

Unveiling the College Choice and Adaptation Processes of Academically Talented Chinese Students Selecting Korean Universities Under the New International Student Recruitment Policy

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ABSTRACT

Due to the expansion of globalization and the decrease of students in the school age population, it is important for Korean universities to recruit international students. The number of international degree-seeking students in Korea has increased tremendously over the past two decades due to campaigns such as the 'Study in Korea 2020' and individual universities' promotional activities. However, the quality of these international students' academic achievements has not been explored thus far, nor has there been analysis of the methods focused on recruiting academically high achieving students. In this study, I explore the characteristics of academically talented Chinese students (ATCS) and how to best recruit them. Chinese students make up the highest proportion of international degree-seeking students in Korea. According to interviewed ATCS, several factors influenced their decision-making processes when they selected their study destination and as they adapted to an unfamiliar environment. When selecting a study destination, emotional reasons had higher influence than rational reasons. Expectations for academic achievement, desire to be different from others, and personal preference were key reasons for selecting a study destination, which contrasted from those reported by Chinese students in previous research. During their adaptation process, academic adaptation occurred prior to social or cultural adaptation. ATCS considered academic achievements more important than making friends. Their academic achievements naturally led to social acceptance by Koreans as they earned their respect. All the interviewees emphasized the importance of their relationships with their academic advisors, which helped them adapt to Korea and their study environment. Lastly, students who spoke Korean adapted faster and easier.

Keywords: Higher Education in Korea, Chinese Students, Academically Talented, Decision-making Process, Adaptation Process, International Student Recruitment

Introduction

Currently, no industry can be free from globalization and global competition for development, expansion and

survival. Globalization is becoming more important and crucial due to the diminishing value of physical boundaries between countries. Education is not an exception.

Recruiting international students is critical to Korean universities in building international competitiveness since universities now are driven to compete in the international education market (Lee, 2014). The steep decline of the school age population fuels fierce national competition between Korean universities due to the imbalance foreseen between supply and demand (Kim,

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2011; Kim, 2005).

An increased amount of attention has been focused on formulating strategies to recruit international students in Korea since the beginning of 1990s as well to expand the international educational presence of Korean universities (Kim, 2006). The internationalization policy which was first announced in 1993, and the higher education reforms led by the Korean government in 1995 can be interpreted as responses to the changes in the international education environment (Park & Song, 2013). In 2004, a new nation-wide goal was announced by the Ministry of Education to recruit international students. As a result, the Study in Korea 2020 plan was launched, which aimed to recruit 200,000 international students by the year 2020 (Lee, 2008). Strategies of the Study in Korea Project evolved in 2008, and measures to enhance "Global Education Service" were released and executed in 2010 to further recruitment of international students (Bae & Kim, 2014).

Since then, strategic tactics such as providing courses offered in English, recruiting international professors, increasing scholarship opportunities, installing new dormitories, launching one-stop service systems for international students and even simplifying the entrance application have been implemented by individual universities and the Korean government to increase the number of international students (Bae & Kim, 2014). To support the universities, the Ministry of Justice simplified the visa-issuance process and granted various scholarships to encourage international students to come to Korea. Such drastic measures were used to strengthen the international competitiveness of and increase the chances for the survival of Korean higher education (Lee & Im, 2014).

The efforts of the Korean universities and the Korean government in promoting Korean higher education (including scholarships such as Global Korea Scholarship (GKS)); the number of international degree-seeking students increased from 1,983 in the year 1995 to 6,160 in the year 2000, and again to 104,262 in the year 2016 (Li & Lee, 2014; Park & Song, 2013; Kim, Kim, & Lee, 2008; Ahn & Choi, 2008; Korean Educational Statistics, 2017).

So far, universities have recruited the bulk of international students through agents, and have individually promoted themselves in various college exhibitions. Although this led to a significant increase in the number of international

students, it also created a discrepancy in academic achievement between Korean students and international students that entered the same universities. New methods for recruiting academically talented students were needed to demonstrate and maintain the educational quality of Korean universities and to ensure Korea was ranked highly among other educationally-popular destination countries (Lee, 2014).

If such methods are sustainably implemented, academically talented international graduates from Korea will hold significant value in their home countries as the reflection of the quality of Korean education. They will enhance the academic reputation of Korean universities, which will attract more academically talented students in the future (Jo, 2003). In contrast to the importance of this goal, studies on recruiting academically talented international students have not been conducted much in Korea so far.

