

An Empirical Study on the Factors of Academic Success for Chinese Students in France

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Abstract:

In recent years, there has been a growing trend of Chinese students studying in France. Investigating the conditions and factors that contribute to their academic success within the French higher education system holds practical significance. This research is rooted in Sino-French international relations and employs a multidisciplinary approach encompassing fields such as education, linguistics, and cross-cultural adaptation. It elaborates on the distinctive characteristics of Chinese international students in France across three dimensions: language communication, culture and thinking, and learning methods and attitudes. It synthesizes three unique identity strategies adopted by Chinese students and provides recommendations to enhance their study abroad success.

Keywords:

France, Chinese Students, Study Abroad, Identity, Strategies

1. Introduction

The attractiveness of higher education has become a particularly popular tool for international influence, and many countries are actively striving to attract promising foreign students. The rapid growth of student cross-border exchanges has become a global phenomenon. France, as an important member of the European Union, places great importance on the influence of education. It has repeatedly simplified visa procedures for foreign students and supports and encourages them to work in France after graduation. At the same time, mastering a second language other than English has also become a focal point of interest for Chinese students. The growing community of Chinese students studying in France not only represents a positive momentum in Sino-French friendly cooperation but also serves as a strong testament to the charm of French culture and education.

According to data from the official website of the French Embassy in China [1], as of May 19, 2021, the number of Chinese students studying in France has reached 37,000 (the third-largest group of foreign students). According to data from the

French Higher Education Authority [2], since 2015, more than 11,000 Chinese students have been studying in France each year. With the warming of the friendly relations between the two countries, it is believed that this trend will continue.

2. Literature Review

In the context of the continuous increase in the number of Chinese students studying in France, researching their academic success in the French higher education system has become increasingly important. However, domestic scholars have limited research on the academic success of Chinese students in France. The existing research primarily focuses on specific schools and specific student groups, with a concentration on discussions related to their cultural adaptation during their stay in France. For instance, Guo Juan (2016) conducted a study on Chinese students at the University of Bordeaux in France and identified factors influencing their cultural adaptation [3]. Jin Shanshan and Guo Fengying (2018) provided recommendations on cross-cultural competence and adaptability based on their research on students from the Sino-European School of Technology at Shanghai University studying in France [4]. Cui Yuzi (2019) focused on exploring the causes of emotional inhibition in Chinese students' classrooms in France but did not mention specific solutions [5].

However, the factors influencing the academic success of students studying in France are complex and multifaceted. The limitations of existing research are evident in terms of a singular research perspective, a narrow sample size, and relatively vague solutions. Furthermore, the lack of in-depth research on the French higher education system has hindered the ability to provide substantive recommendations for student success in studying abroad in France. Given these challenges, this study aims to combine the characteristics of the French higher education system, focusing on a broader group of students traveling to France. It will investigate their preparation and behavior before and after integrating into the French higher education process, delve into the specific characteristics of Chinese students, and provide necessary experiences and support for their successful academic journey.

3. Case Analysis of Chinese International Students in French Universities

This section should present your findings objectively, explaining them largely, concisely, precisely in the text.

3.1. Object of Study

The French engineering education system represents elite education in France. Therefore, Chinese international students studying at engineering schools in France are one of the focal subjects of this study. To ensure a broader and more representative research, the author also selected Chinese international students studying at other types of universities in France. Ultimately, the research subjects come from three French universities that implement elite education: Ecole Nationale de l'Aviation Civile, HEC Paris, and Sorbonne University.

3.2. Research Methods

The study primarily utilizes John W. Berry's Dual-Dimensional Cultural Adaptation Model to analyze the identity characteristics of Chinese students during their study abroad period in France. Berry's Cultural Adaptation Model is widely

employed in current research on cultural adaptation, emphasizing the analysis of cultural adapters and mainstream cultural groups as two independent aspects. It highlights the distinct attitudes of cultural adapters toward their own ethnic culture and mainstream cultural groups [6]. Following the classification method proposed by cross-cultural management expert Laurence Romani [7], the research adopts an empirical paradigm. It employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative cross-analysis methods to discover issues through the investigation data itself. Additionally, it follows the methodology of Jean-Pierre Segal [8], incorporating preliminary immersive investigations to eliminate irrelevant factors and refine the questionnaire grid. The questionnaire content primarily includes basic information of the respondents, self-assessment of language proficiency, evaluation of higher education in France, academic performance, and daily life in France. It is complemented by semi-structured in-depth interviews. Furthermore, the study integrates the behaviors of Chinese international students in France participating in various cross-cultural communication activities (such as roundtable meetings during special holidays) to gain a clearer understanding of their genuine thoughts and actions in relaxed social environments.

