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Chinese Students in Russia: Causes of Migration and Basic Educational Behavioral Tenets

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Abstract

The article examines the key behavioral tenets of Chinese students in the process of educational migration in Russia, based on several sociological studies. Some basic problems associated with the learning process of the educational migrants are also presented, as well as the attitudes of the Chinese students about the geographical and household living conditions in Russia. The possibility of continuing to reside in Russia after graduation is also mentioned. The conclusion is that at this moment the majority of Chinese students do not feel comfortable staying in Russia and planning whether to stay/return to China or migrate to other countries.

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1. Introduction

International student mobility nowadays is one of the most promising research areas, not only for the development of an innovative university, but also for the economy and the foreign policy of the whole country (for example, WTO has included international education in its list of regulated services; financial market indicators in 2014 suggest that international student mobility contributed 102 billion US dollars to the global economy). Modern educational migration has its own specificity: countries that are currently playing a minor role in the global economic processes tend to become leaders by using methods such as socio-cultural and migratory expansion.

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Educational migration in the Russian Federation is the third most significant migration trend after labor migration and the resettlement of compatriots. At present, there are nearly 110,000 international students in Russia, with the Chinese students accounting for nearly 20 thousand of them. This number is relatively small (in the overall ranking of Chinese student mobility around the world, Russia takes only 11th place) as many educational migrants from China choose to study in Russia only after failing in their attempt to study at a US or European university.

Further adding to the small number of Chinese students studying in Russia is the fact that only approximately 40 thousand people are studying the Russian language in China. This figure is considerably less than what it was in the days of the Soviet Union; in today's China, most students learn English. Russian as a foreign language is taught only in some schools, mostly in Manchuria (Li, 2007).

China has some principal differences from the western system of values and religious beliefs. China is also known for a strictly hierarchical social structure that permeates many aspects of society and influences the educational system in the following ways:

- hierarchy and obedience to the teacher
- student "saving face" in any difficult situation
- close contact with the family, the authority of parents in teaching
- collective nature of learning process
- hard work and dedication to learning
- prevalence of visual aids in the learning process (Ishikawa, 2009; Nee & Holbrow, 2013; Xiaojiao et al., 2013).

This socialization of modern Chinese youth accelerated because of demographic pressure, uneven regional development, the cultural and economic gap between urban and rural areas, and the great stratification of society in the competitive environment. As a result, the motivation of the behavior of young Chinese is mainly determined by practical purposes, gradually replacing those motivations inherent in Confucian culture of moral qualities of mutual aid, compassion, and kindness. Young people in modern China have very pragmatic attitudes to the choice of the future course of life (Kosheleva & Pak, 2011).

All of the above mean that the educational concepts of the West -- with its penchant for individualism and self-reliance -- and the East differ a great deal. Therefore, the aim of this article is to clarify some of the basic causes and behavioral tenets of Chinese educational migrants for the subsequent formation of the optimal method of teaching Chinese students in higher education institutions in Russia.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample

Sociological research on this issue took place in 2013 using questionnaires. The sample was comprised of students from three major Chinese universities (Tianjin Pedagogical University, Zhejiang University of Foreign Languages, and Changchun Pedagogical University) as well as Chinese students of Tomsk Polytechnic University (see Table 1). The results are correlated with similar research conducted by V.G. Gelbras (2001) and A.G. Larin (2009) in 2001 and 2007 respectively, which makes it possible to trace certain dynamic behavioral tenets of educational migrants.

Table 1. Quantitative distribution of the respondents according to the University.

Total number of people	Tianjin Normal University	Zhejiang University of Foreign Languages	Changchun pedagogical University	Tomsk Polytechnic University
395	109	131	77	78

2.2. Procedure

The research was conducted in all courses: 4% of the respondents attended preparatory courses studying the Russian language, 93% were undergraduate students (61% of total respondents were in their final year of undergraduate study), and the remaining 3% were in graduate programs. Unfortunately, data on gender in this case is not relevant: in the questionnaires of the Zhejiang University of Foreign Languages most students did not indicate their sex. Other data fit into the representative error of 5%. Students from TPU studied mainly in technical specialties; all the students who completed the questionnaire in China studied Russian philology and / or linguistics.

3. Research and results

One of the fundamental aspects of successful training in the recipient country is knowledge of the language of studying. The first and most significant difference between learning process from the western countries in Russian analogue is that there is no entrance exam in the Russian language (i.e. no easily accessible standardized assessment that would be a Russian equivalent to a TOEFL, IELTS, iTEP etc.). The practice of direct entrance exams for language has never really caught on. Instead, incoming international students are enrolled in a preparatory course for pre-university Russian language training that can last from three months to one year. Therefore, the vast majority of Chinese migrants (90% to 95% according to different sources) begin to study the Russian language starting from scratch.

