

The Perspectives of the Chinese Students in the U.S. Business Schools

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Abstract

This study examines the perspectives of Chinese students in US business schools, as over a quarter million Chinese students are currently enrolled in colleges in the U.S, out of which twenty eight percent of them are enrolled in various in business degree programs. This research attempts to explore the accomplishments of these Chinese students and whether or not their expectations for coming to US business schools are met and what are not met. The results reveal that most of the Chinese expectations are met, while an assumption of studying in the US business schools is easy is untrue. The results also indicate that Chinese students want to develop a global view and depart from the traditional Chinese system of college education. They want to learn more innovations and skills that prepare them for a better future. Both administrators and educators in business education need to have a better understanding of these perspectives of this market segment, not only for serving this small group, but also expand the cultural diversity as a part of globalization trend.

Keywords: Higher education, Business education, International business education, Mobile students.

1. Introduction

In the past ten years from 2004/05 to 2013/14, the total international students in the U.S. rose only 54.8%, while the total Chinese students in the country rose from 62,523 to 274,439, representing a 344% increase, according to Open Door report [Report of Open Door, 2015]. The U.S. is in the lead for attracting international students, as 886,052 during the 2013-14 school year were enrolled in US colleges, representing over 20% of the total international students, or about 4.2% of the total number students enrolled in the U.S. These international students and their families spent about US\$27 billion in the U.S. in 2014, according to US government report [2015 Top Markets Report]. Providing higher education for international students makes a significant contribution to the U.S. economy. [NAFSA Report, 2013/14]. In New York State for example, the portion of this contribution was about US\$3.2 billion, which accounts for over 10% of the national total contribution made by the international students in 2014. Attracting the best students from around the world has become a large and growing global export opportunity [Zawacki-Richter & Bedenlier, 2015; Lumby & Foskett; 2015 Top Markets Report]. Conversely, countries that see their students study abroad normally hope that these students return home and contribute to their home economy.

While the U.S. has maintained its leading position for attracting international students, China has become the largest single source of international students. Chinese students not only make up a commanding 31 percent of all international students in the United States, but also account for about two-thirds of the increase in total international student enrollments in the country in 2014. This strong growth is likely to continue, presenting important export opportunities for U.S. colleges and universities [2015 Top Markets Report; Report of Open Door, 2015]. Educators and researchers seek to better understand this phenomenon and identify effective ways to serve this population, not as an educational strategy, but also an international trade strategy. This research, through an empirical setting focuses on the perspectives of Chinese students who choose to study businesses in the U.S. in order to provide some insights and directions for educators, university administrators, and trade administrators. Figure 1 presents the total number of Chinese students in the U.S., 2003-2014.

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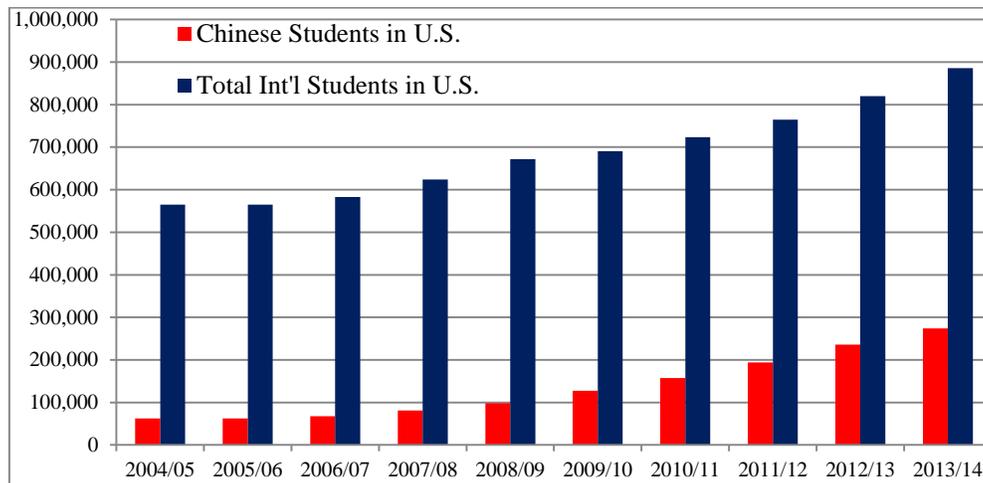


Figure 1: The number of Chinese student's vs. total int'l students in the U.S., 2003-2014

Source: Open Door, 2015.