At the same time, managing and assisting the adaptation of international students already in Korean universities to life in Korea is equally as important as recruiting them. Although most Korean universities thrive to meet their internal numeric goals for international student recruitment, comparatively less investment has been made in student management or in support for international students' adaptation. International students suffer from limited Korean language courses and courses conducted in English, low employment opportunities, discrimination from Koreans, mistreatment due to the aggressive attitudes of Koreans, financial difficulties, academic challenges, homesickness, and the experience of being an outcast, all which cause difficulty in adaptation (Kim, 2009).

Without understanding and providing the needs of the international students in Korea, strategies to recruit more international degree-seeking students to Korea cannot be successful in the long run. To achieve the goal of recruiting 200,000 international students, new measures should be taken. These new measures need to be different from blind agent recruitment, which cannot guarantee the academic quality of international students. The first step to achieving the goal of Study in Korea 2020 should be to better understand the target students. Studies on international students' migration, their decision-making processes and adaptation processes should be conducted to better attract international students. To maintain sustainable high-quality education in Korean universities, policies to attract academically talented students need to be developed.

Student migration from China to Korea is relatively

easy due to the proximity, which is evidenced by the fact that Chinese students make up approximately 70% of international students in Korea (Rhee & Park, 2012). During the past three decades, academically talented international student mobility increased mainly from East to the West, from knowledge consuming country to knowledge creating country, and with dominance of the English language (Holloway, O'Hara, & Pimlott-Wilson, 2012). Knowledge consuming countries export talent, and knowledge creating countries import talent. Korea has been a knowledge consuming country, and remains one, as more students leave Korea than enter the country (Phillips & Stahl, 2001; Park, 2008). Migration from China, one knowledge consuming country, to Korea, another knowledge consuming country is quite a unique phenomenon, especially in the case of academically talented students (Khraiche, 2014). The exploration of academically talented Chinese students' reasons for migrating to Korea adds academic value to this study because the findings may help to explain the manifestation of the student migration pattern from one knowledge consuming country to another.

The results of research on academically talented Chinese students (ATCS) are crucial, since it is currently implied internationally and especially within China that entering a Korean university as a Chinese student is relatively easier than entering a Chinese university. Chinese people, in general, think that students who study in Korea are academically less talented (Park, 2013). Korea is not considered to be the most admirable study-abroad destination; United States and Europe are still favored (Jo, 2003). The relationship between Korean students and Chinese students in Korean universities is not positive, and Korean students and Chinese students have negative impressions of each other (Jon & Jang, 2012). This problem leads to poor adaptation of Chinese students to life at Korean universities. The satisfaction level of Chinese students in Korea is not very high, as many have experienced being disregarded and discriminated against due to their nationality. Some Koreans alienate Chinese students and disparage China's economic situation (Kim, 2009).

To fulfill the goal of Study in Korea 2020 policy and improve the educational reputation of Korean universities, assessing current ATCS in Korea and understanding their decision-making processes and processes of adaptation to life in Korea is important to reform the policies made to recruit ATCS. Understanding the perspectives of ATCS

already studying in Korea would make it easier to find adequate methods to recruit new ATCS and ways to aid in their adaptation. Thus, I focus my research on ATCS' decision-making processes before coming to Korea, the compromises they make, their adaptation processes to life in Korea and the influential factors in both processes in order to create a sustainable recruitment cycle of academically talented international students.

Theoretical Models in College Choice

David Chapman proposed that in the process students go through upon deciding on which college to attend, the characteristics of the student, student's family and a series of other external features influence the decision heavily (Chapman, 1981). In 1982, the Jackson model proposed three stages that students go through before making a college choice: the preference stage, the exclusion stage and the evaluation stage (Vrontis, Thrassou, & Melanthiou, 2007). Students first make a list of the universities they prefer; exclude some institutions from the list after assessing the tuition fee, location and academic quality; then rate which institution best suits their needs and make a final decision. Hanson and Litten (1982) also introduced a three-stage model: students decide whether to attend post-secondary education, investigate and make up a list of candidate institutions, then apply and enroll. In 1987, Hossler and Gallagher suggested three phases in the college decision-making process: predisposition, search process and choice. Students decide to proceed in higher education, gather information, and then compile a list of universities they choose to apply to.

These models described aspects of the decision-making process when selecting a college/university and the influential factors. However, they did not take into consideration international student mobility, because the concept flourished after the 1990s (Phillips & Stahl, 2001).

