

DOI: 10.18721/JHSS.12107

УДК 378

## DEVELOPMENT AND EFFECTS OF EDUCATION FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN CHINA

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This paper serves as a historical study of the development of China's education for international students, based on which the authors try to summarize its effects on promoting China's hard and soft powers. Since the implementation of the Reform and Opening-up Policy, the education of international students in China has made remarkable progress, boosting the internationalization process of China's development. Its experience and implication deserve close observation and analysis. The paper uses data collected from Chinese government documents, public files and education reports, aiming to illustrate the facts and characteristics of the three stages of China's international students education since 1978. The study was conducted using the historical approach to research, while combining the perspective of Education Science, Sociology and International Relations. The paper presents conclusions that the development of education for international students in China has: promoted the oversea popularity of Chinese culture and China's soft power; created a positive effect on promoting bilateral relations and attracting foreign investment; facilitated human resources exchange; accelerated the internationalization process of Chinese universities. With the continuous growth of overall national strength and reputation, education for international students in China still has great potential.

**Keywords:** China, scholarship, international students education, the Reform and Opening-up Policy, the "Belt and Road" Initiative.

**Citation:** G. Zheng, M. Li, Development and effects of education for international students in China, Society. Communication. Education, 12 (1) (2021) 71–81. DOI: 10.18721/JHSS.12107

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## РАЗВИТИЕ И ПОСЛЕДСТВИЯ ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ ДЛЯ ИНОСТРАННЫХ СТУДЕНТОВ В КИТАЕ

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Проведено историческое исследование развития китайского образования для иностранных студентов, на основе которого авторы пытаются обобщить его влияние на продвижение жестких и мягких сил Китая. С момента принятия «Политики реформ и открытости», образование иностранных студентов в Китае достигло заметного прогресса, стимулируя процесс интернационализации развития Китая. Его опыт и последствия заслуживают пристального наблюдения и анализа. В статье использованы данные, собранные из китайских правительственных документов, публичных досье и отчетов об образовании, с целью проиллюстрировать факты и характеристики трёх этапов обучения иностранных студентов в Китае с 1978 года. Исследование проводилось в рамках подхода, сочетающего в себе точки зрения предметных областей педагогики, социологии и международных отношений. В статье приведены выводы о том, что развитие образования для иностранных студентов в Китае способствовало международной популярности китайской культуры и мягкой силы Китая; оказало положительный эффект на развитие двусторонних отношений, а также привлечение иностранных инвестиций; облегчило обмен человеческими ресурсами; ускорило процесс интернационализации китайских университетов. С непрерывным ростом общей национальной силы и репутации образование для иностранных студентов в Китае все еще имеет большой потенциал.

**Ключевые слова:** Китай, стипендии, образование иностранных студентов, «Политика реформ и открытости», инициатива «Пояс и путь».

**Ссылка при цитировании:** Zheng G., Li M. Development and effects of education for international students in China // Society. Communication. Education. 2021. Vol. 12. No. 1. Pp. 71–81. DOI: 10.18721/JHSS.12107

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### Introduction

This is a historical study focusing on the issues of what stages has China's education for international students gone through, what kind of effects it projected on China's overall development and how it achieved such progress.

In an age of globalization, the education of international students has become an important part of the internationalization of higher education and a necessary measure for a country to enhance its international competitiveness and expand its international influence. As an ancient civilization with great culture, China has been attracting a great number of people around the world to come and study since ancient times. The Tang Dynasty of China has seen a prosperous scene of cultural and personnel exchanges.

Contemporary China implemented the policy of reform and opening-up since 1978, which rejuvenated the education of international students. In recent years, with the rapid development of China's economy, the remarkable deepening of internationalization and the continuous growth of soft power, the Chinese government has paid more and more attention to the education of international students and has introduced various policies to encourage and attract students around the world. According to statistics, in 2019, nearly 400,000 overseas students from more than 200 countries and regions studied in China's universities and institutes. China has become a leading figure in Asia in terms of education for international students, and the third largest in the world. How did this phenomenon of "studying in China" emerge, what process has it experienced, what kind of prospects does it have in the future? These issues make it necessary for us to review the development of Chinese international student education over the years, exploring the motivation and experience of its process, and try to discover its positive effects on China's overall development.

