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‘We all need cultural awareness and cultural affinity’ : the academics’ view on Chinese students’ academic transition into undergraduate studies in Britain

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‘We all need culture awareness and cultural affinity’: the academics’ view on Chinese students’ academic transition into undergraduate studies in Britain

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Abstract:

Despite the growing trend in more Chinese students coming to the UK to study, they still face considerable problems and difficulties in adapting to their academic studies, due to cultural and pedagogical differences. This research explores the issues that impact their academic transition of Chinese students taking undergraduate studies in Britain, in order to improve the teaching and learning practice within British Higher Education. The chapter provides a practical framework that incorporates the influential factors and practical suggestions around the students' academic transition in relation to cultural and pedagogical differences. It is contended that cultural awareness should be initiated and cultural affinity should be nurtured among the Chinese students, academic staff, and university management authorities, to improve the teaching and learning experience within the British Higher Education context.

Key words: Chinese students, academic transition, cultural awareness, culture affinity, undergraduate studies, British higher education

1. Introduction

Figures from Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2017) indicate that the number of student enrolments from China was much larger than from any other overseas country. In 2015/16, the amount of student enrolments domiciled from China topped to 91,215 in the United Kingdom (UK), 12,500 more than in 2011/12 when there were 78,715 student enrollments from China. Despite the large amount of Chinese students studying in the UK, Gu (2011) and Spurling (2007) highlight their problems and difficulties in transition and adaptation into their academic studies under the new cultural and educational settings, for instance, being reticent in classroom and group works, perceived lack of critical thinking, difficulties in independent learning and essay writing, and reluctance and reticence with regard to interaction with lecturers and other peer students. These problems are always challenging for the Chinese students, module by module, entry by entry, and year by year.

Under such circumstances, this chapter attempts to identify why the culture factors play an important role and what cultural and pedagogical influences may lead to these challenges in relation to the Chinese students' academic transition. Practical measures are put forward and suggested to be taken by stakeholders under British Higher Education contexts to help with Chinese students' academic transition and achievements. As for Chinese students in the UK, their goal is mainly to attain high quality short term academic performance (Wu and Hammond, 2011).

It is noted that there is a gap identified from the literature review that suggests studies concerning the Chinese students' learning transition specifically at undergraduate level, are scant, though plenty of literature studies the Chinese students at the postgraduate level. The chapter focuses on the perspectives of the academic staff, to

study Chinese students' academic transition undertaking undergraduate programmes in British high education contexts. Findings are presented from eighteen interviews with academic staff from either British universities or Chinese ones (where the Chinese students studied before they were transited into UK higher education). Among of which, sixteen interviews are conducted with UK academics, across the subject fields in business management, computing science, mathematics, digital business, IT, language studies and construction, to avoid disciplinary bias. Another two interviewees are from transnational education (TNE) institutions which are based in China, delivering Sino-UK joint programmes.

A culture influence versus academic transition framework is introduced (Figure 1.). The upper part of the framework expounds what cultural and pedagogical factors may influence the Chinese students' academic transition. Further illustrations of these factors are shown in section 2 to 6. In the lower part of the model, practical measures to be taken by Chinese students (section 7), British academic staff (section 8), and the university management authorities (section 9) are suggested, based on the finding and discussion of this study. Section 10 concludes that cultural awareness and cultural affinity should be nurtured for the improvement of teaching and learning practice, which will benefit all parties.

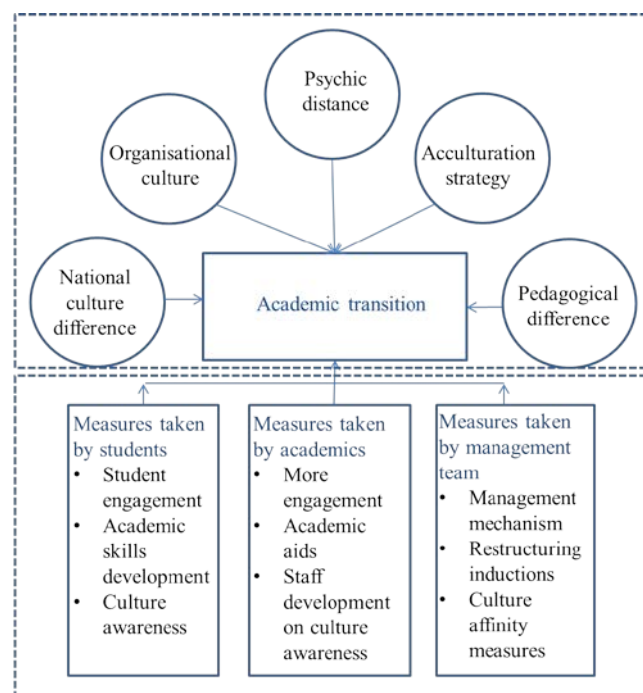


Figure.1 Cultural influence versus academic transition framework (source: this study)

