Intercultural Administration of International Students
A Case Study at Jinan University

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Abstract

Cultural differences among international students refer to their differences in beliefs, values, understandings, behavioral codes, manners, and customs. Because of these cultural differences, it is important to take interculture into consideration and take appropriate actions in the teaching and administration of international students. From the perspective of interculture, the paper discusses the teaching and administration of international students in China, based on a case study at Jinan University. It highlights the characteristics between the East and West through the students' interactions within the different cultures, and attempts to put forward feasible solutions to the cultural adaptability of international students. I (or we, depending on the number of the authors) argue that the education and administration of international students is a kind of intercultural education and administration, and a kind of service-oriented education and administration model.

Keywords: interculture, international students, intercultural management, student administration

1. Introduction

During the 10 years of the Great Cultural Revolution, the recruitment of international students was stagnated. This continued to be restored after the "Reform and Opening up" in 1979 (Note 1). However, China has observed an increasing number international students from only 33 students in 1950 to over 377,000 in 2014. (http://www.eol.cn/html/lhlx/content.html) According to the ChinaNews.com (2010), in 2009 the number of international students in China reached to 230,000 from 190 countries and regions studying in China in 2009,, making the highest record since the People's Republic of China was founded. These students are known to study at 610 universities, research institutes and other educational institutions in 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, excluding Taiwan, Hong Kong special administrative region and Macao special administrative region.

The number of students coming from Asia stands the first place, accounting for 67.84% of the total number of international students throughout the 2009. This was followed by Europe with 15.06%, America 10.73%, Africa 5.22%, and Oceania 1.14%. South Korea, the United States, Japan, Vietnam, Thailand, Russia, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, and Pakistan are the top ten sending countries. (http://www.chinanews.com/edu/edu-zcdt/news/2010/03-22/2183667.shtml)

As such, it has become greatly important for the education and administration of the international students to confront many forms of diversities. These might include large differences in age, Chinese proficiency, personal pursuits and time to study abroad, various educational backgrounds, religious beliefs and cultural backgrounds amongst international students.

2. The Relationship between Interculture and Educational Administration of International Students

Before we enter to the discussion of the relationship, it is necessary for us to find the origin of inter-culture and its relation with inter-subjectivity.

2.1 Inter-subjectivity and Inter-culture

Inter-subjectivity refers to a kind of interactive relationship between different subjectivities and the resulting restructuring of meaning. Subjectivity is often mentioned in historical texts. When people come across a text, their interpretation of the text will involve a kind of conversational or communicative relationship with other subjectivities. The interactive relationship established between different subjectivities, like that between student administrators w and students, identifies the distinctive characteristics of specific subjects. Thus, cross-cultural interaction is a concrete representation of inter-subjectivity that western philosophy reflects in the field of culture (Wang, 2004). In the terms inter-culture or inter-subjectivity, the prefix of inter- is based on diversity, despite of differences. Interactive conversational relationship can only be seen between different entities. The greater this kind of diversity is, the greater responses will be generated, and the resulting relation will become more remarkable as well.

Interculture is a meta-theory in cross-cultural administration. The so called "cross-cultural administration" originated from the international administration concept of transnational corporations that are required to adopt an inclusive approach in the process of international administration. This approach includes flexible management styles for different races, different types of culture and particular phases of cultural development of the subsidiaries. It aims to design a feasible code of conduct for staff in different cultural atmospheres to maximize the potentials and values of the corporations.

Thus, the core of "cross-cultural administration" is to dissolve conflicts and contradictions caused by cultural differences. It also aims to realize the communication and understandings between teams or members with different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, this approach helps to eliminate external interference of cultural differences. In the same vein, "cross-cultural administration" of international students means an administration approach and research on the correlation between two cultures, rather than comparative administration of any selected two different cultures.

Concept and culture cannot change the world, but it can change people who can change the world (Li, 1996). Thus, logic goes first when it comes to the administration on international students of different nationalities and cultures. Logic priority means that the student administrator should be aware that one should start from himself or herself, change his or her own idea, intellectual value and frame of thinking, as well as the whole culture pattern. We cannot simply considered the administration of international student as that of domestic students. In a seemingly multicultural context, we must notice that international students administration is a cross-cultural administration, is a kind of deep level of service-oriented administration mode.