### Statement of the Problem

With the scope of human activities increasingly globalized, the internationalization of higher education has become more and more prominent and important. Students are eager to understand the knowledge of other countries, and a huge international students market has been formed nowadays. Meanwhile, scholars need to keep up with the latest development of the academic field, thus they constantly communicate and cooperate with their counterparts in other countries. When a government plans to formulate or adjust its education policies, it also needs to draw lessons and practice of other countries. In this context, the internationalization of higher education has become an indispensable aspect of a country's educational development or even its overall national strength.

China has enjoyed a long history of its reputation for emphasis on education and culture exchange since ancient times. After the implementation of the Reform and Opening-up in 1978, modern China has realized a dramatic revitalization of global engagement and international education, in which the education for international students has played a key role in this process. With a relatively poorer starting point in the 1980s, China's higher education for international students has made a tremendous progress in the last 40 years and surpassed many western countries which occupied the position of large shares in the global markets of international students.

## Research Methods and Corpus

The study was conducted in the approach of historical research, while combining the perspective of Education Science, Sociology and International Relations. The main body of the discussion is structured in two parts: the first part follows a linear narrative using file reading and text analysis, the evolution of China's international students education was presented in a timeline from 1978 to the present, while the second part was designated to logical analyzing and outlined summarizing. It employs a comprehensive use of the inductive method of history and analytical method of social science theories. The paper uses data collected from Chinese government documents, public files, education reports and academic works to enrich the sources of information from multiple channels and to ensure the accuracy of the data and the objectivity of the research.

## Discussion

### The Expansion and Adjustment of the Opening-up Policy in International Education (1978–2000)

In 1978, China implemented the well-known policy of Reform and Opening-up, which pushed the country's essential project on economic construction, fully stimulating the social vitality of this huge country. China's economy, science and technology, culture and education have entered a new stage of rapid development. At the same time, the relationship between China and the world is undergoing positive changes. The relationship with Western countries has gradually eased and international exchanges have increased dramatically. In this context, the Chinese government has introduced a number of policies to support the development of the education of international students in China, such as the "Regulations of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China on Foreign Students Studying in Chinese Universities" ("中华人民共和国教育部关于外国学生入中国高等院校学习的规定") promulgated in 1980, "Foreign Students Relevant Regulations on Studying in China" ("外国留学生来华学习的有关规定") promulgated in 1986, and "Interim Regulations on Recruiting and Training Foreign Postgraduate Students in China" ("关于招收和培养外国来华留学研究生的暂行规定") issued in 1988, etc. [1]. In 1979 and 1984, China held the second and third national conferences on international students' issues, and put forward the main goal of international students education in China: to strengthen cooperation with the "Third World", emphasizing that international students education in China is a long-term and strategic part of international aid, which recognized the strategic significance of international students education for the first time [2].

In the 1990s, education for international students in China came into a period of rapid development. In 1991, the Ministry of Education promulgated the "Trial Measures for the Granting of Degrees to International Students in China by Institutions of Higher Education" ("关于普通高等学校授予来华留学生中国学位试行办法"). In 2000, the Ministry of Education issued a notice on implementation of the "Regulations on the Administration of the Acceptance of Foreign Students in Higher Education Institutions" ("高等学校接受外国留学生管理规定"). With the issuance and implementation of a series of policies, the enrollment and management policies for international students in China have become more scientific. Provinces, cities and universities have more autonomy and approval powers on issues of enrollment; tuition fee, and related policies have become more flexible. With the increase in the number of international students, the establishment of a full-time management institution for international students has become inevitable for the improvement of international student management. In 1996, China established "China Scholarship Council" (CSC) to take charge of the international student affairs. In 2000, in the notice of the "Minutes of the National Education and Foreign Affairs Conference", the government proposed to improve the management of logistics for international students in China, striving to create a better environment for them. By 2000, the number of international students in China had increased to 52,150, which is a dramatic increase of 649.92 % compared to 1990, accounting for 2.7 % of all the international students globally in the same period [4].

