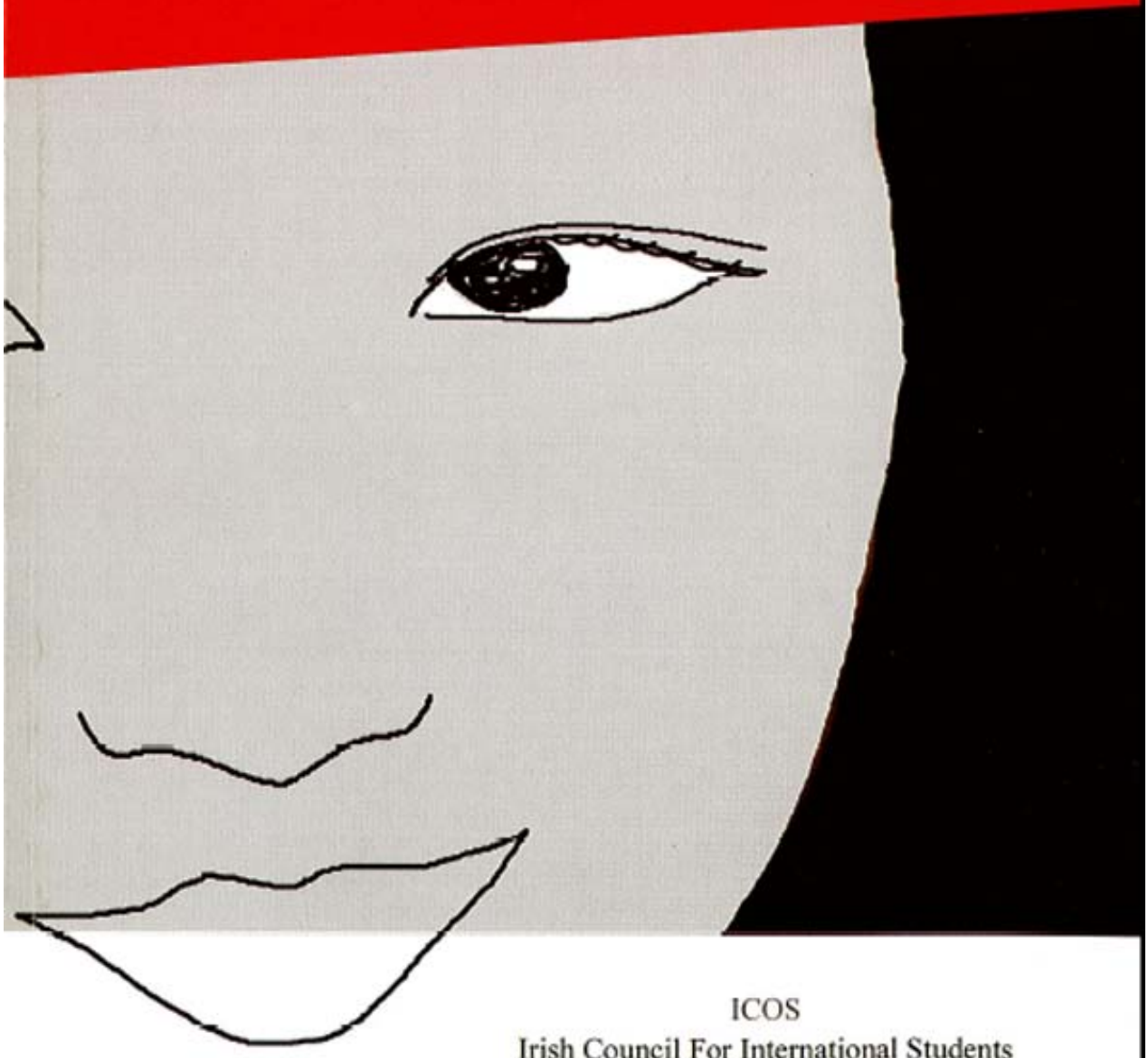
Chinese students in Ireland:

New Opportunities, New Needs, New Challenges

Papers from the ICOS Seminar 26 January 2001

中国学生



ICOS
Irish Council For International Students

Chinese Students in Ireland:
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Edited by
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INTRODUCTION

This publication brings together the papers presented at the seminar on Chinese students in Ireland which was organised by the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS) in early 2001. In publishing this compilation of first-hand accounts of experience from Chinese students alongside comment and analysis from experienced academics who teach them, the aim is to provide both a record of the event and an information resource for a wider audience. ICOS hopes that the papers gathered here will be of direct practical use to those individuals who will have the responsibility for policy-making, and for recruiting, teaching and supporting Chinese students, in Irish educational institutions in the future.

The Irish Council for International Students is an independent and non-profit organisation whose core members are the Irish universities, Institutes of Technology and independent third level colleges, acting through its network of college representatives and through its secretariat in Dublin. It seeks to promote the broader benefits of international education, and its central focus is on international students in Ireland, and the quality of their experience here.

Alongside the provision of advice, information and training services, and the management of Fellowships in Ireland on behalf of the Government and other sponsors, ICOS works to encourage good policy and practice in international education, for the benefit of all concerned. Over the years, a series of conferences and seminars on issues in international education in the Irish context have brought together the representatives of its member institutions and other key players in the international education field, both in Ireland and abroad, and this seminar and publication are the most recent contributions to this endeavour.

Why a seminar on Chinese students in Ireland? For many years, the quiet presence of small numbers of high-calibre Chinese postgraduates has made a valuable contribution to scientific and technological research in Irish universities and Institutes of Technology. But it is only very recently that the growing demands of large numbers of young people in China for undergraduate education in the West (particularly in English-speaking countries) has been met by an Irish response at national level. In the framework of the government's new 'Asia strategy', Irish third level colleges were encouraged to reach out to the Chinese student market, and their response was such that the numbers of young Chinese people studying in Ireland, mostly in language schools and independent third level colleges, tripled between 1998 and mid-2000.

The ICOS seminar itself took place at an important moment in these developments, shortly before a new government-led educational trade mission went out to visit a number of Chinese cities in early 2001, resulting in the first small cohorts of Chinese undergraduates entering Irish universities and Institutes of Technology for the academic year 2001- 2002. The seminar itself generated a high level of interest, to the point where there were not enough places available to satisfy demand, and a wide range of institutions and interests were represented on the day. The general level of satisfaction was confirmed by the requests for a follow-up workshop to look in more detail at some of the issues raised, which duly took place in June 2001.

Clearly new opportunities are opening up for Irish third level colleges as well as for the students attending them. The opportunities deriving from the presence of significant numbers of international students from a background so different - and one so important on the world stage - are neither simply economic, nor purely academic, important as these are. If Irish colleges can fully meet the challenges posed, they will also gain a vital resource for fostering a wider global awareness among the whole academic community here, and for developing Irish students' ability to live and work successfully in an international environment in the future.

Potentially, there are gains for all concerned, but it is essential for Irish educational institutions to 'get it right' in terms of their programmes and support services from the start, so that the Chinese students coming here to study are welcomed and supported to leap across the considerable cultural, social and academic gaps they face, feel fully included in the schools and colleges they attend, and can reap the educational rewards they seek.

In organising this seminar, ICOS was already aware that recent recruitment of Chinese undergraduates elsewhere had not been without its surprises and difficulties, and considered that providing a forum for information and discussion at the start of the new 'China experience' in Ireland would be a valuable service to all involved in international education here.

The seminar's fundamental aims were: to raise awareness of issues likely to affect Chinese students here; to provide information to participating Irish academics and administrative staff on the socio-cultural and academic challenges the students will experience; and to facilitate thinking about the development of appropriate support and advisory systems in the host institutions. A significant start was made on the day itself, and ICOS hopes that this publication will further support these aims.

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The interest and involvement of both the Department of Education and Science and of the Department of Foreign Affairs were important to the success of the seminar, and their

contributions frame the presentations of the other contributors. In his opening address the Minister for Education and Science, Dr Michael Woods, put the day's discussions into the context of national strategy, and Joe Hayes, former Ambassador of Ireland to China, offered many valuable insights in his chairing of one of the seminar's main sessions, and provided a postscript to the report, stressing the value of the ICOS initiative.

ICOS was concerned to bring together at the seminar the perspectives of students, teachers and administrative staff, and to explore both socio-cultural and academic issues; these considerations determined the structure of the seminar and the choice of presenters. The result was a positive interaction on the day itself, and for readers of this publication there are many fruitful connections and correlations to be found among the papers included, which make the whole considerably more than the sum of its parts.

The two Chinese students in Dublin, Wanling Hou and Yu Hong, told their own stories of arriving and settling in to life in Ireland simply and effectively, and their vivid personal accounts are a good way in to the complex issues of social and academic culture discussed in more abstract or general terms elsewhere. The student interview appended to Yvonne Turner's second paper adds further to this first-hand information, since it delineates many elements in the life experience of one Chinese student prior to entering Western-style higher education, and so is included in full in this report.

The opposite side of the coin is found in the perspective of an Irish college administrator involved in the reception and integration of groups of 'new' Chinese undergraduate students. Lisa Kelly shared with participants the evolving practical responses of her institution to the challenge of providing a welcoming and supportive environment which would enable their rapid adaptation, and her paper includes many practical insights which can assist other institutions starting on the same process.

In commenting on the matters in hand from the point of view of an academic working with the more 'traditional' Chinese postgraduates in Irish universities, Dr Da-Wen Sun nevertheless touched on many of the same cultural issues that emerged from the personal accounts, and raised the thorny issue of immigration procedures affecting both entry to Ireland and (particularly relevant to postgraduates) visits of spouses to students already established here. It was helpful that the Department of Foreign Affairs representative was willing to take up this issue subsequently, as responses from the floor indicated it was a major problem for many of those present.

All involved benefited enormously from the two central presentations from Yvonne Turner, who has provided two papers for the publication, based on her contributions on the day. There was no doubt in participants' minds that her expert insights, while based on the UK/ China experience, were directly relevant to the Irish context.

Her long experience of working with Chinese students in China and the UK strengthens the value of the long-term research she is now conducting into their interactions with Western social and academic culture, and her close familiarity with China and elements of Chinese society shines through the first paper on the cultural and social background of Chinese students coming to the West. ICOS is especially grateful for her generosity in granting permission for the publication of the second paper, which forms the largest contribution to this report, and which includes an informative interview with a young woman student, other useful research findings and a detailed bibliography. All of this material is an invaluable reference source for future use by those in Irish educational institutions working with Chinese students.

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The seminar concentrated on specific issues which can and should be addressed by the educational institutions involved in the current large-scale recruitment of Chinese students. Clearly, those host institutions which are well informed about and sensitive to the backgrounds and expectations of the young people they recruit will be able to enhance their students' educational experience and to increase their cross-cultural competence in the wider Irish society, as well as their potential contribution to it.

However, there are larger social issues, less amenable to this type of discussion and action, which may have an impact on the efforts being made to increase the numbers of international students benefiting from education here. As this publication goes to press in February 2002, many in the education sector must be reflecting on the recent shocking death of a young Chinese student, Zhao Liu Tao, on the streets of Dublin, against a background of growing levels of xenophobia and racism which have tarnished the reputation of Ireland as a place of welcome, and affected the well-being of many international students, in recent years.

This tragic event is a stark reminder that it is not enough to develop national and institutional policies on non-EU student recruitment to Irish universities and colleges in a vacuum. The decisions that are taken must be directly linked to other areas of policy and provision, as well as to a broader vision of Irish society in the new century. For example, there are close connections between issues of safety and security of students, and of the provision of adequate accommodation for them in the context of major housing problems in Irish cities, and these

require urgent attention. It is also time that the growing international student presence featured more significantly in national debates and initiatives on issues of race and ethnicity in Ireland, and in relation to overall immigration policy.

At different points, the recent Skilbeck report on the role of universities in society urges both greater recruitment of non-EU students, and increased levels of interaction between university and community. In addition, the technological sector, which often has closer local community links, is now vigorously pursuing its own international recruitment strategies. For the benefit of all our students, and the future health of Irish society, it will be crucial that those responsible for developing the third level sector in the years ahead should view their institutions' internationalisation strategies and their community initiatives, not as two entirely separate areas of action, but as fundamentally linked.

Wendy Cox
Chief Executive, ICOS

OPENING ADDRESS

Dr. Michael Woods TD

Minister for Education and Science

It gives me great pleasure to be here today to launch this seminar on *Meeting the Needs of Chinese Students in Ireland.* Firstly, I would like to begin by extending a warm welcome to Ireland to those students who commenced their studies here in the current academic year. I hope that your time here is rewarding both academically and socially.

There has been a strengthening of bilateral relations between Ireland and the People's Republic of China in recent years. The official visit to China by the Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, in September 1998, the first such visit by an Irish Prime Minister, led to the development of the Asia-Pacific Strategy, which has helped to lay the foundations for even closer relations between our two countries in the future. This Strategy helps Irish exporters to improve their sales in Asia through a range of measures such as the opening of additional diplomatic missions in the region and the coordination of a series of projects to increase awareness of Ireland among key decision makers in the area.

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) forum, established in 1996 for countries in Asia and Europe to increase cooperation in economic, political and cultural fields has led to further strengthening of relationships between our two countries. Bilateral trade is also growing and trade between our two countries is on an upward trend. China is now Ireland's nineteenth largest trading partner. Both our nations have rich histories and diverse cultures yet we share common goals for the future of our people.

Discussions on the future development of relationships and cooperation between Asia and Europe are ongoing, covering a range of political, economic, social and cultural issues. We are currently in the process of finalising a *Memorandum of Understanding on Education Cooperation* between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of Ireland.

The Vice-Premier of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency Li Lanquing, during a visit to Ireland last April, raised the question of an *Agreement on Scientific and Technological Cooperation* between our two countries. China is already successfully operating a number of

other such bilateral agreements. This agreement, which was signed in September 2000, is intended to provide a formal framework in which cooperation arrangements can be developed between scientific institutions, research centres, higher education institutions and companies in both countries. China and Ireland are both committed to rapid growth in the IT sector and the Chinese representatives have expressed a particular interest in the area of software development.

As a small island nation, Ireland has a long tradition in the education and training of international students. In the golden era of Irish monastic settlements, scholars came to study in Ireland from all over Europe. In recent years, Ireland has transformed itself into a technologically-based economy. The Ireland of today is a bustling, high-tech, business-friendly country with competitive and innovative companies experienced in international business at its leading edge.

It has been widely acknowledged that a key factor in our recent economic growth has been our human resources. Over the years, higher education in Ireland has gained international recognition for its quality and diversity. It has contributed greatly, not only to the personal education of students, but also to cultural, economic and social development and the provision of new knowledge and scholarship. Since the early 1960s, Ireland has signed many cultural agreements designed to encourage co-operation and facilitate contacts in the fields of culture, science and education. Our agreement with China dates back to 1985.

While numbers of Chinese students in universities in Ireland are still relatively small, compared with students from other non-EU countries, they are well represented in other educational institutions. There are currently almost 1,000 Chinese students attending English language courses in recognised schools in this country. Since January 1998, approximately 3,000 have completed language courses and many go on to third level studies.

I believe that student mobility is an enriching experience, not alone for the individual student, but also for the institution concerned. The student has the experience of living and studying in another country and learning aspects of its culture. The institution also gains from the experience of catering for students from abroad. An international dimension is brought to the campus and the ensuing multi-cultural experience helps to broaden the educational and social horizons of the Irish students. Lasting friendships are formed which transcend continental boundaries and cross racial divides.

I congratulate the Irish Council for International Students on the advice and information services that they provide, not alone for Chinese students, but for all international students coming to study in Ireland. An assignment to study overseas places an enormous strain on a

student. No matter how familiar the student is with the language, there is the day to day difficulty of being clearly understood in what is for them a foreign language with its own expressions and accents.

