

# *A Case Study on Cross-Cultural Encounters in Wenzhou Polytechnic University*

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**Abstract:** Recently, with the economic development of China and the enhancement of its comprehensive national strength, more and more international students come to study in China. China further strengthens the cooperation with other Southeast Asia countries with the establishment of ASEAN Free Trade Area and the rise of “Belt and Road”. The education cooperation is one of them. At the same time, Wenzhou has attracted some international students. It is a chance for the universities in Wenzhou in international education and a challenge never before. These international students will adapt a process from familiar to strange environment, such as, the different customs, religion and value will make them feel difficulty and unaccustomed. This article will investigate and analysis intercultural adaptation of some representative international students in Wenzhou Polytechnic. The purpose of the article is to give an perspective on cross-cultural encounters in Chinese vocational school, and tries to explore what kind of difficulties international students encounter in Chinese vocational school, and how could they overcome these difficulties by taking advantage of methods. Hopefully, this study can find the problems and difficulties in intercultural adaptation, and help international students to overcome cultural barrier, and provide some reference to intercultural communication in vocational school in future. To achieve this purpose, the aim of the article is to identify which value-orientations lead to conflicts and how these conflicts are managed. The article will, firstly, provide an overview on the background of cross-cultural encounters in China, secondly, explore the main difficulties in cross-cultural communication between international students and Chinese students in Wenzhou Polytechnic. Thirdly, find out some measures to improve the cross-cultural adaptability of international students

## 1. Introduction

In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping, respectively, puts forward construction plan including economic and trade, regional order, people-to-people and cultural exchanges in three aspects of “ the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road”(the Belt and Road) cooperation initiative. China plans to work with 65 countries along “the Belt and Road” to build a community of shared interests, shared future and shared responsibility based on political mutual trust, economic integration and cultural inclusiveness. In addition, the Ministry of Education of China actively responded to the call of the national “the Belt and Road” and subsequently

formulated “the Action to Promote the” Belt and Road “Education”. As a consequence, “the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road” also provides new opportunities for the educational development of international students in colleges and universities. Since 2015, the overall number of international students in China has grown steadily, and the quality and mix of students have been constantly optimized. Countries along “the Belt and Road” have become the main source countries for international students in China. Moreover, China's Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance issued “the high level on the implementation of Chinese characteristics in planning the development of the higher vocational school and professional opinions”, which suggests that all the higher vocational colleges of China should “carry out international vocational education services to provide high-quality technical and technical personnel support for Chinese industries to move towards the middle and high end of global industries”. There is no doubt that developing higher vocational education for international students is an effective way to achieve this goal. However, for a long time, compared with undergraduate and graduate education, the education development of higher vocational international students in China is relatively lagging behind, and the related proposition of promoting the education development of higher vocational international students in China has not caused enough attention. It is still a long way to go to greatly promote the optimized development of higher vocational education for international students in China. At the meanwhile, Wenzhou Polytechnic actively respond to the national “the Belt and Road” initiative, and it positively response to the concept of school --- “where regional industry development, the service of school will go”. In order to better actively serve the needs of enterprises' internationalization development and provide services for Chinese enterprises' industries in Asian countries, Wenzhou Polytechnic undertakes the task of vocational education and train for personnel from Asian countries, and strives to achieve the internationalization of industry-education integration. Since 2018, Wenzhou Polytechnic has received a batch of Cambodian students and two batches of South African students, with a total of more than 50 people.

However, the increasing number and level of international students in China have brought new challenges to the management of international students. The diversity of international students means that those who come to China come from diverse cultural backgrounds and ethnic beliefs. Therefore, a series of problems, such as the clash of cultural concepts, difficulties in language and cultural communication, and difficulties in school fitness have become prominent. How to help these international students to better adapt to the educational environment of higher vocational colleges in China and improve the quality of international students' talent training is of great significance to promote the internationalization of higher vocational education in China.