<http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Enrollment-Trends/1948-2014>

2. Review of Literature

Chinese families place education as a top priority for thousands of years, and with China's economic reforms during the past decades leading a growth in wealth and a shrinking family size (only one child per family) sending children to international universities has become less burdensome. Of all international students, about 65% of source of funding comes from students' families. Meanwhile, many U.S. universities are facing an increasingly tough financial situation with a shortage of domestic students, a decrease in corporate support, and declines in government subsidies. In such a situation, Chinese students with money to spend may fill that financial gap [WES Report, 2015; Joseph, 2012]. In the past decade, many Chinese parents are tired of the rigid college admissions, and an education system that focuses mainly on academic scores at the expense of students' overall development. In addition, corruption, bribes, and sharp increases in college tuitions and fees in China's educational system make the parents seriously consider sending their kids abroad for college education [Yan, 2015]. For these reasons educators and researchers are interested in the perspectives of Chinese students, and whether or not these expectations are met abroad.

The top fields of studies in the 2013/14 year, 28% of Chinese students in the U.S. are enrolled business/management the fields better enable these students find employments in China [Ortiz, Chang, & Fang, 2015]. Figure 2 presents the major fields of study for the Chinese students in the U.S. [Source: <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Fields-of-Study-Place-of-Origin/2013-14>].

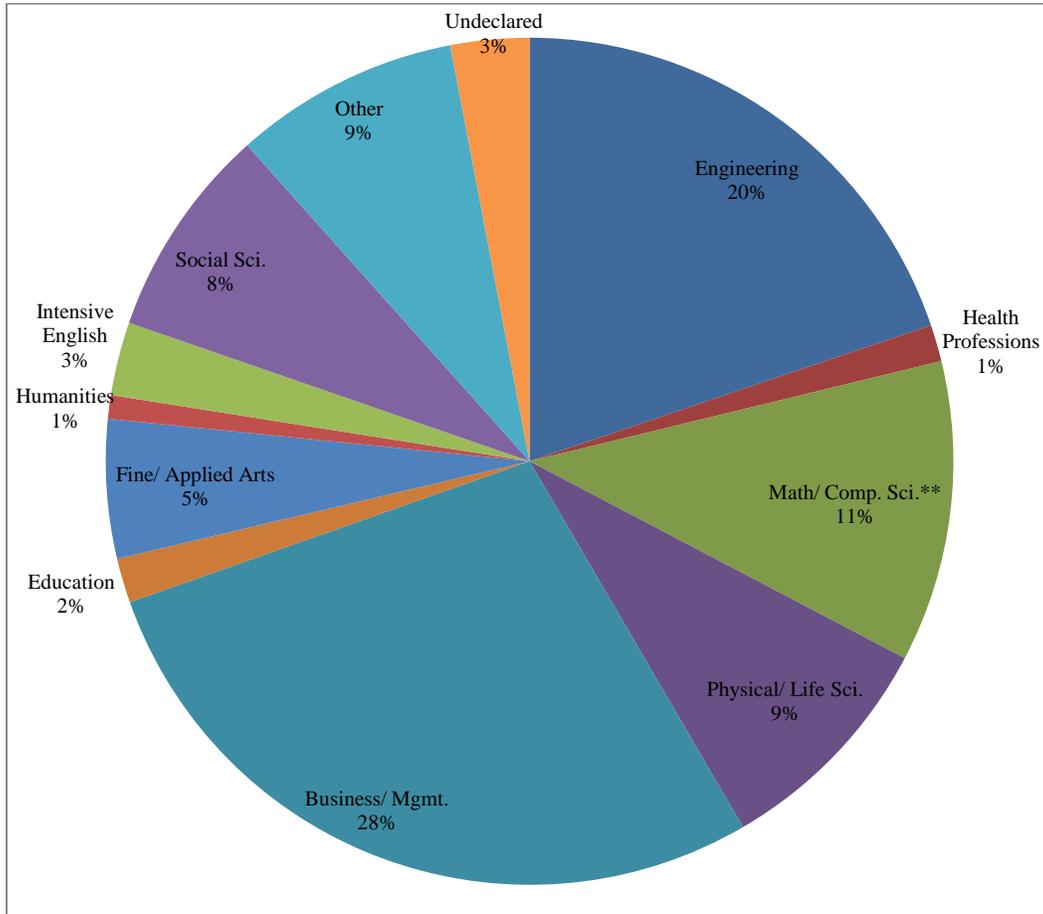


Figure 2: Major Fields of Studies for Chinese Students in the U.S., 2014

Source:<http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Fields-of-Study-Place-of-Origin/2013-14>