For 30 years now, ICOS has been serving the needs of international students in Ireland. It does this through the provision of specialised advice and support services and also through training and information workshops for staff of its member institutions who work with international students. Most of the major third level institutions involved in international education in Ireland are members of the ICOS Council. ICOS collaborates with many international education agencies as well as administering Irish Government-funded and other official Study Fellowship Programmes.

In conclusion, I would like to say to the Chinese students present that I hope your stay in Ireland is very rewarding and that when you return to your own country you will retain many happy memories of your time here. To the other participants involved in the support and teaching of these students, I hope that you will leave this evening having gained a clearer insight into the issues which affect Chinese students at third level in Ireland, and hopefully, sown the seeds of developing support systems appropriate to the needs of these students during their time in Ireland.

CHINA TO IRELAND: CULTURAL ADAPTATION

Chinese Students in Europe: the influence of culture and society

Yvonne Turner

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Introduction

Going to study in a new country is always challenging. The social norms, the academic traditions and the constructions of knowledge that predominate in the host country inevitably differ in some ways from the system in which a student has spent their previous education careers. For students from some countries, however, the degrees of difference will be more significant than for others. For students travelling from the People's Republic of China (PRC) to universities in Europe, this is particularly the case. This paper seeks to provide an introduction to some of the most common cultural and social issues which may influence the quality of a Chinese student's stay in a European university - issues which will have an impact not only on their academic performance but also on the way in which they are likely to regard the host country and its higher education (HE) system long after completing their chosen course of study. The academic aspects of adaptation for Chinese students are covered in the author's second paper contributed to this volume.

This paper draws primarily on teaching and research experience in the UK and Chinese education systems - gained both in China and in Britain. Though primarily written with the UK system in mind, the parallels that exist between social and educational assumptions underpinning HE provision in the UK and Ireland allow these notions to provide a general introduction to some of the processes of cultural adaptation that Chinese students commonly confront as students in either environment.

The context

In recent years, particularly since the Asian economic crisis brought about the decline of longer-established markets in the region, universities in Europe have been involved more and more in recruiting students from international markets like China. To be successful in such ventures, however, it is important to take a holistic view of the needs of potential students. This not only supports student development, but also helps to ensure that institutions can compete in the

market in the long term against universities from other countries who have a more established history in international student recruitment, such as the USA, Canada and Australia.

It is hard to over-emphasise the importance of the Chinese market to contemporary international student recruitment. In the UK, for example, the British Council estimate that more than 10,000 students from mainland China will begin studies at undergraduate or postgraduate levels in the UK in the academic year commencing September 2001. At the same time, few universities in the UK offer more than a low level of general induction for international students - at most a week at the beginning of the academic year - and few have considered the impacts that a growing internationalism is likely to have on community and curriculum.

Chinese students in the international community

To a large extent, the issues that confront Chinese students are similar to those which affect other international ethnic and regional groups who study in the European context, especially students from countries in Asia. China differs from other Asian states in some particular ways, however.

First, the existence of a governing Socialist system for more than 50 years has had a significant impact on both education and society in the country. It is insufficient, therefore, to simply classify China as a ‘dynamic neo-Confucian’ culture in the way that commentators frequently regard communities such as the Taiwanese or ethnic Chinese groups from, for example, Malaysia. Over three generations, the Maoist-Socialist ethic has pervaded all aspects of life and has fundamentally influenced the structures of society and interaction in the People's Republic.

Second, it is very important to remember the size of the PRC. Although 95% of the population is ethnically Han Chinese, there exist many ethnic minority groups and with a population of 1.29bn people living in a country that extends more than 3000 miles from border to border in each direction, any attempt to classify ‘Chinese people’ as a single homogenous and identifiable group would be both simplistic and inaccurate. A Chinese person from Harbin (in the North-East) and Kunming (in the South-West) may possess some broad similarities but are as different from each other as is a person from Dublin and Athens in culture, habits, lifestyle and expectations.

It is important to understand, therefore, that this paper can provide only the broadest of stereotypes in addressing the needs of Chinese students and that each institution and individual should work closely with their own student body to understand their particular preoccupations and needs in terms of educational support.

Assumptions in the paper

At the same time, some general principles exist which are shared by many students from China and which may form the basis of a preliminary agenda for discussion between those offering pastoral support in universities and their student communities. Underlying the identification of these themes are a set of important value assumptions about the nature of the implied contract between host country, institution and international student which need to be made clear.

In the recent past, some among the established domestic university community in the UK have espoused the view that international students are seeking an ‘overseas experience’ in a European country and, therefore, the obligation to adapt and meet the prevailing norms of the host country rests entirely on the student and not the institution: ‘they have come to Britain to study, so they must adapt to how we do things here’. This perspective is rapidly dying away in UK universities, however, for a number of reasons.

First, and most obviously, multi-cultural life is an inherent part of the fabric of all European countries and little, if any, cultural homogeneity exists among the 'home' student population, even without considering the needs of international students. Attitudes or behaviours that privilege one particular ethnic group, therefore, quite clearly do not reflect the reality of European society and, at their most extreme, represent expressions of tacit bigotry or even racism which are unwelcome in any institution of higher education.

Second, the increasing number of institutions who are looking to enrich their community and earn revenue from the inclusion of international students give students more choices than ever before in deciding where to go and study. As noted above, competitive positioning in this market is dependent on a whole range of student satisfactions, personal as well as academic. If a students feels socially or emotionally neglected during their course of study, no matter what the academic quality of the institution may be, that view will inevitably have an influence on the way in which they report their experiences to friends and family members who may also be considering study abroad.

Third, our understanding of culture shock and its effect on human performance suggests that it is difficult for an individual to engage with change in all aspects of their lives simultaneously with equal success. International students come to universities for a relatively short time and need to accustom themselves to enormous differences in all aspects of their academic lives as well as their personal environments. If universities seek to maintain performance standards for the whole of their student community, this will be assisted by attention to a range of aspects of student life which are not directly attached to academic matters and which, in the most part, may not be regarded as important for the home student community.

Whilst many undergraduate students, home and international, may be inexperienced in making domestic decisions, for example, the range of access for home students and the unit of support immediately outside the university community itself is far greater than for the international student. Students from very different kinds of social structures, such as China, will need very high levels of support in almost all basic areas of domestic life, therefore, if they are to complete the induction period both successfully and happily and then move onto success in the academic arena.

Domestic life: food

There are a number of ways in which domestic life in China differs markedly from that in Europe. One of the first things that Chinese students talk about with universal dislike when they get to the UK, for example, is the food. Chinese students report that they rarely come to Europe with an idea that they will like many of the foods on offer, but that the reality of European cuisine is even more distasteful than they had imagined.

Most Chinese students will be familiar with McDonald's and other kinds of western fastfood, but, on the whole, a diet based on large quantities of plainly cooked meats and dairy products served on individual plates in the European style will be something that many find difficult to cope with. Eating with a knife and fork can be as challenging for some Chinese folk as eating with chopsticks for the first time is for some Europeans, though the learning curve is short! Nor do many Chinese restaurants in European cities offer much to satisfy the Chinese taste. Menus are heavily biased to Western palates and are a mere shadow of what is on offer from cuisine in China itself.

In addition, students from the PRC will find the costs of eating out, even in cheap establishments, extremely high compared to what they are used to at home. For example, it is routine in Beijing - one of the most expensive cities in China - to find street-side restaurants open from early in the morning until late at night where it is possible to find good, freshly-prepared food for less than 50 pence a head, and often much less. Eating out for most meals a day, therefore, is relatively common for many city dwellers in China, especially among those groups who would be likely to marshal enough financial resources for a stint of foreign study. The relatively formal and expensive European food culture that exists, especially in many university towns, is likely to be extremely daunting and bewildering for many Chinese students. It is quite common to hear of students from mainland China who arrive in the UK with a suitcase full of instant noodles brought from home as an insurance policy against bad-tasting and expensive food available here.

This issue has a range of implications for HE institutions, for example in the types of accommodation that universities might suggest for Chinese students. Halls of residence may not be a good choice, perhaps, since their kitchens rarely offer a wide range of authentic international cuisines. Alternatively, problems may ensue if Chinese students are living in home-stay accommodation where they are expected to eat with a family which does not include international cooking in its range. It also may influence the menus for food available in refectories, if that is where a large population of Chinese students eat. At least, adopting the practice of more than one UK university, an initial induction programme that incorporates a trip to the nearest Chinese supermarket or the contracting of an Asian marketer to come to the university to sell food items to students may be a good way to respond to this basic need.

Costs

Another immediate response that many Chinese students give to life in Europe is a sense of almost disbelief at how expensive everything is. Costs, not only the costs of food and living but also of travel, books and information resources in particular, are truly astounding for students who come from countries such as China. In the classroom in China, for example, students will not routinely be expected to purchase their own text books and the relative costs for books, even if they do purchase them, are extremely low compared to European costs, owing to the way in which the Chinese government regulates the publishing industry. Students will also be accustomed to unregulated access to photocopying, without routine reference to copyright laws, to extremely good systems of cheap public transport, and to very lost costs for access to entertainments and tourist attractions.

In spite of the financial resource requirements imposed by immigration officials before granting a visa to international students, the costs of studying in Europe can be extremely daunting to many students from China. Coming to terms with costs and how to find good access to cheap sources of information, entertainment and food will be a concern to many in the student community. At the same time, it is also important to remember that a number of students who come from the PRC are likely to have a wealthy and privileged lifestyle at home. A few students will have no money problems, will want to buy cars and other expensive accoutrements of youth lifestyle in the UK and this can have an impact on their relationships with home students and others who lead a more traditionally-impoverished student lifestyle. The important factor to consider here is once again that the Chinese student community is unlikely to be homogenous in any regard, especially in terms of their financial capability but that the majority will find the financial contrasts with their home country extreme.

Household chores

Other aspects of domestic life that could evolve into difficulties for Chinese students include the management of household tasks and daily domestic responsibilities. China is a hugely populated country and family is an ever-present factor in a young person's life. Children are highly regarded and family care systems extremely well developed. Many young Chinese people are unlikely ever to have carried out even the most basic of domestic tasks or chores while they have been living at home with their families, and few students who come abroad to study will have lived outside the family home. This does not only typify Chinese students, certainly. Home students may have enjoyed similar comforts, ranging from Mum's home cooking and laundry, to a shoulder to cry on when everything seems to go wrong. However, the degree of dependence for all domestic decision-making and task-performance that is usual in Chinese society presents particular challenges for students from the PRC when they go abroad to study. Learning the routines for carrying out basic tasks in an unfamiliar environment makes the learning curve particularly steep.

Money and banking

A good preliminary induction programme for international students would necessarily include a detailed introduction to the banking system and financial customs that predominate in the student’s country of study.

For Chinese students, it is important to understand the degree of suspicion that is typical in respect of the banking system. China's non-convertible currency imposes specific difficulties on Chinese students when they arrive and money transfers may well take longer than for students from many countries. Students are likely to want to trade or pay fees in US dollars - the most commonly available foreign currency in China - and may be unwilling to accept the unfavourable exchange rates that may be available in banks in Europe. There is a flourishing black market for currency in China and it is quite common for routine transactions to take place outside of the conventional banking system. Students may be bewildered, therefore, at the extent of reliance on the formal banking system that exists in most European countries.

In addition, China is a much more cash-based economy than most European countries and students may take some time to accustom themselves to electronic money transfers and the kinds of virtual financial transactions that many Europeans take for granted. Some members of the Chinese student community, especially those from wealthier urban backgrounds, will be extremely sophisticated in financial matters. But the majority may approach financial transactions and financial management with a naiveté that exceeds that of most home students at the point of entry to university.

Social contact

Loneliness is a key personal problem that many Chinese students encounter on entry to education programmes overseas. China is a society based on the strongest emotional and personal relationships maintained by family and friends. Most Chinese students are unlikely ever to have slept in a room by themselves, for example, before they come to study abroad. Students in Chinese universities share single-sex dormitory rooms of about eight people. They sleep in bunks three high and the only personal space available to them will be the space available on that bunk and perhaps in a small locker. The provision of personal space that is considered essential within the European context may well be bewildering, therefore, and add to the sense of isolation experienced by many Chinese students.

In addition, students are likely to have lived and studied within a fairly defined and known community for most of their lives. The majority of students - even at university level - continue a pattern of study within their home town or home province. Class or cohort identity in the education system is carefully managed and maintained throughout students' careers. Given the existence of the style of government and educational interventions in personal and students lives that exist in China, students typically will never have needed to be enterprising in the finding or making of friends. Family is ever-present as a force and offers ready-made support and emotional control in an individual's life.

To a greater extent than for many other groups, therefore, it may be very difficult for students from China to reach out and make friends from the diverse and independent university community that typifies the European experience. Numerous stories exist, for example, about doctoral students from China who have arrived in Britain and studied alone for three years, never making any friends and finding themselves unable to break out of an intense social isolation that is damaging to them both personally and intellectually.

On the other hand, stories exist about the degree to which home students in the UK have found the Chinese student community apparently inward-looking and even unwelcoming when individuals have made overtures of friendship. Certainly something of a cultural difference seems to exist in different preferences and perceptions about how to develop relationships. In part, this is a response to differing levels of independence that is built into the underlying values in the two education systems. Universities in China take an active role in organising and stimulating opportunities for the development of student relationships. The notion of the independent adult student who is responsible for managing all aspects of their own student experience is entirely absent from the Chinese construction of education.

It is helpful, therefore, if institutions wishing to recruit increasing numbers of students from China consider the implications of the stimulation of social aspects of students' lives, not only on first entry to the institution but on an ongoing basis. Many universities in the UK have initiated international student societies or have responded to students' own initiatives in this area. However, this represents only a partial response. If one accepts that at least part of the motivation for Chinese students to come and study in European institutions is to encounter and interact with people from the chosen country of study, an international society - where students will only meet other students from countries outside the host country - may not answer their social needs in full.

'Pub culture'

In this aspect of student life there is another point of difference in the prevailing attitudes of many home students and Chinese students in Europe. In China, as in many Asian and non-European countries, alcohol is not regarded in a positive light as part of the student experience. Given the way in which alcohol and student union bars in the UK, for example, have dominated much of student life historically, opportunities for Chinese students to get to know their host country peers outside the lecture room may be more difficult than otherwise might appear. Attempting to find social fora that are equally attractive to all groups of international and home students is an issue that is particularly challenging to students unions in the UK, especially as many home students are increasingly turning away from attractions available on campus and looking at more expensive entertainment venues in nearby towns and cities. Once again, the costs of entertainment are daunting to many Chinese students on limited budgets.

The lack of fluidity of social interaction between home students and international students generally may be of concern to university authorities and is perhaps a force that is increasingly working to fracture the university community rather than contribute to its cohesion. It also draws on the assumption that cultural exchange is a one-way process. It is extremely important to remember that home students have as much to learn from their international counterparts as *vice versa*. With China's imminent entry to the World Trade Organisation and its existence as the biggest single business market in the world, missed opportunities for social and intellectual exchange between university students may well develop into missed economic opportunities in the future.

Urban life: noise and community

Secondary and higher education in China is a predominantly privileged and urban phenomenon. This means that the majority of students who come to study in Europe will have spent at least

part of their lives in the huge cities which dominate China's East coast. Many of the student community are likely to have been city dwellers all their lives. In contrast to even the most cosmopolitan metropolis in Europe, Asian cities and in particular the cities in China are enormous (e.g. Beijing 14m people, Shanghai 17m), filled to capacity and keep a pace of activity that has no parallel.

Asian cities are also very modern, with burgeoning construction and huge civil engineering projects springing up all the time. Chinese students, then, frequently find even the most bustling European city not only too quiet, but rather small and, in some cases, somewhat old-fashioned. For those students who are studying in more rural or suburban situations, withdrawal from city life may have a more acute impact on the quality of their experience. To some degree, there is little that an individual institution can do to respond to this problem. However, it underlines the desirability of developing a coordinated approach to student social and cultural activities - through international offices or in coordination with student unions - in order to promote the advantages of locality and situation, rather than risk student drop-outs resulting simply from the location of the institution.

