new China had strong political and diplomatic complexions, and restricted the scale and level of international students studying in China.

3.1.2 Education Policy for International Students from the Reform and Opening-up to the End of the 20th Century

The reform and opening-up initiated in 1978 allowed China’s education of international students to enter into a new period of recovery and development. After conducting researches on relevant overseas conditions, scholars believed that the development of international students education could cultivate “friendly” international students for China and promote the bilateral exchanges between China and the countries from where international students came from, and that internationalization was also a trend of development of higher education consistent with China’s strategy for higher education development in the future. Under the stimulation of these two factors, China removed the ideological shackles restricting the development of international students education and attached high importance to the education of international students.

In 1978, China enrolled international students through examination for the first time to solve the problem of uneven quality levels of international students. In 1979, the State Council approved the Request for Instruction on the Criteria for Fees and Charges for Self-financed International Students, which marked the initiation of exploration of the path to self-financed study abroad, the Interim Regulation on the Management of Foreign Students Studying in China enacted in the same year included various issues arising from the study and living of international students in China into the scope of management of international students and required that international students must comply with the disciplinary requirements and provisions of the schools receiving them. In the following years, a series of rules and regulations, such as the Regulations of the People’s Republic of China on Academic Degree (1980), the Provisions of the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China on the Organization of Short-term Training Courses for Foreigners (1983) and the Measures for the Administration of International Students (1985), were enacted, which helped China to build the institutional framework for the administration of international students. After a ten-year period of exploration from 1979 to 1988, the Provisions on the Admission of Self-financed International Students Studying in China promulgated in 1989 officially expanded the channel for admitting self-financed international students, delegated power from the central level to the education administrative departments at lower levels, and granted higher education

institutions the independent right to enroll international students to promote the activity of various higher education institutions.

The Interim Measures for Regular Institutions of Higher Education to Confer Chinese Academic Degrees to International Students Studying in China promulgated in 1991 ensured the institutionalized and standardized management of the academic degrees for international students.

The documents issued thereafter, such as Notice on Adjusting the Criteria for Scholarship and Living Allowance for International Students Studying in China (1993 and 1999), Notice on Implementing the Interim Provisions on the Administration of Academic Degree Certificates of Regular Higher Education for International Students Studying in China and the Detailed Rules for Implementation Thereof (1994) and Interim Measures for the Annual Review of Scholarship for International Students (1997), further adjusted and improved China's administration of international students studying in China, due to which self-financed international students increased rapidly in number and became the mainstream type of international students studying in China. During this period, the China Scholarship Council was officially established, which marked the transition of the mode of administration of international students studying in China from centralized and unified administration by the central government to the macroscopic management by the government and independent management by higher education institutions.

In summary, the 1980s represented a decade for the exploration of the model for self-financed study abroad, and the 1990s a decade for the transformation of the mainstream mode of administration of international students studying in China. In these two decades, China established the framework for the administration of international students through multiple policies, and enlarged the scale of international students while promoting the alignment of international education with international standards. These two decades also marked the transition of China's concept of international education, from the fulfillment of international obligations to the adaptation to the trend of international development, from the political and diplomatic properties to the educational properties (Wang YX & Xie SH). This transition from objective fulfillment to subjective acceptance laid a solid foundation for China's international education to enter a brand new stage of "all-round open development".

3.1.3 Education Policy for International Students Since the Beginning of the New Century

Since the beginning of the new century, the education of international students studying in China has become an important aspect of higher education, and its importance has been highlighted in related education policy. In 2000, the Administrative Rules on the Acceptance of Foreign Students by Colleges and Universities was promulgated jointly by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Public Security, which integrated the provisions on the administration of international students contained in previous rules and regulations into a single unified set of rules, providing legal support for the education of international students and covering many aspects, such as the management of academic degrees and records, teaching and training, course configuration, and campus management. The Notice on Implementing the Chinese Government Scholarship Annual Review System issued in the same year set up a variety of scholarships, and filled the gap in respect of scholar assessment in the past. In addition, the Chinese government developed long-term plans at a macroscopic level to promote the development of the educational undertakings for international students. For example, the 2003-2007 Action Plan for Invigorating Education promulgated in 2004 presented a long-term plan for "enlarging the scale, improving the level, ensuring the quality, implementing standardized management" for the purpose of enlarging the scale of international students studying in China and improving the quality of international education. According to the Study in China Program initiated by the Ministry of Education (2010), by 2020, the number of international students studying in China will increase to 500,000, including 150,000 with academic degrees, making China the largest destination country for international students in Asia. In order to accomplish this strategic goal, China will gradually increase the number of candidates for the Chinese Government Scholarship, develop international education industry based on the guideline of "scale enlargement, structural optimization, standardized management and assured quality"¹, and endeavor to build an international brand for the education of international students.

3.2 Achievements in the International Education Industry

3.2.1 Establishment of International Student Education System

Establishment of the system for receiving self-financed international students in colleges and universities

¹ Notice of the ministry of education on printing and distributing study in China plan.

http://old.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe_850/201009/xxgk_108815.html

Before 1989, the Ministry of Education determined in a unified manner the quota and the criteria for fees and charges for enrolling self-financed international students, and directly managed the recruitment and enrolment of self-financed international students. The Provisions on the Admission of Self-financed International Students

Studying in China allowed higher education institutions to have greater decision-making power, including greater right to recruit and charge fees from international students. The delegation of greater decision-making power to higher education institutions promoted their activity in recruiting self-financed international students, allowed them to communicate and exchange with overseas higher education institutions more frequently and more intensively, enabled the group of self-financed international students, which originally was a minority group, to become a mainstream group of international students, and thus opened new channels for international students to study in China.

