

Research on the Development Trend and Impact of International Education in China

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Abstract: International education has received a lot of attention in recent years in China; international schools are becoming more prevalent in China. An increasing number of students are opting for international education or studying in international schools, making the trend of international education and its impact a matter of public concern. This article will explore the trends in international education in China by studying the number of international schools in China, the history of international education, and the changes in Chinese society, as well as the influence of international education on society and individual students.

1. Introduction

People's living standards are progressively improving in current Chinese society, and Chinese households are earning an increasing amount of money. "In 2021, the national per capita disposable income was RMB 35,128, a 9.1 percent rise over the previous year in nominal terms" (Fang Xiaodan, 2022), and also, "China's GDP per capita reach RMB 80,976 in 2021" (Sheng Laiyun, 2022). The data provided by the National Bureau of Statistics demonstrates that China's economy is rising and that the standard of living for Chinese families is improving.

Therefore, according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Abraham Harold Maslow:1954), many families in China have already met the first three needs, which are: physiological needs, safety needs, Belongings and love needs (Abraham Harold Maslow,1954). To be more specific, physiological needs and safety needs are the basic needs, and due to the fulfilment of these basic needs, Chinese families are no longer concerned with matters of survival such as food, housing, and safety (Saul Mcleod, 2018:4). When these basic needs are addressed, individuals begin to seek greater goals. As a result, more and more families are pursuing Esteem needs and Self-actualization, which encompasses "dignity, achievement, status, personal potential, and self-fulfillment" (Saul Mcleod, 2018:4), respectively. It is unquestionable that a decent education is critical for achieving Esteem needs and self-actualization. As the majority of parents in a family are no longer able to attend school, they place their expectations of better education on their children. As "Maslow indicated that the need for respect or reputation is most important for children and adolescents and precedes real self-esteem or dignity"(Saul Mcleod, 2018:4), and Chinese parents want for their children to be able to easily satisfy the fundamental needs of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in the

future. This is why it is critical for children to have a quality education.

Simultaneously, in 1982, “China established a national policy of family planning and advocated ” one child per couple.”“(Fudan university: 2015). This policy has resulted in a rising number of one-child households, indicating that children get more attention and in Chinese families, and so Chinese parents are willing to spend a great deal of money and time on their children's education. In today's Chinese society, there is a growing demand for highly educated people. In layman's terms, graduates with higher qualifications or better schools are more likely to find better or higher paying jobs, and because many companies in China are now looking for a combination of talents, students need to learn a variety of skills in order to survive in society. International education not only offers students the opportunity to study at an internationally renowned university, but it also aims to develop students' overall abilities, and as a result, more parents want their children to receive international education. Because of this demand, then there is a market for international education in China, and in recent years the number of international schools and tuition classes related to international education has gradually increased, as the data shows: “From 2010 to 2020, the number of accredited international schools in China is increasing year by year. 907 international schools will be accredited in 2020, an increase of 5.3%.” (Xiao Lisa, 2021). Because more and more families are opting for international education, the discussion of trends in international education and the impact it has had is crucial to the future of international education and the public's perception of it.

2. Development Trends

2.1 History of International Education Development

The history of international students in China can be trace back to the Qing Dynasty, when between 1872 and 1875, the Qing government organized a group of students aged around 12 to go to the United States and opened a preparatory school for studying in the United States (also known as the “Bureau of Study Abroad”) opposite the Universal Cemetery outside Shandong Road in Shanghai. At the time, the Qing Dynasty was lagging behind the West in terms of technology, so some Qing government officers thought that these international students could go abroad to learn advanced technology and bring it back to China. This was the first group of Chinese students to study abroad, and the Preparatory School for Study in America was now known as the International School. From 1872 onwards, more and more Chinese students went to study in developed countries to learn advanced technology and ideas and to receive a better education. According to statistics from the Chinese Ministry of Education, between 1978 and 2019, a total of 6,560,600 students studied abroad in various categories (Ministry of Education, 2020).