In addition to economic well being, many Chinese students decide to study abroad as they believe there is a better quality education in foreign countries. Several other factors may also influence the decision making for Chinese students to study abroad. First, more Chinese citizens are completing college and thus eligible to apply to grad school. Second, up to 1,000 universities in France, Italy, and other 14 popular overseas destinations for Chinese applicants are now accepting Chinese national college entrance test scores or "Gaokao" scores as admission criteria [Source: <http://en.yibada.com/articles/41077/20150626/italy-france-now-accept-gaokao-scores.htm#ixzz3k8luYq4i>]. Third, many U.S. schools are recruiting more aggressively overseas, marketing their programs to a wider talent pool. Many schools in the U.S. have set up their gateway offices in China, i.e. Columbia University and Ohio State University. Word of mouth then fuels the trend, as once some students attend educational programs, they recommend it to friends back home. Meanwhile, new specialized master's programs appeal to students, particularly those from China, eager to delve deeper into a single subject and gain a credential to compete with the growing population of educated young adults, without taking much time out of the workforce [Ozturgut & Murphy, 2009; Yan, 2015; Albrecht, Malagueno, Holland & Sanders, 2012]. Some critics say China's state-run education system — promoted as the hallmark of Communist meritocracy — are being overrun by bribery and cronyism. Such corruption has broadened the gulf between the privileged and non-privileged classes [Levin, 2012].

For this reason educators and administrators are interested in the decision making process that encourage Chinese students to choose to come and study in the U.S. The growth in Chinese students may also reflect a confluence of factors. First, more Chinese citizens are completing college and thus eligible to

apply to graduate school. Second, many U.S. schools are recruiting more aggressively overseas, marketing their programs to a wider talent pool. Word of mouth then fuels the trend.

Several recent studies have investigated the reasons and decisions for Chinese students to study overseas. The study by Bodycott (2009) reveals that some foreign institutions have to understand not just the psychology and the needs of Chinese students, but also those of their parents. Their decisions and needs may not be the only factors responsible for the choice leading Chinese students to decide to come to the U.S. The education being offered, (along with the way the institution is marketed), should effectively be aligned with China's requirements for development.

Glass (2012) suggests that international students who participate in leadership programs, community service, and campus-organized diversity discussions, interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, and take courses with materials on race and ethnicity, report greater levels of learning and development. However, that study focused on learning outcomes rather than decision factors leading international students to come study in the U.S.

When looking into the Chinese applicants' backgrounds, many schools find some outstanding characteristics the Chinese applicants possess. First, they are China's best students who are probably aware that if they attend universities in China, they may not be able to go to the best universities in the world. For example, among top 100 universities around the world, only two Chinese universities are ranked in 39th and 67th places by the U.S. News and World Report [Source: <http://www.usnews.com/education/best-global-universities/rankings>]. Second, unlike U.S. institutions that value candidates who present themselves as unique, their Chinese counterparts want students who excel on entrance exams that require years of rote learning and possess a strong grasp of math and science. Third, these young individuals are ambitious and many want to go to Ivy League schools, a symbol for those parents who raise their children successfully. Fourth, they desire to learn more about critical thinking, and very importantly, they want to be exposed to things aside from just test taking [Henze & Zhu, 2012; Taylor, 2012; Wu, 2014; Ruiz, 2014; Soria1 & Troisi, 2014].

IIE published a report on motivations of the foreign students in the U.S. The report focuses on the following motivations: 1.Limited places available to study at (highly prestigious) universities in the home country; 2.Specialize in an area which is not offered in the home country; 3.Have access to specific laboratories/libraries not available/accessible in the home country; 4.Learn or improve knowledge of a foreign language; 5.Interest in foreign culture, history and landscape; 6.Get more practice-oriented education than offered in home country; 7.Possibility to build up networks/friendships in an intercultural context; 8.Improve career prospects/chances of getting a job in the home country; 9.Opportunity to develop the personality/become more independent; 10.Get a broader/more flexible education than offered in home country; 11.Experience new ways of thinking and acting in the field of study; 12.Improve chances for an international career [2015 Top Markets Report]. The report on motivations is rather general. Other research focuses more on what graduate courses the Chinese students choose rather than why they choose United Kingdom as their destination [Zheng, 2010; Russell, Rosenthal, & Thomson, 2010; Wu, 2014].