Establishment of academic degree system aligned with international standards

The delegation of power promoted the activity of higher education institutions in recruiting international students, while the establishment of academic degree system motivated international students to study in China. In order to facilitate the graduates to be employed in their home countries, the Report of the Working Conference on International Students approved by the State Council in 1979 designed the academic degree system for international students and proposed to issue academic degree certificates to international students. The Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Academic Degree promulgated in 1980 officially established the "bachelor-master-doctor" three-level academic degree system, which had been adopted till the present, allowing foreign scholars studying and conducting researches in China to apply for and obtain internationally recognized mainstream academic degrees of higher education in China. The Provisions on the Administration of International Students Studying in China promulgated in 1986 further classified international students studying in China into seven types on the original basis, including candidate for bachelor's degree, candidate for master's degree, candidate for doctor's degree, general scholar, senior scholar, visiting scholar, and short-term visiting scholar. The establishment of academic degree system enabled China's higher education to align with intentional standards in respect of academic degree management, and solved the problem of academic degree certification for international students after returning to their home countries.

Establishment of Chinese proficiency grading criteria and Chinese proficiency test system

In 1987, the "National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language" was established. In 1989, the State Education Commission of China promulgated the Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK) Syllabus and started to implement Chinese proficiency tests both at home and abroad. In 1992, the Measures for HSK was promulgated to serve as the basis for testing the Chinese proficiency of international students studying at higher education institutions in China. The establishment of Chinese proficiency grading criteria and Chinese proficiency test system greatly motivated international students to learn the Chinese language, which lays a solid linguistic foundation for them to learn professional courses in China, and also makes good preparation for the cultural adaptation and life adaptation.

Establishment of the management and evaluation system for international students

International student education is a special educational behavior in the field of higher education. The quality of education and the level of management are closely related to the international reputation and image of a country in its higher education level. China has started to set up an evaluation system, which mainly evaluates the educational management and the teaching quality for international students. In 1999, the trial implementation of the Management and Evaluation Indicator System for the Education of International Students Studying at Higher Education Institutions and the Plan for the Implementation of Management and Evaluation for the Education of International Students Studying at Higher Education Institutions was commenced in the pilot regions. Although no complete and effective evaluation system has been developed up to now, the establishment of this system has provided institutional support for enlarging the scale of international students studying in China and ensuring the standardized management thereof, and played an important role in enlarging the scale of international students studying in China and improving the quality of education thereof. With the continuous enlargement of the scale of international students studying in China, the quality of education of international students became an aspect not to be neglected. Therefore, the Ministry of Education promulgated the Quality Code for Higher Education of International Students in China (Interim), which emphasized on the necessity of taking quality management for the education of international students in China as the main direction of development in the future. However, the specific results of the implementation thereof still require a systematic, comprehensive evaluation and supervision system to provide support and feedback.

3.2.2 Improvement of the Education Management System for International Students

Greater right of higher education institutions to recruit and manage international students

Before the reform and opening-up in 1978, the recruitment of international students by various higher education institutions was strictly controlled by the Ministry of Education and included into the nationally unified recruitment plan. Such highly centralized educational management of international students in China was not favorable for the development of international education industry. This situation had not been improved until 1980, in which the Ministry of Education delegated the right to recruit short-term students to various higher education institutions. The Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Education System Reform promulgated in 1985 granted the autonomous right of foreign communication to higher education institutions, while the Measures for the Administration of International Students Studying in China (1985) and the Provisions on the Admission of Self-financed International Students Studying in China (1989) expressly granted the autonomous right to recruit, teach and manage self-financed international students to higher education institutions.

Standardization of the education and management system for international students

As China enlarged the range of recruitment of self-financed international students and higher education institutions gained greater right to educate and manage international students, more and more international students swarmed to China to study. However, this trend was also accompanied with certain problems, such as the inconsistency between the international student management criteria of different higher education institutions, the uneven levels of international student management at different higher education institutions, and frequently occurring disorders of international student management. As the solution to these problems required an international student management system at the national and legal level, the China Scholarship Council was established in 1996 to take charge of the study, financial support, administration, and other activities in respect of foreign citizens in China and to render the recruitment, election and administration of international students onto an organized and legal track. In 2017, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Public Security jointly promulgated the Measures for the Administration of the Recruitment and Training of International Students in Schools, which further regulated schools' acts of international student recruitment, training and management considering the situation at that time.

Improvement of the incentive mechanism for recruiting international students

China established the Chinese Government Scholarship for international students, and successively established various scholarship programs for international students in the 1990s, such as the Chinese Culture Research Fellowship, the Scholarship for Outstanding Students and the HSK Winner Scholarship, which diversified the original monotonous pattern of scholarship. Meanwhile, in order to further standardize the review of scholarship, China started to implement the international student scholarship annual review system, and adopted policies such as the Measures for the Annual Review of Chinese Government Scholarship (2000) and the Provisions on the Administration of Chinese Government Scholarship (2001) to provide support at the institutional and legal levels. After China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO), China's economy grew quickly, the per capita consumption ability and level improved rapidly, and the previous scholarship coverage and criteria gradually became inconsistent with the rapidly developing economy and consumption level. To address these issues, China not only encouraged the local governments, higher education institutions and enterprises to establish more scholarship programs, but also increased the amount of Chinese Government Scholarship. The most recent action was the issuance of the Notice on Improving Chinese Government Scholarship System and Funding Criteria by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education in 2014. In order to support the One Belt and One Road Initiative, China also established the One Belt and One Road Scholarship in 2015 and provided the Chinese Government Scholarship to ten thousand candidates from the countries along the One Belt and One Road each year. These scholarship policies had certain effects on the structure of source countries of international students studying in China, among which the most obvious effect was that the number of international students from various countries along the One Belt and One Road, such as Russia, Kazakhstan and Pakistan, increased continuously in recent years, and these countries ranked among the top ten, even top five source countries.

4. The Current Status of International Education in China

China's international education exchanges were inactive and even set back because of political and diplomatic factors before 1978 (MA, 2016). However, when the reform and opening up policy was adopted in 1978, the whole of China witnessed a great development in international student education.