The development of the education for international students in this period has several characteristics summarized as followed:

1. The education of international students has created a new situation since the founding of modern China. The enrollment of international students has gradually expanded, laying the foundation for today's achievement [3]. At the same time, we should also realize that this period is still in the early development of the education of Chinese international students, and there is still great room for improvements in the future.

2. The management system for international students has been improved, and a large number of related policies have been introduced. Similar to the expansion of the scale of international students, this period also lay the foundation for the international student management policies and regulations. The policies were more flexible, local governments and universities gained more autonomy, which created a positive effect for the rapid growth of international student enrollment, especially in the coastal areas of eastern China.

3. The source of international students has been diversified in terms of the coverage of different countries, and the proportion of international students from western developed countries has increased. However, in the 1980s, cultivating talents for the "Third World" countries and maintaining relations with the latter were still important factors to be considered in the enrollment of international students in China. The in-depth reform of international student education and the industrialization process still need to be strengthened.

In short, the education of Chinese international students in the early stage of reform and opening-up has made many pioneering achievements, but still has limitations such as the lack of full development, insufficient experience, and policy factors against industrialization. As the prelude to the full evolution of international student education, this period is transitional, and it is about to usher in a brand-new period of rapid development.

#### **Taking WTO as an Opportunity: The Flourishing Development in International Students Education (2001–2012)**

The education of international students is a project of General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) among the three international agreements of the World Trade Organization (WTO). It is an important content of international trade and an essential aspect of the internationalization of higher education. In 2001, China's accession to the WTO created a positive and favorable policy environment for the rapid expansion of the education for international students. At the same time, China's economy has entered a golden period of significant growth, becoming the world's third and second largest economy in 2008 and 2011 respectively. China's international status has been significantly improved and international exchanges have become more frequent. The competitiveness of China has been continuously strengthened, which has brought about a remarkable increase in the scale of international students and a comprehensive upgrade of related policies and services. The education of international students in China has entered an unprecedented period of vigorous development [5].

During this period, Chinese government successively promulgated several laws and regulations, which have specifically stipulated the relevant content of studying in China. In 2004, the "2003–2007 Educational Rejuvenation Plan" determined the principles of education for international students, namely "Expanding the scale, improving the level, guaranteeing the quality, and standardizing the management". 2010 was a year of historical significance for the development of international education in China. First, in the "Outline of National Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010–2020)", it is clearly stated that the scale of foreign students in China will be further expanded, the number of government scholarships will be increased, and the focus will be on funding developing countries, as well as optimizing the management of international students in China. In the project of "Studying in China" promulgated afterwards, the goal was further defined as "By 2020, the number of international students of higher ed-

education in China will reach 150,000” [6]. Based on national strategy, China will continue to increase the number of government scholarships, making the national source and category of international students in China more reasonable and balanced. The Ministry of Education of China actively promotes the establishment of a platform for mutual recognition of qualifications and credits transfer between China and other countries. These policies and regulations have further regulated the enrollment, management and services of China’s international education. In particular, breakthroughs have been made in the informatization system of international student management, and the degree of standardization have been further improved. The policy for international students in China at this stage can be summarized as follows: education for international students in China has been formally treated as an important service trade, the government kept improving the standardization and informatization level to adapt to the trend of internationalization of higher education.

By the comprehensive effect of many factors such as trade development, international exchanges, and policy support, the scale of China’s international student education has grown dramatically at this stage. According to the statistics from 2001 to 2013, a total of 746 universities and institutes in China had accepted 2,539,775 international students from over 200 countries and regions, which is an increase of 2,208,252 compared with the previous period (see Table 1). The annual average of the growth rate was 14.75 %. The number of international students pursuing academic degree and diploma in China was 942,983, with its average annual growth rate of 18.3 % [7].

**Table 1. Number of International Students in China (2002–2012)**

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Number of International Students	85829	77715	11084	14108	16269	19550	22349	23818	26509	29261	32833
Annual rate of growth, %	42.35	9.45	42.60	7.49	15.30	20.17	14.32	6.57	11.30	10.38	12.21

\* The data was collected from the Department of International Cooperation and Exchange, Chinese Ministry of Education: “Concise Statistics of International Students in China”, 2001–2012.

