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Research on the Cultural Integration of International Students in Universities: A Perspective of Cross-Cultural Management

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Abstract- With the development of globalization, the number of international students in Chinese colleges will continue to grow, and the education of international students has gradually become an important part of the domestic higher education system. Facing the group of international students in China, its complicated cultural backgrounds and individual differences further increase the difficulty of school management. Therefore, colleges need to start from the perspective of cross-cultural management to strengthen the management of international students, improve and innovate the management system of domestic universities. In this case, schools can reduce the cultural anxiety of international students and improve the cross-cultural awareness of managers, as well as create a better campus environment. In a long run, schools can then create a good environment conducive to the reform, innovation, and development of domestic higher education, and promote the rapid and high-quality development of national education.

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I. Introduction

Since China adopted an opening-up policy and its active participation in economic globalization, the number of international students in China has witnessed a consistent increase. In 2017, China has become the world third-largest and Asia's largest destination country for foreign students studying abroad, attracting 489,200 international students from 204 countries and regions. It is estimated that the number of international students will exceed 500,000 in 2020[1].However, it's not easy for overseas students to fit in the local environment. While such a situation can help develop the cause of education in China, it also brings great management pressure to colleges.

II. Problems

The current situation of the cultural integration of international students is quite tricky. Considering the psychological conditions of international students, most of them are struggling with psychological changes such as loneliness, homesickness, and emptiness. As Oberg's culture shock theory deduced that people may be 'precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse (1954)', such a sense of unfamiliarity may further increase because of the language barrier, living habits, and moral standards. At this time, the impact of cultural differences will gradually become apparent. The first time a person living in a certain cultural environment enters another unfamiliar cultural environment, the loss of all the symbols and means of social communication that one is familiar with produces a feeling of being overwhelmed and apprehensive, and resulting in a psychological reaction of resisting the new culture. That is, when people living in a certain cultural environment try to understand or adapt to a new cultural group, they may experience feelings of helplessness, doubt, rejection, and even fear due to different cultural backgrounds, values and habits[2]. Thus, it would be very hard for some international students to open up to people from other cultures and to adapt to a new cultural environment.

Meanwhile, international students are also facing many problems in daily school life. One of the most common problems is their adjustment to life at Chinese college. There are differences in the thinking styles, personal habits, and moral concepts of different international students in China, which makes the school management even harder. For instance, the maladjustment to accommodation conditions has always been a major problem in school management. Whether it is on-campus accommodation or off-campus accommodation, the differences in religious beliefs and living habits of international students in different countries make school management continue to face new challenges. For international students living on campus, the international student dormitory is a gathering area for students from various countries. The huge cultural differences between them cause students with low adaptability to feel at a loss or even cause conflict between them, which brings lots of inconvenience to school management. For international students who live off campus, the lack of the school's jurisdiction and discipline may encourage their lazy living habits, leading to serious late school absenteeism. At the same time, the student's rented house may be in an area with a poor public security environment, which can be a huge safety hazard. In this case, it is difficult for the school to ensure the physical and mental health

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and safety of students. Thus, the school often fails to further improve the daily life management of international students, not only because it's difficult to detect their discomforts in life, but also because it relates to personal privacy and different living habits, which requires more detailed and personalized management.

III. Reasons

The reasons for such cultural integration issues of international students are as follows. The very first reason is the cultural differences between countries, especially that different people have great individual differences. When individuals come to an unfamiliar cultural environment, such differences will be further amplified. 'Acculturation is the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members. At the group level, it involves changes in social structures and institutions and in cultural practices' (Berry, 2005). Lucas is an international student from Turkey. He and Ming, a student from Shanghai, often study and play together. Once, Ming invited Lucas to the college canteen for lunch and ordered fried pork for Lucas. He also enthusiastically introduced and recommended this signature dish to Lucas. Unexpectedly, Lucas behaved very angry, and left the canteen on the spot, leaving Ming alone at a loss. From this case, we can see that differences in religious culture are one of the main reasons for this misunderstanding. Obviously, as a Muslim, Lucas cannot eat pork. However, Ming does not understand this cultural difference, and his kindness was misunderstood. Meanwhile, in an unfamiliar environment, international students from different cultures are more likely to face problems caused by cultural differences. For example, when international students who believe in Islam go to the cafeteria to eat, they will feel inconvenient to some extent. Due to differences in religious beliefs, Chinese universities rarely have dedicated Muslim cafeterias. There is no clear ingredient list for the meals in the canteens for international students' reference, and due to the language barrier of international students, it often happens that Muslim students eat meals with pork or do not have more suitable meals to choose, which seriously affects the daily life of them. It will also cause certain harm to their psychology. Thus, when it comes to the cultural integration of international students, it would not be an easy task for college management to take into account cultural and individual differences.