4.1 International Education Market Scale

4.1.1 General Introduction of International Education Market Scale

During the period from the reform and opening-up to the end of the 20th century, the total number of international students studying in China increased smoothly, from 1236 in 1978 to 52.2 thousand in 2000, marking an annual increase of over 2300. After the beginning of the 21st century, the scale of international students studying in China was enlarged rapidly. 356 universities in China received 61.9 thousand international students from 169 countries and regions in 2001, while a total of 492,185 international students from 196 origin countries and regions were studying in China's 1004 universities in 2018 (Figure 1).

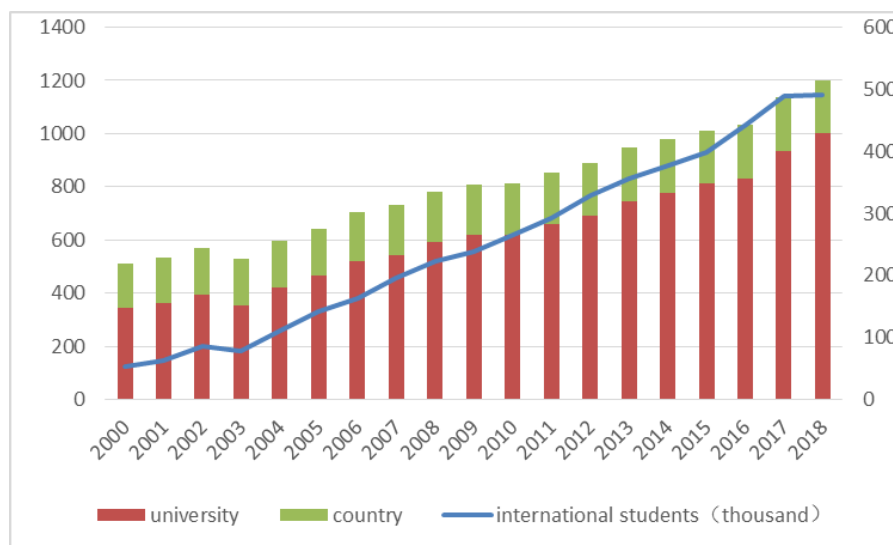


Figure 1. The number of international students in China since the 21st century²

In general, China's colleges and universities received 25 thousand more international students on average each year after the beginning of the 21st century. The number of international students studying in China in 2018 has exceeded 490,000, just one step short of the goal of 500,000 by 2020 set out in the Study in China Program. In terms of the number of institutions accepted international students, there were about 50 new institutions every year. In terms of the number of countries of origin, there was a certain increase in the first decade of the 21st century, and the number of countries of origin fluctuated slightly around 200 since 2010.

4.1.2 Current Status of International Education Market Scale

The scale of international education in China is basically the same as that in developed countries. The United States ranks first while Australia, Canada, China, Germany, France, Britain have similar scale in the export market of higher education services. About 1.074 million international students received higher education in the United States while Australia, Canada, Germany, France, Britain had 549,000, 495,000, 359,000, 343,000 and 307,000 international students respectively.

China is the world's fourth largest recipient of international students with a total of 489,000 in 2017³. However, China accounts for slightly smaller international education market share and there exists a big import and export deficit. The export of education services is an important part of a country's export trade. Currently, five developed countries—the United States, Britain, Australia, France and Japan -- account for nearly 80% of the trade share in education service market, among which the United States and Britain account for nearly 60%. For example, the Chinese students studying in the USA contributed 21.8 billion USD in 2012 and 35.8 billion in academic year 2014-2015 to the USA's economy⁴. Although China became the world's third largest country receiving international students in 2015, its education services export volume accounted for only 0.65% of the world's total education services export volume (Du, 2015). The average education services export volume of the

²Data in figures and tables are all collected from the Concise Statistics for International Students from 2000 to 2018, issued by the Department of international cooperation and exchange, Chinese Ministry of Education

³Top 10 countries in the world for the number of international students <https://www.liuxue86.com/a/3924279.html>

⁴More than 0.32 million Chinese students studying in the USA, making an annual contribution of 11.43 billion USD to the USA's economy <http://edu.people.com.cn/n1/2016/1115/c1053-28862753.html>

USA was more than 20 times that of China, and the UK exports more than nine times that of China. China's education services export volume is extremely inconsistent with its huge higher education scale (Zhang, 2014). In terms of import and export trade volume of education services, China's annual overseas study consumption market is at least 250 billion RMB, ranking first in the world⁵. For example, the Chinese students studying in the USA contributed 11.43 billion USD to the USA's economy in academic year 2015-2016. While the international students studying in China made a direct economic contribution of 2.2 billion USD in 2011 (CAFSA, 2015). Despite the fact that China has made great breakthroughs in terms of the scale of international students, the immediate problem is how to convert the scale of international students to its national economic benefit, reduce and even reverse the great deficit of education services import/export trade, and thus promote the healthy development of China's international students education industry (Ye & Xia, 2020). The scale of international student education is uneven among regions and universities in China. In 2017, a total of 935 Higher education institutions receiving international students, among which 237 institutions receive more than 500 international students. The 237 institutions have received 401,000 international students in total, while the remaining 698 institutions have received 88,000. This means that 82% of international students in China are monopolized by 25% of universities and institutions, and there is a significant gap in the level of internationalization of higher education among universities. Most international students study in 13 provinces and municipalities including Beijing, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Guangdong, Liaoning, Tianjin, Hubei, Yunnan, Shandong, Fujian, Heilongjiang and Shanxi while other areas have accepted fewer than 10,000 international students.

International students account for a smaller proportion among the total number of enrolled students in a higher education institution. It is recognized that an international university is a university with a number of international students accounting for 10% or above of the total number of its enrolled students. However, there is still a great gap between the proportion of international students studying at higher education institutions in China and the aforementioned percentage. Statistical data shows that even at China's key universities under the national construction of Project 211⁶ starting from 1995, Project 985⁷ starting from 1998 and the Double First-rate Plan⁸ starting from 2015, the proportion of international students is only 3.7%. However, such proportion in European and American countries with developed higher education can generally reach 10%-20%. For example, the number of international students studying in Australia accounts for 19.8% of the total number of enrolled students in Australia, and the number of international students studying in the UK accounts for 16.9% ; the proportions of international students studying in non-English countries such as France and Germany all exceed 10%. In addition, the gap is manifested not only in the number of international students, but also in the quality of international students.