This study will investigate and analysis intercultural adaptation of some representative international students in Wenzhou Polytechnic, The aim of this essay is to explore what kind of difficulties that international students encounter in Chinese vocational school, and how could they overcome these difficulties by taking advantage of methods. Hopefully, this study can find the problems and difficulties in intercultural adaptation, and help international students to overcome cultural barrier, and provide some reference to intercultural communication in vocational school in future.

## **2. Cross-Cultural Adaptability of International Students in Higher Vocational Colleges**

When international students leave their own country to study in a completely unfamiliar country in terms of language, culture, diet and living habits, there will be some psychological tension. In the process of trying to adapt to the new life environment, international students may experience various mental pressures due to loneliness, communication and completion of studies, cultural and economic feelings, and their own future plans. According to the questionnaire survey of 15

international students in Wenzhou Polytechnic, and interview of 2 teachers in the international student management center of Wenzhou Polytechnic, it has been found that there are difficulties in cross-cultural communication between international students and Chinese students in Wenzhou Polytechnic.

## **2.1 Difficulties in Language Communication**

Language is an important part of a nation's culture, and cultural adaptation must go through language adaptation. Language is not only the carrier of culture, but also is a way to understand a culture, and it is also an important medium for communication between people. Without language, the inheritance of various civilizations in the world will be hindered everywhere. Language barrier has always been a major obstacle to cross-cultural adaptation for international students in China. Because of language differences, these international students have encountered various problems in their study and life in China.

In the survey of the basic information of international students in Wenzhou Polytechnic, we know that the Chinese language proficiency of international students is very weak. In terms of the 50 international students in the school, their Chinese language proficiency is basically zero or they have only been trained in Chinese for a short time, so they are not capable of communicating smoothly in Chinese, and quite a few of them even cannot communicate smoothly in English. When international students conduct social activities in Chinese, they often have the phenomenon of disordered words, inarticulate words or have some ineffective communication, which brings psychological pressure and frustration to some of them. Especially when international students have professional courses, language communication difficulties are becoming more and more severe. It is a long process from simple communication in Chinese to grasping knowledge in Chinese, and most international students cannot complete this process within a year. Due to their limited Chinese proficiency and relatively difficult to learn Chinese, international students will have many difficulties in adapting to the Chinese language.

It can be found from the survey that language brings many problems to the life and study of international students. Many international students are not only poor in Chinese, but also poor in English. Therefore, as for international students, their language level is limited, so they will have great difficulties in adapting to the daily life and study in China. In terms of daily life, the level of language proficiency is directly related to their daily necessities and basic interpersonal communication. If the language maladaptation problem cannot be solved in time, it will directly affect the process of attracting international students in China, and also affect the process of internationalization of higher education in China, which will also have a negative impact on the smooth implementation of the "Belt and Road" plan. In terms of studying, the quality of language ability is related to the students' academic performance and the establishment of their confidence in learning in China. In a word, the better the language level is, the better the cultural adaptation is, vice versa, so to solve the problem of language adaptation of international students is imminent, and there is a long way to go.

## **2.2 Difficulties in Psychological Adaptation**

In addition to difficulties in language communication, international students in Wenzhou Polytechnic are also under great psychological pressure, such as homesickness, discrimination, psychological depression, etc. These psychological pressures always affect their mood and their pace of adapting to the new culture. This chapter mainly discusses the difficulties in psychological adaptation among international students.

First, some international students said that they feel discrimination and prejudice in China. At

present, the majority of students studying in China come from the third world countries where the economic development is not as good as China's and national strength is not very strong. The international students come to China with the purpose of learning, with a nervous sense of not very confident in China. Such it could be happened that they are very sensitive to what others think of them and how they behave. No matter what others say and do can make them feel different. During the survey, international students generally reported that Chinese people prefer communicate with European and American students to Asian and dark-skinned students, which all shows the discrimination and prejudice that international students feel in school.