Previous Research on the College Choice of International Degree-seeking Students

National and international students have different decision-making processes in college choice because they come from different socio-demographic profiles. For students seeking foreign degrees, government policies,

world economy and economic and political conditions in the destination countries are the acting influential factors (Altbach, 1991). Studying abroad has been considered as an "opportunity to obtain a scarcer, more valuable type of cultural capital in the form of a Western university degree (Waters, 2006, p. 189)." Along with these factors, the influence of family and peers, the institution's global ranking, and students' personal traits affect their decisions (Eder, Smith, & Pitts, 2010).

Additionally, push and pull factors were discovered in potential international students. Push factors influence a student to seek a degree abroad and make the student decide *whether* to go. In contrast, pull factors attract the student to the destination country/university and make the student decide *where* to go. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) defined more specific push and pull factors in international student mobility. The push factors were (a) knowledge of the destination country, (b) quality of education in destination university/country, (c) qualifications of the destination, (d) recommendation from friends/relatives/agents and (e) education environment. The pull factors were (a) better courses offered in overseas, (b) difficult to gain entry to the universities at the home country, (c) no desired courses provided in the home country, (d) desire to better understand the destination country, (e) intention to migrate, (f) easiness in obtaining information of destination country/university, (g) fees, (h) travel cost, (i) job opportunities, (j) living environment, (k) whether there is any racial discrimination, (l) entry qualifications, (m) whether the desired university is a government run institution and (n) whether there are friends and/or relatives in the destination area. Visa and monetary issues were highlighted as key influential structural factors (Eder, Smith, & Pitts, 2010).

Previous Research on Chinese Students

Chinese students seeking a degree in Australia mentioned four push factors that motivated them to study abroad: China's strong economic growth, going abroad becoming a trend in China, the Chinese government's support for international education and an "inadequate supply of university places in China's higher education (Yang, 2007, p. 3)." Six pull factors were also discovered by Yang (2007): knowledge and awareness, recommendation, cost, environment, geographic proximity and social links.

When Chinese students decided to seek a degree in the United Kingdom's Business School, they considered the reputation of the destination country in regard to educational standards and the university's global recognition (Djafarova & Waring, 2012). Another group of Chinese students in the UK mentioned that the four influential factors in their choice of destination included safety conditions of the destination country, global university ranking and education quality of the destination country, expected annual expenditure and duration needed to learn the language spoken in the destination country (Gong & Huybers, 2015).

The case of Chinese students in Korea is quite different from those in the US and Europe. They may show different tendencies because the migrating group could differ, such as the ethnically Korean Chinese students who come to Korea for a degree. The reasons for coming to Korea in the order of the most popular answers for ethnical Korean-Chinese students discovered by Park (2009) were (a) academic purposes, (b) opportunity to study abroad, (c) good educational environment, (d) personal career development, (e) to enhance Korean language proficiency, (f) family's financial capability, (g) no better alternatives, (h) favor Korea, (i) recommended by friends, (j) Korea is the motherland, (k) proximity from China, and (l) ability to speak the language. The reasoning of Chinese students in Korea was different from the ethnical Korean-Chinese but similar to those of Chinese students in Western countries. In the order of most popular reason, (a) academic purposes, (b) opportunity to study abroad, (c) to learn the language, (d) family's financial capability, (e) personal career development, (f) good educational environment, (g) did not see other better alternatives, (h) to earn money, (i) favor Korea, (j) Korea being more developed than China and (k) a genuine love for Korea were the reasons of choosing Korea (Park, 2009).

Decision-making Process of Academically Talented Students

Five reasons were previously found to have influenced the decision to seek a degree abroad among Chinese students in the US: (a) see the world and broaden experience, (b) learn the language and experience native speakers, (c) improve professional and financial potential, (d) gain insight from new relationships and (e) take control of

the future (Hegarty, Fuxman, Elifoglu, & Chao, 2014). The majority of students surveyed were academically talented students. Of 105 surveys, 46.7% of the respondents scored in the top 50% of the Gaokao (Chinese College entrance exam), which is a sufficient score to get into any first or second tier Chinese university.

Theoretical Models of Adaptation

Culture shock theory proposed by Oberg in 1960 is the most widely known theory of cultural adaptation. There are four emotional phases of Culture Shock after international migration: honeymoon (experience of rapture, admiration and passion), crisis (experience of depression, frustration, anger, anxiety and unfitness), recovery (learning the culture and resolves the crisis phase) and adaptation (adapting to the new culture and becomes competent); (Chung & Yang, 2004).

