



Cross Border Education and Cross-Cultural Opportunities: Building Friendship Amongst Chinese International Students and U.S. Domestic Students

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The year 2020 has been a turbulent and challenging year for everyone in education globally. While teachers and administrators of American schools are working hard to find new pedagogical approaches to teaching as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Chinese international students have found themselves caught in transit. When the COVID-19 outbreak started and schools switched to online teaching options, these international students could not simply go home. Though some decided to board international planes and endure the stressful flights home, they were timorous and distressed about the future of their education and many wondered how they would complete their degrees.

In many cases, these students were not left alone to manage the onset of challenges brought on by COVID-19. Administrators of American colleges sought solutions to ensure the well-being of these Chinese international students and to assist with their transition to their homes and their families. In order to plan for the continuity of global education for the cross-border students, U.S. higher education institutions continued their recruitment of new international students for Fall 2020, even during COVID-19, and with the introduction of national border restrictions. However, according to IIE's COVID-19 snapshot survey, which surveyed 520 institutions, only about a quarter (26%), indicated that their international student's application data for the 2020/21 academic year remain the same when compared to the previous year. Over 50% of these institutions noted that their application numbers were lower compared to previous years (Martel, 2020). In particular, 76% of the 234 U.S. institutions from 43 states, which hosted 47% of the total population of Chinese international students in the United States, indicated in the survey that their recruitment of the future Chinese students has been affected, cancelled, or postponed as a result of COVID-19's impact.

In the same report issued by the Institute of International Education (IIE), most institutions also reported experiencing challenges with virtual enrollment, including concerns about decreases in enrollment, less student engagement with faculty and peers, and lack of access or inability to attend online classes. Foreseeing the long-term challenges of virtual enrollment for international students, institutions reported the following changes amidst the virtual environment: decrease in enrollment (75%), decrease in student engagement with faculty and peers (74%), inability to access online courses (68%), adapting the course schedule to different time zones (62%), inability to access student services and support on campus (59%), and increase in withdrawals (48%) (Martel, 2020).

In the past ten years, the increased numbers of Chinese international students have noticeably changed the demographic on many American campuses. Although COVID-19 has put a temporary halt on recruitment in 2020, most institutions expect to resume their recruitment of Chinese international students to the U.S. education system. This report studied the friendship initiators and barriers among Chinese international students and U.S. domestic students through their social interactions. Currently, the COVID-19 pandemic presents to all international students, and U.S. domestic students, an online learning environment lacking actual in-person social interactions. Perhaps this situation serves as a reminder of the purpose of physical "cross-border" global education and highlights the significance of cross-cultural connections. When Chinese international students travel abroad to pursue post-secondary education, their social interactions with domestic students are essential to learning more about themselves and about their counterparts; these are valuable experiences for those seeking a global education. As we recognize the importance of cross-cultural communication among Chinese international students and U.S. domestic students, we hope to identify these factors and help bring the cross-cultural social interaction to fruition in the post-COVID era.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Celia Liu holds an interdisciplinary background and a wide range of experiences from the business sector of U.S. public accounting firms, to the educational institutions in U.S. higher education environment, community language schools, and various non-profit organizations involving the Asian American community broadly.

She received her Ed.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. She also holds an M.B.A. in Public Accounting and an M.S. in Taxation from Fordham University's Graduate School of Business, and an MAT from Rutgers University. She joined the College of New Jersey (TCNJ) in 2010, teaching Chinese language and philosophy courses, accounting courses for TCNJ Business School, Rutgers Business School's MBA program, and international transition courses for international students at Rutgers Business School. Celia is frequently invited to conduct educational workshops on issues related to cross-cultural communication and topics about international education regularly. She is the founder of Cross-Cultural Consulting, LLC, and the educational advisor for The Pacific Education, Advocacy, Research, and Learning Institute of New York (PEARL Institute), and Women in Front Institute (WIF), a global coalition which encourages Asian women to thrive at science, business, education and political fields. Her research interests focus on cross-cultural communication, Chinese international students' assimilation and adaptation, and the globalization of U.S. higher education. Celia has maintained extensive involvement with the community-based schools since 1997.

As a dedicated advocate for the Asian American citizens' community involvement, Celia Liu actively assisted with municipal and board of education campaigns for many years in her local community, Edison, New Jersey.