The education of international students at this stage has distinct characteristics and trends of development, which can be roughly summarized as follows:

1. The national source of international students in China has been further expanded and diversified. During this period, the number of international students from all continents has increased significantly. The largest increase is in Africa, where the number of students has increased by nearly 2300 % in the past 15 years. The number of European students studying in China has also increased rapidly by 995 % in the past 15 years. Asian countries are still the main area with the largest number of international students coming to China. For example, in 2016, it occupied eight of the top ten seats. Since 2000, South Korea has been the country with the largest number of international students coming to China, and its number of international students has been significantly ahead of the second-ranked country. The growth rate of the number of students studying in China from the United States, Japan, and Russia has been in a relatively stable state for a long time, making them more consistent to maintain the top positions.

2. For a long time, China has provided various forms of scholarships for international students in China, which have played a positive role in improving the quality of the source of international students in China and adjusting the scale of international students in different regions. At this stage, the total number of scholarship-receiving international students in China has shown a substantial increase, but the proportion of scholarship-received international students in the total number has shown a trend of decreasing firstly, and then gradually increasing. This shows that the Chinese government has continuously increased its funding for scholarships for international students in China in recent years. Among all the scholarship

students coming to China, the number of Asian students is still the largest because of the relatively large number of the latter. The situation also showed that the growth rate of the scale of international students in China has exceeded the growth rate of the Chinese government's scholarship expenditure, making it difficult to maintain the original coverage rate.

### **Further Optimization and Improvement of International Student Education under the “Belt and Road” Initiative (2013–present)**

Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed a cooperative initiative to jointly build the “Silk Road Economic Belt” (“丝绸之路经济带”) and the “21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road” (“二十一世纪海上丝绸之路”). The “Belt and Road” initiative has brought new development opportunities to the education of international students in China. By delivering high-quality educational resources to the “Belt and Road” countries and promoting the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind, it has greatly promoted China's international education. The Ministry of Education issued a document of “Promoting the Joint Construction of ‘One Belt and One Road’ Educational Action”, which clearly pointed out that educational exchanges should provide talents support for the construction of the “five links”, namely the policy communication, facility links, unimpeded trade, financial links, and people-to-people connectivity. It also stated that in the next 5 years, more than 10 overseas bases of education will be built, and over 10,000 new students from the countries and regions along the “Belt and Road” will be subsidized each year to study in China.

In 2016, Chinese government issued a number of policy documents related to the education of international students in China to serve the “One Belt One Road” initiative. The top-level design of China's international education was further improved. Combined with the national education project, the Ministry of Education issued the “Promoting Co-construction of the “Belt and Road” Education Action” to expound the supporting role of education in the construction of the “Belt and Road”, and advocated other countries to join the “Belt and Road” education community. This document is an important manifestation of the all-round and new pattern of China's education opening up to the world, and clarifies the overall program and practice of China's construction of the “Belt and Road” education community.

With the continuous development of the internationalization of higher education on a global scale, education service trade has begun emerging as an important field of international trade. According to statistics from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the number of international students in the world has increased from 2 million in 1998 to 5.3 million people in 2017, China has played an important role in this development [8]. After Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward the initiative in 2013, popularity of “Studying in China” set off in the countries along the “Belt and Road”. As of 2017, China has signed agreements on mutual recognition of academic qualifications with 46 countries and regions, of which 24 countries are along the “Belt and Road”. The initiative provides a broad prospect for growth in the education of international students in China. In April 2019, the Office for Promoting the Construction of the “Belt and Road” released the project of “Belt and Road Initiative: Progress, Contributions and Prospects”, and stated that China has established the Chinese Government Scholarship Program of “Silk Road” in the summary of educational achievements, and signed agreements on mutual recognition of higher education qualifications with 24 countries along the route. 38,700 people from the countries along the “Belt and Road” received Chinese government scholarships to study in China in 2017, accounting for 66 % of the total scholarship students in that year. The Chinese Academy of Sciences has set up MA and PhD scholarships and special training courses for countries along the “Belt and Road”, which has covered more than 5,000 students in total [9].