Relationships between generations

This issue underlies an important general social difference between China and countries in Western Europe. As a nation, China has not yet fully seen the emergence of the power of youth culture, as has evolved in Europe over the past thirty years. The extent to which marketing, entertainment and popular culture in the UK are geared to those aged under thirty has been an aspect of life in Britain that Chinese students have found heady and exciting but also bewildering and difficult to understand. Accustomed to the power and control of gerontocracy in both personal and political life, Chinese students may find the emphasis on youth and ‘freedom of choice’ at once invigorating and bewildering. Devoid of the strongly-controlled moral context in Chinese society and the daily support and control provided by the family, universities in Britain have seen examples both of Chinese students ‘going wild’ during their stay in the UK but also becoming personally and emotionally paralysed as they attempt to make sense of and contextualise a contemporary environment far removed from their own.

To a greater extent than other student groups, perhaps, students from China will be accustomed to an external locus of control in determining their daily routines and the parameters of acceptable behaviour. Inside the lecture room and without, they are likely to benefit from clear directions and explicit support to help them begin to move towards self-determination and independent learning and living.

Conclusion

The list of themes and issues above provides the merest glimpse into some ways in which Chinese students must adapt and learn to survive when they arrive in Europe. In routine transactions with individual students, inevitably their own personalities will emerge far more strongly than any set of cultural stereotypes. Just as it is important to identify the issues that may confront students and institutions in their contact with each other, so it is also important not to problematise Chinese students as a group within the broader university community. The majority of Chinese students do manage to adapt very quickly and perform well in their studies. They are able to form a range of relationships with people in diverse parts of the community and to develop in ways that are happy as well as healthy.

As this group begins to play more of a part in university life in Europe, however, some clear strategies exist that may further enhance their experience. The role of student support, pastoral care and cultural induction is essential in giving students a good start. Maintaining that progress, and understanding the acute way in which home-sickness and isolation remains a threat throughout student careers, is an important aspect of any policy responsive to the needs of international students.

Finally, understanding - helped by training and awareness-raising activities - the degree to which issues or behaviours that can appear problematic in relationships between cultural groups result most often from differing social norms than other more contentious causes is vital in maintaining those relationships healthily. Nothing facilitates understanding better than friendship, and friendship quickly turns the ‘foreign’ into the familiar. In this light, the most important facet of university policy, therefore, could usefully be to incorporate friendship into the bureaucracy, along with patience and a willingness to change.

CHINA TO IRELAND: CULTURAL ADAPTATION

A Chinese Student in Ireland (1)

Wanling Hou

Postgraduate student, Dublin City University

My name is Wanling Hou, but most of my friends call me Dodo. I am from Dalian in China. This is a city with a population of around 5 million in the North-east of China. Dalian is a beautiful city beside the sea. The climate is lovely. During the winter you can make a snowman, and in the summer you can swim in the sea. There are trees and flowers everywhere and it is not too cold nor too warm. Dalian also is a fashionable city. In September every year there is an International Fashion Show. In some ways it is like Ireland. The people in Dalian prefer seafood. I also like Irish mussels and potatoes as well.

I am 25 years old and I have been in Ireland for one and a half years. My family in China consists of my parents and my elder brother. My parents both work as doctors. They both work very hard. My brother is married and working in business. He used to be an officer in the army in China. I have a grandma and grandpa who live near our apartment. They love me so much. My grandma can play the piano and my grandpa can sing Chinese traditional songs. Sometimes we have parties at home. I can't forget it. It is really good fun.

Sometimes I feel homesick, like the day before yesterday, which was Chinese New Year. In traditional Chinese custom, I should be at home with my family, but instead I was doing an exam. My Mum called me to wish me Happy New Year. I felt better and that evening I celebrated with Chinese people and Irish people.

Before I came here, I was a DJ in China for three years. I had completed my secondary education and passed my examinations, and I studied music full-time in Dalian University for four years. At the same time I worked part-time at Dalian public radio station.

I really miss life in Chinese university. I lived with seven other students. We had a modern apartment with everything in it. We always talked and ate and swam and did sports with each other. The guys and girls in my school lived in separate buildings.

When I graduated from university, I became a professional DJ full-time in Dalian Radio and Television Station. I loved this job. It was exciting but after some time I was a bit tired with my work. I felt that I should learn more, get more knowledge and I also wanted to improve my English. I thought about studying somewhere abroad. I had visited the United States for two months. Then my cousin told me about Ireland. She had been here for two years. She was a student here, and she told me a lot about Ireland and that it was very beautiful and peaceful. She said she liked it here, and that it is a very good place to study. She also said that the people here are so kind.

So I tried to get more information from websites, and then I made a decision to come here. I checked the information about language schools in Ireland. American College was a bit more expensive than the others, but they said they had good and active education and that they take responsibility for their students as well. So I chose this college. I spent six months in this college. It was nice.

The first time I came here things felt quite different, the buildings, the food, the weather - almost everything. The city was very quiet in comparison with China, and the air was very clean.

I lived with a host family for four months, and got on very well with them, especially my host Mum, even though we didn’t understand each other very well. She used to use her hands and smile, and write things down to help me to understand. She is wonderful and her name is Mary.

Before I came, I had never cooked a meal before, and I didn't know how to cook. I didn't know how to do shopping because I hadn't done that before either. I hadn't washed clothes, I hadn't used a bank, so I had many things to learn. I must say also that I was older than many Chinese students coming to Ireland. Many of them are only 18, whereas I was 23 so I think many of them know even less than me of these things. My host Mum was the main person to help me learn all these things.

I studied English in American College for six months. Then I applied for a Masters in Communication Studies course in Dublin City University. And I was successful. I like the course in DCU. I see a lot of different films in my class. I learn about the theory and history of European film, television and radio. I am very interested in that and I enjoy my studies. I had my first exam recently and I got a bit nervous. That was my first exam in DCU. My teacher Orla and Irene helped me a lot. I really want to thank them. The result will be out in two weeks. I hope I will pass.

I am one of only two international students in my class and most of the time I am very happy and am friends with my colleagues, but sometimes I feel left out if I don't understand what they are saying. Sometimes they laugh and I don't understand why. I don't really mind if they laugh at me - usually. I can understand most of them but sometimes when we are sitting around a table, I really don't know what they are talking about. I then feel silly and left out. Language is hard sometimes and I find it difficult to express what I want to say.

I have a very good friend who is Irish, and he has helped me a lot in my life here. When he heard recordings of my radio programme in China, he was really interested even though he didn't understand any of what I was saying. He suggested many times that I should try to have a radio show here. I was scared that my English wouldn't be good enough, but he said that he would help me.

So now I have a radio show on Anna Livia radio station in Dublin. It is called 'The Dodo Show' - like my name. I broadcast for 30 minutes every Wednesday at 8pm and it is especially for members of the Chinese community in Dublin. We discuss life in Ireland, and I interview many people with a range of different experiences in Ireland. I have even interviewed some of the people in this room! I try to help the Chinese understand Irish traditions and culture and I learn about the problems facing Chinese students and try to find a way to help them feel at home and not alone. Anybody can talk to me. I learn about what the Chinese here want and what they are thinking.

I like Irish people. They are really kind to me. I try to learn Irish dancing and songs and I will spend some time learning more about Irish traditions and culture when I finish this course. One thing that makes me angry is that Irish people know very little about China. For example, they think we are all poor. I have to explain to them how much it costs me to come and study in Ireland (which is a lot of money). I would like to ask that Irish people take time with us, especially because for many of us the language is very hard.

For the future I would hope that Irish and Chinese people could get to know each other better and get on well together, because they are both wonderful. I really hope that students like me can help the two cultures to come together.

CHINA TO IRELAND: CULTURAL ADAPTATION

Chinese Students at Dublin Business School: some issues and questions

Liza Kelly

International Student Services Officer, Dublin Business School

Dublin Business School has been one of the Irish market leaders in international student recruitment, and as a result has a large international student body. Chinese students make up the highest percentage of this student body, and over the past number of years a good deal of knowledge has been gathered about the problems typically faced, and questions asked, by them.

As a response to the large need for English language training for international students, a Foundation programme was established in 1999, which meets this need along with providing other cultural and academic training. Although the course has a variety of nationalities enrolled on it, Chinese students make up the majority. This course is a bridging course for the students, and when completed, generally leads to the student taking an undergraduate or postgraduate programme.

International Student Services

The International Student Services Office at Dublin Business School provides a large number of services to the international student body. The Office is run with an open-door policy, so there are staff members on hand to answer student queries, or deal with any problems throughout the day.

During the past few years a large amount of information has been gathered in the course of answering student enquiries. The International Student Services Office has used this information to compile a number of information sheets that are readily available to students. A large, detailed street map of Dublin is on display, and smaller maps of the city centre are also available.

In addition to these services, the International Student Services Office is responsible for arranging the airport pick-up and accommodation for those students who require it, along with orientation and immigration advice for the entire international student body. These services are vital to the international students, and make the Office the first point of contact for them. This

has meant that throughout the year Student Services staff are often called upon to answer a large range of questions on academic, cultural, social and welfare issues. The Student Services Office also provides advice and support to any student who is having problems adjusting to life in Ireland, and can organise professional counselling for any more serious cases.

The main areas where our international students have difficulties are in accommodation issues and the immigration process, and some of the issues and potential problems, along with some solutions to them, are outlined below.

Accommodation

The majority of students coming to Dublin Business School are placed with a 'homestay family'. We recommend that these students stay with the family for their first four to six weeks in Ireland, which gives them the opportunity to adjust to Irish culture before they begin their search for rented accommodation if they require it. Homestay accommodation has a number of advantages and disadvantages, but there a number of steps which can be taken to make the experience more enjoyable for both student and family.

It is important to give incoming students a clear idea about what to expect in relation to various aspects of the accommodation situation. First, the cost of all types of accommodation should be clearly explained to all international students *before* they arrive in Ireland. They should also understand that it can be very difficult to find accommodation in the private rental sector, particularly during September and October. So we advise new students to arrive early if they intend finding their own accommodation. Experience shows that any references that a student can supply are very helpful, and the Student Services Office often writes reference letters for students.

Homestay accommodation has advantages and disadvantages. It can be difficult for a student to feel comfortable living in a family home, but it does afford the student a good chance to learn about Irish life, try Irish food and adjust to Irish pronunciation and colloquial language. If a student is to stay in homestay accommodation it is very important that they have a clear picture of all that it entails.

Similarly, we try to provide the host family with as much information as possible about their student, and if possible about the culture that their student comes from. The more information that they have, the fewer problems they will have. This is particularly important with regard to food, as many nationalities have special dietary requirements.

We have found that friends prefer to be grouped together, although there are also a number of reasons why a college might not want to do this. However, it can be very isolating to be alone in

an apartment or homestay, particularly if it is the student's first time away from home. If the student's language is weak, communication is easier if friends are together, and the possible stresses of the homestay arrangement can be alleviated if there are two students together to support each other.

Students may find they need to change accommodation, and are sometimes involved in landlord-tenant disputes, and experience shows the important of providing good advice and all necessary support at such times. Moves can be very stressful and can have a detrimental effect on a student's well-being and academic work. Again, it is important to give as much support as possible.

If a student has problems with their landlord or accommodation, it can be difficult for them to understand the legal terms and issues. Many international students are also unfamiliar with Irish housing laws and their rights as tenants.

For many students who do not speak English as a first language, it can be hard to communicate when angry or upset. Chinese students may also find it difficult to stand up to people in authority and may need extra support, or may need a member of the college staff to negotiate on their behalf.

Immigration Issues

The immigration registration process is quite complicated, and it is important that all international students are informed of the process when they arrive in Ireland. Where possible, it is better to provide the information in writing so as to avoid any misunderstandings.

Staff should where possible assist the students to fill in any forms and accompany them to the Immigration Registration Office; this can be arranged as a group activity. Language students especially tend to need extra support during this process, as they often have communication difficulties.

If any immigration difficulties arise, it is essential to provide practical support and assistance. Problems may arise as a result of students not knowing about the registration process, having insufficient money in their bank account, or not yet having a permanent address at the time of registration. Sometimes students don't receive their 'Green Book' and sometimes they forget to extend the residence period at the appropriate time.

Chinese students in particular seem to become very worried about the immigration process. If any student has concerns, staff should listen carefully, and reassure them that help will be given. The problem may have been heard countless times before, but it is important to the individual student that you take their concerns seriously.

Travel Advice

Students usually want to make the most of their time in Ireland, and will often want to use college holidays to travel in Europe. Getting visas can be difficult: Chinese students do have a hard time getting visas for certain countries…it can sometimes take up to six or eight weeks! So some advice about this, and any help that can be given is very much appreciated.

The DBS International Student Services Office provides information about, and assistance with, travel outside Ireland. It is vital that all students are aware that a visa is required to travel outside Ireland, and that a re-entry visa is required to return to Ireland! A number of information sheets are available in the office to provide information about the location of the various consulates and embassies, and the documents usually required for a visa application. We also try to provide a reference letter if the application is for a particularly important occasion, such as a wedding or birth of a relative.

Also, if family or friends are coming to Ireland, students can require a certain amount of assistance. The college can help by providing a reference letter to support the friend or family's visa application, which states the student's status and course dates.

Visits by family or friends to Ireland can sometimes cause difficulties and upset, particularly if the student has changed in appearance or attitude since their arrival in Ireland. It is important for college staff to provide the student with support during this time.

Conclusion

In general the majority of the Chinese students in DBS have come to Ireland to study English, before moving on to take undergraduate or postgraduate studies. These students face basic communication difficulties and cultural differences, along with all the other problems associated with moving to a new country. While the problems that are outlined here are of course not experienced exclusively by Chinese students, for the Chinese students at Dublin Business School even the most simple problem can become almost insurmountable because of their limited command of English on arrival.

As I have mentioned throughout this paper, it is extremely important to be as understanding and as patient as possible when dealing with your Chinese students. Simply by listening and providing some advice or assistance, you will help the student feel supported and better able to deal with his or her situation.

However, care should be taken not to allow a student to become too reliant on you to solve their every problem. It is important to provide just enough support to allow the student to deal effectively with his or her situation, and not to permit a situation where a student expects you to

do everything for them! If the correct balance is achieved, the student will be able to fully enjoy his or her time in Ireland, while also being able to grow and develop as a mature and capable adult, acquiring personal skills which could almost be considered as important as any academic qualification.

CHINA TO IRELAND: ACADEMIC ADAPTATION

A Chinese Student in Ireland (2)

Yu Hong

Undergraduate student, Dublin Business School

Here comes the Snake[1]!

May I say happy New Year to you, and thank you all here today. First of all, I would thank ICOS for offering me this chance to talk about the experience of Chinese students in Ireland. As one of them, it is my honour to speak to you on this occasion.

I am currently a second year student majoring in Management and Information Systems at Dublin Business School. Before I came here, I really knew very little about Ireland. I would have only associated this word with some famous Irish characters, say James Joyce or Oscar Wilde, or maybe Guinness beer!

My story is quite simple. Having finished one year of independent study at higher education level, I decided to further my studies at a leading university in Shanghai, in which I had already done one-year modules. I had heard from one of my friends that enrolment interviews were being held by a Shanghai-based education agent (China International Intellectual Cooperation) with Dublin Business School for students who intended to study in Ireland. I decided to attend the interviews. Actually, I had planned beforehand to apply for university admission in the United States when I had finished my first degree program. That would have required one further year of study, but unfortunately I was not a patient person. With the full support of my family, I attended the interview and passed the enrolment exam. I started my first time studying overseas here in Ireland.

For most students in China, Ireland, as a member of European Union, is believed to be a fast-growing country that could have a bright future. So I reckoned that it would be helpful for my career to study here.

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[1] The seminar took place at the time of the Chinese New Year, as the Year of the Snake began. In traditional Chinese astrology, everyone is born under the sign of one of 12 animals, which change at each New Year.