OVERVIEW AND RESEARCH METHOD

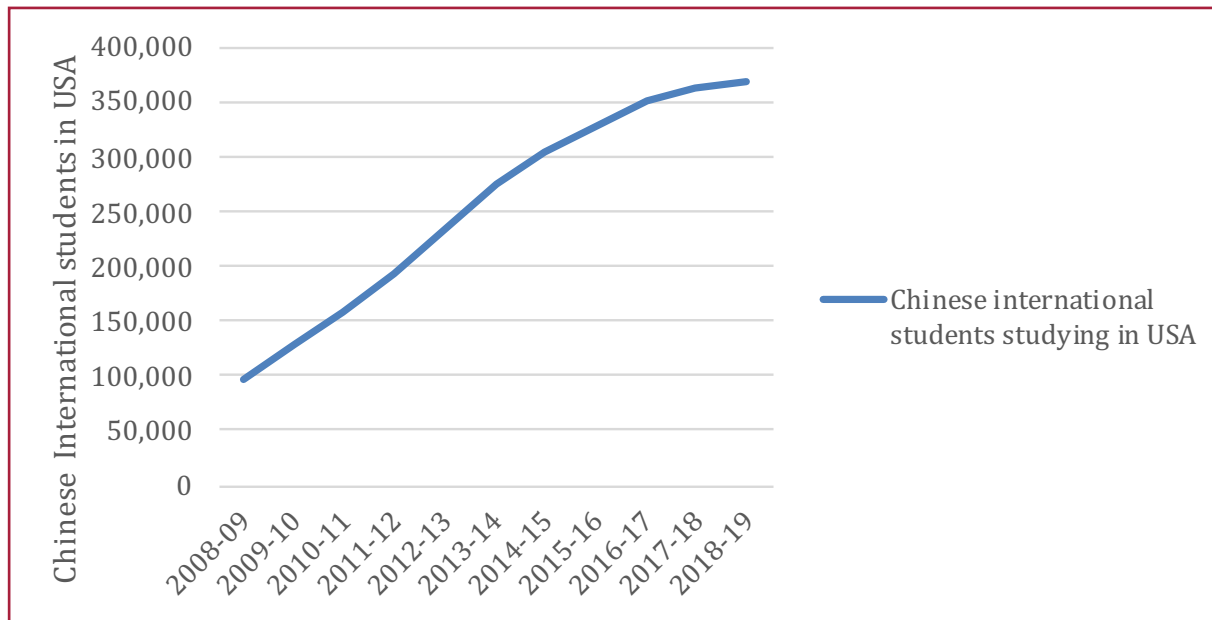
In the past 10 years, the number of Chinese international students studying in U.S. higher education institutions (see Figure 1 and Figure 2) has grown exponentially (nearly quadrupled), from 98,235 in 2008-2009 to 369,548 in 2018-2019¹. However, Chinese international students often report assimilation difficulty and tend to stay in homogenous social groups within the Chinese international students' circle. In the past five years, since 2016 to 2019 the increase of Chinese international students has declined, from two-digit increases (2008 to 2016) to only single digit (see Figure 1). In 2019, the number of Chinese international students only increased from the previous year by 1.7% in the U.S., however in the same year, higher education institutions in Australia hosted 1.7 million² Chinese international students (an increase of 7.6% from 2018).

In this qualitative research, I performed an investigation of the cross-cultural social interactions among two groups of students: Chinese international students and the U.S. domestic students. Titled "Building Friendship Amongst Chinese International Students and U.S. Domestic Students" this study illustrates how cross-cultural friendship among domestic students and international students can be mutually beneficial and enhance the students' educational experience campus wide. The concept of global friendship can help the world reduce conflict and achieve cross-cultural interconnectedness.

This research involved two phases of in-depth personal interviews. I conducted the first phase of interviews among equal numbers of U.S. domestic students and Chinese international students at U.S. higher education institutes. Chinese international students in this study refers to those who had their K-12 education in China and are currently enrolled in U.S. undergraduate programs. The U.S. domestic students in this study refers to those who had their K-12 study in the U.S. and are currently enrolled in U.S. undergraduate programs. The social interactions and personal experiences were explored and collected of both groups of students in three different settings—classrooms, residence halls, and student activity organizations.

FIGURE 1: THE NUMBERS OF CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS STUDYING IN USA

10 year increase	2008-09	2018-19
276%	98,235	369,548

FIGURE 2: CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE USA

Data Source: Open Doors Data: <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Places-of-Origin/Leading-Places-of-Origin/2011-12>

The second phase of interviews involved faculty, instructors, administrators at residence halls, student life/activities departments, and psychologists at offices of Counseling and Psychological Services.

