

Features of sociocultural adjustment of Chinese students studying in Russian universities

Características del ajuste sociocultural de los estudiantes chinos que estudian en universidades rusas

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ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this article is determining the sociocultural features of adjustment of Chinese students to study in Russian universities. The expansion of bilateral economic relationship between Russia and China has led to a growing interest of Chinese young people towards receiving higher education in Russian universities. Simplified procedure of admission of foreign students leads to complication of their cultural adjustment to a new sociocultural environment. The article presents the results of sociological survey of Chinese students studying in the technical university. It is concluded that the transition of a foreign student to a new society is accompanied by culture shock. Symptoms of culture shock and phases of cultural adjustment process are highlighted in the present article on the bases of K.Oberg methodology. According to U-curve cultural adjustment model proposed by

RESUMEN:

El propósito de este artículo es determinar las características socioculturales del ajuste de los estudiantes chinos para estudiar en las universidades rusas. La expansión de la relación económica bilateral entre Rusia y China ha llevado a un creciente interés de los jóvenes chinos hacia la educación superior en las universidades rusas. El procedimiento simplificado de admisión de estudiantes extranjeros conlleva a complicar su adaptación cultural a un nuevo entorno sociocultural. El artículo presenta los resultados de la encuesta sociológica de estudiantes chinos que estudian en la Universidad técnica. Se concluye que la transición de un estudiante extranjero a una nueva sociedad es acompañada por choque de la cultura. En el presente artículo se destacan los síntomas de choque cultural y fases del proceso de ajuste de la cultura en las bases de la metodología K. Oberg. Según el modelo de ajuste

Lysgaard S., the adapting person overcomes three main phases: initial adjustment, crisis state, and final adjustment. The analysis of the conducted survey has confirmed that adjustment to a new culture takes place according to the U-curve by Lysgaard. Determination of ways to solve the problem of foreign students' adjustment to study in Russian universities is associated by the author with the identification of sociocultural characteristics of a specific country. It is revealed that the peculiarities of adjustment of Chinese students to study in Russian universities include sociocultural, psychological, and didactic features. In this connection, it is necessary to determine the extent of the impact of these characteristics on the adjustment process of Chinese students.

Keywords: adjustment, adjustment of Chinese students, culture shock, sociocultural features.

cultural U-Curve propuesto por Lysgaard s., la persona que se adapta a las tres fases principales: ajuste inicial, estado de crisis y ajuste final. El análisis de la encuesta realizada ha confirmado que el ajuste a una nueva cultura tiene lugar de acuerdo a la curva U por Lysgaard. Determinación de las formas de resolver el problema del ajuste de los estudiantes extranjeros a estudiar en las universidades rusas está asociado por el autor con la identificación de las características socioculturales de un país específico. Se revela que las peculiaridades del ajuste de los estudiantes chinos para estudiar en las universidades rusas incluyen rasgos socioculturales, psicológicos y didácticos. A este respecto, es necesario determinar el alcance del impacto de estas características en el proceso de ajuste de los estudiantes chinos.

Palabras clave: ajuste, ajuste de estudiantes chinos, choque cultural, características socioculturales.

1. Introduction

Internationalization and globalization of economy and culture encourage intercultural and educational contacts of a wide range of different ethnic culture bearers. Today, the students are a significant part of them, and among them the greater part falls on educational migrants from China. For a significant number of countries the most prestigious higher education is the one received abroad. The first citizens of this state used to come to study in the Russian Federation since the late 40-s of XXth century. Therefore, university teachers, especially linguists, have gained some experience of working with them. Although despite this, there still are certain difficulties in working with this contingent of students.

Every Chinese student who comes to the Russian university for training is a citizen of the country with specific mentality, psychological state, a kind of the world perception, and the new sociocultural environment. This should be taken into account for the successful management of the educational process of Chinese students. Since joining the Russian university, they find themselves in an exceptionally unusual and unfamiliar linguistic, social, and national environment, to which they need to adjust. The difficulties of the adjustment process of Chinese students to the Russian environment and to studying in Russian universities require conducting comprehensive psychological and pedagogical research.