The average number of degree students studying at key institutions of higher education in China is less than 500, accounting for only 2.4% of the total number of enrolled full-time students, which is much less than that in the aforementioned countries⁹. Apparently, the internationalization level of Chinese universities is inadequate.

4.2 Source Countries of International Students

4.2.1 General Introduction of Source Countries of International Students

As observed from the historical distribution of the source countries of international students studying in China after the beginning of the 21st century, the South Korea and Japan in Asia, and the USA in the Western World, have ranked the first three places for a long period, and the South Korea has been ranking the first among all source countries, with a total number of students much greater than the sum of the numbers of students from the USA and Japan. This situation did not change until 2013 when the Belt and Road Initiative¹⁰ was proposed and

⁵2013 report on the trend of study abroad <http://www.eol.cn/html/lx/baogao2013/page1.shtml>

⁶Project 211 is a constructive project aimed at strengthening about 100 institutions of higher education and key disciplinary areas as a national priority for the 21st century conducted by the government of the People's Republic of China. There are 116 universities in the project 211.

⁷Project 985 is a constructive project for founding world-class universities in the 21st century conducted by the government of the People's Republic of China. There are 39 universities in the project 985.

⁸Double First-rate Plan is a constructive project aimed at building a number of world-class universities and first-class disciplines to enhance China's comprehensive strength and international competitiveness.

⁹Revealing the embarrassing situation of the internationalization of Chinese higher education institutions <http://edu.qq.com/a/20150421/048984.htm>

¹⁰The Belt and Road Initiative is a cooperation initiative initiated by China around the silk road economic belt and the 21st century maritime silk road

implemented. In recent years, the numbers of international students from surrounding countries, such as Thailand, India, Kazakhstan and Pakistan, have increased abruptly, and these countries have taken the positions originally occupied by big European countries, such as the UK, Germany and France. Over the past decade, the numbers of international students from three countries, namely, Thailand, Russia and Pakistan, have seen the greatest increase, Thailand ranking the second, Pakistan the third, India and Russia the fifth and the sixth. Among the top ten source countries, 9 surrounding countries have become the main force contributing to the quantity of international students studying in China (Table 1).

Table 1. Top ten sending countries 2000-2017

Year	No.1	No.2	No.3	No.4	No.5	No.6	No.7	No.8	No.9	No.10
2000	Korea 16787	Japan 13806	USA 4280	Indonesia 1947	Germany 1270	France 891	Singapore 854	Russia 703	Australia 676	Thailand 667
2001	Korea 22116	Japan 14692	USA 5431	Indonesia 1697	Germany 1321	Vietnam 1170	France 1057	Russia 1056	Australia 971	Thailand 860
2002	Korea 36093	Japan 16084	USA 7359	Indonesia 2583	Vietnam 2336	Thailand 1737	Russia 1492	France 1341	Germany 1226	UK 1061
2003	Korea 35353	Japan 12765	USA 3693	Vietnam 3487	Indonesia 2563	Thailand 1554	Germany 1280	Russia 1224	Nepal 1199	Mongolia 1060
2004	Korea 43617	Japan 19059	USA 8480	Vietnam 4382	Indonesia 3750	Thailand 2371	Russia 2288	Germany 2187	France 1954	Nepal 1495
2005	Korea 54079	Japan 18874	USA 10343	Vietnam 5842	Indonesia 4616	Thailand 3594	Russia 3535	India 3295	France 3105	Germany 2736
2006	Korea 57504	Japan 18363	USA 11784	Vietnam 7310	Indonesia 5652	India 5634	Thailand 5522	Russia 5035	France 3857	Pakistan 3308
2007	Korea 64481	Japan 18640	USA 14758	Vietnam 9702	Thailand 7306	Russia 7261	India 7190	Indonesia 6590	France 4698	Pakistan 4450
2008	Korea 66806	USA 19914	Japan 16733	Vietnam 10396	Russia 8939	Thailand 8476	India 8145	Indonesia 7084	Kazakhstan 5666	Pakistan 5199
2009	Korea 64232	USA 18650	Japan 15409	Vietnam 12247	Thailand 11379	Russia 10596	India 8468	Indonesia 7926	Kazakhstan 6497	Pakistan 5738
2010	Korea 62957	USA 19668	Japan 16808	Thailand 13711	Vietnam 13018	Russia 12481	Indonesia 9539	India 9014	Kazakhstan 7874	Pakistan 7406
2011	Korea 62442	USA 23292	Japan 17961	Thailand 14145	Vietnam 13549	Russia 13340	Indonesia 10957	India 9370	Pakistan 8516	Kazakhstan 8287
2012	Korea 63488	USA 24583	Japan 21126	Thailand 16675	Russia 14971	Indonesia 13144	Vietnam 13038	India 10237	Pakistan 9630	Kazakhstan 9565
2013	Korea 63029	USA 25312	Thailand 20106	Japan 17226	Russia 15918	Indonesia 13492	Vietnam 12799	India 11781	Kazakhstan 11165	Pakistan 10941
2014	Korea 62923	USA 24203	Thailand 21296	Russia 17202	Japan 15057	Indonesia 13689	India 13578	Pakistan 13360	Kazakhstan 11764	France 10729
2015	Korea 66672	USA 21975	Thailand 19976	India 16694	Russia 16197	Pakistan 15654	Japan 14085	Kazakhstan 13198	Indonesia 12694	France 10436
2016	Korea 70540	USA 23838	Thailand 23044	Pakistan 18626	India 18717	Russia 17971	Indonesia 14714	Kazakhstan 13996	Japan 13595	Vietnam 10639
2017	Korea 63827	Thailand 27884	Pakistan 24879	USA 23911	India 20911	Russia 19751	Japan 14717	Indonesia 14573	Kazakhstan 14224	Laos 14222

The information of the main source countries of international students studying in China contained in Table 1 shows that geographic relation and the recognition of Chinese culture have powerfully attracted international students from China's neighboring countries and the developed countries. In the years when the bilateral diplomatic relation was normal, the neighboring countries, such as Japan and Korea, remained the major source countries of international students in China, mainly because the geographic closeness and cultural closeness would create a sense of acquaintance, which allowed the international students from these countries to adapt to the life and climate in China more easily and rendered it psychologically more acceptable to adapt to their study and daily life in China.