The research work by Chao and Hegarty (2014) focuses on the Chinese students' motivations for attending colleges in the U.S. Their results indicate that Chinese students are seeking education with a world view and opt to break from the Chinese system of learning. Their study indicates choosing to study in the U.S. may be an academic endeavor, but the reasons behind the choices are not solely for academics. The other research by Hegarty, et al (2014) explores decisions Chinese students make on whether or not to study in universities and colleges in the United States. Their research attempts to investigate the process of decision making that leads to Chinese students studying in the United States as their preferred destination. Their study reveals that international student enrollment is a vital component of university life and a much needed source of financial revenue. The Chinese students' decisions to attend college in the U.S indicate that Chinese students are seeking education with a global view, and they choose to break from the traditional Chinese educational system are two of the most challenge decision variables. Their study offers

academicians and university administrators a better understanding of the Chinese students' decision making process, hopefully to provide a better quality education to serve this market segment.

3. Method

With the focal questions in mind, this research explores whether or not Chinese students' expectations are met. A survey was developed to investigate the Chinese students' perspectives and expectations: explore the accomplishments of these Chinese students and whether or not their expectations for coming to US business schools are met and what are not met. The following variables are developed from literature reviews.

Variable Selection

The following variables serve as accomplishments that Chinese students gain in their study in the U.S. from the literature review.

1. I can see the world and broaden my experience;
2. I can explore my heritage;
3. I can learn a language when being with native speakers;
4. I can improve my professional and financial potential;
5. I can gain new insights and outlooks through new relationships;
6. I can take control of my future;
7. It is easy to progress academically in American schools;
8. I can develop some skills that are not available in my home country;
9. I can earn a more valuable degree from an American school;
10. There are better quality programs in schools abroad;
11. It may enable me to stay abroad;
12. I can enjoy more freedom;
13. There is better technology, i.e. computers and network, abroad;
14. There are more inspiring programs in schools abroad;
15. Critical thinking is more emphasized overseas.

Sampling, Hypothesis, and Test of Hypothesis

Due to the nature of this empirical study, the questionnaires were distributed to Chinese students enrolled in business majors in two large university campuses in America for a convenient sampling. The respondents were asked to evaluate the selected variables in a five point Likert scale, with 5=mostly accomplished, 4=accomplished, 3=neutral, 2=not accomplished, and 1=not accomplished at all.

The hypotheses for this research are to find if there are any significant differences in the Chinese students' decisions for choosing to study in the U.S. rather than in China

H₁ There is no significant difference for Chinese students to see the world and broaden their experience, either in China or in the U.S.

H₂ There is no significant difference for Chinese students to explore their heritage, either in China or in the U.S.

H₃ There is no significant difference for Chinese students to learn English, either in China or in the U.S.

H₄ There is no significant difference for Chinese students to improve their professional and financial potential, either in China or in the U.S.

H₅ There is no significant difference for Chinese students to gain new insights and outlooks through new relationships, either in China or in the U.S.

H₆ There is no significant difference for Chinese students to take control of their future, either in China or in the U.S.

H₇ There is no significant difference for Chinese students to progress academically in schools, either in China or in the U.S.

H₈ There is no significant difference for Chinese students to develop skills, either in China or in the U.S.

H₉ There is no significant difference for Chinese students to earn a more valuable degree, either in China or in the U.S.

H₁₀ There is no significant difference for Chinese students to find better quality programs in schools, either in China or in the U.S.

H₁₁ There is no significant difference for Chinese students to remain, either in China or in the U.S. after graduation.

H₁₂ There is no significant difference for Chinese students to enjoy freedom, either in China or in the U.S.

H₁₃ There is no significant difference for Chinese students to enjoy better technology, i.e. computers and network, either in China or in the U.S.

H₁₄ There is no significant difference for Chinese students to have more inspiring programs in schools, either in China or in the U.S.

H₁₅ There is no significant difference for Chinese students to acquire more critical thinking in schools, either in China or in the U.S.

Alternatively, there are significant differences in each of these hypotheses.