In 1997, Berry explained another phase of adaptation. Acculturation is when someone who grew up in one distinctive culture experiences another new different culture, which leads to a change of behavior. Assimilation is embracing the new culture and coping with it. Separation is avoiding the new culture while "holding on to their original culture." Integration is embracing the new culture and holding on to the original culture at the same time. Marginalization is holding less value and putting less effort into cultural adaptation (Berry, 1997).

Factors Affecting Academic Adaptation

International students who interacted more with students who were nationals of the study destination showed better adaptation and higher satisfaction than those who spent more time with students from their home country. At the same time, language was a critical factor in building relationships and adjusting to classes (Surdam, 1980). Personal situations and university issues also affected international graduate students' adaptation. Among personal situations, communication and cohesion, financial resources, and leisure quality and living conditions had great impacts in adaptation. In the area of student-faculty relations, quality of instruction, facilities and curriculum flexibility, tangible support, and relationships with other students were the key university related issues

that influenced adaptation (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Faculty, facilities, interactions in class, academic life, organization of educational process and administrative services also influenced students' adaptation to university life (Toshikova-Hristozova, 2012).

Johnson stated that "while studying a subject at the university level is challenging, learning a language with its cultural implications, technical terms, and slang and acronymic language creates additional changes that may serve to isolate international students (Johnson, 2014, p. 248)." However, even if a student is fluent in the language, difficulties may occur because they may lack understanding of the culture (Morrow, 2010). The understanding of the language can vary due to how one perceives a situation or to language connotations (Schryve, 2007)¹.

Adaptation of International Students in Korea

According to a study conducted on government scholarship recipients in Korea, age and personal characteristics affected adaptation to Korean social culture and engagement in relationships (Han, Bae, & Jeon, 2011). It is suspected that other personal backgrounds are not as influential since personality decides perception. Moreover, people with strong self-control and higher emotional tolerance tend to adapt better (Britt, 1983). People with higher social and emotional competencies on university life adjusted better (Jin, Liu, & Lee, 2015).

Chinese students who had better relationships with Korean students showed higher satisfaction. These findings are in line with the results of research conducted regarding Chinese students in western countries. However, friendship with Chinese students did not show correlation with higher satisfaction levels. This may imply that Chinese students are more interested in making Korean friends although they may form Chinese student groups within the university and spend more time amongst themselves (Yoon & Kim, 2013).

At the same time, previous experiences such as visiting the destination country affected students' adaptation (Klineberg & Hull, 1979). People who voluntarily chose to study abroad displayed higher levels of emotional satisfaction (Son & Lee, 2011). When a student's selection of Korea as a study abroad destination was not the

1) Requote from Johnson (2014)

student's first choice, it did not seem to have much effect on their adaptation (Kwon, 2008). Especially in academic adaptation, language proficiency was proven to be more critical (Kim, 2009). This is due to the fact that language is a foundational ability to building friendships, understanding university courses and communicating in daily life.

Four factors were discovered that disturbed the successful adaptation of international students in Korea. First, international students who learned Korean upon entering a university, did not find it sufficient enough for tertiary education. Lack of language ability led not just to academic maladjustment, but caused devaluation of the international student by oneself, by Korean students and by faculty. This sense of failure led to depression as Korean students equated language ability with international students' academic ability, which then led to maladjustment. Second, international students had a challenging time understanding the cultural context in Korean university students' life. This led students to drift away from making Korean friends after a couple of negative experiences such as excessive drinking or forced drinking. Third, not enough understanding and consideration of Korean students made it difficult for international students to fit in. Although some Korean students are willing to help, sometimes their gestures of help made the international students feel more uncomfortable and/or distant. Since Korean students tend to have less understanding of how to build relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds, the methods of the approach were perceived as inappropriate. International students felt an emotional barrier from Korean students when they were treated differently just because they were foreigners, although it could have just been an act of consideration. Fourth, some professors provided less aid to international students in need. International students reported that some professors were condescending when they asked questions when they did not understand and asked them to figure it out on their own like other Korean students (Kim, 2012). Moreover, Chinese students found it difficult to fit in among Korean students as they felt that Korean students do not embrace international students as *we*, an inner group (Kim & Lee, 2009).

Methods

A qualitative analysis was used purposefully to determine the details of decision-making processes and adaptation processes of ATCS. Various quantitative studies have been conducted on the reasons of Chinese students for studying abroad and the difficulties that international students experience, but not much with in-depth explanation. The author focused on the participants' decision-making processes, factors that affected their decision-making processes, whether their decision-making process influenced their adaptation in Korea and what made ATCS decide to compromise and adapt. A case study methodology was selected to better understand the ambiguous nature of talent mobility, since in-depth interviews provide insightful information rather than generalized answers (Yin, 1989).