The lack of cross-cultural awareness is another cause of cultural integration problems. Cultural awareness means having a clear understanding of cultural identity and underlying biases[3]. Since different people are affected by various cultural environments, every individual has different cross-cultural competence that can help recognize cultural differences in a group and use them to enrich a situation rather than detract from it. Most college students and teachers are unfamiliar with the concept of cultural awareness and the uneven level of cross-cultural competence further obstructs effective communication between the school and international students. Thus, when it comes to a situation that requires enough cross-cultural awareness, it would be very hard for them to react to new and ambiguous situations without discomfort and to respond to others in non-judgmental ways. For instance, international student Mike and local student Jay have recently become friends, and they often study together and prepare for exam review together. One day, they were studying together in the library. Mike said he wanted to buy a cup of coffee. He asked Jay if he wanted to bring him a cup, but Jay refused and stayed in his seat to continue studying. However, when Mike came back, he found Jay was looking at his notes. He was very unhappy at the time, but he didn't say it immediately. Since then, he has never studied with Jay again. Jay also noticed this change, but didn't understand why[4]. In this case, it is easy to find that their lack of awareness of the different attitudes of personal privacy between Chinese and Western cultures is the decisive factor in causing this misunderstanding. Mike's attitude should be 'These are my own notes, my personal thing, and others shouldn't read it without my consent.' But Jay obviously has a different view: 'we often study together and are very good friends. The notes or other things between friends should be able to share with each other.' The opinions represented by them are also the views of Chinese and Western cultures on personal privacy. Chinese culture is a typical collectivistic society while a large number of international students may come from an individualistic culture. Influenced by the concept of individualism, people tend to emphasize the protection of individual personality and dignity. However, since Chinese people are more concerned about cooperation and dependence with others, some of their behaviors may seem too selfish and eccentric to their fellows. The misunderstanding between Mike and Jay also shows their level of cross-cultural adaptation. According to the concept of cross-cultural adaptation put forward by the anthropologist Redfield (1936), cross-cultural adaptation means the integration of different cultural groups, and the adaptation to this cultural integration phenomenon[5]. However, under the cross-cultural background, people will have a various understanding of the concept of 'acculturation/social positioning' because of the differences in language, traditional customs, and religions. According to John Berry's model of acculturation (1994) [6], there are four different attitudes: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. The individual will have different

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acceptance of their cultural identity and the host culture according to their internalized culture, their desire for social integration, and their willingness to take risks. Thus, when individuals don't have enough cultural awareness to understand different tricky situations caused by various factors such as different living environment, cultural background, and personal personality, it will definitely be obstacles for college managers to solving the integration problem of overseas students.

More importantly, managers of universities lack the awareness of cross-cultural management and have little knowledge about cross-cultural management strategies that are conducive to the administration of international students. Not only international students, but college manager and teaching faculty should try to understand and adapt to a different culture. The culture awareness of college managers will directly affect the mode and school decisions on the management of international students. At present, the management mode of most universities for international students is often simple and lacks personalized management. Due to the lack of awareness of cross-cultural management, college managers don't know how to apply relevant theories of cross-cultural management into practice. Meanwhile, the lack of unified training for relevant management personnel in colleges and universities also hinders the development of efficient college management. Therefore, many colleges and universities inevitably adopt a formalistic management mode, which has little effect on helping international students to integrate as soon as possible. Most of China's traditional higher education adopts standardized management methods. This management method has formed an inherent concept in people's minds and is difficult to change. Judging from the previous management model, we can find that college management usually appoints some teachers with weak professional level and fewer class hours to serve as managers. They often have not received systematic professional training, and they lack cross-cultural awareness and education service awareness. This approach can easily lead to irregular management models, making students, especially international students who are not familiar with the Chinese education model, in a passive state under such model management, affecting their physical and mental health to some extent.

IV. Solutions

In order to improve the efficiency and quality of international students' management, colleges need to figure out some solutions under the view of cross-cultural management. From the perspective of individuals, one needs to increase the cross-cultural sensitivity of international students, especially college managers by combining the cross-cultural theories mentioned above. Individuals should learn to change their attitudes toward unfamiliar cultures, trying to be more tolerant and open to different habits. For example, the most basic thing that both students and managers need to do is to improve their ability to show respect and positive regard for another person. Especially managers should act as mediators that can help international students adapt to the new environment as soon as possible. School managers should improve the ability of cross-cultural management from the following aspects: First, it should supervise whether the teaching courseware and teaching methods used by teachers are formulated according to the actual physical and mental development of international students, learning needs, and cultural background so that the cross-cultural awareness and communication ability of international students in China can be promoted. Second, managers need to play the role of "Internet +"technology in the management of overseas students[7]. School managers can search and organize resources through the Internet, to understand the learning and management needs of international students in China, and to build digital campus cultural exchange platform which allows international students to interact with managers and other students, strengthening the quality of cross-cultural management. For international students, one way to improve cross-cultural competence is to gain cultural background knowledge through language learning, so that they can understand Chinese culture by understanding Chinese language background and learn both culture and language more effectively since the two are intertwined. Through the learning of cross-cultural communication, students can understand their own culture, accept cultural differences, understand and respect different cultures, equip with the knowledge, skills, and values of cross-cultural communication and integrate the new environment as soon as possible.