The more information concerning the national-cultural specificity of foreign students is available to teachers, the more successful will be their teaching activities, while students' familiarity with new language will help them to be more successful in their future profession. It also opens up wide opportunities to penetrate into another culture and consequently into a new world, which becomes available through new language. In line with this, knowledge about the national mentality, the characteristics of the ethnic culture and psychology of the Chinese people, as well as the place of this nation among the other peoples of the world, is of great interest to those, who introduces them into new culture and language environment.

2. The concept and essence of sociocultural adjustment

The definition of "cultural adjustment" can be found in the sociological encyclopedia, which defines this concept as the process of cultural adjustment of personality to the specific conditions of the cultural environment that determines the specific characteristics of cultural life (Osipov, 1998). It is cultural adjustment, which is associated with adaptation mechanisms, such as communication, values, norms, identity, traditions, folklore, religion, and family ties.

Social adjustment is the process and result of active adaptation of the individual to the conditions of a new or changed social environment through the harmonization of requirements and expectations of its participants. Social adjustment has two forms: active (characterized by active influence on social environment, and the desire to change it) and passive (determined by

the conformist perception of the conditions of social existence, a lack of desire to change, to adapt these conditions to their own standards, assessments, tools, and activities). In the course of social adjustment the person learns the moral norms and values of the immediate environment; the traditions and customs of family, ethnicity, professional and informal groups. Values play an extremely important role in a person's life, determining the way of his existence in the world and the ultimate development goals.

Definition of "sociocultural adjustment" is given by the researchers as the process and result of interaction, mutual adjustment, and mutual change of a person (or group), who enters (enter) into new sociocultural environment (Berdina, 2015; Krasnorutskaya, 2013). For better understanding of the "sociocultural adjustment" concept, it is expedient to describe the concept of "sociocultural environment". Researchers have substantiated their view on the understanding of the phenomenon of "sociocultural environment" as a combination of the "culture" and "sociality" concepts (Yuzhanina and Yuzhanin, 2009). The elements of sociocultural environment include traditions, norms and values of culture; the system of sociocultural exchange and bringing people to the sociocultural interference, created by the society, as well as the population's way of life and regulatory structure of society.

3. Sociocultural features of Chinese students

In recent years, the number of Chinese students wishing to study in Russia has increased almost by 40%. An important factor in the selection of Russian universities by Chinese students is tuition fee, which in comparison with the UK or the USA is pretty low. In addition, for admission to the UK or the USA universities, students must take the exam in English in pretty harsh conditions, while the procedure for admission to Russian universities for foreign students is almost formal. However, this leads to the fact that Chinese students, who almost do not speak Russian, since the first day of their stay at the Russian university fall into a certain language vacuum and experience a culture shock. Despite the interest in receiving higher education in Russia, Chinese students face lots of complications in studying and life, caused by foreign linguistic and sociocultural environment (Butenko, 2008).

We believe that it is advisable to start studying the problem with the analysis of studies devoted to sociocultural characteristics of Chinese students that affect the success of their adjustment to training in Russian universities. Identifying characteristics affecting the adjustment of Chinese students to new sociocultural and pedagogical conditions as well as understanding the nature of these features will allow teachers to more successfully interact with Chinese students, create conditions for their effective integration into the cultural and educational environment of the university, and to work successfully in their chosen professions.

The problem of adjustment of the individual to the new environment is primarily a problem that occurs due to cultural differences. The main feature of Chinese culture lies in its belonging to the so-called "collectivist" type, where the core values are the adherence to tradition, the cult of obedience and duty contributing to the preservation of group unity and the interdependence of group members (Sarakaev, 1996). However, being in an alien environment, members of the collectivist type of culture are experiencing difficulties, helplessness, and disorientation. Therefore, according to the research by N. Trofimova, Chinese students take care about their fellow countrymen, who have recently arrived for training that facilitates their cultural adaptation (Trofimova, 2004).