I will never forget the time we landed in Dublin airport. Two other girls came from Shanghai with me and one of them was crying on the phone with her family in China.

Perhaps I was lucky! I met a ‘Mr Nice Guy’ - Mr Byrne who was the host of an Irish family. He and his family were so kind to me during my stay with them. With their warmth and help, I got through what was the most difficult time.

My new college life started without any serious incident, but the most surprising thing for me was that the lecture styles were so different from what I had experienced before. The lecturers discussed topics so fast without following the order of the pages and chapters of the textbook, which made it almost impossible for me to cope with the pace. The background details of the topics were hardly specified. And we were required to take down very substantial class notes, but at the same time we were asked to respond to the lecturer. I doubt it is a problem for students with a brain divided in two, but it was impossible for people like me. It took me about three months to adapt to the new teaching styles. That was not a good experience at all, because I felt like a robot. Believe me!

Sometimes, I thought our lecturers were really cold-minded creatures with no care for students' feelings. Once their class was finished, they just walked away, leaving no opportunity for us to ask questions. The relationship between teacher and students was also quite different. In China, the relationship between teacher and students is much more like between parents and children. Perhaps that is why so many Chinese students feel isolated in college. They may think that the lecturers don’t care about their needs, and neither do their classmates. Language problems often create obstacles between them. Sometimes they form a small class community in which they do assignments together and help each other.

In general, Chinese students are mostly introverted people, especially in the classroom. They don't want to take the initiative to speak. They rarely answer questions given by lecturers in class. This is not because they don't know the answers, nor that they don't want to answer. They are just afraid of speaking in public. If they make a mistake, they are frightened of being laughed at. This would be quite embarrassing, and to Chinese people ’face’ matters a lot.

Most outstanding Chinese students do lots of study outside the classroom, rather than working hard in class time. So the library becomes their best friend. Actually I was a good example. Last year I thought I could do the same thing as before, that is just do more in class, then less work in my spare time. But finally it turned out that my study methods were totally wrong. I didn’t do well last year.

In my humble opinion, it would be very helpful if lecturers could activate the interests of Chinese students as much as they could. By all means, let them be a part of the class by putting them into group projects working with Irish classmates. Also they could encourage Chinese students to speak in class, to ask questions, or to give opinions by trying every means possible. They need to help them have confidence and to feel they will not be laughed at when they speak.

Everyone wants to be a person who has an active, creative and attractive manner. So I say where there is a will, there is a road.

The experience of Chinese Postgraduate Students: Academic Advantages and Disadvantages; Practical and Personal Difficulties

Dr Da-Wen Sun

University College Dublin; President, The Irish-Chinese Cultural Society

This paper is based on the author's own teaching and research experience in the Engineering School in University College Dublin. The author himself has received undergraduate and postgraduate education in China and is currently supervising six Chinese PhD students and two Chinese Research Masters students in UCD, who receive scholarships from funded research projects managed by the author.

Background: the Chinese education system

Chinese students enter third level colleges by passing the national university entry examinations held every July. Because of the limited number of places available in universities in China, the competition for places is very severe. In the past, the rate of success in getting a place in university was very low. For example, in 1978, there were about 360 pupils in my high school taking the examinations and only two were admitted to universities. However in a top high school in a city, the success rate could be over 90%. The failed students certainly can have second or more attempts in the following years. Over the past 20 years, places available in universities have been increasing continuously, however compared to Ireland, the rate of pupils who can be admitted to universities is still extremely low. Therefore, students entering state universities should have a very solid knowledge of basic subjects, and therefore usually students coming to Ireland with a primary degree (four years or more full time undergraduate courses) will be very strong academically.

In China, postgraduate study is very similar to the system in the USA. Only students passing the national postgraduate study examinations can be admitted to postgraduate study. A postgraduate programme normally lasts two and a half to three years full time. In this programme, the first one and a half years are for courses including English and advanced professional subjects, and the second one to one and a half years are for research in a specialised field. Therefore a

Chinese postgraduate programme is similar to one which combines a taught master's programme with a research master's programme in this country. So students coming to Ireland with a postgraduate degree are expected to be very solid both in theoretical knowledge and research skills.

Academic advantages of Chinese postgraduates in Ireland

These factors in the Chinese education system mean that Chinese students in the fields of sciences and engineering (where the author has experience) with a postgraduate qualification already have adequate academic training before they come to Ireland. This training will have covered the following aspects:

How to select a research topic

Students are taught methods of literature survey, reading scientific literature both in Chinese and English, and finding relevant gaps of knowledge in the proposed research area, so that a research project can be proposed. Generally speaking, students are required to write the project proposal independently.

How to design the experiment

Students are also taught the methods of experimentation including data acquisition and analysis, arrangement and management of experiments, and comparison of their results with other people's work. If there is an experimental rig involved, students are expected to design and manufacture the rig themselves, with some help from technicians.

How to present the results

Students are normally required to present their results at group or departmental seminars from time to time during their research project. In these seminars, they will be confronted with difficult questions. Through these exercises, they can expand their research ideas and learn how to defend them. Also they have to publish their results, so they learn how to write research papers.

How to use English as an international scientific language

English is taught in the first two years of university as the first foreign language. Students must pass a national English test to be awarded their degrees. At postgraduate level, scientific English is taught as an integral part of the course, which includes extensive training in reading English literature, and writing papers in English. Therefore, students with a postgraduate qualification should have good scientific English reading and writing skills. Because these students learn

English with a strong emphasis on grammar, scientific writing is normally not a problem for them.

Academic disadvantages for Chinese postgraduates in Ireland

As indicated above, Chinese students with a postgraduate qualification are likely to be high calibre researchers. Indeed, most of my Chinese postgraduate students are excellent. They can normally complete their PhD in less than three and a half years, with four to eight peer-reviewed papers published in international scientific journals.

However, China is a big country, and at August 2000 there were 1018 universities in China excluding 811 universities for adult education. All these universities are at very different levels, so therefore are their graduates. Normally universities under the administration of Ministry of Education are the best and now there are 71 universities in this category. Graduates from some low level universities will be weaker academically, despite having their primary or postgraduate degrees.

In general, the academic disadvantages for Chinese postgraduate students in Irish universities are as follows:

English conversation skills

Using English as a working language is always a challenge for Chinese students. Although most students learn English during their undergraduate and postgraduate studies in China, their opportunities to use English for conversation in China are very limited. Therefore, their oral and listening abilities are often weak. In particular for students from lower level universities, English writing is still a difficult task for them, let alone speaking and listening. Furthermore, in China, most students learn American English, therefore when they first arrive in Ireland, they have great difficulties in understanding the Irish accent. Even I, who had lived in the UK for a few years, found it difficult to understand the Irish accent at the beginning! However, their speaking and listening abilities should improve after one or two years.

If students can share accommodation with Irish students or to live with an Irish family, the improvement in their English may be quicker. Unfortunately, these students tend to share with other Chinese students, although they realise the importance of integrating into the Irish community. My students are lucky, as I am the president of the Irish-Chinese Cultural Society, and in our Society there are some members who are willing to teach English to Chinese students voluntarily, so I can place some of my students with these people. They then have regular contact each week so that students can improve their language skills.

Ability to fit into the system

Students often find it difficult to fit into the system due to lack of knowledge of Irish society and poor communication skills. However, even for students with good English, fitting into the system still seems to be difficult. As postgraduate students, when they are doing their research projects, they are required to purchase relevant equipment or consumables, or to manufacture an experimental rig. However they often find it very difficult to find the suppliers or manufacturers. Sometimes, they just don't know where or how to find them. Their ability in this area can only improve after they have lived in this country for a few years.

Collaboration with other organisations

In doing research, sometimes students have to use some instruments in other departments or institutions. In this aspect, some students will have difficulties in making contact and sorting out all these things themselves. This is partly because of their communication skills and partly because of the ability to fit into the system. If students make friends with more Irish students, this problem is less severe. Therefore when I allocate office space for Chinese students, I always place them with Irish students if I can.

Practical and personal difficulties

Most of the students will experience some practical and personal difficulties while studying in Ireland. This kind of difficult experience starts when they begin to apply for visas, and it can continue throughout their duration of their studies. Sometimes, this difficult experience leads to the emotional feeling that they are not welcome in this country, even though Irish people themselves are very friendly.

Difficulty in getting an Irish entry visa

Three or four years ago, getting an Irish visa normally took about one month. Nowadays it needs more than three months. Chinese students coming to Ireland to do postgraduate research are often on scholarships from research projects with fees paid by research projects funded by EU or the Irish government funding agencies. These projects normally need to start rather soon, but the lengthy visa application makes it difficult both for the students and for their supervisors who manage the funded projects.

Difficulty in arranging for their spouses to join students in Ireland

Generally speaking, it is impossible to arrange for students' wives or husbands to join them in Ireland, as almost all visa applications of this kind seem to be automatically refused. Although it is possible to get a short-stay visiting visa, this kind of visa is not renewable. In 1998, an application for the wife of one of my students was refused, then she appealed but was refused again. After that, UCD International Office got involved, and the visa was finally granted, but

the student had to sign a statement guaranteeing that his wife would go back to China after the visit. In 1999, another student left for the USA without completing his project because his wife could not renew her visa and he did not want to be separated from her. There are many other upsetting stories involving visa applications for students' spouses.

Registration with the Immigration Office (formerly Aliens' Office)

After students come to Ireland, they must register with the Immigration Office to get a one-year residential permit to live in Ireland, and they must renew this permit every year. Nowadays even registering with the office is a difficult task. Students must get up at 5 o'clock or earlier to join the queue outside the Immigration Office. On a cold, rainy and windy day, this is extremely uncomfortable as there is no shelter outside the office. Also the renewal of the permit can only be applied after the expiry date, not before the date. Sometimes, students have to go abroad for conferences or holidays, or they have an urgent reason to return to China near the expiry date of the permit. They must have a re-entry visa to come back to Ireland to continue their studies, and a re-entry visa will not be issued near to the expiry date of the residence permit. In this situation, students cannot go abroad, no matter how urgent the situation is. Otherwise, they will have to apply for a re-entry visa in a third country and the very lengthy visa application process begins again.

Financial and employment issues

Finally, although most Chinese postgraduate research students have scholarships to support their studies, there are also other Chinese students, especially students on taught Masters degree courses, who depend on their own financial resources. However it is illegal to work in this country during their study even for a few hours per week.[2]

The outcome: valuable researchers lost to Ireland

Because of all the difficulties they encounter, Chinese postgraduate students often leave Ireland and move to Canada, the USA or the UK when they finish their studies. Some students even leave without finishing their courses or research.

The experience of the last few years in the Departments of Civil Engineering and Agricultural and Food Engineering in Earlsfort Terrace (UCD), is that two of our postgraduates have gone back to China, four have emigrated to Canada, one went to the USA and one is now in the UK.

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[2] In April 2001, the Minister for Justice announced changes to the immigration regulations affecting international students and employment, with the result that non-EU students are now permitted to work for up to 20 hours during term-time and for longer during vacations. This is in line with practice elsewhere in Europe. (Editors' note)

Not one of my students has decided to live and work in Ireland. Most of these people have the highest qualifications, and they are treasures to Ireland. Their leaving for a third country is certainly a loss to the Irish economy and the country as a whole.

When an Unstoppable Force Meets an Immovable Object: Chinese students in the UK university system

Yvonne Turner

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Introduction: Chinese students and UK universities today

Changes in Higher education funding in recent years have encouraged universities and colleges to look increasingly to overseas students, both as a method of revenue-earning, and as a way of increasing the diversity of the university community. International offices have never been busier, it seems, as they try to meet the challenge of recruiting new students world-wide in growing numbers and at the same time meeting the academic standards demanded by departments and faculties.

The challenge to maintain student numbers became even more pressing after 1997 when a number of the long-term sources of international students – the rapidly-developing economic powerhouses of Asia – collapsed under the weight of regional economic crisis (Gough 1998). Not only did individuals in those countries see their personal wealth disappear but a number of governments have subsequently taken significant action to rebuild the domestic economy at the expense of international migration. For example, in Malaysia – long a good source of international students for Britain – the government imposed monetary controls that made it very difficult for Malaysian nationals to take money abroad, including for education purposes. As a result, UK universities and colleges began looking to newer markets, and China has loomed large in this picture.

Some historical context

Pre-Revolutionary China had a long tradition of sending its young people abroad to acquire an international education (Hayhoe 1996). Dr Sun Yat-Sen, Deng Xiao Ping and other national revolutionary leaders benefited from education in the USA, Japan, France or the UK (Hayhoe 1996, He et al 1998, Sang 1998). However, with the closing off of China during the 1960s, the situation changed. Academic exchange was limited to small numbers among the party elite who

were able to travel to the Soviet Union and other Eastern bloc countries to receive technical or political education. The beginning of the reform process in China in 1978 altered that picture again, however, and the 80s and 90s saw a huge increase in the numbers of students seeking degrees in Europe and the USA. In the late 1990s, universities in Britain were happy to meet that demand, and the numbers arriving in the UK has increased markedly.

Chinese students in UK universities now

There is no doubt that an increase in the number of full fee-paying Chinese students in UK higher education is potentially good for the bottom line of each institution. There are a range of implications that attend this increase in numbers, however, that require careful attention if Chinese students participating in UK higher education (HE) are to get the best out of their learning experience. A body of literature over many years documents the difficulties experienced by a variety of international students in the UK higher education system, in the achievement of both their initial expectations of the university experience and in performing adequately within the system itself (McNamara and Harris 1996, Elsey 1990, Jones 1999, Kinnell 1990, Mortimer 1997, Shotnes 1987; Hayter 1996). Many of the issues affecting overseas students impinge on a basic approach to academic equality in UK HE. This questions the extent to which both institutions and the people within them are aware of or equipped to ensure that culturally different student groups receive real equality of access to the apparent educational opportunity. It is interesting to note that the Times Higher Education supplement reported recently that the UK's global share of the international student market has fallen substantially – perhaps reflecting perceptions about multi-cultural insensitivity in UK institutions compared to other global players (February 2000).

In order to understand the needs of Chinese students effectively, as a foundation for enabling provision, it is useful to consider the extent to which the teaching and learning process in the UK and in China may be enculturated. Such an investigation would include consideration of what has been termed a learner's implicit theory of learning: the way in which learning experiences might influence attitudes and behavioural responses to the encounter of new learning situations (Claxton 1996). Such an investigation may be especially illuminating when examining learners' perceptions as they move across cultures, and has the potential to reveal insights useful on both a practical and philosophical level.

This paper investigates and compares the Chinese and UK education systems at three levels: macro-level political policy and the sociological role of HE in China and the UK; professional and practitioner aspects focusing on teaching and learning methods and philosophies; and student perceptions, drawing on research data from questionnaires and interviews from Chinese

students in a UK franchise degree programme and studying in a university in the UK (both offered by the University of Hertfordshire). The paper attempts to draw from the literature an understanding of the degree to which the two education systems are culturally similar or different in institutional provision and teaching and learning paradigms. From student responses to questions, it aims to develop a picture of their implicit theories of learning, which derive from their experiences in the two systems, and examines the ways in which that may impact on their behaviour in a learning environment.

The macro level: social and political construction of higher education in China and the UK

In beginning to develop an understanding of the cultural aspects of HE in the two countries, it is useful to explore the way in which notions of education are expressed in both societies and are constructed through the policy objectives of governments over time. This reflects the tendency of policy objectives to flow down to individual institutional programmes and trickle into routine aspects of professional practice, such as teaching methods and approaches to assessment and evaluation (Hayhoe 1996, Pepper 1996).