One sample Student's *t*-test is used to test the hypotheses. A *t*-test is any statistical hypothesis test in which the test statistic follows a Student's *t* distribution if the null hypothesis is supported. It is most commonly applied when the test statistic would follow a normal distribution if the value of a scaling term in the test statistic is known. The one sample *t*-test requires that the dependent variable follow a normal distribution. When the number of subjects in the experimental group is 30 or more, the central limit theorem shows a normal distribution can be assumed. If the number of subjects is less than 30, the researcher should plot the results and examine whether they appear to follow a normal distribution. If the distribution appears to be non-normal, and/or if the number of test cases is significantly less than 30, then a one sample median test, which does not require a normal distribution, should be used to test the hypothesis [Hamburg, 1977; Conover, 1980; Davis and Cosenza, 1985; SPSS^x, 2002; Wikipedia, 2012]. Five percent of the *t*-Tests *one* tailed probability level was selected to signify the differences between preferences. When the scaling term is unknown and is replaced by an estimate based on the data, the test statistic (under certain conditions) follows a Student's *t* distribution. The estimate value for testing hypotheses in this study is 3, which is neutral.

4. Results and Issues

Results

Over 350 respondents were surveyed, with 128 completed responded for analyses, representing 36.5 percent of the total surveyed. Table 1 presents the general background information of the respondents.

Table 1: Backgrounds of the Respondents

Variables	Groups	Valid %
1. Age	<18	6.4
	18-35	92.0
	>35	1.6
2. Gender	Male	56.0
	Female	44.0
3. Family annual income	<\$30k	33.9
	\$30-50k	26.4
	\$50-75k	13.7
	>\$75k	25.8
4. Education	College	69.6
	Graduate	30.4
5. Marital status	Married	9.6
	Single	90.4
6. Sources of financial supports	Parent	56.8
	Own saving	5.6
	Obtained scholarship or GA	22.4
	Combination of various sources	15.2
7. Number years studied in the U.S.	<1 year	13.6
	1 year	9.6
	1-2 years	16.6
	>2 years	60.0
8. How many schools did you apply to?	1 school	14.6
	2 schools	5.7
	3 schools	16.3
	>3 schools	63.4
9. If you took Gaokao, you stood at	top 25%	44.9
	26-50%	43.5
	lower 51-75%	11.6
10. Why choose business major	Better job opportunities in China	95.1
	Better US business education	91.3

Source: original

It is noticeable that 25.8% of the Chinese students who took the survey have a family income over US\$75K a year equivalent, and most of the students were born after 1978 when the one child per family policy was initiated [Source: <http://healthland.time.com/2013/01/10/little-emperors/>]. In other words, these respondents had alternatives for their college selections: they could either study in China, or go abroad. More than 60 percent of the respondents have already studied in the U.S. for over two years and therefore have had ample time to affirm their reasons for leaving China. It is also noticeable that 88.4% of respondents took Chinese college entry exam (Gaokao) in the top 50%, 100% stood at top 75% which means all these took university entrance exam can go to universities in China [Sina, 2015]. Overwhelming majority believe business majors offer better job opportunities in China, and US business education is better.

Table 2 presents the test results of One-Sample *t*-Test, with mean differences, *t* values, degrees of freedom, and two tailed significances of these tests.

Table 2: One-Sample t-Test Results, test value=3

One-Sample <i>t</i> Test	Mean	Mean Dif.	df	<i>t</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
01. See the world and broaden my experience.	3.71	0.709	116	5.448	0.000
02. Explore my heritage	3.27	0.272	113	2.336	0.021
03. Learn a language when being with native speakers	3.61	0.609	114	5.064	0.000
04. Improve my professional and financial potential.	3.55	0.548	114	4.749	0.000
05. Gain new insights and outlooks through new relationships.	3.58	0.575	112	4.776	0.000
06. Take control of my future.	3.43	0.430	113	3.699	0.000
07. It is easy to progress academically in American schools.	3.08	0.080	112	0.667	0.506
08. I can develop some skills that are not available at home country.	3.35	0.348	111	2.883	0.005
09. I can earn a more valuable degree from an American school.	3.25	0.250	111	2.197	0.030
10. There are better quality programs in schools abroad.	3.43	0.434	112	3.599	0.000
11. It may enable you to stay abroad.	3.11	0.106	112	0.870	0.386
12. I can enjoy more freedom	3.35	0.351	113	2.920	0.004
13. There are better technology, i.e. computers and network abroad.	3.42	0.421	113	3.757	0.000
14. There are more inspiring programs in schools abroad.	3.35	0.345	112	3.000	0.003
15. Critical thinking is more emphasized overseas.	3.45	0.451	112	3.872	0.000