It should be noted that Russian culture also belongs to the collectivist type of culture, and this could serve the basis for finding similarities in the Russian and Chinese cultures. However, Russia and China are the two largely opposite types of culture. This circumstance causes many complications, which lead to frustration, dissatisfaction of Chinese students with the new environment and university, doldrum, and limited social communication with Russian students.

The system of higher education in China (Education system in China, 2010) is characterized by significant differences. In China, there are two types of universities. First type includes technical

universities with a large number of natural science and technical faculties, as well as technical universities of the same profile. General universities, which have faculties in the humanities and natural sciences, are the second type of Chinese higher education institutions.

In Chinese universities students are enrolled based on the results of entrance exams. The shortage of grade points required by the most prestigious universities in China leads many Chinese students to study in Russia. This is evidenced by the results of the study conducted by Ding Xin (2009), according to which 74% of Chinese students believe that it is easier to join a good university in Russia than at home. However, in recent years, Russian universities are increasingly chosen because of good teaching of natural sciences. With regard to philological and artistic training in Russia, their high level is attracting Chinese young people, who wish to obtain professional knowledge in these areas.

It should be noted that in the Chinese high school considerable attention is paid to the mechanical memorization of large amounts of information. Academic performance rating is carried out mainly in written form through a widespread practice of testing. That is why Chinese students take written exams better, have proficient skills in written tests, and have difficulty in oral interviews and oral exams (Forbush and Foucault-Welles, 2016), especially when the latter ones require knowledge of foreign language.

For Chinese students, assessment of the training results at the end of a semester that is common in Russian universities seems quite strange. In Chinese universities the results of the sessions are open, since they consist in ranking of students, which is announced at the general meeting. In Russia, grades are recorded in the examination record list as well as in student's grade book. Thus, the results can be announced only at the wish of the student. According to the remarks of Chinese students, such a system does not foster a sense of responsibility for learning outcomes that is contrary to the Chinese culture attitudes (Ya Qiang, 2005).

Modes of study used in Russian universities seem new for Chinese students. Russian teachers (especially philologists and art historians) conduct classes in the form of conversation, trying to build a meaningful dialogue with each student and bring the student to the subject of discussion. As noted by Chinese researchers, it is at this time that complications arise, since discourse always has a culturological conditioning (Pak, 2008).

In addition, in a traditional Chinese school, students never answer "no" to the teacher's question whether they understand the material, even if they do have difficulties in learning new material. Therefore, when working with Chinese students it is always necessary to put indirect questions about the correct understanding of material studied in class.

At that, for Chinese students it is important to get from the teacher not so much approval, as the focus on the mistakes made. Chinese students are accustomed to the fact that the teacher needs to understand the complexities that arise in their training, as well as worries about the student as a person. It is generally associated with features of the relationship between teachers and students (pupils) in China, where children are taught to respect the teacher, because it is believed that the teacher is always right, so they never contradict him. And therefore tutoring sessions conducted in the form of discussions in the Russian universities, which of course can lead to disputes between teacher and student, cause, as noted by I. Grebennikova, a lot of stress in Chinese students (Grebennikova, 2010).

The Chinese educational system is characterized by close interpersonal relationship between the teacher and the student (pupil). Every spare moment is used to establish such an informal relationship. Teachers are invited at home, and in fact are becoming members of the family. During long breaks, teachers together with the students have a meal, talk together, and solve important issues. In Russia, where school also implies respect for the teacher, the relationship between student and teacher is characterized by the considerable remoteness, joint lunch or dinner is inadmissible, while an invitation on the part of the student can be seen as an allusion to good grades.

Thus, Chinese students lack such a caring relationship, especially in the first year of study,

when there are no sustainable reasons for the training, no training skills in a new environment, no built relationships with the student group, and the like. As evidenced by the studies of Li Xueyuan, Chinese students are quite worried about the lack of preparedness for study at the Russian universities due to the difference of the training forms and methods inherent in the Russian universities, as well as possibility to be misunderstood by the teacher, and receive a failing grade in a certain discipline (Li Xueyuan, 2009). According to the researcher, the successful adjustment of Chinese students to learning in Russia depends on their ability to create the valuable relation to future profession in terms of the chosen university, mastering new organization forms and methods of training in higher education institution, and formation of professional consciousness.