4.2.2 Current Status of Source Countries of International Students

Asian students are the main international students studying in China, indicating the single structure of international student source countries.

Table 2. International student numbers and proportions by sending continents in 2017.

Continents	Number	Proportion
Asia	293222	59.9%
Europe	75064	15.3%
Africa	74244	15.2%
America	39203	8.0%
Oceania	7439	1.5%
Total	489172	100.0%

As shown in Table 2, Asian students were still the main force of international students studying in 2017 in China, the number of whom accounted for 59.9% of the total number of international students studying in China. Among the Asian countries, there are 10 countries sending more than ten thousand students to study in China, including South Korea, Thailand, Pakistan, India, Japan, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Laos, Vietnam and Mongolia.

The number of international students from these 10 countries accounts for 73.96% of the total number of all Asian students studying in China and 44.33% of the total number of all international students studying in China. In contrast, among the remaining 158 countries and regions in Europe, Africa, America and Oceania, there are only 2 countries, namely, Russia and the USA, sending more than ten thousand students to study in China. Although China receive international students from more than 200 countries and regions, the international students from only a few countries constitute the main force of international students studying in China, indicating that structure of international student source countries is highly concentrated and single. Such excessively concentrated source country structure is not favorable for China to mitigate the risks associated with its education services export trade. The abrupt decrease in the number of international students from these countries, once it occurs, will negatively affect China’s education services export trade. In addition, due to economic reasons, students from Asian countries do not have a high consumption capacity in China and their economic benefits are relatively limited, which is one of the reasons why the export value of education services in China is relatively small.

4.3 Education Levels of International Students Studying in China

4.3.1 General Situation of Education Levels of International Students Studying in China

After the entrance to the WTO, the Chinese Ministry of Education divided international students into the degree foreign students” and the non-degree foreign students. The former includes junior college students, undergraduates and postgraduates. The latter includes various long-term or short-term foreign students who study in China not to earn degrees, such as senior visiting students (who already have a master degree or higher degree), ordinary visiting students (sophomores or above), Chinese language students (who study in China to improve the level of Chinese language) and short-term visiting students (who study in China less than one semester). The 2003-2007 Action Plan for Invigorating Education specified the improvement of the level of international students in China as one of the important goals of international education development, and its essence was to increase the proportion of degree students. The implementation of this plan also delivered good effects. As shown clearly in Figure 2, the proportion of degree students increased from 26.9% in 2001 to 49.4% in 2017, and the proportion of non-degree students decreased from 73.1% in 2001 to 50.6% in 2017.

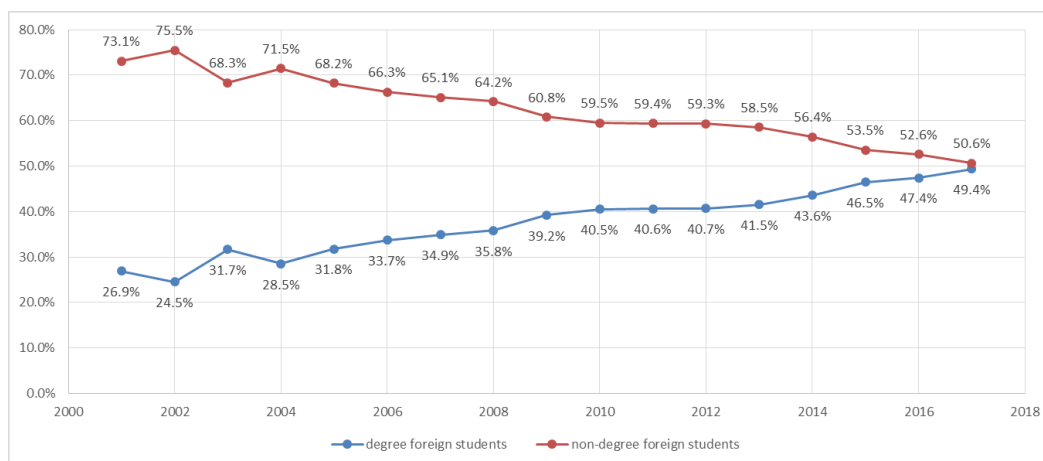


Figure 2. Trend of changes in the proportions of degree students and non-degree students.

The gap between the proportion of degree students and that of non-degree students is narrowing and even basically flat, indicating that the level of international students studying in China was improved significantly. Considering the current trend of development, degree students will replace non-degree students and become the main category of international students in China within the next few years. The proportion of undergrads among degree students remains at a constant level of about 30%, and the proportions of postgraduate students for master’s degree and those for doctor’s degree are increasing year by year.

4.3.2 Current Status of Education Levels of International Students Studying in China

The number of international students--those studying for degrees, especially for graduate degrees, is usually considered an important indicator for measuring a university's academic status. The number of international students receiving high-level education in China accounts for a slightly smaller proportion of the total number of all international students studying in China before 2000. In the 21st century, the Ministry of Education implemented the 2003-2007 Action Plan for Invigorating Education and expanded the recruitment scale based on the principle of “expanding the scale, improving the level, ensuring the quality, and standardizing the management” to attract more international students to seek undergraduate and postgraduate education in China¹¹. Although in recent years, the proportion of degree students is on the rise, respectively accounting for 46.5% and 49.4% of the total in 2015 and 2017, the non-degree students are still the main body in China’s international education market.