This research applied an inductive analysis approach to establish clear links between the evaluation and the findings. The investigation led to the development of a theory about the underlying structure of the experiences determining the “initiators” that help develop friendships and the “barriers” that hinder friendship between international students and domestic students.

THE BARRIERS OF GLOBAL CROSS-CULTURAL FRIENDSHIP

The investigation of the social interaction between Chinese international students and U.S. domestic students indicated that the two groups inherently display a distance larger than which among the individuals within their own groups. This barrier could be explained with the foreigners’ social distance described in American sociologist Bogardus’ social-distance scale.

The Social Distance theory described by American Sociologist, Emory E. Bogardus, is very helpful in explaining why visitors to a country (sojourners) are naturally distant, unfamiliar with and less related to American students. Applying Bogardus’ social distance theory, we can try to reduce the social distance by encouraging students to be “co-workers” by putting the two groups together to work with one another or to be

“neighbors” by arranging them to become roommates in their resident halls.

In addition to the social distance, the interviews with Chinese international students and the U.S. domestic students revealed many possessed pre-existing stereotypes about the other group. For example, some common stereotypes include generalizations of financial status – Chinese students are too rich, or nationalism – American students are xenophobic, etc.,

It is important to note that this research discovered that the stereotypes exist in both directions. Not only do domestic students have pre-existing generalizations toward Chinese international students, but also international students hold stereotypes toward domestic students as well, which sometimes prevents them from reaching out to form friendships with domestic students.

Besides the social distance and the pre-existing stereotypes as the predominant “barriers” to friendship among international students and domestic students, the third customary barrier for friendship is related to the language adjustment or personal lifestyle preferences which reflect the differences in culture and social practices. They often found themselves unfamiliar with each other’s interests or hobbies as icebreakers to initiate the friendship. Moreover, the lack of shared future plans or common career outlooks as connectors for maintaining the friendship further.

Barriers:

- Pre-existing stereotypes or prejudice (Robert Park's race relation cycle)³
- Foreigners' social distance (Bogardus' social-distance scale)⁴
- The differences in culture and social practices, as well as the lack of shared common interests



Emory S. Bogardus
(1882 -1973)
*Bogardus Social
Distance Scale*



Robert E. Park -
(1864 - 1944)
Marginal Man Theory

THE INITIATORS OF GLOBAL CROSS-CULTURAL FRIENDSHIP

Conversely, the *initiators* of friendship are often found when a student who understands the cultures of both groups initiates the connections. I compared this connector with the “marginal man” in American Sociologist, Robert E. Park’s study. Such connector usually demonstrates the characteristics of cultural understanding of both groups – cultural hybrid. For instance, either a U.S. domestic student who had study-abroad experiences or who was studying the Chinese language. These American students who had experiences studying abroad developed an empathy toward Chinese international students. Due to this shared experience (or equal status), they understand how challenging it is to speak and to study in a foreign language, hence extending their help for Chinese students in an effort to connect them with U.S. domestic students’.

The finding of friendship initiators leads us to revisit the “marginal man” model developed by American sociologist, Robert E. Park. The “marginal man” (or cultural hybrid) is someone living and sharing intimately in the cultural life of two distinct groups of peoples. “The marginal man is the key personality in the contacts of cultures... He is the crucible of cultural fusion.” “It is in the mind of the marginal man—where the changes and fusions of culture are going on—that we can best study the processes of civilization and of progress.” (Park, 1928) Though the marginal man model in Park’s study was meant to explain the migration in different cultures, it was detected that individuals with understanding of both cultures can act as the “crucible of cultural fusion”

in the social interactions among the U.S. domestic students and Chinese international students.

Initiators:

- Contacts and connection joined by a *Marginal Man*
- Curricular design to increase same status and shared experiences
- Promote study abroad opportunity for U.S. domestic students

Areas to increase the cross-cultural interactions effectively on campus, include within students’ organizations, classrooms, the residence halls and the dining halls.