4. Sociocultural adjustment and culture shock

Entering of a foreign student into a new society and getting to know new culture could cause cultural shock, i.e. unpleasant feelings when entering into a new society. In addition, this is accompanied by the loss of communication with friends and loss of previous status, rejection, discomfort when comprehending cultural differences, as well as the confusion in values and personal identity (Oberg 1954; Stefanenko 1999).

The term "culture shock" was introduced into scientific circulation in 1954 by the anthropologist K. Oberg, who suggested that the entry into the new cultural environment may lead to disorientation of a person. This process consists of the following phases:

Phase 1 is called the "honeymoon" since it is characterized by euphoria, enthusiasm, and emotional uplift. This phase lasts from several days/weeks to six months;

Phase 2 is characterized by hostile and aggressive attitude to "foreign" country, criticizing, and stereotype-based thinking. The person faces problems. The inhabitants of the new culture environment seem to be indifferent to the problems of the individual, which is experiencing a crisis state;

Phase 3 is called "recovery" because it is characterized by the overcoming of the crisis state by various methods, including a sense of humor;

Phase 4 is called "adjustment" and is characterized by the adoption of the customs and habits of the new country, by the fading sense of alarm, the individual is getting used to the traditions of the country, national food and drinks (Oberg, 1954).

According to S. Lysgaard, the adjustment process takes place according to the U-curve (Lysgaard, 1955). The scientist underlines that when considering the levels of adjustment and well-being of a person, who is temporarily in another country, in terms of time parameters, the U-curve shows that at first the satisfaction and well-being gradually decline, however, then start to grow again. In other words, migrants during adjustment to new environment undergo three phases: the first phase is characterized by enthusiasm and high spirits, the second phase is characterized by frustration, depression and embarrassment (in fact "culture shock"), while in the third phase these sensations turn into confidence and pleasure.

5. Methodology for studying the adjustment problems of Chinese students

To identify the problems of adjustment of Chinese students to the educational process at the university we have conducted their sociological survey.

The study involved 200 Chinese students, of which 11% were the first-year students, 15% - the second-year students, 8% - the third-year students, 50% - the fourth-year students, and 16% - the fifth-year ones.

The questions were aimed at studying the problems faced by Chinese students during the training.

6. Research outcomes of the adjustment problems of Chinese students

By studying the data obtained, we revealed that the language barrier is the main problem. Thus, 40% of respondents, who came to study in the Russian Federation, had no preliminary language training, 50% of respondents confirmed that at the time of arrival in the country they could read with the dictionary, though did not perceive oral speech, and only 10% of students were fluent in the Russian language. This situation suggests that a significant number of Chinese students (about 50%) did not plan in advance arrival to Russia. Among those students, who planned to study abroad, about 85% had previously consulted with experts, who in fact were their relatives and countrymen, who previously studied in Russian universities. Only 15% of Chinese students independently sought information about the selected university, the country, and its culture.

Among the objective factors that impede the adjustment of Chinese students to the sociocultural environment of modern Russian society, are factors such as cultural heterogeneity of the Russian society and the ambiguity or the ambivalence of the attitude towards citizens of other countries and cultures. The success in individual adjustment of foreign student depends on racial and national tolerance. Thus, 30% of the students often face this problem in public transport, 13% noted that their rights have been violated in the service sector, while 3% stated the existence of the same problem within the walls of the higher education institution.

An important role in social and cultural adjustment is played by adjustment agents, who help the individual to master the situation. For Chinese students such agents are the university teachers, the staff of the student academic group, and the fellow nationals. The Chinese students noted that they got significant assistance and support from fellow-countrymen (68%), university teachers (20%), roommates (10%), and students of the academic group (10%).