2. National culture difference

Hofstede (1991) proposed four cultural dimensions when identifying the culture difference among different countries (nations): power distance, individualism versus

collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity versus femininity. Whilst restructuring his research with the involvement of Chinese researchers to avoid deliberate western bias, Hofstede (2003) introduced the fifth one, long term orientation. Culture dimensions demonstrate the clarification of the culture difference between nations (countries) and 'culture shock' (Oberg, 1960) that the immigrants, in this study, Chinese students might come across during their stay and studies in another country, for instance, the UK.

Power distance presents the perception on relations between individuals with different hierarchical authorities in a specific nation. In large power distance countries, like China, one can perceive marked privileges, and different ways of interaction/behavior between individuals, compared to much more egalitarian interactions in small power distance nations, for example, the Britain. During the course of Chinese students' transition into their undergraduate studies in the UK, power distance offer powerful explanations on their transitional behaviours, particularly within the interaction with the academics. The Chinese students are very polite to academics either in classroom or other private occasions. They are reticent and seldom ask questions on the class, which they feel it is rude and make the lecturers annoyed. Their classroom attendance is always good, which they think is a way to show their respects to lecturers. They also respect authorities and the published knowledge although they might be frustrated when they are reading books or papers showing different views on the same phenomena. To some extent, power distance also partially explains why the Chinese students are perceived as being lack of critical thinking and argumentation during their academic studies (Durkin, 2011).

Another issue that can be illustrated by the power distance between Chinese students and their academics is 'speaking out'. Chinese students can hardly speak out their lecturers' first names, instead, they call 'teacher xxx'. They think they are at different level and different age with the academics, which forms up 'an invisible wall' (S2) and keep Chinese students away from their lecturers. In the lower power distance countries, for instance, the UK, students call their teacher's name directly which stands for an equal relationship between them and makes the interaction naturally developed.

Collectivism means, in some sense, all the group members' interests are protected, and in return, members' loyalty and commitment to the group are required. Individualism prioritizes a person's own and his immediate family's interests upon others. Academics in British universities may perceive Chinese students prefer to stay together keeping in a group, either when socialising, eating and living, having classes and tutorials, or attending group works. They are from China, a collectivist nation (Hofstede, 1991). Chinese students find difficult sometimes to ask questions that they might think stupid in front of group of students. They think other people, especially their co-national group members may laugh at them. Such a collectivist group may regulate and repress its members' behaviour or performance by requesting its member taking on the obligations for the group, for instance, 'if a Chinese student does not

appear in the classroom due to his personal reasons, other Chinese students might not be present as well' (S9). However, if the opinion leader within Chinese students group takes on well into classroom participation, other Chinese students may be well engaged.

Being reticent in the classroom and not asking questions rarely by Chinese students can also be addressed and explained by their perceptions on uncertainty avoidance, the third national culture dimension identified by Hofstede (1980), who defines it as how a person reacts and looks when he/she confronts situations which are unpredictable, unclear, and unstructured. The Chinese students may feel frustrated and worried about 'losing face' to their lecturer and peers if they ask some silly or very basic questions. According to British academic staff in digital business, they suggest that, 'they should not necessarily feel uncomfortable when asking random questions. If they do not understand, I prefer them to ask because there would be lots of other students in the classroom who do not understand' (S10). Evidently, there is a gap in the expectations in classroom participation between Chinese students and their lecturers, due to the culture difference under some uncertain circumstances.