Secondly, some international students said they felt homesick. International students pointed out that in addition to feeling different degrees of discrimination in China, the strongest feeling is missing home, family and friends. After coming to China for a few months, most Asian students gradually lose their freshness and interest in the surrounding environment, and then they miss their own country and their relatives more and more. Moreover, the problems brought by religious views and values are also gradually highlighted, which is the reason for their poor psychological adaptation. Many students reported that although they can make phone calls or video calls with their families every day, they are not able to spend time with them, which makes them want to finish their studies and return home all the time. When international students come to China, they face a new living environment. They not only have to face great pressure in study, but also have to face difficulties in life. It is inevitable that they will miss their parents and friends back home. This has something to do with the fact that international students cannot timely integrate into Chinese campus life. Without the communication and companionship of friends, they become increasingly homesick. However, if the school can make them integrate into the life in China as soon as possible, maybe they will temporarily forget these bad feelings and actively make themselves into the new life. There is no doubt that when they leave home for the first time and come to China thousands of miles away from home, they are always accompanied by a sense of homesickness in the face of all kinds of strange and in-adaptable life, which adds an invisible difficulty to their cross-cultural adaptation.

Finally, some international students said they suffered from psychological depression. Due to lack of self-confidence and self-control, some international students feel that they cannot learn Chinese well, cannot balance the time between study and play, and are full of anxiety about various exams. Moreover, international students rarely seek help from Chinese teachers when they face with these problems, it could lead to psychological depression in the long run and make themselves more difficult to integrate into Chinese campus life.

### **2.3 Difficulties in Social and Cultural Customs**

There are many factors that influence the acculturation of international students, and the acculturation of international students in China mainly includes living environment and interpersonal communication. This chapter mainly discusses the difficulties of international students' social and cultural adaptation.

First of all, the inadaptability of living environment mainly exists in diet, climate, urban transportation and customs. The food in Wenzhou is sour and sweet, which makes some international students feel uncomfortable, and they prefer to cook their own food in their apartments. In addition, some international students said that Chinese people's food types are complicated, and some of them may cause discomfort. For example, some Chinese people like cat meat, rabbit meat, mouse meat and dog meat which makes them find it hard to accept. In terms of transportation, although the buses in Wenzhou are convenient to travel, the traffic jam is more serious, and taxi charges are high, it makes some international students feel unbearable. In terms of climate, almost

all the students surveyed said that they are not used to such wet summers and cold winters, and autumn is particularly short. In terms of customs, this is mainly reflected in the fast pace of life in China and it seems all the Chinese students are very busy in the daily life which make international students feel very anxious. In addition, some uncivilized phenomena in Chinese society, such as shouting loudly in public places, breaking the traffic rules, jumping the queue and so on, will make some international students have psychological inadaptability.

Secondly, in terms of interpersonal communication, international students generally expressed that Chinese students are too introverted and conservative, and are not willing to make friends with international students. Most international students say that they seldom communicate with Chinese students and prefer to communicate with students from their own countries. Language barrier also causes them to gradually reject communication with others. Through the survey, it has been found that international students also had a habit of cluster, either in class, or after class, international students in general would like to stay together with the students who comes from the same country and they are used to communicate with their mother tongue. In addition, international students also expressed that some Chinese behaviors are very difficult for them to understand. For example, some Chinese people were dishonest in their communication with themselves. Sometimes when they walk on the street, Chinese people like to be very curious and stare at them , it could make them feel like they are different from others. Most of the international students in our school are introverted and form a relatively closed group. Their communication with their compatriots is far more than their communication with Chinese, which hinders their contact with local society and cultural adaptation to a certain extent.

All in all, the survey found that the reason why international students feel uncomfortable in many aspects is largely because they face a completely different living environment in China. In terms of language environment, social and cultural environment, weather and traffic, there are more or less differences between them and their home countries which leads to a series of problems in their study and life in China and affects the process of their cross-cultural adaptation. To put it simply, the more similar the social environment of international students is to their living environment in China, the better their cross-cultural adaptation will be. The greater the difference between the two countries' socio-environmental environment, the worse their adaptation in China will be.