An extensive literature documents the constructs of both the Chinese and UK HE systems (Altbach 1996, Barker 1996, Beard and Hartley 1984, Cheng Kai-ming et al 1999, Evans and Abbott 1989, Hayhoe 1989, 1996, He et al 1998, Lin 1993, Little 1992, Pepper 1996, New Star 1996, Tsui 1998, Van der Molen 1996, Wang 2000, World Bank 1997, Zhou 1998, Zou 1992). This paper aims to provide an overview of the key aspects of the social and political construction of education in China and the UK as background to further discussion. The conclusions of the analysis shown here focus on a small number of governing variables which may not, therefore, represent the complex richness of more detailed assessments. A composite summary of these key comparators appears in figure 1. The emphasis in this figure is on the development of the Chinese HE system, for two main reasons: first, it reflects the degree to which the HE environment in China has been subject to significant and turbulent change during the twentieth century; second, discussion of the implicit theories of learning that Chinese students may possess refers predominantly to their previous experiences within the Chinese education system before arrival in the UK. The UK information provides a comparative benchmark in considering cultural aspects affecting higher education pedagogy in the UK system.

Cultural Factors in the macro HE environment

Mapping the sequence of developments in higher education in China as shown in figure 1, reveals a number of interesting areas where the development of HE in china may show marked cultural differences from that of the UK.

First, it seems that the extent of rapid political change and economic modernisation that took place in China in the twentieth century led to a government focus only at the highest levels of action. The major thrust seems to have been towards developing the HE sector, working with broad policy objectives around provision, institutional development, programming and curriculum. Considerations of the intangibles of a philosophy of education and teaching methodology during the twentieth century have remained less affected by developments in the period and have tended to play a minor role in government policy and action. This implies that many of the pre-revolutionary assumptions about how to teach and how to learn may be likely to have been less challenged than other aspects of the HE paradigm and undergone fewer changes as a result. During periods of extreme political turbulence, such as the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), this trend of the smooth development of traditions and constructs of teaching and learning were severely challenged (Pepper 1996). However, the strength of the mainstream tradition retained its force during the reconstruction period, partly because of a tendency for rejection of the political elements of that era to sweep up some of the practical changes and departures from earlier traditions of practice that accompanied it (Tsui 1998). This also reflects the closeness between active politics and HE that is a distinctive long-term feature of HE in China. A rejection of the political radicalism of the 1966-76 period, therefore, necessarily involved the eradication of much of the style of HE provision which went with it (Pepper, 1996. ch.17).

A second aspect to consider here is that of the overall orientation to HE and to intellectuals in China. Throughout the period from pre-revolution onwards, the view of HE seems to be that it is a tool for social engineering of one kind or another. The aim of HE is to achieve some kind of single purpose or set of purposes closely related to government or social objectives. This is a contrast to the more amorphous and liberal assumptions which operate in UK HE. The practical consequences of this are a narrower range for the university curriculum, geared to defined policy aspirations, than may be the case in the UK, and consequently a closer expectation of the achievement of particular behavioural or intellectual outcomes from graduates through the system. This suggests a high level of conformity of expectation perhaps from students and from policy makers about what a university education could be expected to ‘do’ for individuals and the country.

In intellectual orientation, it is clear that the liberal tradition of intellectual criticism and autonomy dominant in UK higher education is absent in Chinese educational constructs (Goldman 1981, Hayhoe 1996; Pepper 1997, Allinson 1989). Not only the closeness of the connection between HE and politics/government, but also the predominant approach of

scholasticism reinforces this view. The relatively low levels of research undertaken in higher education in China develops this aspect further (also owing to the narrow and specific notion of HE as a mechanism for achieving specific social and policy objectives) as does the strength of the elitism, both in hierarchy of institution and in student body, that seems to be present. In some part, this may represent the relatively recent development away from a feudal social order, since scholasticism tends to be an intellectual feature of that social model. The practical implications for teaching and learning practice, however, seem clear and are demonstrated through the predominant didacticism of the Chinese system. The context for the development of critical thinking and innovation through new research are mainly absent within such an approach to higher education.

As noted above, the scholastic attitude to intellectual thought which has carried across from Chinese historical tradition and was reinforced by the politically totalitarianism of the Chinese state for the large part of the twentieth century, leads inevitably into a unitary view of knowledge and learning in teaching provision. High levels of state control and an absence of intellectual freedom and autonomy, generate an environment where the translation of specific policy aims for HE are targeted through teaching style and programme content. Even where teaching methodology may not be represented directly in policy instruments, the policy-generated narrowness of the curriculum, prescription of materials available and prescriptive specification of desired student outcomes, lead to a model in which highly standardised and conforming teaching practice is almost inevitable. This is especially the case in a system where the socialist environment of the second half of the twentieth century linked educators' professional compliance and performance directly with their continued professional well-being and at times, such as during the Cultural Revolution period, personal safety – though there are, again, indications that a longer-term Chinese attitude may also be reflected here. The Confucianist tendency to emphasize the 'master' as expert leads to an expectation that student performance ultimately mirrors the direct competence of the educator (Chen 1994).

The purpose of the education process in this compounded environment, then, is to develop individuals who are models of certain kinds of behaviour or who develop professional or intellectual knowledge with specific uses in society. This reflects a preoccupation with the social and moral elements of educational programming and a notion of 'right' behaviour, both deriving from the pre-Revolutionary Confucian inheritance and from Marxist ideology (Partington 1988). The impact on teaching and learning that results from this is the desire to learn in order to find the 'right' answer and to develop into the 'right' kind of person along clear and definable lines.

The contrast with the UK system in terms of policy approach and definition and articulation of the social role of education appears to be marked. Already mentioned, the liberal, culturally critical, independent academic is a notion that is absent in the Chinese model. Key areas of difference emerge in attitudes to the nature of knowledge, innovation and creative thinking and perceptions about the basic purposes of HE. The processes of HE in the UK, where critical thought and opportunities to develop across a self-determined and independently articulated path, are also largely absent in the policy preoccupations and educational traditions in China. Autonomy in programming and determination of curricula and programme also seems to be absent from the Chinese system, which focuses on a narrower range of higher conformity in expectation of the role and capability of HE in society than that which is present in the UK (State Education Commission 1996, Li 1994).

Figure 1: Key aspects of higher education constructs in China and the UK in the twentieth century

Attribute	China: traditional pre-twentieth century model	China: the early twentieth century model (1895-1949)	China: Maoist/Socialist model (1049-1978)	China: the Deng/reform model (1978-present)	The contemporary UK system
Main type of institution/ provision	Range of colleges and academies at county to national/imperial levels: universities do not formally exist	Introduction of the university (1895); rapid development of HE along 'Western lines'; predominantly the USA model	Range of universities; rapid development of training colleges, industrial training institutions etc.	Range of universities; expansion of provision at all levels	Mixed provision – range of universities and other HE institutions
Role of HE in society	HE as a mechanism for moral and social order	As a mechanism for moral and social order / developing ideas of 'modernism'	HE viewed as a mechanism for political social reform and Marxist economic modernisation	HE viewed as a mechanism for social and political reform and control; an engine for economic development	HE viewed as a mechanism for achieving broad liberal and economic development objectives
Politicization	Intimate formal and informal connections between intellectuals and political power	Traditional connections weakened / connections to 'foreign powers'	Formal and informal co-identification between politics and education; connections to 'foreign powers' severed, except for USSR	Intimate formal and informal connections between intellectuals and political power	Weak formal and informal connections between intellectuals and political power
Intellectual autonomy	Heavy social control over education and intellectuals; periodic persecution of intellectuals	Social controls significantly weakened	Social control very tight; intellectuals come under widespread suspicion and subject to persecution	Heavy social control over education and intellectuals; periodic persecution of intellectuals	Intellectual autonomy exists, subject to broad non-specific controls
Intellectual orientation	Scholasticism dominant – absence of free creative or critical thought	Scholasticism dominant – sporadic experimentation with scientific, creative and free thought	Marxism/Maoism dominant – absence of free creative or critical thought	Scholasticism dominant – attempts to develop scientific, creative and free thought	Critical and applied approaches to creative thinking dominant
Access	Elitist – HE available to social class elite	Elitist – social class elite – money and guanxi an important factor	Wide access to vocational education and training; widening access to formal HE, but subject to political credentials	Provision limited; partial development of access via competitive merit system; formal HE elitist	Historically elitist – access widening, especially in non-formal sector
Organisation and ownership	Higher education colleges – public; vocational institutions – private	Universities – foreign/public; vocational institutions private	State controlled education	State controlled mainstream HE; private sector provision on the periphery	Mixed ownership – formal HE state-owned
Institutional Structure	Hierarchy of institutions – periodic political persecution	Old hierarchy breaks down; conceptual hierarchy in place	Notional equality; real inverted hierarchy of	Hierarchy of institutions along traditional lines	Hierarchy of institutions; boundaries incrementally

Structure	of lower level/private institutions	– political turbulence distorts planned development of HE	institution, owing to politically suspect nature of education	traditional lines	blurring

Formal/non-formal mix	Formal institutions dominant - non-formal (career vocational/training institutions) have little status	Formal and non-formal institutions developing; no clear dominance as established HE provision shifts to new pattern	Expansion of non-formal education provision; all education suspended 1966-1970	Formal institutions dominant in planning and influence; non-formal dominates extent of provision	Formal and informal institutions exist; no clear dominance as HE undergoes successive reforms
Career destinations/social utilisation of graduates	Literal vocationalism – university study leads to employment as government official	Career destinations diverse	State appointment system; mainly to industry or political appointments	State appointment system gives way to student self-determination; vocationalism dominates	Career destinations diverse
Breadth of curriculum	Narrow – emphasis on interpretation of the 'Classics'	Narrow - but growing as a result of foreign influence; introduction of science and foreign languages	Very narrow – focuses on vocational-industrial, scientific skills and political reeducation	Introduction of new disciplines – provision of humanities and Social Sciences increases	Very wide - across range of institutions and at institutional level
Level of subject specialism in design	Generalism – focus on the humanities - little or no critical research undertaken	Generalism – developing specialism and research	Generalism – political studies; limited scientific research	Generalism	Tradition of specialism within discipline and subject
Orientation to knowledge	Unitary - knowledge viewed as 'truth', 'fact'	Unitarism gives way to the development of plural perspectives at the margins	Maoist/Marxist unitarism – absolute 'truth' is as given by the Party	Unitary - knowledge viewed as 'truth', 'fact'	Pluralist view of learning and understanding
Intellectual approach	Emphasis on 'pure' intellectualism – no pragmatic application of learning or teaching of skills	Emphasis on 'pure' intellectualism – little application or pragmatic skills work in the formal sector; developing concern with 'modernism' via skills at the periphery	Co-identification of work and intellectual though; re-education through labour frequent	'pure' intellectualism mainly emphasised; limited experiments with alternative forms of assessment in certain areas	Applied approaches – testing via research and practical application dominant
Teaching and	Didactic – Master and	Mixed - introduction of	Polarized – education via	Didactic – teacher-centred;	Mixed methods – didactic,

assessment methodology	disciples; Imperial examination system	applied and experiential approaches; examination system	labour vs. didactic formal teaching; assessment via examinations in formal education; experience and skill elsewhere	assessment via centralised examination system at institutional, Provincial and State levels	teacher-centred methods blend with student-centred approaches
International orientation	Absence of international contact or context	International structures and systems adopted	Virtual absence of international contact or context	Massive expansion of international exchange and ‘opening up’	Intellectual community exists on an international level

In the UK, HE is viewed as contributing to an environment of diversity and internationalism while in China, the domestic and conformist traditions lead to a different set of educational preoccupations and patterns of practice. The implications for the style of student experience and the teaching and learning process which students in each of the two systems may undergo, therefore, seem to provide plentiful opportunity for differences stemming from cultural and other sources. This emerging picture can be developed by a more detailed examination of teaching and learning styles and practices in the two systems.

The teaching and learning environment in HE and basic education

As already noted, from the constructs that are implied by the social and political constructs of education, it may be possible to infer a read-across from policy objective to student perception about the educational process. In this way, it may be possible to project that students from China are likely to possess a generic construct of higher education that desires to achieve certain specific aims in their lives though their participation and that those aims would have some direct input into society. They would be likely to have a notion of a standard educational experience, reflecting the education process in which they had previously studied, based on learning 'truths' or about morally 'correct' behaviour that fits them to become useful members of society. They would expect to undergo training in interpretation of information, led by an expert educator that enables them to make sense of contradictory or unclear issues and derive clarification by the processes of reductionism which helps them to fit their experiences into the right model.

The main aim of the learning process in this model would be to refine non-conforming attitudes and to develop capability of understanding the precepts of an absolute model of knowledge which can assist in resolving life's problems. A 'successful' scholar, deriving from this macro construct of education, is one who can bring the examples of the model of knowledge they have developed in order to simplify and make sense of confusion, and thus make a productive contribution to the continued stability and harmony of society. Such a projection deriving from the wider context, resonates with much of the literature about Chinese students' attitudes to the educational experience, from within the pre-twentieth century era and into the development of modern higher education (Cheng et al 1999, Chan and Drover 1996, Ho 1986, Gallagher 1998, Little 1992, Lin 1993, World bank 1997). It can be developed further by examining in more detail the practical outcomes of a student's experience in the educational environment.

The dynamics of teaching and learning in the Chinese educational setting: interview results

This section draws on a number of sources, notably illustrative interviews given by students in a large private higher education institution (BIMC) in Beijing in 1999. These interviews form part of a larger collaborative project currently underway. Fuller results from this work, in the form of personal histories about Chinese students in the new private higher education sector in China, will be reported later. More details of methodology are provided in Appendix I, and Appendix II is an abbreviated transcript of one Chinese student's story as outlined in her interview.

The Chinese education system

In terms of academic background, the Chinese system presents very different challenges to the learner than the European one. First, there are only places in the public domestic system for 7% of eligible students (China Daily 1998). Many students will value university education very strongly, therefore, and their initial motivation in the learning situation tends to be very positive. In other areas, eligibility criteria for entry to higher education in China may affect individuals' notions about learning. University students in China, for example, must be single (and without children), under the age of 27 years and able to meet a physical fitness requirement as well as the challenging intellectual standards set for university entry. Several students interviewed noted their desire to pursue a private 'western' education option because their personal circumstances – marriage or children, for example – effectively barred them from participation in the formal system. A strong parallel perception seems to exist that HE - and education generally – is aimed exclusively at the 'young', concomitant with both entry requirements and the policy notion that HE exists to develop future leaders of the country. The extensive network of part-time adult education options available to people in China challenge this assumption somewhat. However, the dominant preference interviewees expressed was for participation in the formal system, owing to the strong institutional hierarchy in China and the status that a formal university education would confer to an individual's future life.

The learning process

Further differences begin to emerge between the UK and Chinese systems when considering the practical processes of the learning experience. As implied above from the policy emphasis on standardisation, Chinese students will have experienced an extremely formal

and didactic approach to teaching and learning during their years of compulsory education and at university (Sharpe 1998).

Although the Chinese government has been attempting to reform the system (Pepper 1996, State Education Commission 1996, Li 1994), overwhelmingly, innovation in the classroom has been unsuccessful and the environment is very traditional in style. In the classroom, the teacher speaks and the students listen. Asking questions in class is actively discouraged; the teacher/lecturer may ask one or two favoured students questions but may not ask questions at all except to competitively test students' recall in a *viva* kind of style. Questions that the teacher asks are likely to be factual – it is not normal practice to ask students to venture an opinion. Should a student provide an incorrect answer, they tend to receive some kind of rebuke or punishment from the lecturer and can become the victim of ridicule from classmates after the class. During the class, the teacher will provide the students with structured notes – usually on the blackboard, which the students will copy and learn verbatim – students are not encouraged to take notes independently.

Active participation in learning, then, is something that can be highly emotional for Chinese students. It may be particularly challenging in the UK system, for example, where student participation and opinion-sharing occurs openly in many seminars and lectures. Interviewees noted that they were often very worried about looking stupid or losing face in the classroom environment. In addition, 'basic' skills, such as the ability to organise matrix notes or aids for revision is something that can be bewildering for Chinese students simply because they have no prior experience.