Whatever the extent is to which the Chinese students are transitioned into their academic studies in the UK, they are working very hard and sometimes, making some of academics think the Chinese students are struggling with work life balance, 'although hard working is good, it may affect productivity'. For some of the Chinese students, they need to find time to relax, socialise with their friends and have a good time. The time for work is definitely important, but they should think of their health status and their wellbeing' (S11). One of the reasons for the Chinese students to work hard lies in the culture dimension of long term orientation, the Chinese students are from Long-term oriented societies which foster pragmatic virtues oriented towards future rewards, such as saving, persistence, and adapting to changing circumstances (Hofstede, 2003). Their families have high expectations in the Chinese students and may think studying overseas is a valuable investment for future; as a result, the Chinese students are very determined in terms of what they should achieve. As one academic staff member has discovered, the Chinese students 'were here because their parents wanted them to have great education in a prestigious British university, do master's degrees afterwards, and return to China to obtain a good job' (S11).

3. Organisational culture

Korsakienė and Gurina (2012) acknowledged that Cultural differences at the national level are posited mostly in values and less in practices, whilst cultural differences at organisational level, are considered mostly of different practices but not values. For instance, Denison & Mishra (1995)'s organisational culture model, was derived from the organisational management practice. And the culture web advocated by Johnson, Whittington, Scholes, Pyle and Johnson (2011) analyses the elements of organisational culture at operational level. The practice of the organisations, where

Chinese students take their pre-UK studies in China and undergraduate studies in the UK, brings influences on the Chinese students' academic transition in the UK.

Denison (1984, p.5) defined corporate culture as 'the set of values, beliefs, and behavior patterns that form the core identity of an organisation'. One of notable traits within an organisational culture model developed by Denison and Mishra (1995) is adaptability, which assumes translating the demands of the business environment into action and describes organisational efforts to balance internal identity with external events and the impetus to change. The measuring indices for adaptability include creating change, customer focus, and organisational learning. The increasing number of Chinese students and other international students within British higher education stands for an emerging change for each British university. No longer is the British higher education mainly for its home students, but to some extent it has been transformed to multi-national education (MNE). Under such circumstances, the British universities' development strategy should reformulate, management mechanism should adjust accordingly, and the culture of organisational learning throughout the universities should be encouraged.

The culture web advocated by Johnson et al. (2011, p.176) depicts the 'behavioural, physical, and symbolic manifestations of a culture' at organisational level. Six elements are enumerated to form up the culture web, among of which, stories and routines, these two elements particularly impact the extent to which Chinese students adapt into their studies in the UK. Stories refer to the people, events, and other historical issues about which are still talking within an organisation, giving insights into what are important conventionally in the organisation. The Chinese student who tends to study in the UK may be encouraged by the previous students' stories from the same Chinese university, for example, the academic achievements within the organisation and their British universities afterwards. Routines and rituals, are defined as the typically daily behaviour with a long history and particular activities or special events 'that emphasize, highlight or reinforce what is important in the culture' (ibid, p.177). For well-developed Sino-British Centres where accommodate the Chinese students opt to study in the UK, there have been yearly events formulated to provide services to their students, like pre-departure training embedded with sampled academic studies, counseling sessions to their students from a cohort of British universities, and outstanding alumni guest lectures, and so on. These stories and routines may influence the Chinese student's future transition into British higher education and university options in relation to their further study in Britain.

4. Psychic distance

Psychic distance is defined by Hallén and Wiedersheim-Paul (1984, p. 17) as the 'difference in perceptions between buyer and seller regarding either needs or offers' within an international business. It is composed of three elements: cultural affinity, trust between the buyers and the sellers, and personal experience. Cultural affinity

within a business transaction is construed as the cultural similarity between the buyers and sellers in language, business habits, cultural and legal environments, and etcetera. Bell, Ireland and Swift (2014) apply this conception into their research on the process of cross-cultural decision making in higher education sector. Swift (1999) introduces a metaphor of cultural affinity as 'catalyst' for relationship building in the first place, and even before the relationship begins.

Borrowing the notion of psychic distance regarding the Chinese students' transition under the British higher education, cultural affinity can be addressed and mediated in the process of relationship built-up for the Chinese students with others during their transition journey. It is natural if Chinese students set up their own co-national group where they feel comfortable and belonged, due to the existence of cultural affinity among the group members. But with their lecturers, clearly and generally, there is no culture similarity or affinity between them (besides in a few circumstance under which an ethnically Chinese staff works for the university, though the Chinese staff might behave in the British way). However, in the course of close interaction and communication between Chinese students and the university academics, cultural affinity can be explored and cultivated by all means. Alongside with the willingness and personal experience within the process from either party, a well-connected relationship set up. This is beneficial to students' academic transition.