3.3. Issues and Reasons faced during studying in France

Firstly, in terms of **language communication**:

When an individual lacks proficiency in a language, they cannot convey a coherent and complete story during communication, giving the impression of having limited thought or even a lack of emotion[9]. During interviews, the author observed that Chinese international students, while recognizing the importance of language proficiency to their lives and studies, were unsatisfied with their level of French or English. Language barriers not only reduce a student's willingness to actively communicate but also have a significant impact on their integration into local culture and life. As a result, a substantial proportion of Chinese students, despite some preparation in language, still lack the high level of proficiency required to support their studies and life in France. There is a vast gap between having learned French and being able to use it for communication and study.

Secondly, in terms of **culture and thinking**:

Compared to Western students, Chinese students are more accustomed to collective living and learning. Students who grew up in China often have close ties with their families, and the dormitories in Chinese universities are mostly shared by multiple students, with students often doing things together. In contrast, French schools typically offer single-room accommodations, with lodging dispersed both on and off campus. This requires students to independently attend classes, handle administrative tasks, shop, and more. Many Chinese students in France are often unprepared for this, experiencing varying degrees of adjustment challenges. This often leads to negative emotions and, in severe cases, can even affect the student's mental and physical health.

The need for and emphasis on relational ties make the desire to deepen interactions with others very common among Chinese students. However, whether students take action varies from individual to individual. In interviews, some Chinese students mentioned that due to a lack of understanding, French students usually do not choose to initiate contact with foreign classmates. However, as long as Chinese students take the initiative to communicate, they are more than willing to interact and increase

mutual understanding. In fact, many Chinese students are hesitant to initiate conversations with French students.

Thirdly, in terms of **learning methods and attitudes**:

The characteristics of French education are teaching students to question. French students prefer to acquire knowledge through active communication and hands-on practice; the features of Chinese education lie in a transmission-based learning where the teacher imparts knowledge and students learn by attending lectures. Chinese students place more emphasis on internal reflection, understanding and digesting knowledge by attending classes, reading books, and researching materials. Additionally, French teachers often assign a significant amount of reading materials to be reviewed before class, expecting students to participate in class discussions and complete their learning, note-taking, and other class tasks during the interaction. In contrast, most Chinese students primarily focus on the lecture in their home country and only highlight content when the teacher points out its significance. As a result, Chinese students haven't been fully trained in the ability to read extensively before class, take extensive notes during class, and record their thought processes, which means they might not display an active learning attitude in class.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on John Bailey's cultural adaptation model, this study observed that Chinese students studying in France generally demonstrated three distinct identity recognition strategies, which the author has named the "Exclusion" strategy, the "Sponge" strategy, and the "Diplomat" strategy.

Exclusion Strategy: Students with exclusionary tendencies tend to isolate themselves from the host country's cultural environment. This image corresponds to Bailey's "Separation" and "Marginalization" strategies. Such students rarely venture outside of the closed circle of Chinese students. Their proficiency in French and English is average at best, they struggle to adapt to the local cuisine, often feel homesick, and are prone to psychological problems. Interviews with these students are particularly challenging as most of their time is spent on social networks, rather than face-to-face communication. Through understanding, the author found that these students' motivation to study in France is often not self-driven. Coupled with poor language skills, they ultimately form an "Exclusionary" identity strategy.

Sponge Strategy: These students exhibit a high degree of flexibility in cultural identification. They quickly and fully adapt to and appreciate French culture, actively communicate with locals, and become good friends. This image is in line with Bailey's "Assimilation" strategy. Interestingly, these students refer to their Chinese peers as "they" instead of "us" in interviews, suggesting a subconscious identification as half-French. Upon returning to China after their studies, they still retain distinct Eastern characteristics, quickly reverting to their Chinese identity. These students exhibit a remarkable ability to "go with the flow" and "do as the Romans do," indirectly reflecting a certain level of consistency and harmony between Chinese and French cultures.

Diplomat Strategy: Most Chinese students possess characteristics of the "Diplomat" identity. These students, cultivated in the elite environment of French higher education, represent the image of China's future young "new elite, high potential". This image aligns with Bailey's "Integration" model. The term "diplomat" is used in

this study to denote individuals representing their nation's interests when dealing with foreigners. It reflects that the majority of Chinese students surveyed in this research demonstrate intelligence, capability, negotiation skills, and other admirable qualities. They approach French culture with curiosity and appreciation while maintaining deep Chinese sentiments. Their primary characteristics are a collective cultural perspective, studying in France not only for personal career prospects but also to return to China with their acquired knowledge and contribute to the nation.

Considering the above characteristics and analysis, the author suggests the following for Chinese students studying in France: Chinese students should prioritize learning French before going abroad and work hard to improve their language proficiency. Understand the differences between studying in France and in China and be mentally prepared. After arriving in France, students should continue deliberate practice in language, communicate boldly in French, and develop a habit of pre-study and extensive reading. Engage actively in class discussions, think critically, and ask questions. Building good relationships with French professors and classmates, enhancing mutual understanding and trust, is also crucial to the success of their overseas study journey. Chinese students should endeavor to immerse themselves in French society, integrate into the local lifestyle and social circles, cultivate positive factors in identity recognition strategies, and maximize their study abroad outcomes.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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