## **2.4 Difficulties in Academic**

According to the survey, international students have difficulties not only in language communication, psychological adaptation, social and cultural adaptation, but also in academic study. This chapter mainly discusses the difficulties of international students in their studies.

According to the communication between the author and international students, they said that they feel great pressure from studying in Chinese universities because of academic pressure. First of all, international students said that the lack of basic knowledge in the new field made them feel helpless in the learning process, it makes them unable to timely understand the content of the teacher in class, and unable to timely finish the homework after class. Secondly, the international students said that sometimes teacher's speaking are very fast and they could hardly understand if it is mixed with difficult dialect. In the meanwhile, they felt great mental pressure for the homework which requires Chinese as the carrier. In this case, they will not be able to complete their studies successfully if international students lack timely and effective help. Moreover, in the face of academic pressure and difficulties, some international students have a fear of difficulties which directly affects their learning enthusiasm.

Thirdly, in the process of learning adaptation, international students generally reported that it is

difficult to adapt to the school schedule and strict attendance of Chinese universities. For example, some international students pointed out that they are not used to 8-am-classes at Chinese universities. They also expressed that they are not used to Chinese teachers' strict attendance regulation, which leads to serious lateness and absence from class among international students, and it may directly lead to punishment, suspension or dropout of school rules and regulations. Finally, some international students expressed that they could not adapt to the teaching methods of some Chinese teachers and there are too many exams in China. They said that part of the Chinese teachers like to focus on theory in the classroom, however, because of the weak foundation of Chinese and English, the explanations of the theoretical knowledge in the class could hardly let them fully understand the meaning of the class, they said if the teacher can combine theory with practice, the course effect may be better.

### **3. Measures to Improve the Cross-Cultural Adaptability of International Students**

In view of the main problems of acculturation of international students from “the belt and Road” countries in China and the main causes of these problems, the author puts forward the following suggestions:

#### **3.1 School Should Establish a Long-Term Chinese Language Training Mechanism**

Cross-cultural adaptation is a process of multi-factors, in which language plays a key role in cross-cultural communication. The differences in language and mode of thinking will hinder the communication process. Most of the international students attribute the difficulty in cross-cultural communication to their low Chinese level. Therefore, when conducting language teaching in Chinese, teachers should not only carry out Chinese pronunciation, vocabulary and grammatical structure, but also pay attention to the social, psychological and cultural aspects related to language teaching, and strengthen the practical use of language. For example, school should actively carry out campus activities so that international students can have opportunity to practice their Chinese. Such as paper cuttings, Taijiquan, dumpling making and other traditional cultural activities. School should try to create an atmosphere to international students to practice and improve their Chinese, so that they can adapt to Chinese culture faster, and shorten the adjustment period as soon as possible.

In addition to special intensive Chinese learning at the beginning of admission, firstly, schools should also establish a long-term educational system and methods for Chinese learning. It is suggested that the international student administration department of the school should take the lead and cooperate with relevant departments to establish a long-term Chinese training system. Secondly, schools need to hire special Chinese teachers to teach international students, set up fixed training classrooms or Chinese communication corner, and organize international students to attend the training class in their spare time, so as to continuously conduct intensive Chinese training for the aim of improving international students language capacity. Language training should be personalized, and the teaching programs and content should be customized according to international students' Chinese level. Finally, teaching Chinese as a foreign language belongs to the cultivation of communicative competence, therefore, the density and frequency of students' practice should be strengthened. The continuous improvement of international students' Chinese ability will play a significant role in promoting their study, life and cross-cultural communication in China.

#### **3.2 School Should Pay Attention to Strict Management and Emotional Care**

As a special group in Chinese colleges, international students always been managed by a set of

special rules and regulations which is different from Chinese students. However, in the process of implementing the rules and regulations, the educational management personnel of international students and teachers who teach international students must first act in strict accordance with the rules and regulations, and teach the students to follow Chinese laws, school rules and regulations and public morality strictly. It should not be dealt with gently, but must be dealt with seriously in strict accordance with the rules and regulations. If there are some international students violate the rules.