5. Acculturation strategy adopted

Berry (1990) identifies four acculturation strategies for the immigrants who are being settled into the host community but with their heritage culture: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. He contends that integration strategy is most adaptive for sojourners who endorse the host culture whilst being committed to the original culture. Based on Berry's findings, Searle and Ward (1990) argued that psychological and sociocultural adjustments are two acculturation outcomes to be considered. The author speculated that, for specific immigration group such as international students whose goals are to achieve short term academic performance, it is crucial that their academic adjustment, under the newly cultural settings should be covered into acculturation outcomes. Whilst pursuing their academic progress in the intercultural settings, acculturation strategy ought to be addressed and conducted either deliberately or unintentionally by the Chinese students to cope with their psychological, sociocultural, and most important of all, academic challenges.

Berry's acculturation strategy delineates four possible different outcomes for acculturative activities, based on the presumable dichotomy of the individual's self-identification on their culture of origin and participation into another given culture. However, the dichotomisation, although it is convenient, can hardly do justice to the cultural and intercultural complexity potentially existing in reality. As a reformulation or development to Berry's acculturation framework, Bourhis, Moise, Perreault and Senecal (1997) propose an interactive acculturation model, which places

emphasis on the interaction between the host community and immigrants group when adopting the four acculturation strategies differently. Bourhis et al. found that only the same integration or assimilation strategy is adopted by the two groups, can they reach to a consensus status; otherwise, conflicts and problems arise.

Berry' framework and Bourhis et al.' interactive model facilitate the development of Chinese students' academic transition, particularly when they are conducting interactions with their peer students and lecturers. They may adopt separation strategy from scratch, hiding them into their co-national group as a way of self-protection, as initially they may think they are in a strange country surrounded with strange people. Gradually (how long this time period is individually dependent), the Chinese students make themselves aware of their study purpose in the UK. For the sake of that, attempt to change their strategy to integration with the local community are made, which here refers to their lecturers and peer students. The readers of this paper may notice most of Chinese students studying in the UK have an English name, though sometimes different names from the one on their passports can cause them trouble. It is not for fun or another purpose, but a gesture to show their goodwill to be easily called and communicated with instead of their hard-to-pronounce Chinese names, under such conditions of which they start to adopt an integration strategy. However, if their counterparts, the lecturers and the home or other international students, do not cater for their attempts (or make the Chinese students outsiders) but take on an another acculturation strategy, for instance, simulation or separation, the situation would be problematic and make the Chinese students' academic transition even harder.

6. Pedagogical issues

Pedagogy is the study and theory of methods and principles of teaching. It is difficult to describe the difference between Western and Chinese pedagogies that may influence Chinese students' intercultural adaptation and academic transition into the British higher education (Gu & Maley, 2008). One of the reasons is, the Chinese pedagogies that originally inhibited from Confucianism are actively entangled with Western discourse in the course of industrialization in contemporary China (Cheng & Xu, 2011).

However, Pratt, Kelly and Wong (1999) make a proposition on the selection of learning approach that annotates learning in Confucian heritage cultures (CHC) as a sequential, indivisible, and irreversible four-stage process. It covers memorizing, understanding, applying, and questioning. Memorization and repetition make it assured that the knowledge is available when needed. Appropriate and deep understanding by repetitive learning ensures that the knowledge is applied properly to problems solving under certain circumstance. Questioning and higher level critique is expected only at the last stage of learning, usually after encountering new problems or new situations. These mental processing stages can, to some extent, explain why the Chinese students under CHC are quiet and reticent during the class, especially the

newly enrolled ones, as they might be in the process of repetitive learning, deep understanding and attempting to utilize the knowledge that just mastered to resolve the problems they have met before. In the view of Chinese, critical thinking only can be established after the knowledge is fully commanded. The Chinese students would be frustrated and anxious to handle their psychological journey of learning, if the British academics raise a question for critical thinking at their early learning stages.

Mismatched pedagogical expectations between the teachers and international students may lead to academic transition problems (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). Such mismatches occur very common in reality. From perspectives of the Chinese students, university academics should be knowledgeable, teaching them what and how to learn with clear guidance. A well behaved Chinese student should sit quietly in the classroom, listening to the lecturers and taking notes without questioning and challenging what teachers say. However, in the British academics' point of view, the teachers' role is to perform as a classroom organiser, facilitating the development of students' creativity and independence. According to academic (S7), in business within the IT field, who said in the interview, the students are assumed to 'know how to structure and write an essay, what critical thinking is, how to organise their independent learning, and how to engage in group discussions', instead of just absorbing what the teacher says.