2.2 Using Intercultural Practices for International Students Administration

Regarding to the cultural differences among international students, especially interactive problems, it would be meaningless if we only focused on the inner component of each individual cultural system, and blindly follow or reject the differences. International administration institutions and workers have to touch the reality between two interacting cultures authentically. A mere comparison and cultural isolation measure is of no help. In that case, only our understandings of cultural characteristics of the East and West enable us to get close to the interactive reality, and solve the adaptability problem of international students in their study and social lives.

However, the current international student administration work in China is mainly following the tradition by focusing on providing students with basic living facilities and allocating necessary academic support, taking care of their own living habits and religious practices and customs. Students' adaption in Chinese mainstream culture is left unattended.

Due to the diversity of students' lifestyles, values, beliefs and other cultural aspects, universities in China tend to separate international students from domestic students to reduce cultural conflicts. This style of administration causes trouble maintaining mutual understandings and communication, and might cause cultural isolation and misunderstanding. Cultural isolation is an inevitable phenomenon in the initial period of human culture development, which creates various independent regional cultures, and they all tend to estrange from one another. Cultural isolation also limits cultural activities (Xu, 2008). At Jinan University, the administration mode of cultural isolation inhibits the communication between Chinese and western cultures, limits international students' social interactions that enable them to integrate into Chinese mainstream culture. This also slows down the speed of international students' adaptation into social life in China. Hence, international students tend to communicate

in their fellow groups, creating a gap between Chinese and international students.

A strategy to deal with cultural differences is to minimize resulting impacts. The fundamental standing point of this strategy is to face such differences. The minimization method means homogenizing all types of cultures, producing consistency or encouraging the cultures to isolate from each other to reduce potential conflicts (Susan, 1997).

It is unwise for student administrators to ignore or cling to the convention in the cross-cultural administration environment. The most effective way is that they should accept the convention and regard them as a starting point. With the increase of the student administrators' experiences, the convention should be mended. Those student administrators have to test it constantly, and revise their own plan according to the first-hand information. The student administrators should be willing to doubt themselves and their conventions, negate it consciously and redefine their experiences.

Despite the distinctive characteristics in international student administration and service aspects, European and American countries with more international students do have one thing in common. They provide as much chances as possible for international students to make contacts with the host countries. They adopt administration without difference. The indifferent administration of international students in China should be accorded with this international convention. That is we need to implement convergent administration rather than special administration. Yet, convergent administration is by no means completely or simply equivalent administration. As a result of the cultural particularity of international students, their ideology and practices of their customs are different. The resulting cultural conflict and contradiction cannot be fixed by equivalent administration or sweeping approach. It can be solved by gradually focusing on the mutual reaction, namely, on the part that has been permeated into each other according to specific situations.

3. Inter-culture Reinforcing Cross-cultural Administration of International Students

Cross-cultural administration at university means that the university administration, consulting service agencies and educational institutions should understand individuals positively from the perspectives of cultural differences and cross-cultural aspects when a contradiction occurs in the process of interactions between groups with different cultures. They should also find out the source of the contradiction, adopt some cultural integration measures to solve the conflict or contradiction effectively, and maintain the normal order of education by ensuring the smooth realization of the goal of international education.

The cross-cultural administration of international students mainly focuses on the interactions that one or some cultural elements permeate into another culture. Therefore, it is necessary for student administrators to focus on the part and the whole at the same time. From the part of international students, they need to concern about the part that another culture permeates into. In terms of Chinese culture, the internal system of the whole culture should be concerned, because only the whole culture system can explain why the other culture can cause reaction in itself. Thus, the cultural conflict arises, causing this kind of reaction rather than another. The administration institution and administrators of international students should spare no effort to understand other cultures and accept them. To accept other cultures does not mean that they lose the value of their judgment, but it will provide a solid foundation for their education administration. Student administrators should have a series of core values, which can guide them and provide support to help them to find their own positions. In the cross-cultural environment, efficient administration requires administrators to have the ability to lay a solid foundation under the condition of uncertainty, and understand the feeling of who they are (Susan, 1997).

If universities attempt to find out the connection between cultures by sorting the whole internal system of two or more cultures in the cross-cultural administration of international students, then such a connection becomes external. It is an observing result of the student administrator. From the perspective of inter-culture, it is impossible for two or more cultures to establish a kind of connection by its whole system. Moreover, the permeation of the whole cultural system will absolutely pull the other culture out of sight. In that case, the connection can only be injected from external forces, rather than the circumstances of those who encounter. Thus, the cross-cultural administration of international students has to originate from intercultural thought. The most concerning point can only be the part of interaction, namely, the part of the cultural conflict, rather than each whole system. In this sense, student administrators must consider the association with the other culture (Wang, 2004).