The initiator of friendship occurs when the two groups of students encounter a common interest or activities. Students who work together with a common interest, for example: students’ organizations, team projects and campus events, often develop a comradeship through the compassion for the shared activity. Frequent negotiations and cooperation with the shared activity provide the opportunity to gain further interpersonal trust, empathy and compassion among Chinese international students and domestic students. A research performed identified that Chinese international students are very willing to create students’ activities and cultural events to help provide intercultural learning opportunities in American universities and colleges (Breuning, 2007). Research also discovered that international students from Asia spent significantly less time in the physical activities on campus (Yoh, Yang & Gordon, 2008). This study findings provided advisors, campus recreation staff, and health-related professionals on campus with recommendations that can be used to best understand the level of physical activity participation among international students and to promote a more physically active lifestyle among the population.

Cross-cultural curriculum, such as foreign language courses, global engagement or exchange programs often initiate the international connections through college educational opportunities and curricular design. Additionally, in the efforts to offer assistance to international students for their initial adjustments to the U.S. environment, some institutions implement “transition course credits” requirements for international students. These courses are designed to assist Chinese international students by familiarizing them with the American culture and in an effort to accelerate their adjustment to the American environment. Institutions could incorporate the teaching of global connections through these seminar courses and invite domestic students to join and peer-learn with these international

students. These transition course credits and other liberal education courses can infuse topics and activities to promote empathy, humanity, cross-cultural communication, and global civility. These learning opportunities could be mutually beneficial for domestic students and international students.

Increased contact and shared experiences are evidenced as successful cross-cultural friendship initiators. For example, sharing residence halls as roommates, same as participating with student-life activities, creates ample opportunities for our students to interact with those from countries outside of America. A survey study indicated that pairing international students and domestic students as roommates, preferably with an American upper classmate, offered social support for international students to further develop relationships with American students (Tolman, 2017). This social support significantly enhanced their campus experience and even has a positive correlation with their English language skill, their academic success, and their social relationship with the American students.

Additionally, the U.S. domestic students in my study, who studied abroad shared that they empathized with the difficulty in adjustment experienced by Chinese international students. The increased intercultural empathy and compassion toward the international students I observed in my study coincided with a survey study issued by The Institute for the International Education of Students (IES). Data from more than 3,400 survey respondents revealed that 90% of these students expressed that the study abroad experiences influenced them to seek a greater diversity of friends (Dwyer & Peters, 2004).

COLLECTIVE EFFORTS TO BUILD A “GLOBAL” VILLAGE

Finally, this research also discovered many positive signs about the development of cross-cultural social interaction and how it can lead to mutual beneficial opportunities to improve the international relations with “global friendship.” With the number of international students (1,095,299) representing 5.5% of the total student numbers in the U.S. higher education (19,828,000) environment⁵ in 2019-2020, one in every 20 college students on U.S. campuses could be an international student. Given the increasing proportion of international students on college campuses, institutions should seek to increase the opportunities to offer cross-cultural training and to promote multicultural awareness within their campus communities.

Faculty and administrators participating in this research expressed their optimism about the development of global friendships among younger generations. Though we clearly see many barriers initially for the cross-cultural interactions, the internationalization in the higher education environment, ultimately is our best opportunity to promote diplomacy while these students, the future world leaders, are learning side-by-side in our U.S. higher education campuses.

The success of globalization in the higher education campus requires the collective efforts of the administration and the faculty to advocate for the benefits of intercultural learning and practices. Institutions should start to recognize the challenges related to cross-cultural communication among domestic students and Chinese international students and aim to identify





solutions collectively.

Upon recognizing the underlying challenges of the cross-cultural interactions among Chinese international students and the U.S. domestic students, the faculty and the administrators from the student affairs offices, global engagement offices, residence and dining halls, and student advisors should collaboratively promote and advocate:

- an inclusive campus climate that explicitly welcomes international participants;
- a world-ready classroom with global interconnectedness curriculum;
- a concept of cross-national global friendship as a part of 21st-century education.

POST COVID-19 CHALLENGES

Finally, under the current tensions globally amidst the Coronavirus pandemic, U.S. government imposed the temporary ban of international travel and entry since January 2020. The U.S. Department of State announced the temporary pause of all international exchange programs due to COVID-19 on March 12, 2020⁶. While the entire world is facing a global health crisis, Chinese international students face another stigma due to the origin of the COVID-19 virus.