Jin and Cortazzi (2016) advocate that the cultural synergy should be introduced to the intercultural teaching and learning settings. Under such circumstance, the academics have a positive learning attitude to learn from and with international and local students. Equally, different groups of students learn, understand, and appreciate each other's cultures from each other, with a view to formulate a status of cultural synergy and no threats to loss of their own culture identity (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002). To reach to a status of cultural synergy in an international teaching and learning environment, the author would allege that cultural awareness is essential for all the stakeholders, the academics, students, and even the management authorities within higher education sector.

7. Suggested measures to the Chinese students

From the perspectives of academic staff, for the sake of Chinese students' smooth academic transition into the British higher education settings, they are expected to engage themselves more either in the classroom or their social life, develop their academic skills, and build up the sense of cultural awareness.

7.1 Students engagements

All the academics involved in this study either in computing or other subject fields, suggest the Chinese students need to be more responsive and participatory in the classroom. That would stop many of the potential problems, particularly in the case of

not understanding one hundred percent of what are the requirements from their lecturers. They also 'need to be more open to come and talk to lecturers, academic advisors, or personal tutors, specifically from the very start of their studies, whatever topics being studied. 'What they do is to avoid any issue in the future, not wanting it to be a problem' (S5). Another member of staff agrees, 'if any academic issue (arises), the Chinese student should not just keep it to themselves. They should come to see me and we can help them sort it out quicker' (S11). Most of the academics disagree that the Chinese students resort to their co-nationals in the same classroom for an academic problem, 'if one student has got that academic question, other students may have the same one. Probably they have all misunderstood.' (S18)

Some academic staff worry about the Chinese students' attendance, as they have come to the situation that one Chinese student approaches them to ask for more handouts for their peer students. They warn the cohort of Chinese students, 'it is not right if you think struggling with a course makes no point for you to attend. At the end, it will hurt you even more, because you will understand even less.' (S5)

Chinese students are encouraged to use the office hours of their tutors or the time of being lectured to ask questions, if they prefer to meet face to face. Alternatively, if they are not confident enough or feel uncomfortable to meet in person, therefore email communication is also welcomed. However, the academics suggest, 'they should deliver email correspondence in a professional way, by using the university's email box instead of their personal ones. Not only the email records can be easily traced down, but in some occasions, their personal email service can be blocked due to some technical reason!' (S17)

Outside of the classroom, the Chinese students are encouraged to get involved in the local life, 'Socially, the Chinese students need to have more willingness to participate and broaden their university life, make friends straightaway whether they are British or the ones from other countries' (S11), 'go out to participate in social events, go with your newly made friends to the cinema, the pub, and restaurants' (S17), 'Do not keep to yourself or surround yourself only with the people from your home country.' (S5) the reason lies that, 'Learning overseas does not mean the study only, it is the entire experience. ' (S3)

7.2 Academic skills development

First of all, for the benefits of developing academic skills within a British university, the Chinese students should 'learn the play of the game first, by means of which you have got to manipulate the situation for yourself. And, you have got to know how to learn and adapt into a new educational system to get the most out of it.'(S5). Echoing this, another academic argues that the Chinese students should give concern to their study handbook when a new semester starts, 'if they read the guidelines in the handbook carefully, they will know exactly what their teachers expect, and therefore, a lot of misunderstandings can be eliminated , the workload of staff's and students'

can be reduced considerably as well.’ (S12)

The Chinese students should bear in mind that ‘independent learning is the core to British higher education. What are being taught in the classroom is essential only, as a result, students’ homework should cover preparing for the lectures, regurgitating and digesting what they have learned from the class, and reading the recommended reference materials independently’ (S15). Academic staff S2 and S9 who are ethnically Chinese have similar opinions to S15. They encourage Chinese students to ‘form a habit of reading, searching, and retrieving for academic evidence within the reading materials to support and justify your views’. In this way, the students’ independent learning abilities ought to be improved and developed gradually.