As the basic way of cross-cultural administration, it is necessary for intercultural thought not to fall into a single culture system, namely "isolating administration" and "special administration". If it falls into one single culture, then the consideration of the other culture will be lost, so as the guidance of association between one culture and the other. As a result, it will depart from the cultural phenomenon of cross-cultural administration.

Student administrators are responsible for building a bridge or mechanism between different cultures to provide spaces for mutual conversations and draw attention from each other. Then, the association and reaction appear in the opposite side. Administration institutions and student administrators cannot remain to see from the inside after the internal association between two cultures has been found out. On the contrary, they need to see from the outside, focusing on the best part that can establish an association between the two cultures. That is the specific horizon that Chinese culture looks into other cultures. This expecting horizon can essential space for mutual communication.

4. Inter-culture Helps to Educate and Administer International Students

International students are the carriers of their own cultures. They bring different cultures into the receiving country, potentially creating the fuse of conflict. Furthermore, their strange and discomfort of the foreign culture and the subconscious nostalgia may also harden the conflict and confrontation. Therefore, international student institutions and administrators should pay special attention to cultural differences and intercultural characteristics.

4.1 Changing the Ideas of Administration and Improving Student Services

The educational administration of international students is a complex task, which arises from international students as a group of large differences. Therefore, a conflict occurs due to the soomthness of university administration and uniqueness of students themselves. Institutions and student administrators have to grasp the principles and rules of administration that are not only flexible but also normative. They should keep in mind that the ultimate purpose of international student administration is to serve them. Without violating the principle of this rule, they must maintain and develop good conditions for international students to study and live. This can be done by helping international students better understand China and strengthen the friendship between China and other countries. In this case, when a problem or conflict arises, these students can cooperate actively to fix it, and the difficulty and cost of daily administration work will be reduced.

Instead of treating culture as a problem to be solved, student administrators have to change their thought and turn culture and its characteristics into a useful competitive advantage. Micheal Porter believes that a country or institution can take advantage of the breeding factors, such as diversity of cultures, complexity of religions, differences in customs and so on. In order to help international students to adapt to the new environment, student administrators should design schemes and policies that reflect the complexity of international students' academic and social lives by taking advantage of cultural diversity to raise the competitive advantage.

Cox and Blake (1991) hold that competitive advantages are derived from the diversity of culture. In their analysis, the diversity of culture can produce the following results. Firstly, it can improve the state and university's preferences for their native culture. Secondly, it can help universities to recruit more students from different countries and extend their brands to a wider market. Thirdly, it can improve universities' ability and quality of making decisions in a wider perspective. Fourthly, it is beneficial to both Chinese and international students in terms of improving their creativity through the diversity of perspectives and reducing the requirement of consistency. Last but not least, it can improve the flexibility of universities to meet various needs and confront possible changes in the surrounding environment.

Through culture, as a lens, we can know other things. It is like the water around fish. It can also distort our view towards the world. More importantly, we always tend to judge others with our own culture as a reference. Therefore, instead of controlling one culture by another one, or adopting some compromise, we might as well face the challenge and take some positive ways to solve the problem of cultural differences. In that case, the overall result will be superior to the simple addition of each part. By going beyond their own native culture, institutions and student administrators of international students can know more about their own culture and other cultures. Meanwhile, they have to be aware that cultural conflicts are not static. They are a dynamic process of development. They have to adopt different strategies for different contradictions based on the familiarity with each kind of culture.

Thus, in the process of administration and education for international students, administration institutions and workers not only play the role of student administrators, but also the role of servers for international students' well-beings. It is widely known that administration and service are complementary to each other. The essence of administration is service, and service is the important purpose and means of modern administration. "Manage" is not simply prohibition and punishment, but it advocates and strengthens the awareness of service, as well as combines with the administration and service. The affair of international students belongs to the foreign affair of education and administration. However, the affair of international students actually to serve international students. Once we provide good service, administration can be achieved more than half.