Living conditions of Chinese students significantly influence the success of adjustment to the new environment. Getting used to new food is a problem for Chinese students. Thus, the vast majority of the first-year and second-year students (25%) have meals in the university canteen. Those respondents who used to live in city during 3 years or more cook meals themselves (75%), which is apparently is associated with the self-sufficiency in conducting housekeeping.

With regard to the overall assessment of adjustment to the dormitory living conditions, it should be noted that about 50% of the first-year and second-year students, as well as 80% of the upper-years students consider living conditions at dormitory accommodation quite acceptable. Thus, over time, most Chinese students successfully adjust to the life in a dormitory.

The majority of interviewed Chinese students indicate a certain level of the Russian language proficiency for everyday communication, though insufficient for the educational process at the university. Language understanding problems led to difficulties in the perception of content of the lecture that was evidenced by 40% of Chinese students. Besides, students noted the difficulty when working with scientific material and course books (30%) as well as oral responses in class (20%) that affected the acquisition of professional knowledge, abilities, and skills. To improve learning process, Chinese students offered increasing the number of classroom hours to study the Russian language (25%).

Those respondents, who noted that they used to live in the city for more than 3 years (78.5%), testified about the comfortable conditions of being in another country, the attractiveness of new nature and culture. Students, who have just arrived to study in Russia, were not satisfied with the housing and living conditions, felt the negative attitude of others, they faced difficulties in communicating with others (36.5%), and the like. Thus, the above confirms the fact that the adjustment to the new sociocultural environment occurs in accordance with the U- curve.

7. Features of sociocultural adjustment of the first-year Chinese students

The process of adjustment of Chinese students is taking place throughout the whole period of their study at the university, though especially tough it is in the first year of education, i.e. during the study at the faculty of pre-university training (FPT). Therefore, the investigation of the adjustment process and its successful organization will contribute to more rapid involvement of Chinese students into the student environment, as well as facilitate the process of their training and education. One of the necessary conditions for quality learning of scientific disciplines at the FPT is the accounting for the mentality, psychological state and other characteristics of the Chinese national consciousness, because in addition to the typical difficulties, such as substantive, linguistic, methodological, and organizational problems, Chinese students face certain psychological problems. Accounting, forecasting, and planning these problems allow to objectively formulate and vary training goals to develop strategies for addressing them.

Research conducted by university teachers and psychologists (Antonov, 1998; Dovgodko, 2010) indicates the fact that the socio-psychological adjustment process of Chinese students studying at FPT can be divided into several phases specified in Table 1.

Table 1
Adjustment phases of the first-year foreign students at the university

The adjustment phases	Key features
Assessment of learning opportunities and prospects	Future student, being at home, chooses the country and the language of study, as well as evaluates learning opportunities at the selected higher education institution, paying a close heed to the advice of parents, friends, and acquaintances.
Climatic phase	Intending student determines the opportunity of living in the new country, taking into account psychophysiological condition of the organism.
Waiting phase	Intending student is in a state of emotional anticipation of the meeting with the new country, city, and university.
Entering into a new environment	The student enters into new and unfamiliar society, receives information about rules of conduct and life, starts contacting members of the society, and evaluates his capabilities for further stay in the new country.
Phase of direct involvement in training activities	The student faces the first problems of language, social, and household nature. He gets a sense of mismatch between expectations and reality that can lead to a stress condition.
Doldrum phase	After the first few days (or weeks) of staying in a foreign country all students experience mental disorders of various degrees manifested in depressed mood,

	self-esteem, pessimistic view on everything that happens, and for the future.
Mental equilibrium phase	In case of overcoming dissatisfaction in relation to different types of activities, changes of the life stereotypes, the student begins to experience gradually a state of stability and mental equilibrium.

Adjustment of Chinese students to the Russian reality is a complex process that can be managed and accelerated. This process involves many aspects. Among them the most complex, in our opinion, are the adjustment to new sociocultural environment, new educational system, new language of communication, and the multinational character of the student group.