For critical thinking, S9 believes that ‘British higher education per se is not only to teach the students simply one, two or three, but it aims at developing students’ critical thinking abilities’, ‘there is not only one right solution, but a lot of other ways to do the work and do it well’ (S10). Chinese students ought to challenge, criticize, and ‘make critical arguments to generate their own views when writing an essay or other required assignments, but not just to respect lecturers and repeat what is in textbooks.’ (S9)

As for English studies, it is normal for Chinese student, when reading, to come across some new English words in the course of their academic studies. An ethnically Chinese academic (S13), whose background is computer modeling in econometrics but not English related disciplines, strongly encourages Chinese students to take use of English-English dictionary to grasp the precise meaning of the new words in the phrases. He further illustrates, ‘misunderstanding of a paragraph probably derives from the errors or deviations on the meaning of new words in that paragraph, if the Chinese students keep on translating to get Chinese meanings or expressions.’

7.3 Cultural awareness

‘Developing cultural awareness and taking advantage of opportunities available when studying overseas, is important.’ This statement is from an academic (S6) who was appointed as a China link tutor (the Chinese students’ personal tutor) by his university just before being interviewed for this study. S6 embarks on Chinese language studies since he has started to deliver his own scholarly exchange activities and business promotion works for his university in China. He believes, ‘the Chinese students who are studying in the UK are experiencing what the UK is offering to people, and they ought to perceive how the British people interact with each other, which provides reflections on their behaviours. Meeting people from different cultures and other nationalities is very useful in terms of broadening their mindset individually’ (S6).

Cultural awareness can lead to smooth academic transition. ‘Once the Chinese students realise random interaction with lecturers and other nationality peers is universally acceptable, they start to follow.’ An academic in digital business confirms

this (S1). He give an example to explain further, ‘An excellent Chinese student performed very well and became a first class degree holder, after he was aware of how research in the British way is structured. He introduced some small Chinese cases into his final dissertation which I think benefit him considerably’ (S1). The students and staff are learning from each other, which is corresponding to the proposition of cultural synergy advocated by Jin and Cortazzi (2016).

8. Suggestions to the academics

8.1 Staff engagements

Some of academics, who have abundant teaching experience with Chinese students, admit that generally the Chinese students are not going to approach to them. On the contrary, ‘I need to approach the Chinese students initially’ (S5), the staff tend to ‘try to involve the Chinese students in the classroom as best as they can’ (S1) and ‘to see intentionally if the Chinese students have special requirements.’ (S15). For the same reason, the academics ought to ‘always remind the Chinese students of the support and extra help available throughout the course, for example, the additional free English classes, small modules on how to write an essay, computing training sessions by the library, and so on’ (S17), and to make them aware of the academics’ ‘availability and the guidance provided that they can explain to them quite comprehensively’ (S6). Interestingly, S5 finds that ‘once a personal relationship with the Chinese students is established, they are then comfortable to come to see their tutor.’ Under such circumstance where the personal relationship is being built, cultural affinity between the academics and the Chinese students develops.

Academics interviewed for this study realise that it is difficult to engage Chinese students when delivering lectures to a large students group. But certainly in tutorials or seminars with a small group of students, ‘it is easier for a lecturer to interact with the Chinese students’ (S6). In terms of techniques and measures, ‘I would raise examples from the Chinese context and ask Chinese students to contribute their China-based knowledge to whatever topic or academic subject is being delivered. I would say we really want to learn how things work in China, which makes Chinese students feel relaxed, comfortable, and more confident. They are also happy as they are talking about something where no one in the classroom knows the answer’ (S6). Unconsciously, this academic proposes the concept of culture synergy (Jin and Cortazzi, 2016), asking for mutual efforts from both academics and Chinese students to understand one another’s cultures. Another measure to help with the Chinese students’ transition is the intervention from the academics in the group discussion, ‘quite often the group discussion works fine if I ensure the Chinese students know others in the group and understand what my expectations for the group discussion are’ (S7).

However, the staff engagements does require the Chinese students’ engagements as

well, it is actually a '50-to-50 road.' (S5). The academics may 'initiate and make the first move at the beginning, but after that, the Chinese students need to take the lead' (S1). The Chinese students are required to 'be honest with what they do not understand and then go to see and talk to their tutors. Also they need to put efforts into their work' (S1), they need to 'be open minded, embed themselves into their studies, and be ready to engage and participate, only when we (the university and its staff) are told, can we know that an issue is a problem and help sort it out' (S5). Under such conditions, the academic staff and the Chinese student ought to 'meet each half way' (S1).