2.2 Modification of the Study Abroad Objective

However, the above information only shows the change in the number of Chinese international students, the change in international students is not only in numbers, but also in terms of their objectives. The majority of Chinese students have evolved from altruism to egoism. To be more specific, initially, Chinese overseas students would go to other nations with the intention of bringing back innovative technologies and want to impart their knowledge to Chinese students or utilize it to help build their nation. Early international students like Zhan Tianyou and Qian Xuesen are examples of those for whom studying in other nations was motivated by genuine altruism. Today's international students do not go to other nations with the same altruistic motivations as their forefathers; instead, there is an increase in egoism. This is because, as previously said, Chinese families are getting more affluent, and due to the growing popularity of international education in

China, which has directly resulted in a major reduction in the difficulty of international study. While it is acknowledged that many international institutions have a stronger educational foundation and a better rating than those in China; for example, according to the 2022 QS university rankings, only six universities in mainland China are in the top 100 universities in the world (excluding Taiwan and Hong Kong) (QS top university, 2022). And while the number of students studying abroad remains a small proportion of all students in China, having an international education and going to an international institution provides pupils who come from higher-income families with a greater chance of admission to a top-ranked school. And graduating from an internationally renowned institution increases their chances of getting a better job in the future. So, in some ways, most international students are now studying abroad for personal growth, this can be seen as a pure form of egoism. However, there is no right or wrong answer to studying abroad with the objective of altruism or egoism. This change from altruism to egoism is inextricably linked to changes in Chinese society.

3. The Impact of International Education on Chinese Society

3.1 The Positive Impact of International Education from a Micro Perspective

Today, international schools are becoming more prevalent in China, as an increasing number of students want to have an international education. From the beginning with the Bureau of Study Abroad, there are now independent international schools and international departments inside public schools. As noted previously, China had 907 globally approved international schools in 2020. These international schools provide tailored curriculums for Chinese who wish to study abroad. Specifically, some international schools provide A-Level, IB, and IELTS to students interested in studying at UK colleges. In contrast, others offer SAT, AP, and TOEFL to students interested in studying at American institutions. This gives students an advantage when applying to universities abroad in the future, not only because the subjects they study at these international schools are identical to those studied in local high schools abroad but also because those international schools prepare students for university life abroad by developing their English language skills in advance.

International schools assist students in seeking further education, while an international education emphasizes broad abilities, preparing pupils to be more adaptable. As indicated in the introduction, China's desire for integrated individuals is increasing, and the international education curriculum is an excellent tool to help students enhance their general abilities. Numerous courses on the A-level syllabus, such as economics, history, and biology, require a significant amount of essay writing. And according to the Cambridge assessment, the A-level examination would foster a variety of abilities, including “independent thinking, handling and evaluating different types of information source, thinking logically and presenting ordered and coherent arguments and making judgements, recommendations and decisions” (Cambridge assessment: 2022). This is not just applicable for ALevels, but also for other examination systems, such as the IB, which, like ALevels, develop a variety of abilities for students but also contain the CAS project. CAS stands for Creativity, Activity, and Service. Students preparing for and sitting for the IB examination are required to participate in the CAS project, which means they must participate in extra-curricular activities and community service. This means that the IB enables students to develop academic skills and skills in other areas, thereby maximizing their overall ability. Therefore, international education help students to develop a diverse range of skills, international education may require a higher level of overall ability and is more capable of developing complex talents.

In comparison to the traditional Chinese education system, the A-Level, IB, and AP education systems offer a diverse range of courses, including mathematics, economics, history, art, national

languages, and so forth, and students are free to tailor their curriculum base on their abilities, interests, and future university major. In comparison, the courses provided by traditional Chinese education are very restricted in that schools do not offer courses related to economics, languages, or the arts, and only high school students have the option of choosing the overall direction of the system, which are high school level of Social Science or Natural Science, rather than the exact courses they would like to study. This illustrates that international education is truly tailored to the students' talent.