4.2 Broadening the Channel of Cultural Communication and Deepening the Mode of Educational Administration

According to Susan (1997), adapting to a foreign culture is a process of a U-shaped curve that follows 3 phases. The initial phase is extremely complacent and optimistic (honeymoon); But soon it goes into a phase of sensitivity, dissatisfaction and confusion (high noon) orrurs. In the final phase, one can accommodate with the new environment (happy time). Firstly, cultural differences are no longer considered as an advantage but an annoyance. International students may face the greatest risk of failing their study and living in China. With the constant input of the new culture, they will get to know that there are irreconcilable contradictions between individual behaviors.

In the International School of Jinan University, the international students administration institution and workers manage both Chinese and international students from 73 countries and regions. They arrange Chinese and international students to live together, design relevant courses of Chinese culture and history, and organize sports meetings and fellowship activities. This school arranges international students' visits to cultural and historical sites around China regularly, such as cultural tours and root-searching journeys, to deepen their understandings of Chinese society and culture. These tours are also aimed to encourage them to accept and love Chinese culture, and to reduce cultural barriers and misunderstandings. University and school leaders implement a system of class responsibility, and hold symposiums for teachers and students so that the school can obtain information about students' difficulties.

Before coming to China, international students have a certain understanding of China's economic, social, cultural and other aspects through some channels such as books, newspapers, radios and televisions, etc. However, the information they have obtained through these channels may have some deviation compared with the actual situation of China. This kind of cognitive deviation will have certain influence and hindrance for international students to adapt to the culture and life in China. Universities in China tend to manage Chinese and international students separately, creating a difference between them. This kind of administration neglects a bridge for communication and mutual understanding. Therefore, the institutions and administrators of international students should broaden the channel of cultural communication and deepen the mode of educational administration to truly provide international students in China with better service.

4.3 Endowing Students with More Autonomy and Guiding Them for Effective "Self-administration"

International students' needs and status should be respected. To do so, we need to endow them with more autonomy, and guide them for effective "self-administration" positively. In *Education Theory,* Spencer (year of publication) points out that the target of administration is to cultivate a person who can manage himself or herself, rather than a person to be managed by others.

Nowadays, international students tend to consider themselves as a team who seeks for effective education and administration. Working as a team is regarded as a solution to adaptation problems, because it responds to complicated problems with multiple perspectives, and encourages people to make decisions to cope with the dynamic change in the environment simultaneously (Susan, 1997).

In order to deal with the problems of adaptability and integration, the International School of Jinan University set up International Student Affairs, which selects a student from the group of international students to serve as head of this society. The chosen head is responsible for administration and service of international students. This or school has also established international student associations, such as Malaysian, Burmese, and Indonesia societies. Participation in these societies can strengthen international students' sense of belongings to its mother country and the university. These associations organize cultural performances carried out by international students.

In the multicultural milieu at Jinan University, administrators need to develop a new strategy for intercultural administration. They could take cultural boundary issues into consideration to confront cultural differences against the normal standard through Johari Technique. Using this technique ensures that every part of the team will get an opportunity to seize the differences of each other, and allow them to know that how they feel about others and how others feel about them clearly. Hence, a mutual understanding will be strengthened, and the blind spot of cultural misunderstanding will be reduced (Susan, 1997).

Due to the differences of cultures, religions, nationalities and other factors among international students, it would be easy for students from the same country to form groups. Therefore, in the process of educational administration, we should give proper attention to students' status by following the principle of self-administration, self-education and self-service for international students. They should also explore students' enthusiasm of self-administration, attach importance to the positive effects exhibited by student leaders, guide

and support the establishment of international students organization. The suggestions above can help us to attain the result with half effort. In order to attain greater efficiency and settle the problem of adaptability, student administrators have to develop the strategy of basic work and working process at the same time.

They should provide students with effective guidance and supervision, helping them to realize the healthy development of the organization.

4.4 Advocating Cultural Discipline and Establishing the Normative Educational Administration System

Self-discipline means that the individual moral judgment and moral behavior are dominated by subjective value standards. In western countries, moral values are featured by self-discipline. International students in China highly praise entirely rationality and order in daily life. Meanwhile, they also immersed in natural expression of all kinds of emotions and interests in their cultural life. Therefore, International student administrators should focus on students' self-discipline