On July 6th, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued a directive which ordered all international students to leave the U.S. if the courses they are taking in American schools are offered remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. ICE determined that international students do not have a reason to stay in the U.S. if American institutions they are enrolled in only offer online courses. They also indicated that if the schools are not holding face-to-face courses,

international students would have additional mobility to find illegal part-time jobs, or to travel to anywhere in the U.S. instead of on the designated campus sites which could create a security concern. Although this directive was soon rescinded on July 14, in response to lawsuits filed by Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, as well as other lawsuits filed by many other universities and state governments, this disturbing threat stirred up heated discussion and raised serious concern about the treatment of international students in the U.S. from legal and educational perspectives. The distrust sent by the July 6th directive certainly further alienated international students in America. This decision informed international students that their holistic learning experience is not equitable to the experiences of domestic students. We encourage our students to be involved in the community and to learn not only the knowledge in the textbook, but also through real-life experiences. During the years of an international student pursuing education in the U.S., they should be cared and treated equally to a domestic student. The American government or institutions of higher education will not be fully engaged with true globalization until they realize the educational obligation for these learners of the global community.

With the current escalated tension and deteriorative diplomatic relationship between the U.S. government and the government under the Chinese Communist Party, it is increasingly difficult for Chinese international students who are studying in America to not sense the pressure or the stigma. The future of these international students' educational path is covered with uncertainty and unsettling emotions. Will the COVID-19 pandemic leave permanent damage on students' mobility globally? How will U.S. higher education continue to promote globalization and a new 21st-century worldview post



COVID-19 pandemic? Will U.S. institutions of higher education continue to welcome Chinese international students to their campus and also encourage more American students to study abroad? The cross-cultural interactions and cross-border education requires not only the active involvement and participation of international students and domestic students, but also, requires the vision and advocacy of the faculty and administrators from all levels within the institution and the U.S. government. After this pandemic is resolved, U.S. higher educational institutions, more than ever, need to bring global cooperation and competitiveness in preparing both their domestic and international students to work together and to become the world's future leaders.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE RESEARCH:

- In the 2018-2019 academic year, the number of international students in the United States was 1,095,299. This number reached an all-time high and was the fourth consecutive year that U.S. institutions enrolled more than 1 million international students.
- According to the 2019 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange, international students make up 5.5 percent of the total U.S. higher education population.
- This group of international students contributed \$44.7 billion to the U.S. economy in 2018, according to the data from the U.S. Department of Commerce.
- The cross-cultural interaction among domestic students and Chinese international students is an area filled with difficulties and missed opportunities for promoting future global coalition. The globalization of U.S. higher education system is facing an unprecedented challenge.
- The objective of this study is to investigate

the barriers and the initiators of cross-cultural friendship among the U.S. domestic students and Chinese international students; also, to highlight the importance of connecting the social interaction in higher education environments to the worldwide diplomacy and the global relationship when students enter the workplace. Ultimately, U.S. higher education environment needs to recognize the importance of developing a support for global friendship among Chinese international students and the U.S. domestic students.

- During the COVID pandemic, international students faced tremendous uncertainty due to the policy changes and psychological challenges. Being concerned about the safety of their health, as well as their visa status, Chinese international students needed to make the choice of staying in U.S. or returning to China during the pandemic. Those who stayed on campus alone endured the loneliness during quarantine with assistance provided by U.S. colleges and universities; while the ones who flew back to China are facing dilemma of whether they will be able to continue and finish their education in the U.S.
- Looking beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education administrators and faculty could help students identify the friendship barriers and initiators, and further promote cross-cultural interactions among Chinese international students and domestic students.

ENDNOTES

1 <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Places-of-Origin/Leading-Places-of-Origin/2011-12>

2 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/430276/number-of-chinese-students-in-australia-by-education-sector/>

3 Robert Ezra Park explained that to change prejudice and bring integration, it requires a changing of attitude. The “marginal man theory” of Park (1928) says that people who can suspend two different cultures will be the ones who understand the two cultures. A marginal man is situated where the two cultures overlap.

4 In *Social Distance in the City*, Emory E. Bogardus (1926, p. 40) states: “Social distance, or the lack of fellow-feeling and understanding, continues to exist after spatial distances have been eliminated.” Bogardus defined the concept of social distance as the degree of sympathetic understanding between two individuals, between an individual and a group, and between two social groups. The social distance theory, developed by Bogardus (1938), is as follows: (1) family members, (2) friends (chums), (3) neighbors, (4) coworkers, (5) citizens of my country, (6) visitors to one’s country (sojourners), and (7) those excluded entirely from one’s country.

5 <https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Fact-Sheets-and-Infographics/Fast-Facts>

6 <https://www.iie.org/COVID19-Effects-on-US-Higher-Education-Campuses>

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