Table 3. Degree student numbers and proportions by sending continents in 2017

Continents	Degree students	Proportion
Asia	160323	54.7%
Europe	18345	24.4%
Africa	51959	70.0%
America	9047	23.1%
Oceania	1869	25.1%
Total	241543	49.4%

As shown in Table 3, students from Asia and Africa prefer to receive degree education in China, while those from Europe and America prefer to receive non-degree education in China. More than half of foreign students from Asia and Africa choose to study in China for a junior college degree or above, respectively accounting for 54.7% and 70%. Only about 23-25% of students from Europe, America and Oceania choose degree education, and more students from these regions prefer to receive short-term or language-related non-degree education, indicating that the attraction of China’s degree education is inadequate to students from European and American countries.

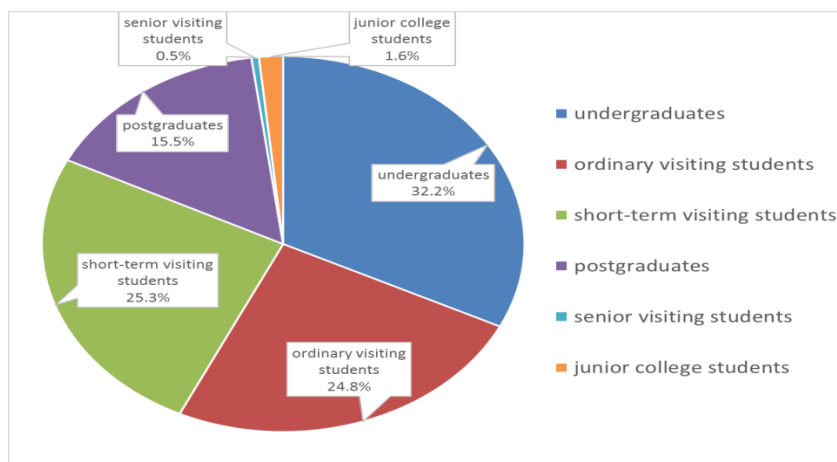


Figure 3. International students in China by education level in 2017

In Figure 3, it can be further observed that the majority of degree students in China receive undergraduate education, accounting for about one third of the total, and the number of foreign students with master's degree or

¹¹ Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China.2004. Education Promotion Plan (2003-2007). http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe_4/200501/5323.html.

above accounts for about 16%. In the field of non-degree education, ordinary visiting students and short-term visiting students are the main body, accounting for about a quarter of the total number respectively. Compared with developed countries, the number of students coming to China for higher education is relatively small. Canada's international graduate students account for 20% of the total number of domestic graduate students, and the United States is about 15%; in academic year 2015/2016, the number of international students seeking the master's degree or above in the UK accounted for 64% of the total number of applicants. Therefore, it can be seen that China is not attractive to high-level international students (graduate students and senior visiting students). The main reason is that China's higher education competitiveness still lags behind that of developed countries.

4.4 Study Subjects Chosen by International Students

4.4.1 General Introduction of Study Subjects Chosen by International Students

Before the reform and opening-up policy in 1978, due to the political and diplomatic factors in the new China, China strictly controlled the majors open to international students studying in China. During the period from the end of 1972 to the end of the 20th century, with the improvement of China's diplomatic situation, the restrictions to source countries and majors were removed gradually, and the majors of international students studying in China underwent a transition from the dominance of science and engineering majors (especially those related to infrastructure construction, heavy industry, and other areas) to the dominance of liberal arts majors, and started to diversify at the beginning of the 21st century. Such transition and diversification were mainly attributed to two factors. The first factor was that the scale of international students studying in China, especially the scale of self-financed international students, was rapidly enlarged after China joined the WTO. The second factor was the development of higher education in China and the growth of China's strength in scientific research, due to which the number of students majoring in economy, management, law, education, medical science, science and engineering increased day by day, and there were more and more students who chose to firstly learn Chinese and then chose other majors.

Table 4. International student numbers by the top nine subjects 2000–2017

Year	No.1	No.2	No.3	No.4	No.5	No.6	No.7	No.8	No.9
2000	Chinese language 35422 (67.9%)	Chinese medicine 3700 (7.1%)	Literature 2851 (5.5%)	Engineering 1740 (3.3%)	Law 1626 (3.1%)	Economics 1582 (3%)	Western medicine 1399 (2.7%)	History 728 (1.4%)	Art 706 (1.4%)
2001	Chinese language 44149 (71.4%)	Chinese medicine 3886 (6.3%)	Literature 3550 (5.7%)	Engineering 1888 (3.1%)	Economics 1726 (2.8%)	Western medicine 1626 (2.6%)	Law 1392 (2.3%)	Management 860 (1.4%)	History 630 (1%)
2002	Chinese language 63328 (73.8%)	Literature 4336 (5.1%)	Chinese medicine 4070 (4.7%)	Economics 2723 (3.2%)	Western medicine 2643 (3.1%)	Engineering 2442 (2.8%)	History 1375 (1.6%)	Law 1287 (1.5%)	Management 1036 (1.2%)
2003	Chinese language 63328 (68.4%)	Literature 5015 (6.5%)	Chinese medicine 4183 (5.4%)	Economics 3091 (4%)	Western medicine 3001 (3.9%)	Engineering 2693 (3.5%)	Law 2053 (2.6%)	Management 1547 (2%)	Art 918 (1.2%)
2004	Chinese language 75270 (83.5%)	Literature 6705 (6%)	Chinese medicine 6283 (5.7%)	Western medicine 4688 (4.2%)	Economics 4525 (4.1%)	Engineering 3519 (3.2%)	Management 2838 (2.6%)	Law 2438 (2.2%)	Art 1291 (1.2%)
2005	Chinese language 86679 (61.4%)	Literature 11600 (8.2%)	Western medicine 9605 (6.8%)	Chinese medicine 8427 (6%)	Economics 6665 (4.7%)	Engineering 4455 (3.2%)	Management 3555 (2.5%)	Law 2905 (2.1%)	Education 2689 (1.9%)
2006	Chinese language 98701 (60.7%)	Literature 14027 (8.6%)	Western medicine 13225 (8.1%)	Economics 7308 (4.5%)	Chinese medicine 7130 (4.4%)	Management 5954 (3.7%)	Engineering 5803 (3.6%)	Law 3667 (2.3%)	Art 2118 (1.3%)
2007	Chinese language 119147 (60.9%)	Western medicine 16902 (8.6%)	Literature 13822 (7.1%)	Economics 8840 (4.5%)	Management 8587 (4.4%)	Chinese medicine 8671 (4.4%)	Engineering 6785 (3.5%)	Law 4700 (2.4%)	Art 2508 (1.3%)