The success in the adjustment of Chinese students to the new environment depends on subjective factors such as the adaptability (adjustment ability) of the individual (Ivanov, 1993) that is congenital and acquired ability of the individual to adapt, or the ability to adjust to any life variety. The basis of innate adaptability is the temperament, emotions, body build, level of intelligence, appearance, physical condition of the body, and the like. One can distinguish between high, medium and low adjusted individuals. The level of adaptability depends on education, training, living conditions and lifestyle, and is largely determined by the personal qualities of the individual, as well as adjustment measures.

The adjustment ability of Chinese students includes three main types: 1) physiological adaptability (to climate, ecosystem of the region, food, water, etc); 2) psychological adaptability (adjustment to new lifestyle, to a changed life situation, etc); 3) social adaptability (perception of new values, communication, reorientation, etc.).

A special factor, to which Chinese students studying at FPT must adapt, is the learning process, because learning itself is the main purpose of their arrival to the Russian university. Adjustment of Chinese students to the educational environment represents a multifactor process of their entering, development, and formation in the educational environment of the university. The adjustment of Chinese students to the higher education institution at the phase of pre-university training includes the adjustment to new pedagogical system, which consists of information and ideological component (teaching forms, and methods of organizational and educational work) and educational and psychological component (student group, its socio-psychological climate, the academic performance rating, and self-training). The adjustment is influenced by certain expectations on the part of both the teachers at the FPT, and the students themselves. Note that the biggest challenge in adjustment of Chinese students to the educational process is their inadequate level of communicative competence that hampers the perception, comprehension, and reproduction of scientific information.

The social environment into which a foreign citizen enters represents a combination of social conditions, circumstances, and situations, which affect his behavior. In the numerous psychopedagogical studies dealing with the behavior of Chinese students, scientists consider the mentioned environment at the macrolevel (new country, city, living standards) and microlevel (microenvironment, which is limited by the specificity of the educational process and the place of residence). The FPT is a kind of community (social medium) with its own integrated structure and special socio-pedagogical characteristics.

Sociocultural adjustment of Chinese students takes place both during training activities and extracurricular activities. The latter, as the researchers note, significantly accelerate the adjustment process, forming the language and sociocultural competence (Krivtsov, 2011). Therefore, it is advisable to organize for Chinese students visits to museums (at the university or in the city), field trips to cultural and historical places of Russia, to conduct themed nights, sports competitions, concerts, scientific conferences, academic competitions in various disciplines, and the like.

Adjustment agents play an important role in the course of Chinese students' adjustment, since they help students to obtain the required information, master new social roles, establish contacts with others, and the like. For Chinese students, such agents are compatriots having resided or studied in Russia for several years, as well as the Dean's office for work with foreign students, teachers at the FPT, members of the student group, etc.

8. Conclusion

For Chinese students, who arrived to Russia for receiving higher education, adjustment problems are related to their sociocultural and psychological peculiarities, as well as originality of previous experience in educational activities. Determination of the influencing efficiency of these factors will help to better organize the adjustment process of Chinese students to the new educational environment.

For successful adjustment of Chinese students to the educational environment, it is necessary to organize interpersonal interaction and ensure mutual understanding between teachers and students, junior students and the upper-year students, fellow students, who are citizens of different countries and bearers of different cultures.

Adjustment of Chinese students to the Russian educational environment as a multifaceted and lengthy process covers all areas of their life. The most difficult adjustment period occurs within the first year of study. The problems that are faced by Chinese students may be objective (due to new style of learning, communication, and interaction) and subjective.

Thus, further interaction of Chinese students with the intellectual and sociocultural environment of the University largely depends on success of their adjustment process. The acceleration of the adjustment process promotes stable emotional and physical condition of Chinese students improving the assimilation of new knowledge, the formation of readiness to study in Russian universities, the comprehension of the significance of the future profession, the formation of new personality traits, as well as mastering of new social roles and future social status. In other words, scientifically grounded process of adjustment of Chinese students to the educational activities in the Russian sociocultural environment should become a part of the educational policy. This will contribute to the improvement of the quality of both propaedeutic and vocational education.

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