In addition to the international student's own efforts, colleges need to play a supporting role as well. Not only the school leadership but also the college managers need to help organize some stimulating activities that students can experience the authenticity of language and culture directly. It's essential for college to make sure that international students can practice and use Chinese in activities to experience the strong charm of Chinese culture to achieve the purpose of cross-cultural communication, to help overseas students understand the similarities and differences between Chinese and their cultures, and to understand different life, diet, thinking, values, etc. College should provide international students with opportunities to experience the strong exotic customs, and enables them to experience the authenticity of language in real situations, so as to further cultivate the cross-cultural competence of international students and to avoid misunderstandings to the greatest extent. Taking a real

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case as an example, there are many international students from Africa in the university where the author is located, but the school rarely organizes relevant international student activities, and the lives of international students and local students seem to be separated. Sometimes I can see international students at school, but local students rarely take the initiative to communicate with them. Most of the international students also form their own small groups, and it seems that they only change a country to live almost the same life as their original way of life. Obviously, such a study abroad life is meaningless. Once international students close themselves and do not communicate with the outside world, then the school's plan to attract international students has obviously failed. Fortunately, in recent years, the school's leadership has rectified the management of international students and introduced a series of improvement measures, including the opening of an English corner for international students once a week. The purpose of this English corner is to enable international students to have friendly exchanges with local students. International students act as teachers in the English corner and chat with local students who want to practice English. This can promote exchanges between students on both sides and enable students to communicate. Understand each other's culture and have a more comprehensive understanding of each other, so that international students can jump out of their original circles in a subtle way, make new friends, and truly integrate into the campus. At the same time, local students can also understand the cultural differences of different countries, cultivate their cross-cultural awareness, adapt to the globalized society as soon as possible, and lay the foundation for future development.

The more important point is that the school should uphold the concept of equality for everyone in terms of policy and management, but it also needs to teach in accordance with the situation and individualize management to avoid unreasonable management policies. The preferential (privilege) policy of the universities for foreign students has a long history. On the one hand, this is an inevitable trend for colleges and universities to cooperate with each other in a globalized environment; on the other hand, in order to occupy higher rankings and get more money in various evaluations, colleges spare no effort to expand the enrollment of international students to. The former is an international obligation that China should undertake as a large developing country, and the latter is also an inevitable requirement for school development. As long as it is kept within reasonable limits, both reasons are acceptable. However, colleges and universities are often prone to going to extremes and adopting some unreasonable and unequal management policies. These policies will inevitably cause unfair problems. For example, differences in school treatment caused by foreign student policies, large gaps in the number of grants, daily assessments, and different accommodation standards will generate public opinion on campus and affect the relationship between foreign students and local students to a certain extent. At the same time, there are often news reports about international students' repeated violations of regulations, and they have adopted an indifferent or even provocative attitude towards the rules. For such international students in a state of cultural dissociation, the school must take tough measures and invest more energy in cultural integration. This kind of situation is often caused by the lack of communication between foreign students and the mainstream culture, and groups formed in a foreign cultural environment will conflict with the mainstream culture due to misunderstandings[8]. Such negative information and emotions are fermented within the group, which can easily lead to fierce confrontations and even extreme events. Thus, relevant departments need to take actions to further promote the management of the convergence of Chinese and foreign students, and severely deal with international students who violate regulations and disciplines. However, the way of international student management should be personalized as well. Schools should provide humanized help as much as possible within the scope of policies. For instance, individualized help should be provided to international students according to their psychological status and cultural adaptability, so that they can adapt to the school management system and integrate into the campus as soon as possible. With China's accession to the WTO, the development of education for international students must directly face international evaluation and international competition[9]. We should take internationalization as the basic direction, learn from the experience and practices of advanced countries in developing foreign student education, combine our own actual conditions, formulate long-term development goals, reform and optimize our management system and management methods.

V. Conclusion

To sum up everything that has been stated so far, the management of international students is facing problems in helping students maintain good psychological conditions and integrate their school life because of the cultural differences, lack of cross-cultural awareness, and the single management model. Thus, in the management of international students in China, college should pay attention to the mental health and life experience of international students, starting with teaching and management, and taking active measures to avoid the seriousness of cultural shock. At the same time, colleges and universities need to increase their attention to the integration of international students, increase the cross-cultural awareness of students and

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management personnel, and adopt corresponding management and education strategies for the specific performance of different students. What colleges and universities also need to do is to continuously improve the educational and teaching activities of international students. In order to strengthen their exchanges with Chinese students, the school should accept and encourage them to participate in club activities, social services, and English corners. In this case, school can do their best to help adjust the cultural adaptation status of international students. When formulating and implementing management policies, colleges also need to uphold the principles of equality, justice, and harmonious coexistence to seek common ground while reserving differences. It's essential for college managers to establish a sustainable management concept, strengthen the overall management of overseas students in China, and cultivate the correct awareness and ability of cross-cultural communication among overseas students. Only in this way can colleges create a rich and colorful study life with international students during their stay in China.

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