The positively improving national image of China and strong policy supports from Chinese government consistently showed their great impetus in driving China's international students education to higher levels. According to a questionnaire by Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, harmonious bilateral political relations, mutually beneficial and win-win relationship in economy and trade, good geographic relations

and China's promising status in economics and politics have been the top 5 factors to attract international students. It is widely accepted that China's stable political environment, potentials in economic development, confidence in the increase of national strength and the long-standing history & culture have played vital roles to appeal to more international students [10].

With the support of the "Belt and Road" initiative, China's education for international students has made significant progress during this period. It is not only reflected in the increase in the scale of international students, but more significantly that China's international student education has begun to shift from the pursuit of quantity to the pursuit of quality. The quality and the level of education for international students have been remarkably improved.

1. The majors of international students are more abundant and diversified, and the professional structure is more reasonable. The most popular majors studied by international students in China can be divided into 15 categories, including Chinese Language & Literature, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Western Medicine, Economics, Engineering, Management, Law, Art, History, Sports Science, Philosophy, Science, Agriculture and Education, etc. For a long time, Chinese language has always been an advantageous major for international students in China. In 2012, the number of students studying in the majors of Chinese Language and Chinese Medicine accounted for 57.5 % of the total number. By 2018, the proportion of international students in the two majors mentioned above has dropped to 40.4 %, and the proportion of international students in Economics, Western Medicine and Engineering has increased to 34.65 % [8].

2. Countries along the "Belt and Road" Initiative have become the main sources of international students studying in China. In 2013, the number of international students coming to China from countries along the "Belt and Road" accounted for about 40 % of the total international students in China. In 2018, it has accounted for 52.9 % of the total number of international students in China, with an average annual growth rate of 8.7 % [11].

3. The proportion of international students who pursue academic degrees continues to rise. The composition of international students in China includes those who pursue academic degrees and those with non-academic qualifications. The foreign students with academic qualifications in China are divided into junior, undergraduate and postgraduate levels; non-academic international students can be divided into general advanced students and short-term students. At this stage, both degree and non-degree international students have shown a remarkable increase year by year, especially the proportion of the students who pursue academic degrees, among which undergraduates account for the largest proportion, followed by graduate students. In 2018, international students with a degree reached 258,122 and accounted for 47.6 % of the total number of international students in China in the same year. The number of international students with a degree exceeded the number of non-degree students for the first time.

### **The Effect of the Education for International Students in China**

Through the history of the development of the Education for International students in China, we can see its tremendous achievements in recent years. The positive development of education for international students is an outcome of China's strengthening of opening-up policy and the enhancing of the "soft environment" for international students. At the same time, the expansion of the scale of international students in China has in turn promoted the further development of China's opening-up and international exchanges, projecting a profound impact on China's integration into the international community. The effect is reflected in the following aspects:

1. As carriers of cultural exchanges and public diplomacy, international students have promoted the spread of Chinese culture and the improvement of China's soft power. Official cultural dissemination is carried out by the government, which is often aggressive and rigid. Sometimes it is regarded as a kind of cultural invasion, resulting in resistance from the audience. The international students who come to China are either interested in Chinese culture or the development experience of modern China. Most of them are individuals who come to study, and they came back home with their perceptions of Chinese

culture and intuitive feelings of China's achievements after the reform and opening up. They tell Chinese stories and impressions of China to the people of their own countries. Their stories will be more credible than official publicity. The impression of China they spread will be more acceptable to the audience, so that the audience can consciously and autonomously perceive the real Chinese culture and the picture of modern China [12]. Many international students in China are also engaged in international and cultural exchanges after returning to their countries. They serve as bridges and make positive contributions to friendly exchanges between China and their countries. It creates a more intuitive and clear understanding of contemporary China's modernization achievements and national development strategy, promoting positive recognition of China's development experience and its philosophy, and thus contributing to the improvement of China's soft power.