The International School of Jinan University publicizes rules and regulations to international students upon their arrivals. Regulations of attendance, scholarship programs, dormitory administration regulations and the like are compiled into a book. The school will distribute these handbooks to each student, and urge them to follow the regulations. Furthermore, to respond to international students' inquiries about resident permit and visa issues, the school invites those who are in charge of the Exit and Entry Administration of Guangzhou to explain the relevant Chinese laws and regulations to them. "Self-discipline" has been normalized and institutionalized to maintain the process. Last but not least, the school has set up a special column in its website called COUNTRY & REGION FIRST. The information and pictures of the first students from 73 countries and regions coming to study in our school were posted on it. It aims to cultivate students' consciousness of moral self-discipline and exert the positive effects of conformity so as to effectively promote the formation of moral and cultural self-discipline among international students. With the increasing number of international students, the school plans to run a new column called TOP FIRST to commend the most outstanding students from each country, promoting a moral and cultural vane for students.

Self-discipline will improve international students' ability to deal with frustration and conflict during their integration to China's society. It has become an indispensable spiritual need for all international students in China. Through this kind of mental adjustment, psychological endurance can be strengthened.

International students' cross-cultural adaption is not merely practiced through the ways they follow their customs and live their lives. It is also a process of psychological adjustment. When contacting and adjusting to a new culture, loneliness, anxiety, homesickness and other forms of precariousness would appear. If these problems cannot be solved effectively, it would harm international students' adjustment in China.

In the process of education and administration, institutions and administrators can neither be xenophobia nor xenomania. They should be inclusive and respectful for international students' customs, and accept cultural differences. But it doesn't mean that they have to abandon the cultural values of their own. They should be humble, studious, modest and polite when evaluating others' behaviors based on their own standard. Thus, for the convenience of international students to adapt to studying and living in China, we should standardize the education and administration system, to provide them with regulations to abide by.

4.5 Focusing on Intercultural Differences and Responding to International Students' Emergencies

Cultural sociology holds that conflict in an intercultural environment is inevitable. Internationalization does not mean that international student administration institutions and workers eliminate all kinds of differences. Instead, they need to list all possibly different opinions and cultural characteristics, and become knowledgeable about the factors that need to be standardized, that is, emergencies that may happen. Then, they devise appropriate policies and handling methods, leaving sufficient space for self-government and self-discipline among international students, so that their capabilities can be developed, and the right decisions and solutions can be made.

According to the principle of crisis management in US, among the "prevention, preparation, response, recovery" measures, the primary task for emergency administration is prevention (Department of Moral Education, MOE, 2011). The differences that are differentiated by this method are helpful to build the bridge for common background. Meanwhile, the potential conflicts generated by differences can be predicted in advance and solved in time.

The International School of Jinan University has transformed its educational administration approaches producing positive effects on minimizing the likelihood of emergency. Firstly, the university and school hold various types of cultural lectures, which include legal and life knowledge to appreciate international students' efforts in adjusting to the new culture and overcoming cultural shocks. Moreover, the university has invested in

running a psychological counseling center, including a consulting, therapy, mediation and mood drain room, managed by professional psychological counselors who provide international students with psychological counseling services. Lastly, the university has established a comprehensive medical insurance system for international students in China. Nowadays, the comprehensive medical insurance system for international students has gradually become the appointed medical insurance that all the international students in China are required to participate.. It has played a great role in optimizing their studying environment, protecting their physical health and legal rights, and maintaining their well-beings.

5. Conclusion

We cannot simply consider the administration of international students in China as administration of domestic students, but as cross-cultural administration of different intercultural characteristics. Although cultural conflict is a kind of periodic performance in the process of internationalization, it is still welcomed by us. First of all, it shows that international students start to fit in the new culture, instead of hiding themselves in their own cultures. Secondly, it provides them a kind of impetus to understand and accept cultural differences.

International students in China can recognize that their acquisition of cultural and language knowledge will be beneficial to their study sojourns. Cross-cultural integration can prompt discoveries of similarities between cultures, and increase mutual understandings, providing them with the ability to predict and control unexpected incidents. All these, in turn, would enhance their adaptabilities. With the enhancement of its comprehensive strength, China has been assuming more important roles in the global education market. We should not view culture simply as a problem which needs to be tackled. Rather, we should transform our mindset and take cultures and cultural traits as competitive edges.

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Note

Note 1. Since 1979, China has pursued a policy of reform and opening to the outside world, a policy which was initiated by Deng Xiaoping. Major efforts have been made to readjust the economic structure, and reform the economic and political systems. China is, step by step, establishing a road with Chinese characteristics, a road that will lead to socialist modernization.

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