8.2 Academic aids

The Interviewed academics put essay writing skills as a priority that Chinese students need to develop. They believe, 'when essays are due for the first semester, a follow up session on how to structure an essay in British higher education should be delivered' (S5). 'A feedback session on their essay writing is needed. In some student cases, their essay is even required to be gone through line by line' (S11).

Since Chinese students are believed to adopt less critical thinking under the teaching and learning contexts, 'academics are asked to produce different examples to show what critical thinking means, and to compare the descriptive versus critically evaluative ways within academia' (S6) to make the Chinese students aware of how to apply critical thinking abilities to their studies.

S12 and S6 take different views on developing the Chinese students' independent learning skills, although they agree timetable management could be a starting point. 'I would raise a timetable from one of Chinese students as an example to present to all students. I check how many free hours a week that he has and help him develop a plan as to know how they are going to use their time outside of their class. All of the students, including Chinese ones in that session then begin to think about how they are going to use their time for independent learning' (S6). Staff 12 adopts a different way for timetable management, suggesting that the Chinese students show 'concern around the deadlines in the timetable and when a certain assignment needs to be done'.

8.3 Staff development on cultural awareness

In order to facilitate the Chinese students' academic transition into the British Higher Education, it is crucial that the practitioners are clear about the difference between the different educational systems. 'Lecturers need to have cultural awareness, which is very important' (S6). S10 suggests that, if financially possible, the academics should make a visit to China and 'just sit in the classroom in Chinese universities for one week or two, and observe what it is like in Chinese higher education. It is easier to understand the issues through direct experience'.

Another option for university staff to develop their cultural awareness is ‘the training on equality and cultural diversity, thereby to learn and be aware of our own unconscious bias’ (S10) on specific ethnical students group. For example, ‘some staff may make immediate negative assumptions about a Chinese student whose English is not very good’, however, the level of fluency of English is ‘not a direct measure on student’s intellectual abilities’ (S10).

Some interviewed academics recommend a book (S11) and a BBC video programme (S6) to help academic staff develop their cultural awareness, specifically for Chinese students’ academic transition. The book is called ‘The Geography of Thoughts: How Asian and Westerns Think Differently and Why’, which ‘really makes sense, and I can relate the views within that book a lot to what the Chinese students are struggling with.’ (S11). The BBC video footage records the exchange of teachers between China and the UK. Chinese teachers go to a British school and the British teachers go to a Chinese one. ‘Both the Chinese students and their UK lecturers can benefit from this programme by reflecting on the content of the programme- how teaching and learning works in either the UK or in China’ (S6).

9. Measures suggested to the universities

Worrying about issues related to inequality and racism are noted, some academics interviewed for this study wonder if it is right or necessarily needed at university level, to offer a specific ethnical student group, like Chinese students, special care and supports for their transition into their life and studies in the UK. However, S13 argues that, ‘the British universities have become providers of higher education products and service to home and international students’. Under this setting, ‘the students either from home or international, are clients for the universities which have obligations to satisfy their clients and enhance their university experience’ (S15). Likewise, S5 echoes, ‘the university needs to do a better job at acclimatizing all international students to our system and our expectations.’

9.1 Management mechanism

At university level, the management team has responsibilities to develop their students’ wellbeing in the university campus by offering systematical management mechanisms and policies. For Chinese students’ academic transition, these policies may include bridging and transition courses for better adapting into university life, special tutoring programmes, and Chinese student mentors helping the new comers. It is also suggested to the universities to develop the Chinese students performance indicators throughout the teaching programmes by analyzing their academic results on every assignment, trying to understand what reasons are causing academic challenges for Chinese students, assuring every student is on the right track during the whole of their academic journey. Only by this means, can the transition problems be identified early on in the journey, rather than being only remedied at the end of academic terms.

Another approach at organisational structure level to help with Chinese students' transition into their university life and studies is the 'combination of the university's international office where the staff there are responsible for Chinese student recruitment, schools and faculties where Chinese students are based, and the wider Chinese student community' (S6). Student community may easily identify transitional problems that Chinese students might come across. Monthly meetings are suggested to be arranged with the involvement of these three parties and discuss how these problems can be ideally dealt with. At a wider level, the universities should strengthen links with the local Chinese community. The more the university involvement with the wider Chinese community, the more opportunity of support by the universities can be provided to Chinese students.