2. The economic benefits brought by the large scale of international students have become more and more obvious. The consumption by international students in China has begun to take shape and creates a considerable market. The import and export of education service trade is mainly reflected in the direct consumption expenditures of students studying abroad, which are mainly divided into two categories. One is the expenditure directly related to tuition fee and accommodation expenses. This part is mainly the earnings for the universities and institutes. The second part is related to other living and social expenses of international students and their relatives as well as friends, including food, transportation, tourism, entertainment, etc. This part can be classified as social income. These two parts of expense constitute the total expenditure of international students. As an important type of trade nowadays, the service trade of higher education brings a large amount of foreign currency earnings to the country. International students living and studying in China will cause demands for domestic products, and will promote the trade of goods and foreign investment between the two countries. At the same time, the appreciation of Chinese culture and landscape will greatly promote the development of tourism, transportation, etc. In short, education service trade can not only bring direct economic benefits, but also generates indirect economic benefits by affecting other industries. Some Chinese scholars have performed a model calculation on the economic contribution rate of international students in Jiangsu Province, which is one of the major provinces for international students studying in China. The results show that from 2000 to 2010, the average annual contribution of foreign students to Jiangsu province's GDP was at least 1.150~172.5 million RMB [13].

3. There are a large number of interdisciplinary high-quality talents such as political and business elites among the international students in China, which play a subtle role in promoting bilateral relations, attracting foreign investment and personnel exchanges. The cross-border flow of high-end talents can establish an interpersonal network and open up channels of information exchange. The new international trade and capital cooperation requires the participation of a large number of professional talents proficient in both languages of the two countries. The internationalization of higher education is one of the main ways to provide such talents. Meanwhile, talents studying abroad are often a considerable part of the elites who hold positions in important national departments, which will have a remarkable impact on the direction of a country's policies [14]. Their participation politically helps deepen cooperation, enhance mutual trust, and promote understanding of the political culture of each country.

4. The development of education for international students in China has improved the internationalization process and academic communication capabilities of Chinese universities and institutions, which helps to improve their academic standards and international competitiveness. The internationalization of higher education is currently an important indicator for evaluating the overall strength of universities. The Chinese government has put forward higher requirements on the quality of education for international students and the supervision system. These requirements have prompted universities to be further involved in global engagement and increase the overseas experience of its faculties. In addition, recruiting foreign students will bring more economic benefits and funds to the university, promoting the latter to increase investment in international exchange and measures to attract more international students, thus creating an efficient circle of mutual promotion.



### Conclusion

To sum it up, what could we generalize from the historical process of the education for international students in modern China, and how should we understand its achievement and prospect?

It is more than obvious that the education of international students in China has made remarkable progress with the continuous growth of its national strength since 1980s. The scale of international students has continued to expand, the curriculum construction and instructional program have gradually improved, and the management system has become more and more efficient. Its process can be divided into three stages: the expansion and adjustment of the opening-up policy in international education (1978–2000), the significant development after joining the World Trade Organization (2001–2012), and further optimization under the “Belt and Road” initiative (2013–present).

Although there is still a certain gap with the United States, the United Kingdom and other major western countries, China’s international student education is on its way of dramatic changes. The development of education for international students in China has promoted the oversea popularity of Chinese culture and China’s soft power, creating a positive effect on promoting bilateral relations as well as attracting foreign investment and facilitating human resources exchanges, and accelerating the internationalization process of Chinese universities [15].

With the accelerating process of economic globalization and the development of the internationalization of higher education, China will further project its reform and opening policy into the education of international students, and an even greater achievement is yet to come. In the future, education for international students in China will be further optimized in terms of scale, specialty, management and services. On the basis of the support from national strategy, the prospect of international student education in China will be assuring, with its quality and reputation continuously improving on the right track.

The project is funded All China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese No. 19CZQK207, Education Department of Jilin Province “the 13<sup>th</sup> Five-year Plan” social science project in 2020 No. JJKH20201131SK, Jilin Association for Higher Education research project No. JGJX2019D4.

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*Received 17.02.2021.*

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*Статья поступила в редакцию 17.02.2021.*

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