Source: original

5. Managerial Implications and Recommendations

The test results of One-Sample *t*-Test *reject* thirteen null hypotheses as test significance are at or less than 5%:

01. See the world and broaden my experience.
02. Explore my heritage
03. Learn a language when being with native speakers
04. Improve my professional and financial potential.
05. Gain new insights and outlooks through new relationships.
06. Take control of my future.
08. I can develop some skills that are not available at home country.
09. I can earn a more valuable degree from an American school.
10. There are better quality programs in schools abroad.
12. I can enjoy more freedom
13. There are better technology, i.e. computers and network abroad.
14. There are more inspiring programs in schools abroad.
15. Critical thinking is more emphasized overseas.

In other words, these thirteen hypotheses present that the Chinese students have accomplished what they expect studying in US universities, so these hypotheses are rejected. Among these rejected hypotheses, the mean differences show 01. See the world and broaden my experience and 03. Learn a language when being with native speakers the highest positive values, which indicate that the respondents believe that they have accomplished more.

With regard to the other two hypotheses: 07. It is easy to progress academically in American schools, and 11. It may enable you to stay abroad, the respondents' mean values are very close to the test value of 3.

The insignificances of these hypotheses suggest that these may not be the primary achievements the Chinese students expect in US schools, so these hypotheses are accepted.

What comes through from this research is that Chinese students try to achieve those that they may not be able to achieve in their home land. Cultural aspects and desires to gain a non-Chinese world perspective emerge as primary goals for study in the U.S. This may be due to the understanding and realization by the Chinese of a global economy and the need to understand the 'globalization' of business. These goals could also be considered to be consistent with attitudes of all affluent middle class who have moved beyond daily sustenance and have achieved long term security.

All universities have Missions and Visions, which encapsulate their goals and aspirations. More and more universities include international and global references into their mission and vision. Some universities go even further by referencing specific countries. For example, Hong Kong University's mission states that it should "serve as a focal point of intellectual and academic endeavor in China."

The authors have found that in some business majors the Chinese students count for over 60%, and such a growth trend will continue. Should educators use Chinese business cases instead of Western business cases is debatable, however, when professors have more knowledge of doing business in China can definitely help nurture the interests, not only for the Chinese students, but also for American and other international students.

6. Limitations and Future Research

While this study is limited by its size, and is confined to Chinese students studying at one university in the northeast United States, it does provide direction and insight for future research to build upon. The sample size can be accepted as a good representation of the decisions of Chinese students who wish to study in the U.S., as the northeast United States has a large number of Chinese students (as opposed to a state with very few Chinese students where such a sample would be non-representative).

However, due to the limited sample size and issues addressed in this study, we believe that there are additional issues which need to be explored. Academic research on the decisions of international student populations (4.1% of the total U.S. college students), particularly Chinese students (about 1.2% of the total U.S. college students) in the U.S. is limited.

While much has been written in terms of their numbers and how universities are accommodating international students, there is limited empirical research on the understanding of 'why' Chinese students choose to study in the U.S. It is imperative in servicing this market segment that universities first understand the motivations behind the decision of these students, as only then can colleges and universities hope to build programs to cater to the long term facilitation of this segment.

Future empirical studies would continue to serve the advancement of knowledge in this area by increasing the sample size across numerous colleges, and broadening the scope by examining any differences in decisions in terms of public versus private colleges, and geographic location within the U.S.

A further recommendation would be to look at any major differences between undergraduate and graduate Chinese students, as well as differences between graduate Chinese who completed bachelor degrees in the U.S. and those who didn't. A further investigation on the motivations of these students' parents is needed.

The growing number of Chinese students in the U.S. has raised some challenging questions for both educators and administrators. In the future, researchers will need to know more about the expectations these Chinese students have when they land in the U.S.

Whether these expectations are met during their studies or after their studies remain important questions for future investigations. If student expectations are not met, then educators in U.S. schools need to eliminate the gap between expectations and the actual perceptions by students. A demographic of this size cannot be ignored and needs to be understood, particularly since the trend is expected to continue well into the future.

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