Lecturer support and extra-curricular relationships

Outside of the Chinese classroom, however, there is frequently a warm and friendly relationship between lecturer and students. Students freely approach lecturers outside of classes – and are often encouraged to do so. The real level of personal contact time and individual support that a lecturer will give to a student is very high compared to the UK system. Lecturers are generally available to students, have low teaching hours and often few other academic responsibilities. Students will be accustomed to finding staff ready willing and able to talk to them privately – and at length, without an appointment.

There is also an important social and personal dimension to the lecturer-student relationship, something which is less frequently found in the UK and often discouraged. Students and

lecturers may eat dinner together, go out together and develop close personal mentoring relationships, very much reflecting the Confucian master/disciple tradition (Cheng 1994, Cua 1989). Lecturers often take on a mentoring role for students, which lasts long after the formal educational relationship has ended. Parents also expect to get highly involved in discussions about all aspects of student work and performance. The insistence of direct communication only with the student about academic and associated matters such as is usual in the UK, is, therefore, puzzling to the families of Chinese students and to the students themselves.

Individuality, assessment and competition

Owing to the competition for places in Chinese Higher education – and driven by the strong examination system which competitively assesses student performance each semester and nationally at the end of Elementary, Middle and High school – students tend to view the education experience extremely competitively. Student work in China is entirely individual, and almost completely examination-based. Students will have had little experience in working in groups, for example, and, therefore, group activities may be difficult for them. Interpersonally, they may find working in a peer group intimidating and may also find it difficult to understand the learning benefits of such exercises. A number of interviewees noted that they felt that group activities were 'just playing, not learning' because the learning style was far removed from the formal mode to which they were accustomed. All stated that they found group working activities one of the most difficult aspects of studying in the 'western' framework.

In addition, Chinese students are not accustomed to the notion that is it technically possible for all students to achieve equally well or badly within the system. In China, class performance lists are produced each semester and students streamed according to their place on the list – there can only be one student at the top of the list, the place on which matters enormously for each student's career and future. If you are at the bottom of the list, you are almost inevitably condemned to ridicule and humiliation from classmates – and sometimes lecturers – as well as being down-streamed or deprived of future educational opportunities. This extreme approach to selection may have the potential to reduce the level of cooperation and sharing with other students that they find comfortable and has further repercussions for how students might operate in groups. Certainly it injects a high level of performance stress into the way in which Chinese students may approach the learning environment.

Formative versus summative assessment

The emphasis on examinations in China has a clear set of implications for study patterns. Students are unlikely to have experienced assessed course-work, though they will have received large amounts of unassessed 'homework' every night, in the form of structured exercises, reading and memorization – and will be willing to work very hard at it. The Chinese government is currently attempting further reforms in education to address the stresses that such high levels of non-assessed 'homework' is having on the development of young people (Kuhn 2000). Students will, however, typically not have experienced the idea that coursework can somehow have an important role in determining final marks for the course. For many students, coursework, therefore, is viewed as unimportant compared to the final exam.

Academic writing and critical skills

The form of examinations in the Chinese system is typically factually-based, with extensive use of multiple choice questions. It is interesting to note that writing, in the sense of how to style, structure and present a piece of writing, is not taught in China, where the emphasis is on calligraphy – learning to write complex Chinese characters correctly. Students, therefore, are unlikely to have encountered essay-writing to any extent, certainly not written assignments of the challenging 3-5000 words typical in undergraduate courses in the UK, or research papers of any length. Nor will they have any experience of using references or multiple sources of information to inform their written work or their thinking. Even at university level in China, courses are driven by single course texts (with supplementary materials in some subjects such as languages), as noted above.

The teaching method emphasises the correct memorization and reproduction of teachers' notes or text book information – referencing is not used, since almost the entire question response a student makes is likely to be in the form of memorized sections of text. Information is viewed in a unitary way: the teaching of facts, a direct reflection of the wider unitarism of the intellectual and political environments (Woo 1993, Meissner 1995, Little 1992, Hayhoe 1996). A strong emphasis in the Chinese system lies in the development of a student's ability to grasp structures and systems which enable the learning and reproduction of information. Given the highly unitary approach to intellectual life in China, this ability seems very developed; techniques for remembering information content are valued and

rewarded through the assessment system more highly than reflection on the value of the content of the data itself (Chan and Drover 1996).

Performance standards

A very important aspect of difference in the two systems lies in the area of the style of assessment and grading. Not only is assessment confined to examinations, designed to produce a list of student capability from first to last in the class, but the pass mark is set at 60% or 'B'. A good student in China would expect to receive grades at either A/B level or 80-100%. It is extremely difficult to persuade a student that a 'C' is an average grade in the UK system or that 50% is 'not bad' or 'average' for a piece of work. Unfortunately, cultural issues concerned with face and ideas about failure mean that it may be very difficult to re-motivate many students once they begin to feel they are 'no good' – whatever the average performance of the rest of the cohort, for example. This results in part from the pressure that students will have experienced in the Chinese system to maintain a consistent level of performance throughout the educational career, and fears about the possibly damaging long-term consequences of poor performance.

Progression and performance

Students in universities confront more extreme perceptions about grading and assessment. Getting into university in China is so difficult that it is virtually unheard of for a student to fail – and should this happen, it is usually associated with a significant personal set-back, illness or something similar. Students are also allowed multiple opportunities to re-take examinations which they have been unsuccessful and this does not affect their progress through higher levels of the degree programme. Frequently, students will be studying for third or fourth year courses without having completed the requirements of all first and second-year courses. Some students studying in the UK, therefore, may find it difficult to take the first attempt at an examination seriously and may regard it as a 'practice run' to see what the form of the examination might be.

More seriously, the high levels of pressure that exist in the Chinese system to ensure performance derive from different stems than within the UK system. In the UK, student motivation may tend to derive from the direct effects of performance in the formal assessment regime. For Chinese students, the pressures are arguably more intangible, connected with 'face', perceptions of class positioning compared to the rest of the group, meeting personal and parental expectation and the wider pressure that society brings onto

students to perform well educationally and then be able to become valuable and 'productive' in their role in the community.

Peer relationships

Socially, there are a number of factors in the Chinese higher education environment, which are culturally very different from the UK, and which shape students' habits and expectations. In terms of working style and patterns, the Chinese class and university runs in a much more tightly structured pattern, and the idea of 'tongxue' (classmate) is socially very important in China. Connections that form at this stage of life are regarded as binding and lifelong. Students are also accustomed to working with the same relatively small group of people throughout their school or university careers.

The looser organisational form and the larger numbers of people in the UK system can leave Chinese students feeling isolated and without the social and academic support network on which they would tend to rely for help. Once in the UK system, other ways of meeting British or other students can be difficult - walking into a crowded student union can be a daunting experience for Chinese students, as it is for many students who come from cultures where going to 'bars' is not necessarily regarded as a socially positive activity for the young. In China, the social environment is controlled both by the authorities and by the peer group; students live in same-sex dormitories on campus throughout their university careers, typically sharing a room with six to eight other people. Social activity tends to be limited, take place in the daytime and is often related to studies in some way. This trend is changing in China in the large urban universities, but remains a consistent pattern through most of the rest of the country.

UK perspectives – how people typically view Chinese students

This section compares some viewpoints expressed in the literature about the ways in which Chinese students are perceived in their orientation to study, with information reported by students. It then compares these perceptions with the results of questionnaire responses from Chinese university students who have been studying in the UK for one semester to examine both the viability of the 'model' and its durability as students adapt to the UK experience.

From the descriptive information derived from the reports of students above, it is possible to notionally map some of the skills, experiences and attitudes that a 'typical' Chinese student might possess on entry to the UK system. Examining the limited writing on Chinese students

in the UK system, and assumptions about teaching and learning, it is possible to list a set of assumptions and map them against the student data to produce a comparative list (figure 2).

Figure 2 : Chinese student experience and perceptions vs. attitudes in UK higher education

Chinese student – 'model' experience	UK system assumptions about student behaviour	Perceptions about Chinese student performance in UK HE
Experienced in developing techniques for processing large quantities of data	Experienced in taking a critical approach to complex problems and conflicting literature/experiences	Experienced in rote learning and memorization of data
Accustomed to individual-based approaches to learning, assessment and educational experience	Students accustomed to working in groups and alone	Students do not make contributions to group work
Accustomed to expressing knowledge as unitarist ideas and factual truth; knowledge as conformity	Understanding is achieved by reconciling conflicting opinions; knowledge as iconoclasm with the past	Students do not understand how to build an argument or reference; find it difficult to express complex ideas
Examinations accurately measure academic accomplishment	Examinations are one of many different methods of assessment	Students are not very good at assessments other than exams; they do not take coursework 'seriously'
Experienced at seeing the lecturer as 'the expert' who conveys absolute knowledge and truths	Lecturer is a mentor who opens up the doors to reflective, independent thinking	Students ask lecturers to provide 'all answers' to learning development
Learning is something that happens to the young; maturity should bring full understanding	Learning is a lifelong process	Students are in a hurry to 'get through' their education; students are reliant on finding 'all the answers'
Learning happens in a formal 'classroom' setting	Learning can happen anywhere	Students are uncomfortable with some learning environments
Higher education helps you to become a good citizen	The social engineering of HE is weak or implicit	Students seek an emphasis on the 'correct' in behaviour and attitudes

From the information outlined above about the predominant model of education in China, it is possible to suggest that the level of academic adaptation Chinese students are required to undergo when they arrive in the UK system might be extensive. Lectures will be a form of teaching that they feel comfortable with (though they may feel uncertain about how to document the learning outcomes of the lectures) but much of the UK university experience,

both academic and social, is something that would be extremely alien to students from the People's Republic. The overall style of independent self-directed learning, the lack of individual pastoral care and support available, the approach and style of student-centred methods and course assessments all present daunting challenges. The extent of academic and personal stress that Chinese students seem to go through during their studies might be likely to disadvantage them both personally and academically.

Results of questionnaire survey of Chinese students in the UK

Reports from students interviewed in Beijing indicated that they perceived in advance a high requirement to change their orientation to learning on entry into the 'western' learning environment. In addition, on commencing their studies in the new environment, the interviewees felt enormous pressure to make significant personal and intellectual adjustments very quickly in order to maintain educational performance. The interviewees also noted that the familiarity of a known home environment and relationship network was influential in coping with the stresses of the change. For Chinese students entering the UK system in the UK, however, the challenges could be more specific, since they would be confronting cultural adaptation in all areas of life.

The interview data was supplemented, therefore, by the results of a questionnaire administered to a group of Chinese students who have been studying in the UK for one semester (approximately 4-5 months) at pre-degree, Bachelor and Master's levels. These were compared to responses provided by UK and other international students, in order to gain some insight into students' learning orientations after a period of study in the UK. (For information about questionnaire method and a summary of results, see Appendix III.)

Significance of the questionnaire results

The information derived from the questionnaires appears mixed. The sample size is relatively small and the questionnaire method does not provide the richness of data given by the interviews carried out in Beijing. In addition, though a small number of the students included in the sample are from the original interview group, the number is too small to provide a good pre-departure point of comparison for the analysis.

There are a number of points of interest in the questionnaire outcomes, however. The general orientation and attitude to study expressed by the Chinese students does appear to be somewhat different from that of the other students in certain respects. For example, Chinese

students express a stronger attitudinal focus towards the vocational nature of higher education – they are studying to help themselves obtain future employment. Their view of learning also emphasises the development of mastery and knowledge leading to personal confidence, to a greater degree than other groups of students. At the same time, they show a lack of confidence in all people's ability to develop as learners through their lives, and a number of the respondents strongly emphasised the practical and experiential aspects of learning, away from the formal classroom setting.

Chinese students focus more strongly on the solitary nature of the learning process, rather than on informal learning with peers, and show a much more teacher-centred approach. This view is reinforced by their preference for small-group tutorials as a medium of learning, an environment where they would be able to learn with the maximum access to lecturers and in a small and supportive group of known classmates. Students from China also emphasise a preference for direct connections between student and lecturer outside of the classroom. They express more cynicism about the 'controlling' nature of assessment and evaluation and more keenness for written assignments and for a variety of interpersonal skills- based assessment methods, perhaps reflecting a reaction to the exam-driven nature of assessment in China.

All of these factors, would be supported by the socialization and 'implicit' theories of learning outlined above as part of the Chinese education model. However, the overall range and level of differences expressed by Chinese students do not appear overwhelmingly significant. It seems apparent from the majority of responses to the questionnaires that, though students from China may arrive with a set of educational experiences that are extremely different from those enculturated in the UK system and the principle assumptions under which UK universities operate, they manage to adjust their attitude and orientation to learning quickly. The questionnaire results strongly suggest that students certainly feel that they can be successful in the new learning environment.

Additional illuminative reference points could usefully be derived from an examination of the correlation between attitude and academic performance and an examination of the degree to which the students are providing 'satisfying' responses to the questions asked, rather than exposing deeply-held changes of belief and opinion. The preliminary outcome does suggest, however, that this group of Chinese students are able to cope well with the

learning challenges opened up by entry into the UK higher education system. Certainly the framework of expectation and high value placed upon university training in China, together with the low levels of domestic provision, would make it likely that Chinese students would adapt and succeed very quickly. However, it is interesting to note the apparent speed of adaptation and the flexibility with which the students do appear to embrace the experience in reality.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to set contemporary Chinese students' orientation to learning within the institutional and policy frameworks of the Chinese education system, and then to briefly reflect on the degree to which those influences affect ongoing student motivation when students arrive in the UK. The scale of the subject is extensive and the conclusions from this paper, therefore, extremely tentative. There are a number of interesting points that may have an impact on provision in UK universities and impact on student success on the system.

Overall, it is interesting to note that a common assumption about Chinese students in the UK system is that they are competent at rote learning but do not possess critical thinking skills (Chan and Drover 1996). Certainly, this may reflect the previous opportunities to develop skills that the students have received in China. It also implies a value assumption prevalent in the UK that critical thinking is somehow more 'useful' or 'important' as an indicator of higher or deeper learning than the ability to process large quantities of data. This assumption may be somewhat limited in its perspective and represent a cultural notion of learning and knowledge, however. Since the ability to manipulate large volumes of data may be in itself an important capability in the 'information age' in which we live, and also may have some implications for the development of the lifelong learning society, it is worth considering this aspect further.

Facility with the use of intellectual techniques and constructs for learning new information is a generic skill underlying the level of rote learning required in the Chinese education system, where content of information is consequently de-emphasised. In itself, this may impose a limitation on an individual's ability to deal with conflicting information content or contexts. However, it is certainly a competence that is highly transferable into a number of different environments, since it is not dependent on the content of the learning itself. It may

enable an individual to experience lower stresses in new learning situations, since the ability to progress a ‘sense-making’ activity in organising structuring for remembering and articulating learning inputs as a prelude to considering the implications of their content may promote confidence to move forward in the learning experience.

This technical notion of learning that seems to dominate the Chinese system, then, should not perhaps be devalued as a contributor to higher and deeper learning experiences but viewed as one of the skills that Chinese students possess in enabling them to move quickly up the learning curve of new learning environments (Chan and Drover, 1996). Certainly, it is sympathetic to the view that Chinese intellectuality has evolved differently to the ‘western’ in its orientative direction more than the basic content of intellectual ideas (Allinson, 1989).

In terms of attitude to and models of the learning experience, a number of possible insights emerge from the Chinese students’ perceptions which may impact on performance levels during assessment. Chinese students may well engage with the educational experience in a more formal way than their UK counterparts and confer a greater authoritative legitimacy on their lecturers. At the same time, they may have an expectation of greater personal engagement in the student learning experience from university academics and administrators and anticipate higher levels of personal and academic support than other groups of students. Certainly anecdotal stories of Chinese students studying in the UK in conditions of complete social isolation are not uncommon. All of these factors merit further study and attention from those involved in educational design in the UK system.