Year	No.1	No.2	No.3	No.4	No.5	No.6	No.7	No.8	No.9
2008	Chinese language	Western medicine	Literature	Economics	Management	Science	Chinese medicine	Engineering	Law
	127574 (55.7%)	19233 (8.6%)	15935 (7.1%)	11335 (5.1%)	10728 (4.8%)	978 (4.5%)	9418 (4.2%)	9128 (4.1%)	4688 (2.1%)
2009	Chinese language	Western medicine	Literature	Economics	Management	Engineering	Chinese medicine	Law	Art
	136576 (57.3%)	21123 (8.9%)	16635 (7%)	14367 (6%)	12260 (5.1%)	11606 (4.9%)	11022 (4.6%)	4966 (2.1%)	2732 (1.2%)
2010	Chinese language	Western medicine	Literature	Economics	Engineering	Management	Chinese medicine	Law	Education
	146149 (55.1%)	25203 (9.5%)	19612 (7.4%)	16863 (6.4%)	15130 (5.7%)	14920 (5.6%)	10962 (4.1%)	6147 (2.3%)	4473 (1.7%)
2011	Chinese language	Western medicine	Engineering	Economics	Management	Literature	Chinese medicine	Law	Education
	161964 (55.4%)	26928 (9.2%)	18949 (6.5%)	18436 (6.3%)	18472 (6.3%)	178379 (6.1%)	11822 (4%)	6684 (2.3%)	5457 (1.9%)
2012	Chinese language	Western medicine	Literature	Engineering	Management	Economics	Chinese medicine	Law	Education
	175676 (53.5%)	30474 (9.3%)	24931 (7.6%)	22596 (6.9%)	21873 (6.7%)	20819 (6.3%)	13042 (4%)	7296 (2.2%)	5361 (1.6%)
2013	Chinese language	Western medicine	Engineering	Literature	Management	Economics	Chinese medicine	Law	Education
	176447 (49.5%)	34899 (9.8%)	27369 (7.7%)	26654 (7.5%)	26201 (7.3%)	23615 (6.6%)	13804 (3.9%)	8183 (2.3%)	7267 (2%)
2014	Chinese language	Western medicine	Engineering	Economics	Management	Chinese medicine	Literature	Law	Education
	194348 (51.5%)	39233 (10.4%)	34134 (9.1%)	27799 (7.4%)	26951 (7.1%)	12857 (3.4%)	12242 (3.2%)	9118 (2.4%)	6664 (1.8%)
2015	Chinese language	Western medicine	Engineering	Literature	Economics	Management	Chinese medicine	Law	Art
	181275 (45.6%)	45461 (11.4%)	39366 (9.9%)	31843 (8%)	30757 (7.7%)	28142 (7.0%)	12277 (3.1%)	9310 (2.4%)	5218 (1.3%)
2016	Chinese language	Western medicine	Engineering	Economics	Literature	Management	Education	Chinese medicine	Law
	169093 (38.2%)	49022 (11.1%)	48394 (10.9%)	37315 (8.4%)	36782 (8.3%)	32976 (7.4%)	24900 (5.6%)	13335 (3.0%)	11187 (2.5%)
2017	Chinese language	Engineering	Western medicine	Literature	Economics	Management	Chinese medicine	Education	Law
	194382 (39.7%)	58090 (11.9%)	53622 (11.0%)	42619 (8.7%)	40667 (8.3%)	39870 (8.2%)	14115 (2.9%)	13104 (2.7%)	11800 (2.4%)

It can be observed from Table 4 that the Chinese language was the first choice for international students studying in China, but its dominance has been weakened from more than 70% in the early 21st century to less than 40% in 2017.

With the enhancement of China’s comprehensive national power, especially the rapid development in high-tech industries such as industrial manufacturing and medical treatment, the proportion of international students in these relevant majors has been rising year by year, especially attracting a large number of students from third world countries, such as India, Pakistan and Africa. In addition, due to the stable and healthy development of the market economy in our country and rapid ascension of economic strength after entering the WTO in 2001, the academic level of economics and management has been rapidly improved with the naked eye, and the gap with developed countries such as Europe and the United States has been gradually narrowed, which has also led to the increasing number of international students studying economics and management. The proportion of international students majoring in economics and management has reached 16.5% in 2017.

4.4.2 Current Situation of Study Subjects Chosen by International Students

The Chinese language is a mainstream major, but its attraction to degree students is inadequate. As shown in Table 5, the proportion of international students majoring in the Chinese language has declined from 67.9% in 2000 to 39.7% in 2017, though international students studying Chinese language account for the majority. There were totally 194.4 thousand international students majoring in the Chinese language, but only 15% of them were degree students in 2017.