Based on the results of research and assessment of their own knowledge of the respondents (see. Table 2) the largest single grouping of respondents – at 41% - can only explain something in Russian. This is the lowest figure of the three research studies: Larin had the same grouping at 66%, whereas Gelbras found that 54.8% of respondents could explain something in Russian. In second place is the item "I can read". In this case, the data of this study differ significantly from the data of previous researches: 29% in this data and only 5% from Larin's results. The discrepancy in results can be explained by the fact that most of the students are studying Russian in China, where the methods of teaching the Russian language are not communicative and speaking practice opportunities are limited compared with previous studies. At the same time, a large percentage of respondents - approximately 16% - indicated that they have little understanding of the Russian oral language or practically did not have it at all (from Larin - 10%, from Gelbras - 25.8%).

Table 2: Your level of knowledge of Russian language (percentage of respondents)

I know it well	6%
I can explain something	41%
I can read	29%
Poor speaking and understanding	12%
Practically do not know	4%
I do not know / know poorly but currently studying it at the University	8%

Instrumental characteristics of knowledge of the Russian language are also average: 51% of students from Chinese universities indicated that they can only explain something and read in Russian. Only 10% of respondents claim that they know the language well. Chinese students in TPU exhibit a similar situation: 57% can explain something and read, while only 18% speak Russian well.

Overall, however, Chinese students, regardless of their country of study, course, or knowledge of language, expressed a positive image of Russia, mainly from the geographical point of view. About half of the students admired the kindness and beauty of the local inhabitants as well as the beautiful nature, fresh air, and expanse of Siberia. Among the negative features were the frigid climate, complex bureaucracy, and difficulty in understanding the Russian language. However, it should be noted that this question was asked through the primary associations with the word "Russia" and, therefore revealed not only the features of Russia as a country, but also some number of common stereotypes (for example, 12% of respondents associated "Russia" with the matrioshka, 8% with vodka, and 6% with president Putin).

The quality of Russian education was also mentioned, especially in regards to technical disciplines. About 30%

of Chinese students at TPU and 22% of students at Chinese universities have noted its high quality. Similar results were observed in the researches from Larin. More than half of the students from TPU (64%) and about half of the students of Chinese universities (43%) would like their children to receive education in Russia. Thus, we hope that despite the number of difficulties there will be an increase in Chinese student mobility to Russia.

However, these same Chinese students do not consider Russia a suitably comfortable place to stay after graduation. In the list of preferred countries for emigration, Russia ranked only sixth after the United States, Japan, Canada, Germany, and Britain (Anohina, 2012). This is because, by and large, Chinese graduates don't want to take up the low-skilled or low-prestige professions being offered to them in the Russian labor market. This is confirmed by the results of the research: 50% of students in China and 61% of Chinese students from TPU planned to live in China after graduation. The second most popular answer, "Conditions are more important than location" was indicated by 9% of students in China and 11% of students from TPU. Chinese students also don't want to work in Russia, but in their homeland: 24% of respondents at Chinese universities and 27% of students TPU polled in this way; however, about 10-12% have not yet taken a final decision and consider Russia as one of the possible countries for further work. At the same time most of the Chinese students want to live and work in China - it marked up about 70% of the respondents. The researches of Larin and Gelbras also contain similar characteristics.

Overseas returnees ("haiguipai" in Chinese) usually end up working in prestigious companies or educational institutions or open their own business. The ideas, values, knowledge, and skills they bring with them allow China, on the one hand, to create a positive image in the eyes of other countries and to increase its own global importance (Li 2007). On the other hand, the way of thinking of "returnees" is already different from the indigenous population, usually on the side of loyalty to the country of residence.

Interesting results could be seen with questions about a possible marriage of friend or a close relative with the Russian citizens: the answer "indifferently" (can be interpreted as "not yet thought about this question" and "positive") was given from 25% of Chinese students regardless of their country, gender or course.

In terms of day-to-day life, about 55% of students from TPU are fully satisfied with the conditions of education and everyday life in Russia. This is a good indicator. However, 48% of them indicated that they cannot fully understand their course of study. The reasons for this phenomenon are different: lack of knowledge of the language - 70%; regular work and absence at the lecturers as a result of misunderstanding - 15%, and other causes - 3% (for example, frequent illness).

4. Conclusion

So, attitudinal research conducted of Chinese students studying in Russian and Chinese universities led to the conclusion that the majority of respondents could link their work in the future with Russia if things change a bit. However, in any case, after graduation the educational migrants would prefer to live in China or several other countries over Russia. Poor knowledge of the Russian language and difficulties connected with its learning are also not conducive to the popularity of Russia as a place for getting higher education.

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