Many universities have already begun to experiment in the design of orientation and support programmes for Chinese students and other international groups in order to help them assimilate socially and culturally with a minimum of difficulty. Given the government’s agenda to increase international student participation in the UK higher education sector markedly during the next few years, there is also an important read-across to curriculum and programme design inherent in this broadening multi-culturalism of the student community.

The enrichment of the university community brought by international students is perhaps limited currently to the social aspects of university life or individual research outputs. A closer examination of the strengths and differences of the learning orientations of the different cultural groups and individuals participating in UK HE could pose important challenges and opportunities to UK educators. It may be useful to consider the degree to

which UK education is heavily conditioned by a cultural paradigm. By doing so, UK universities might be able to develop programmes not only meaningful to a broader international community of students but one which contains important additional elements that would enable the majority – UK students – to approach change and the global information age with the intellectual flexibility and facility that the existing paradigm may be forcing upon international students who choose to participate in it.

Appendix I

Students in Private Higher Education in Beijing:

A qualitative study by Amy Acker and Yvonne Turner

Introduction – the setting for the project

Interviews were conducted with 30 students and graduates from Beijing INTI Management College, a joint-venture college operated by INTI Malaysia and the Beijing Machinery Bureau, a government department. The College was set up in 1993, offering teaching in English language and Business Administration up to Diploma and Higher Diploma levels. In 1996, the college offered a further academic year of advanced studies to eligible students, leading to the award of a franchised BA(Hons) in Business Administration from the University of Hertfordshire in the UK. The first students graduated from the programme in December 1996.

This programme was one of the first franchise full-time undergraduate degree programmes offered in the private sector by a UK university in China. Between 1996 and 1999, numbers of private HE colleges increased from fewer than 100 to over 1000 across China, including domestic and foreign-managed provision (Beijing Education Commission figures). At BIMC, access to the franchised final-year programme was achieved via successful completion of the Diploma and Higher Diploma courses offered by the College.

As a private institution of Higher Education, the College made none of the personal access requirements of State-owned universities, such as age limitations, unmarried status or physical fitness. In summer 1996, the combined student population of English and Business Departments was about 250 reaching 550 in summer 1999. Age ranges of students were from 17 to 37 years. Two or three cohorts of 10-15 students participated in the final-year programme each year after 1996. The general environment of the College in China and the unusual composition of the student body offered particularly interesting research possibilities.

Interview style and method

The interviews were carried out between January and June 1999, with a random selection of students and graduates from the College. The interviewers were Amy Acker, Head of the English Faculty at the College and Yvonne Turner, the representative of University of Hertfordshire, both of whom had worked with BIMC since 1996. The aim of the interviews was to obtain rich information about the lives and educational backgrounds of students who had come to the College from all over China in order to gain some insight about how patterns of educational progress and choice are shaped in this environment. The interviewers emphasised to the participants the personal history aspect of the

research project – 'telling your own story in your own words' – and the non-judgmental perspective that they wished to take on the information that participants chose to share. The interview setting was informal, away from the College premises and interviews lasted from about 45 minutes to 1.5 hours. It became important to guarantee personal anonymity to students participating, all of whom expressed sensitivity about identification by name, though all agreed for the use and publication of other personal information from the interviews as an entire personal history (such stories are frequently published and popular in China).

The interviews were very loosely structured, owing to the personalized content of each session. A progression of topics were covered in each interview, however (list appended) in order to allow some consistency of theme and information. The descriptive nature of the content of the information mitigated somewhat against possible distortions caused by previously-existing relationships between interviewers and interviewees. Without the existence of high levels of trust generated by a relationship developed over time, however, it may have been difficult to achieve such high levels of frankness with which some of the participants expressed themselves. Edited excerpts from a sample interview follow.

The future of the project

The interviewers hope to publish the full results and analysis of the project shortly. The project has developed from its initial phase, however, via the selection of a core group of students who have agreed to participate in annual interviews into the long-term future. This project may show some aspects of career, learning and life paths from the selected group and how their situations reflect the changes taking place more widely in China today.

Interview themes and questions

1. Tell us about who you are: your name and your age and whether you are married, where you were born, what your family is like etc.
2. Tell us a bit about your parents' background and lives
3. Tell us about your elementary education
4. Tell us about the teaching methods, relationships with teachers, environment and types of assessment etc
5. Tell us about your Middle school education (supplementaries as elementary education)
6. Tell us about your High school/vocational school education (supplementaries as elementary education)
7. What did you do after high school? Discuss university/ first jobs, if applicable

   Coming to BIMC – how and why you came

8. Discuss similarities and differences between BIMC and Chinese education system
9. Discuss group working and attitudes to it
10. Tell us about what you've done since you left BIMC (if applicable) – discuss career and life information
11. How do you define success and fulfilment?
12. Opinions about working conditions for men and women in China: does a situation of equality exist?
13. Is there anything special happening in China today that could help you or prevent you from achieving your ambitions?

Appendix II

A Chinese student's experience of Chinese and Western education systems

Female student 'the quiet woman' interviewed by Yvonne Turner on 14 April 1999

Background

I am 23 years old, and I was born in 1976, that year was the end of the Cultural Revolution, which is very significant. I was born in Beijing and I am an only child...so somehow I am quite spoiled by my parents...About 6 months ago I moved out from my parents home because my father, got another apartment from his company, so I live alone now. You know, this is the first time I have lived independently and I wanted to try this kind of life. I think it's quite important for me and for my future.

Family background

My father is a general manager of a food company, the Number One Food Company Limited. It is located in Tiantan. It makes biscuits and chocolate and candies things like that. My mother is retired now but she used to work in the train station. She was responsible for buying stationery for her colleagues. She worked there for 24 years. We lived in one house while I was a child - it came with my father's job. But we moved once or twice since then, only in Beijing.

My father graduated from university in light industry...his major is fermenting technology. My mum graduated from high school. My dad comes from Hebei province and my mum from Shandong province. How they came to Beijing is quite a long story. Actually, after my father graduated from university, he came here to find a job here and my mum came here with my auntie, so both of them...how do you say...actually my father is my auntie's neighbour and my auntie thought he was a good guy...so she introduced my father to my mum and then they got married. They were married for two years and then I was born.

Elementary education

I first went to school in 1983. I was 7 years old. When I started school, all the students were about the same age as me...6 or 7 years old. My school was not near my home. It was in Dongcheng district because my parents thought that the quality of the teaching in Chaoyang district where we lived was not so good. My parents wanted me to get a better...a higher quality of teaching...and the teaching in Dongcheng district is better than other areas in Beijing. This was not a private school, but a government school...and my auntie lived there so I went to go to school and stayed with her. I lived with my aunt until middle school when I came back to my parents' house.

When I went to the primary school, the entrance requirements are not so strict. Not a very strict examination, you just went there and the teachers asked you some basic questions, just some basic maths questions and something like that. Actually as long as your IQ is not so low, you could enter. It was simple...

I'd stay with my auntie during the week and at weekends I went back to be with my parents. In those days, we just had a one day holiday each week...so on Saturday, my dad came to pick me up to go home and on Sunday he brought me back. My aunt has a son and he is 12 years older than me. When I stayed at her house we were always fighting. He was kind of like a brother to me...

My school life was ermmm...it did not make me feel so excited. Because, you know, in the Chinese traditional teaching system, students are usually forced to listen and forced to sit and do things as required by teachers and students are required to do a lot of things...even the first year I went to school every night I have a lot of homework. So it was hard for me to get time to relax and play with my friends. Actually, I think my childhood is not exciting or fantastic, just hard work.

At school, the teacher was very strict and the classroom was arranged...I don't know whether you have been to a traditional Chinese classroom...? It's arranged, just like when we take an exam, with the desks and chairs in rows, the classroom is arranged like that. The teacher stood in front of us and just dictated the information to us and wrote something on the board. We were not allowed to speak freely without raising our hands or we would be punished. So I thought our communication with the teacher is not so good. I did not like school.

Middle school

I left elementary school to go to middle in 7th grade, 1989...3 years middle school and 3 years high school. Altogether 6 years elementary school and 6 years of high school.

I took an examination to go to middle school but actually the examination was quite easy...you know the events that took place in 1989? So at that time, I remember, we just could not concentrate on our studying...and our teachers had to go out to...how do you say...support those er...students...and so that year the exam was quite easy for us and I got high marks...This made it easier for me to go to the good high school which I went to. It was the number 24 middle school in Dongcheng. I went back and lived with my parents at the second year of middle school. That felt good...

Middle school was the same as Elementary school. I think it was the same, all the same...the teacher was very strict, very serious and with thick glasses...always...always *[laughter*]...scolding us students and telling you what to wear and how to walk...everything...everything we did, we had to listen to them. It's quite hard for us and, you know, actually, and my teacher who is in charge of my class was the teacher who taught us maths. Actually my maths was quite poor and I was quite afraid of the

maths teacher. She was very strict even though she was quite young. At that time, she was only 24 but she was quite strict. She was always near you, always like that *[leans over*]...and so every night I cried because I was still with my auntie and I had nobody to tell my feelings to. It's different feeling to tell my auntie, than to tell my Mum, you know. Actually our relationship is close but just does not feel as close as to my mum...It's different... There were some teachers in the school that I liked, though ...the teacher who taught us Chinese...she was quite kind and encouraging and helpful for us...in our studying. Especially students who were quite poor at their studying, she was willing to spend extra time after work to help them. Quite kind. Just a few teachers. The rest were just for the traditional teaching method, and made us lose interest in our study.

High School

From middle school to high school, I also took an examination. Actually I did not go to a high school, it was called a specialised professional school. I went there for four years. I studied the same as my dad –fermenting technology. Like making yeast for bread and that kind of thing. I couldn't make good beer, though!...Actually when I graduated from my middle school, I had 6 choices to go to high schools...I had 6 choices, but I didn't get a good result in the exam. So, you know, that professional school, was my last choice. I had to go there. No choice. The school was located in Chaoyang district.

The teaching there was quite different from middle school and the teachers treated us like adults. They didn't force us to do this or to do that. I think it's quite different. I felt we could have our own right to control our daily lives. Because of my major, I had to do a lot of experiments in the lab, so almost half of the time I spent in the classroom and the other half in the lab. At this time, I thought my study was quite interesting because it was not just simple knowledge you could get from the classroom, but also you could combine your knowledge with practice, it was quite interesting. The teachers were kind and helpful to us. Also the classes in our professional college were quite big, our college is quite big. They have one library building, one laboratory building and two teaching buildings. There were around 1000, about 30-40 in each class.

Every parent wants their children to go to university. My parents were disappointed with me because my results were low and I could not go to the college. But when I went to this specialised professional school, my study was not so bad, so they became happier. While I was studying in this school, I had more interest in my study than in middle school. I was able to study actively not passively, the teachers did not force you to study, instead they encouraged you and supported you. They encouraged you to do some other activities instead of just studying at home and in the classroom. In my high school, we also had a lot of outdoor activities like football matches and things like that. They organised us to go to some society, to go to some old people to do some kind things

for them and things like that ...We also had a lot of inside activities in school. We had a student association. I was a member of that. I think the function of this association was to prepare you as a leader for the future, to prepare you in your managing ability and in your cooperating ability.

Group working in Chinese schools

When I was in the laboratory I worked with my group. Each group would be around three students. I worked with the same students in each subject. We had fixed groups in each class and six or seven different subjects, so different groups. The teacher chose who would be in each group. There was no special way of allocating groups, they just chose students according to the attendance list.

As part of the student association, I also used to work in a group. We would socialize...we went out to some old people who had no children to go to their houses do some housework for them. Everyone could participate in this activity, no special person organised you to do this or that...It made me feel that everyone had the responsibility...every week we coordinated and came together. We had a meeting. It was a bit like leadership training because in this in a group, you still had your own responsibility, you still had to arrange a lot of things... such as who should go to do this and who should go to do that...There was no teacher involved. We could arrange some activities based on our own minds, we did not need to listen to our teachers. Our teachers, you know, gave us free right to organise these other activities. I felt I could be my own leader.

Beijing INTI Management College (BIMC)

I left high school at 19 and came to BIMC in May 1996. Actually my parents' colleague knew the previous principal of the college, Dr Wang. Dr Wang and he were good friends, so my father's colleague introduced my father and introduced him to BIMC. At that time the college was quite near. Just 10 minutes walk from my home. My father told me about the college. He told me that there was a school that was operated by foreigners and all the teachers were foreigners. He just give me the information and let me make the decision. And I thought it sounded OK and I was quite interested in English. It was my favourite subject when I was at school. So I made the decision to come here. I made the decision. It was not my parents' decision. They supported me financially. My parents wanted me to do this because of the fierce competition in China. You need higher education otherwise I probably could not get a good job. And my parents hope that I will have a bright future... I had never been to a college and my parents wanted me to have the experience.

When I came to BIMC, I was quite afraid. I had never talked to foreigners before and was quite frightened...I remember at first I was interviewed by a foreign teacher called Stephen...a guy. He just asked me some basic questions but I just didn't know how to answer and I remember my face turned quite red. I continuously said "sorry" [*laughs]* and he said "No, it's OK, it's not your fault" I did not even know how to say something like:.. "thank you...OK" something like that. I just repeated words I

remembered from inside my mind. The teachers maybe did not even understand what I was saying...but ...the first impression in my mind was good because I remembered he let me sit on the sofa and was very relaxed. He made me feel not so nervous and gave me a cup of tea. We had just a relaxed conversation. I never had this kind of this interview before, especially in a school! I thought maybe he would be like a Chinese teacher, very strict... sitting in front of table and a lot of books and a lot of papers... asking you very difficult questions. But he asked me about my family and my friends and my background. And after five minutes, I became more relaxed and my English more fluent.

When I started at the college, I felt better because no matter what, in terms of the classroom, it was not the traditional Chinese classroom with the tables in rows, here the chairs were in a circle. In that way we felt we had close communication with our teachers and we always played a lot of games. I thought it was fantastic and made me feel, when I woke up in the morning, that I desired to go to school, I really desired to go to school. When we finished our class, we felt the time was so short, we even wanted more time to talk to teacher and to study. That kind of feeling we never had in Chinese school. Even though English was my favourite subject in school in Chinese school, the teachers teach us like...er...they just taught us grammar or memorizing something to pass exams...just like that... they never let us talk. So we had no time and no opportunities to talk English in the school at all. But the BIMC English programme offered us this opportunity to develop our oral skills very fast.

The business programme, was not as interesting as the English programme. Generally, it was fine, you could say ...but communication with the teachers was less than in the English programme. Probably my reason for feeling this was because in the English programme I was supposed to be the best student...for grammar and speaking. I was quite proud of this and I wanted to talk more to the teachers. But when I studied in the business programme, there were more foreign students and they had better English ability, they could speak better English than me...so I felt so shy to speak with them...and, I don’t know how to say this...I lost my self respect. So this why I didn’t like to talk much in the class.

The main difference between BIMC and my previous education was something in the way of teaching . The major difference is the way of teaching. As I told you before in Chinese high school and middle school we did not have our own right to decide what to do...we were always told by teachers what to study and what to learn. I once read an article about western education...it said that in western middle school, the students have the right to choose their favourite subjects. They don’t have to study the things that the teachers arrange for them. But in Chinese school, we didn’t have that right, and teachers used to judge a student just based on their exam results and nothing else. After the exam our results was always read to the whole class. Somehow it was not a good thing for

the students whose results were not so good. In school, competition was very strong. I thought that the teaching style in BIMC was different to what I had experienced before so the way I approached my study was different as well. I think it was quite helpful for me to study and before at school, after class...I didn't have time to read actual books to study and to learn things in my own way. But in BIMC I had a lot of time to read and I read some books, some novels, some English novels and some English articles for my English. At BIMC there was less homework, less enforcement and more independence.