Table 5. Study subjects chosen by international students in China in 2017

Subjects	Total number	Degree students	Degree students Proportion
Western medicine	53622	51620	96.3%
philosophy	594	506	85.2%
engineering	58090	47296	81.4%
science	7884	6292	79.8%
economics	40667	30555	75.1%
management	39870	29246	73.4%
law	11800	8653	73.3%
Chinese medicine	14155	10274	72.6%
history	1242	771	62.1%
agriculture	4738	2866	60.5%
art	6455	3274	50.7%
Education	13104	5223	39.9%
literature	42619	15866	37.2%
Chinese language	194382	29101	15.0%

China's economic strength is also an influencing factor on subject preference by international students. As shown in (Table 5), the four majors of western medicine, engineering, economics and management not only have a large number of foreign students, but also have a great attraction to the degree students. These subjects may offer an insight into the development strategies and social processes unique to China. Chinese universities are well aware that the lingua franca could be a reason for the relatively low flows of Western students to China (Zhang KY & Rienties B, 2016, 2017). In many international student export markets such as the USA, the UK, Australia, the Netherlands and Germany, the lingua franca is English, and many non-English-speaking countries such as the Netherlands and Germany have offered consistent provision of specialized degrees in the English language. The Chinese Ministry of Education launched the Construction of English Excellent Course for Overseas Students in 2013, and 300 top-quality courses with teaching in English have been offered to international students in key universities in China. English-teaching courses vigorously promoted the international student export market. For example, Western medicine has become the second largest subject hosting foreign students in China in 2017. There is great potential for other majors to develop their degree students.

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

Based on the above analysis on the current status and policy evolution of international education industry in China, we make suggestions on how to further expand the international education market and optimize the international education structure in China.

Promote higher education quality and building a unique education brand

“Famous cities and famous universities” are widely targeted by international students. With the promotion of international recognition and reputation of the Chinese higher education institutions, more international students are attracted to China for further study and education. Currently, international students are highly concentrated in a few higher education institutions, which indicates that although the number of higher education institutions receiving international students increases year by year, the scale and level of international students studying at different higher education institutions vary greatly. Therefore, Universities are encouraged to understand international students' demands and establish demand-oriented specialty and course systems. Currently, the international students majoring in the Chinese language account for half of all international students studying in China. According to the market demand, Colleges and universities may develop distinctive Chinese courses and a diversified education system featuring “Chinese language + traditional Chinese medicine” and “Chinese language + culture”, “Chinese language + Chinese financial markets”, etc. Furthermore, the higher education institutions receiving less international students need to establish cooperative relations with overseas education institutions, sign more student exchange agreements, and hire expatriate teachers to improve teaching quality. To do this, higher education institutions are required to establish their own advantageous disciplines based on their own strength and characteristics, introduce quality education resources from foreign countries, learn the representative operation models of foreign education institutions, and launch a variety of Sino-foreign cooperative education programs designed for enrolling international students. In addition, the Chinese government and competent local authorities need to provide more human, material, and financial supports,

establish higher education international cooperation and exchange centers in regions with good regional conditions, centralize and use advantageous resources to cooperate with reputable foreign colleges and universities or even establish branches of such institutions in China, and thus attract more international students to China.

Improve international education support system

As of August 2016, China had signed the agreement on the mutual recognition of academic degrees and diplomas with 43 countries and regions, which accounted for only a small proportion among more than 200 source countries and regions, which was far from enough to meet the education demands of international students studying in China. Therefore, the signing of academic degree mutual recognition agreements with more countries should be scheduled as early as possible since the academic degree certification is a precondition that supports international students to study in China. In addition, family responsibility, course obstacles, culture, language, safety consideration and financial condition of overseas education agencies are the main factors affecting international students' final decision to study abroad. Therefore, the recommended measures are as follows: the first is to establish flexible and diversified scholarship systems, and encourage enterprises and individuals to provide scholarship funds; the second is to improve the work-study programs and the employment policies for international students, extending part-time hours and the duration of employment and residence of outstanding overseas graduates; the third is to improve the medical and insurance systems for international students, including international students into the coverage of self-financed medical security system; and the fourth is to adopt flexible management and convergent management, and provide refined services to help international students to shorten their adaptation period. Aside from these measures, it is necessary to establish a complete and effective system for monitoring and evaluating the quality of international education, issue reports on the quality of international education on a regular basis, provide relevant information and early warnings, and guide higher education institutions to improve the quality of international education service trade continuously.

Expand international student consumer market through market-oriented operation

The education of international students in China is a part of service trade, and education marketing is a necessary means to develop the education services for international students studying in China.

The first action is to establish high-level education marketing agencies to perform "market segmentation", "determination of the target market", "market positioning" and other related tasks. For example, for short-term students, one-to-one marketing should be carried out. For the market involving students majoring in the Chinese language, undifferentiated marketing should be carried out. For international students from the same region with the same cultural background, concentrated marketing shall be carried out. For international students from European countries who have more demand for experiencing foreign culture and less demand for degree education, "Chinese language learning with an internship" and "service-oriented study programs" should be promoted vigorously to increase the number of international students from developed countries (Peng LQ & Xia XR, 2017). The second action is to implement 6P education marketing strategy depending on the type of international student consumer market, which is to carry out education marketing from six perspectives, including Product, Price, Place, Promotion, Public relationship and Political power. The third action is to promote the reputation of China's higher education institutions by building online recruitment systems and overseas recruitment websites, purchasing Google key words and advertisements, creating Facebook pages and English websites for study abroad, publishing articles concerning study in China in international student forums and communities, and actively communicating with overseas students, their parents and teachers via email to answer their questions so as to allow them to better understand the higher education institutions in China. The fourth action is to establish education information centers following the model of the DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst), such as establishing overseas education service agencies, releasing student recruitment information, creating alumni networks, delivering regular outreach lectures and speeches on study in China at overseas higher education institutions, which may provide all conveniences for China's educational institutions to promote educational products and services around the world.

The growing inequality of competition between universities in developing countries and developed countries leads to the flow of students mainly from developing countries rather than to developing countries (Qu RX & Jiang S, 2011). The overview of the changing trends in the three phases of China's international student education structure analysed shows that the study-in-China policy, economic growth and higher education quality have a significant impact on the international student education structure in China. For sustainable development of international education, the Chinese government and university sectors have placed much more emphasis on the diversity of education export, improvement of education quality and support of laws and

policies. The rapid development of international education in China has profiled an education development model with Chinese characteristics. The study on how different government policies have influenced international student flows to China over the past decades is also expected to shed light on how developing and less developed countries develop their international student education.

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