They universities ought to work closely with their Chinese partners who help with student recruitments from China, to prepare Chinese students academically ahead of their departure to the UK. Not just on luggage advice, but a well prepared pre-departure training to Chinese students which should also cover knowledge about 'critical thinking, independent learning, and cultural awareness ' (S6) that teach Chinese students how to interact with local people and manage academic challenges or any other incidents in the proper manner in the British context.

9.2 Restructuring student inductions

It is important for any education institution that their international students are given the right support mechanisms. Induction, the common practice that the British universities provide when the newly recruited students arrive, explains all of the different aspects of the university's life and how things work properly. However, rather than a general induction for all students, the author would suggest a filtered induction introduced to international students specifically, for instance, the service for students loan may be excluded. Furthermore, there is too much information for the new international students (new Chinese students included) to receive and digest, within the short time of the induction week, immediately followed by teaching, assessing and testing over the next weeks. Similar to the university's event of open days, the international students are encouraged to engage with various induction sessions (might be jointly held with open days) later on in a year, especially in the universities which have multiple entry points in welcoming international students. Furthermore, since a large amount of students attend the induction, which is similar to a big lecture, the author would recommend at least a feedback session to follow up with, a tutorial or seminar, to check if the Chinese students or other international students have further enquires or questions.

Some helpful practices are recommended by the interviewed academics for this study. For instance, a boot camp proves a good format, which is not a general student induction, as 'within a boot camp where all academics who are involved in a specific programme are present to meet up with the students, course specifications are briefed,

learning skills and techniques are highlighted' (S4). Another good practice is the Chinese student community in the University of Manchester, Chinese Students and Scholarly Association (CSSA) delivered a specific induction for newly arrived Chinese students in early October 2017. Some ethnically Chinese academics working in the university are invited to give speeches with the topics of academic aids recommended in order to improve students' transitions, and future plans on how to look for an internship or full time jobs after graduation, and how to apply to a master's programme for high level studies, etcetera. From the perspective of the university management team, the event held by a specific student community should always be encouraged, not only for the benefits of students themselves, but for the university's learning per se.

9.3 Cultural affinity measures

The universities ought to help their academics, who are teaching or supervising Chinese students, to be 'more prepared, knowledgeable, and appreciative of Chinese culture' (S6). These academics should have an understanding of the cultural contexts from which the Chinese students have joined, in relation to the 'learning style and social dynamics in Chinese education' (S4). Cultural awareness leads to the appreciation of perspectives of Chinese students' and understanding reasons why they might have particular problems or issues at certain stages of their transition and acculturation journey. Certain training sessions on what Chinese culture and pedagogy entails, although not necessarily for all, and should be encouraged among staff who are not expert in the appreciation of the Chinese culture.

Cautiously, some academics wonder if some university staff at British universities are mandarin speakers or ethnically Chinese, and thereby required to offer Chinese students academic support though their own work load, as 'they do have cultural affinity with the Chinese students group and they do know where the academic issues may provide challenges to the Chinese students in the course of their studies' (S8). The author advocates that more ethnically Chinese staff should be employed if a high proportion of Chinese students are present at a university campus. The reason is simple, 'Only Chinese staff can understand what Chinese students need exactly and what their challenges are within a British university' (S13, who is originally Chinese). Cultural affinity shortens the distance between students and academics, feeds students the necessary academic support at the right time, and resolves issues before they grow bigger and more problematic.

10. Conclusions

This chapter aims, from the perspective of university academics, to identify cultural influences on students' academic transition into their undergraduate studies. Culture differences are at national and organisational level, psychic distance at a personal level (which defines the extent to which students and academics interact), and how an

acculturation strategy could be widely adopted ; pedagogical differences due to differing cultural contexts, between Chinese and Western education systems, are illustrated as the impacting factors. Practical measures aiding the Chinese students' academic transition are suggested to Chinese students, academic staff, and the universities' management authorities. It is contended that cultural awareness should be initiated and cultural affinity should be nurtured among the three stakeholders involved in the Chinese students' learning journey within the UK.

This study of the academics' views on the Chinese students' transition is derived from one part of a PhD research project investigating the Chinese students' acculturation journey in the British higher education contexts. Findings and discussions from the perspective of Chinese students are excluded, acknowledging that the students' expectations and their views on their own academic transition might be different from the academic staff. Further research is necessary into comparing and integrating the findings from Chinese students and the academics. However, it is hoped that the culture influence and academic transition framework presented in this study can benefit all of the stakeholders in intercultural and transnational education settings. After all, every university wants each of their students to succeed.

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