There are some disadvantages to this way of learning. I think the main disadvantage is because the teachers didn't treat you very strictly as Chinese teachers, so we could not manage our time. I think this is a problem we got from Chinese school because we didn't have that habit to manage our time by ourselves. I also think relationships with my classmates at BIMC were not as good as my relationships with my Chinese middle school classmates and so on. Because my classmates from BIMC were from different situations, different places, areas ...they had different backgrounds. But in Chinese middle school, we all had the same background – we had not been out into society. We all stayed in the same area...we all stayed at the school...our minds were quite pure. But at BIMC a lot of students had working experience and some of them were quite sophisticated. I felt at the beginning of studying at BIMC, I felt it was quite difficult to communicate with them because I started to feel it is too difficult to...whenever you say something, you had to be careful...do you understand what I mean? I don't know. Just like you feel you cannot speak...how I want to speak in Chinese school...but here, at BIMC, maybe I would say something wrong...they would get upset. Still, it was not a serious problem...but...

Group work at BIMC

I think group work at BIMC was quite helpful...everyone contributed and we treated one group as just one person and er... I think my cooperating ability began to improve a lot...I liked group work. I don't know...in a group I don't feel so afraid, just in the class...I don't know maybe I have psychological problem [*laughs]*!

I think the difference between group work at BIMC and in Chinese school is that in Chinese school, when we did our group work, we still worked individually. Even though we were in the group, we didn't like to work with each other. Actually, we never did group work like we did at BIMC. We just did experiments... Each person did their own part... not like giving group presentations or conducting interviews for projects things like that...the meaning of 'group work' is different. What I learned at BIMC was about how to cooperate together instead of working individually. I learned this by thinking about my experiences... doing more in groups...more than before and then summarized the experiences I had, getting rid of a lot of bad disadvantages from before. For example, thinking " this

way we do group work is bad"..."and this way is good"..."and then in this way..." Before exams I still like to work independently, otherwise I cannot concentrate on my studies. But if I came across some problems, I would discuss them with others to get some answers

The future

I finish at BIMC in a couple of months. After that I have real idea of what I will do. I really don't know, I have no plans. Actually I am quite afraid of my future life because I have never worked before and I don't know what a job is going to be for me. I don't know if the knowledge I learned from BIMC is suitable for me to work in a company. I feel a bit nervous...and now I try to call my friends who are working and my cousins to try to gain some information from them to release my nerves a bit. They tell me the good things about going to work...not as frightening as I thought. I will get a job in some company. I think it should be a foreign firm because in a foreign firm...foreigners do things actively and they are not lazy... they know how to get their job done in time...how to manage their time...otherwise they will be fired...they have very strong pressure on them...but in Chinese companies and factories, they have the mind such as ...er...they always put off doing things and erm...and as soon as they go into the office, the first thing they do is not work but reading the newspaper and drinking a cup of tea. They don't have too much pressure, so I think it's meaningless to work...just to earn money but without contributing any effort...it's meaningless...I think a foreign company would be more stimulating and I want to combine the knowledge I have learned at BIMC with practice...I really want to fulfil myself...

Success

I think success is not something that means you have to achieve great things. You just have to set your own personal objective and try to achieve it step by step...and you decide the time you can achieve it and then I think the success will come to you. I think for now, the major success for me has got to be to get a good result and to get a better degree. That will be success for me. In my future, I don't expect to gain a high position in a company as soon as I begin work, I don't think I will be a manager or a manager's assistant...no, I have never thought that...I just want a basic job to learn from basic things and to progress step by step and to learn by myself and to improve step by step...that's success. I don't know about getting married or having a child...maybe in 10 years...I don't know. It's not my present plan.

When I get older, I think I will try to remember some very good things from my life. But I'm not an ambitious woman, I just want to have a common life, just as everyone has now...I'm not interested in wearing suits and attending parties and dinners or meeting famous people...I'm not very ambitious. Everyone has their own personal goals and abilities...they have their own condition...I cannot count

on myself to be the chairman of GE or Motorola, it's impossible, I think. I just want to...I just want to fulfil myself as much as I can...you know, without so much pressure on me.

Women in business

As a Chinese woman in business, it is still more difficult for a woman to find a higher position I think. I think this is partly still because of prejudice against women. I think that's it. But now there are more and more women that are in higher position in companies in China...chairmen or general managers...but still very limited, very few...you have to have very very outstanding...very great...it's hard...

I think maybe everything we learnt in the college or in the school is still different from the things that we are going to face in companies and in society...it is still quite different to the reality...so maybe when we go to face some very serious facts, I cannot adjust to it very quickly.

The environment in China

China has a lot of problems. Now...more and more students who graduate from Chinese colleges want to study in foreign countries because they think if they work in a Chinese factory or Chinese state-owned company, the opportunity they have to fulfil themselves is quite limited...I think I agree with this idea. I think most of them who go to foreign countries to study will come back. I think China is still their roots, is still the place they were born. Even me, I have always wanted the opportunity to go to a foreign country to study, it's always been my desire and I think I will try. To study or to work in a foreign country for a different experience, then to learn advanced knowledge and ability and then to come back and to contribute to my country. No matter if it's is good or bad, China is still my responsibility. ...and you know the word "guanxi"...it's always a big problem in China. Maybe you are so great, you are outstanding, you are talented...but just because you don't have a good relationship with your boss, maybe you cannot get promotion, you cannot be recognized, so you have to look for another way...it's always a big problem...even though the government always try to get rid of this...the government has done a lot of things to get rid of this kind of...this guanxi... But it still exists...

Appendix III

Chinese students in UK universities

Results of a questionnaire carried out in the UK by Yvonne Turner, March 2000

Introduction

52 students were surveyed in a questionnaire exercise conducted in January – March 2000, to supplement interviews carried out in Beijing in 1999, and to gather brief illustrative information about the durability of some elements of the Chinese students' learning style. The respondents came from pre-degree Foundation programmes and from a variety of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in the Business School of the University of Hertfordshire.

The sample size and target group was small, and the survey limited by access and time constraints. The results, therefore, could usefully be explored further and expanded in the future. There is some scope, however, for general comparison between the Chinese group and other respondents in certain areas.

The baseline results of the survey follow, presented in the format of the questionnaire itself. The most significant points arising from the comparative aspects of the survey results are presented in the main paper's overview of the issues and topics of the research study, and further comment on the detailed survey results is not included here.

TABLE OF RESULTS

	Chinese	Other Groups	Total
NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS:			
Chinese	**32**		
UK		**10**	
Malaysian		**3**	
Other European		**3**	
Other International		**4**	
TOTAL:			**52**
Q.3 What do you think is the main purpose of education?			
To Acquire more knowledge in a given subject	4	6	10
To mature thinking skills and all round ability	8	6	14
To have fun learning more about something I like	1	0	1
To develop skills useful for employment	10	6	16
To get a certificate to show my ability	6	1	7
No answer given	3	1	4
Q.4 What do you think is the main purpose of learning?			
A process of developing intellectual knowledge in a subject in order to achieve mastery	8	4	12
A process of acquiring practical skills and expertise	6	6	12
A process of developing confidence in oneself and one's own abilities	9	2	11

The ability to remember facts	2	0	2
The ability to see different points of view and use them in one's own way	6	6	12
No answer given	1	2	3
Q.5 How long do you think the process of learning lasts?			
Forever, we always go on learning	27	20	47
Until we finish our development into maturity	3	0	3
Until the end of the formal education process	2	0	2
I have already finished learning what I need to know	0	0	0
Q.6 Which one of the following statements do you agree with most?			
The more you learn, there you need to learn	17	11	28
It is possible to learn everything there is to know about a given subject	1	0	1
It is impossible to learn the most important things in life, you have to experience them	14	8	22
No answer given	0	1	1
Q.7 What do you feel about how people learn?			
No-one is born cleverer than other people, we are all basically the same. Learning is about your environment, not personality	3	1	4
Some people are born better learners than others and will always be better	7	1	8
Some people have an inborn advantage but we can all develop as learners over time	9	10	19
We are all born the same, but some people develop more quickly than others in their lives	11	6	17
No answer given	2	2	4
Q.8 Which of the following statements most closely represents your feelings about learning? **Learning is something that happens mainly…**			
When I am alone, thinking, doing assignments or reading	19	6	25
When I am listening to the lecturer	2	3	5
When I am working with other students in a group	6	7	13
When I am talking to other students about my studies informally – not in a class	4	2	6
No answer given	1	2	3
Q.9 Who has the main responsibility to make the learning process effective?			
Yourself	11	9	20
The lecturer	0	0	0
Learning is a partnership between lecturer and student	20	10	30
No answer given	1	1	2
Q.10 How would you describe the appropriate nature of the relationship between student and lecturer?			
Formal and impersonal, with no personal connection between them	1	0	1
Informal and friendly, lecturer and student develop a social and professional relationship	16	9	25
Open but professional, limited personal contact between lecturer and student focused on learning	14	10	24
No answer given	1	1	2
Q.11 How would you characterize the role of the lecturer in the learning process?			
The lecturer acts as a guide and mentor, supporting the student's development	13	8	21
The lecturer is the expert, who imparts knowledge to the student	4	2	6
The lecturer provides opinions for the student to think about and develop their own ideas	14	9	23
The lecturer listens to the students and facilitates their learning process	0	1	1
No answer given	1	0	1
Q.12 What is the purpose of assessment in Higher Education?			

It is the way in which students' skills are measured	21	14	35
It is a control mechanism to make sure that students do what the lecturers want	7	3	10
It is the method the university uses to show the public it is doing its job	2	1	3
It is an educational convention that has no real meaning	2	1	3
No answer given	0	1	1
Q.13 Which of the following do you think is the most effective method of assessment?			
Examinations	2	7	9
Written assignments/essays	16	6	22
Presentations or oral assessment	8	3	11
Self assessment methods	6	2	8
No answer given	0	2	2
Q.14 How effective do you think that formal mechanisms of assessment (exams/essays etc) are as a way of measuring your learning?			
Very effective	3	3	6
Effective	19	11	30
Not very effective	9	4	13
No good at all	1	2	3
Q.15 How effective do you think that informal methods of assessment (self-assessment, informal discussion) are as a way of measuring your learning?			
Very effective	4	1	5
Effective	21	14	35
Not very effective	4	5	9
No good at all	2	0	2
No answer given	1	0	1
Q.16 Which style of learning do you think most effective in helping you to learn?			
Formal lecture	5	2	7
Formally organised group seminars	3	3	6
Small group tutorials	10	5	15
Student-led group work	1	0	1
Practical experience e.g. work placements	12	8	20
No answer given	1	2	3
Q.17 Which style of learning do you like best?			
Formal lecture	4	3	7
Formally organised seminars	4	2	6
Small group tutorials	7	6	13
Student-led group work	1	1	2
Practical experience e.g. work placements	15	6	21
No answer given	1	2	3
Q.18 How effectively has your experience in higher education so far helped you to learn effectively			
Very effectively – it has met all my needs	0	2	2
Effectively – most of my needs are met	23	14	37
Poorly – few of my needs are met	9	4	13
Not at all	0	0	0

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POSTSCRIPT: THE VALUE OF THE SEMINAR

Joe Hayes

Assistant Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs

I was delighted to be asked to chair the session of the ICOS seminar on the cultural adaptation of Chinese students in Ireland. Not only was it appropriate that I could represent the Department of Foreign Affairs, and in particular the Asia Strategy Committee of the Department, at such an event, but it also held a personal resonance for me. I was Ambassador to China for five years and I was consistently made welcome there. I was very happy therefore to contribute to an event, the ultimate aim of which is to make Chinese students feel welcome in this country and to enable them to benefit to the maximum from their stay here.

As is well known, the Irish government has been working to strengthen the relationship between Ireland and China over that past few years and one aspect of that relationship is the development of Ireland as an education destination for Chinese students. All government policy has meaning for ordinary people, and this seminar provided me with an opportunity to listen and learn about how recent government policy has been translating into reality for the Chinese students who come to study here and for those who work with them. It behoves us in government to respond to the issues raised at the seminar by such a wide range of players in the international education field.

The papers presented covered a range of aspects of the Chinese students' experience, both academic and cultural, and I compliment the speakers on their excellent presentations. I also compliment ICOS for having brought together people whose combined experience and wisdom gave us such comprehensive insights into the Chinese students' world. I noted with great admiration the contributions made by Chinese students themselves, who willingly shared their experiences, and enlightened us with their first-hand and sometimes humorous accounts of the cultural adaptation process.

At the seminar, serious concerns were raised about the manner in which, it is thought, immigration policy and practice is impeding the implementation of the government's strategy to bring Chinese students to Ireland. These were noted and, following the seminar, have been communicated to the relevant parties involved.

While the majority of students have, I believe, positive experiences in Ireland, more needs to be done, in academic institutions and in government Departments. to support and enhance their experience here.

I am delighted that the seminar was clearly useful and enjoyable, and I would like to see similar events take place in the future. I would also encourage the Irish Council for International Students to continue to do what they are doing so well. Thank you.

Profiles of Seminar Chairs and Speakers

Joe Hayes, Assistant Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs
Joe Hayes was Ambassador to China from 1995 – 1999, and is now involved in the implementation of the government's Asia Strategy.

D**r Ivan Filby, Director, International Office, Trinity College Dublin and Chair of ICOS**
Ivan Filby heads up Trinity College's international recruitment initiatives and, in this capacity, has visited mainland China on several occasions over the past two years. He is currently Chair of the Irish Council for International Students.

Yvonne Turner, Senior Lecturer, Business School, University of Hertfordshire, UK
Yvonne Turner has conducted comparative research on Chinese and UK education systems. She has worked as an Associate Professor at the University of Peking Guanghua School of Management and has established a BA in Business Administration in cooperation with the Beijing Education Commission and partners.

Hou Wanling (Dodo) , Student at Dublin City University
Dodo is a full-time postgraduate student of communications in Dublin City University. She broadcasts a weekly programme on Anna Livia FM (The Dodo Show) for the Chinese population of Dublin.

Liza Kelly, International Student Officer, Dublin Business School
As well as having considerable dealings with Chinese students in Dublin Business School, Liza lived and worked for two years in Shanghai.

Yu Hong, Student at Dublin Business School
Yu Hong is a full-time student at Dublin Business School where he is in the second year of a BA in Management and Information Systems.

Dr Da-Wen Sun, Senior Lecturer, Department of Agricultural and Food Engineering, UCD
Da-Wen has lived and taught in Ireland since 1995. Chinese himself, he has worked with many Chinese postgraduate research students. He is also President of the Irish-Chinese Cultural Society.

Seminar Participants

Minister for Education and Science	Dr Michael Woods, TD
Speakers and Chairs	
Ivan Filby	Trinity College Dublin (Chair of ICOS)
Joe Hayes	Department of Foreign Affairs
Yvonne Turner	University of Hertfordshire
Liza Kelly	Dublin Business School /LSB College
Da-Wen Sun	University College Dublin
Hou Wanling (Dodo)	Dublin City University
Yu Hong	Dublin Business School /LSB College
Participants	
Leo Goodstadt	Asia consultant
H.E Zhang Xiaokang	Ambassador of China to Ireland
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THE IRISH COUNCIL FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The Irish Council for International Students (ICOS) was established in 1970 to promote the welfare of international students in Ireland.

Its mission is to enhance the quality and the benefits of international education in Ireland by providing expert support services to international students, to host institutions and to government, and by actively promoting good policy and practice at all levels in relation to the recruitment and support of international students. ICOS is an independent, non-governmental and non-profit organisation, whose members include Irish universities, institutes of technology and other institutions involved in international education and training at post-secondary level. Its main activities are:

- providing specialised advisory, support and training services to international students and to its member institutions;
- administering Irish government-funded and other official Study Fellowship Programmes;
- promoting good policies and practice in international education, particularly through research, publications, conferences and meetings.

ICOS has always had a special involvement with students from the majority world, and an interest in the issues that most affect them. It contributes its expertise to relevant initiatives in the non-governmental sector and to bodies established by government which work in related areas.

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