At the meanwhile, the emotional care of the school should be timely, while the school manages the international students strictly. First of all, the school should send the humanities manual to international students by E-mail before the students leave for China, which will introduce the geographical environment, climate and necessary clothes of the city where the school is located, so that the students can know the relevant situation before they leave for the school. Secondly, school should improve the living environment of international students by ensuring air conditioning and 24-hour hot water supply. On the premise of respecting the eating customs of international students, the canteen should try to diversify the food varieties and tastes so that international students can gradually adapt to Chinese food. Schools with conditions can set up a special dining room for international students or set up a communal kitchen in the apartment for international students, and give full consideration to the different religious habits of international students in the allocation of rooms and food in the dining hall. Finally, the administrators and teachers should be more patient and pay more attention to students' emotional care. School should respect the cultural characteristics of international students in their home countries, and encourage them to communicate and integrate with Chinese culture for the sake of helping them overcome difficulties in cross-cultural adaptation.

### **3.3 School Should Carry out Chinese Traditional Activities to Help International Students Integrate Their Cultures**

The school should regularly organize various traditional cultural activities and issue various measures to encourage international students to participate in, so that international students can get familiar with Chinese culture as soon as possible and adapt to the university environment. The school can organize international students to make dumplings together during the Lunar New Year and enjoy moon cakes at the Mid-Autumn Festival. Moreover, the school can carefully design some colorful extracurricular activities on campus, such as learning brush calligraphy, watching traditional Chinese opera and Chinese traditional dance. Additionally, it is also a good way to organize international students to visit local museums and go out for sightseeing or visit the beautiful scenery of China. It enables international students to gain more direct knowledge of Chinese culture, and try to understand the Chinese way of thinking, improve their ability to appreciate different cultures, so as to speed up the process of adapting to Chinese culture.

### **3.4 School Should Help International Students Overcome Their Academic Difficulties**

First of all, school can take the advantage of the implementation of small class teaching to provide more opportunities for interaction between Chinese teachers and international students in the classroom, teachers should pay close attention to consolidate and review the knowledge in class. Moreover, students with academic difficulties should be guided and tutored in accordance with their aptitude. Secondly, schools can encourage international students to strive for academic excellence through the incentive measures of awards. Finally, in view of the academic difficulties faced by international students, schools should help them build up the confidence to overcome difficulties, and encourage international students to take the initiative to interact with teachers and Chinese

students in class. The teachers should strengthen after-school guidance to the students who have difficulties in learning and help them solve the difficulties in time.

### 3.5 School Should Pay More Attention to Daily Communication and Psychological Counseling

Firstly, international student management personnel and teaching staff must have certain psychological crisis intervention ability, and they must be closely related in international students' daily life. The school should actively build a communication platform, and resolve students' negative emotions in multiple channels and ways by communicating with students more. Secondly, international students should be equipped with professional psychological consultants. The school and teachers should not give international a label if there are some international students encounter in the cultural adaptation difficulties. Instead of it, the school and teachers should learn to listen and consider problems stand in the perspective of students, and make the relevant cultural adaptation aspects of psychological counseling, guide international students to overcome culture shock and cultural adaptation obstacles. Finally, professional teams can be set up to provide psychological consultation rooms for cross-cultural communication, so as to ease the psychological problems of international students for the sake of promoting their adjustment and adaptation to cross-cultural communication, and try schools' best to make them live a happy life when they study in China.

## 4. Conclusion

Cross-cultural adaptation is a problem that needs the joint efforts of the school, students and Chinese teachers. The school should pay more attention to the physical and mental health of international students studying in China and help them live and study happily in China. International students should also be active to expand their circle of friends, and they should adjust their attitude and try to understand the values of Chinese culture and the way of life of Chinese people with respect and tolerance when they encounter cross-cultural conflicts. To understand the root causes of conflicts and solve these difficulties through role transformation and perspective-taking, so as to integrate into Chinese culture and successfully complete their studies.

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