However, many individuals may argue that because students who accept international education can freely pick their courses based on their interests, they are not developed holistically and do not develop comprehensive abilities. In traditional Chinese education, students are required or forced to take numerous courses, which is the actual definition of extensive talent development. However, people with comprehensive talent do not always imply studying a large number of courses but rather having integrated skills. As it mentioned by the balance careers that A competent employee should have some good “soft skills”, such as “communication skills, leadership, critical thinking skills, teamwork skills, and so forth” (Alison Doyle: 2021). At the same time, one only needs to use one subject (apart from some basic subjects, but for international education, many of the basic subjects are already completed before upper secondary education) when students enter the workplace or wish to develop in more depth or prominence in some areas. Therefore, the curriculum and examination arrangements of the international education system, to a large extent, develop students' soft skills in advance and allow students to choose courses according to their abilities, not only laying a good foundation for their future career, but also truly developing comprehensive talent people.

3.2 The Negative Impact of International Education from a Micro Perspective

Because international education and international schools are becoming more and more common in China, and because the cultivating comprehensive talents and the concept of teaching according to the ability of the students are receiving a lot of attention, more and more people are beginning to think about whether traditional schools in China can learn from international education, or whether it is possible to integrate the two education systems.

In theory, Chinese education can learn from international education, but this will take a long time to change essentially, because for students and schools, the most important goal of the student years is to get into a good university, so the change should start with the admissions criteria for universities, which are currently based mainly on the results of the college entrance exam, unlike other internationally renowned universities. Students' overall ability is not considered, so schools and students are taught based on exam results as the core of their education. If the admissions criteria for Chinese universities were changed to be the same as those of other internationally renowned universities, the objective of teaching in high schools would become the development of a comprehensive quality. Also, the reason why international education can develop students' comprehensive abilities is because the content of international education examinations is to examine these comprehensive abilities, such as independent thinking, and evaluation skills. Therefore, if we want Chinese education to learn from Western education, it is essential to reform university admissions and examinations.

However, in fact, as some scholars have stated, “the benefits of educational development are country-specific, regional, social, and contemporary, and frequently vary from country to country or region to region, from society to society, and over time” (Yu Qinbo: 2000), which is a good illustration of the fact that education is not uniform across regions, and that education reform in China must be consistent with the Chinese context and culture.

3.3 The Negative Impact of International Education on Chinese Society (Chinese Education) from a Macro Perspective

Nowadays, more and more people in China are now choosing international education, and the number of international schools is increasing year by year, only a small percentage of children from high-income families have access to international education or go to international schools because of the high tuition fees. According to the 2016 Blue Book of China International Schools: 80% of international schools have tuition fees over RMB 50,000 a year, while 39.3% of international schools have tuition fees over RMB 100,000 a year (CCG & Beijing Royal School: 2016). Such tuition prices are much higher than traditional schools in China, and this tuition price is beyond the reach of most Chinese families. This can result in higher income families being able to provide their children with an international education and the opportunity to study in some international renowned universities, while families with relatively lower incomes will not have the opportunity to provide their children with an international education. As mentioned above, internationally educated students may be more competitive in the workplace, which may lead to a gradual increase in the gap between the rich and the poor in China.

The popularity of international education in China may result in a brain drain of certain public-school educators. This is because most international school instructors in China earn far more than their counterparts at traditional schools. For example, in 2019, “the average monthly pay of Chinese teachers was 4,324 yuan, with just more than 30% earning more than 5,000 yuan,”(China Youth Daily: 2019). However, the minimum salary for an international schoolteacher is RMB 6,500 and the maximum is RMB 30,000 (Tian yuan: 2019), which is much more than the average salary for a teacher in a traditional Chinese school. Therefore, some educational workers may opt to work at international schools to earn a better salary, which is a significant loss for traditional schools. Furthermore, international education may result in another kind of brain drain. After completing their studies, some talented international students may opt to remain and work or settle abroad. According to Chinese Ministry of Education data “from 1978 to 2019, 86.28 percent of overseas students elected to return to China, while 14% chose to remain abroad”. Therefore, this is another type of brain drain for China.

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