Participants

Research participants were screened for three criteria: Chinese nationality, achievement of a relatively-high test score on Gaokao, and the pursuit of a master's and/or a doctoral degree at a prestigious Korean university. All participants were recruited through the Student Union of Chinese students in Korea. Participants were restricted to Chinese degree-seeking students since they are the largest population among the international students in Korea, and their migration is a unique phenomenon, as students migrate from one knowledge consuming country to other.

The Gaokao test score was especially critical in judging whether a student was academically talented, as Gaokao is one of the most official methods used to quantify Chinese student's academic abilities. The scores on mock Gaokao tests were also taken into consideration since there may have been cases in which an academically talented student achieved lower on the real Gaokao test due to excessive stress or health issues on the test day.

Only Chinese graduate students who were either a graduate of or a current student in either a master's program or a Ph.D. program at a prestigious Korean university were selected to affirm their academic achievements. Pursuing higher education above a bachelor's degree was used as a proof of the students' sincerity and devotion

to academics. Students were selected from the top five Korean universities from QS World University Rankings for 2015/16: Seoul National University (36th), Korea University (104th), Yonsei University (105th), Sungkyunkwan University (118th) and Hanyang University (193th). Among the six participants selected, five wished to continue their careers in academia.

After the basic criteria were met, six participants were selected based on whether they were enrolled in their first-choice of study destination country, school and major. This was to see the difference in compromises students had to make during their decision-making processes, the order of the decisions they made in choosing their study destination country, school and major, and whether it had any influence in their level of adaptation to Korea.

To verify whether there were differences in the processes of decision and adaptation between students from different

disciplines, participants from different departments were selected: two students from the department of engineering, one student from the department of education, one student from the department of social sciences, one student from the department of business and one student from the department of liberal arts.

To remain unbiased regarding different genders' opinions, three male students and three female students were nominated. Finally, the type and the amount of the scholarships granted to the participants were considered since scholarships could easily influence the decision-making processes and the compromises made during adaptation. All the subjects were different as there were participants self-funded with minimum scholarships, funded by the Korean government and/or university and/or academic advisor, and scholarships granted by the Chinese government. For a full description of participants see Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Information

	A	B			C	D	E	F	
Gender	Female	Male			Male	Female	Male	Female	
Gaokao Score (approximate)	670 / 750	600 / 750			600 / 750	600 / 750	600 / 750	630 / 750	
Major	Social Sciences	MA: Liberal Arts Ph.D.: Education			Engineering	Business	Engineering	Liberal Arts	
Korean Language Proficiency before coming to Korea	TOPIK level 6	No previous knowledge in Korean language			No previous knowledge in Korean language	No previous knowledge in Korean language	TOPIK level 3	TOPIK level 4	
Current Korean Language Proficiency	TOPIK level 6	TOPIK level 6			Did not learn Korean in Korea	TOPIK level 6	TOPIK level 3	TOPIK level 6	
Taken Language Course in Korea	No	Yes			No	Yes	Yes	No	
Whether Korea was the 1 st choice	No	BA No	MA Yes	PhD Yes	No	BA No	MA Yes	Yes	Yes
Whether the University was the 1 st choice	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Whether the Major was the 1 st choice	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Year Started to Study	2009	2007			2009	2008	2011	2014	
Scholarship	50% BK21 Scholarship	100% University Scholarship			100% BK21 Scholarship	70% (BA), 100% (MA) University Scholarship	10% University Scholarship	60% University Scholarship	

Interview Questionnaire

Questions regarding students' processes of making their decisions to come to Korea in pursue of higher education and the processes they went through in adapting to life in Korea were asked. For a better understanding of the decision-making processes, participants were asked why they chose Korea and their university and major. The factors that affected their decision and the compromises the participants had to make during adaptation and the decision-making process especially when the decision was not originally their first choice were investigated.

To analyze the relationship between participants' processes of decision-making and adaptation to Korea, questions dealing with their daily lives such as dining, relationships and cultural experiences were asked. Questions about their professors, majors, studies, and classes were asked to analyze their academic adaptation. Among six interviews, four were conducted in Korean, one was conducted in English and one was conducted partially in Korean and Chinese. An interpreter assisted for the interview that was partially conducted in Chinese. The languages were decided upon based on the preferences of the interviewees.

Analytic Procedures

Two interviews were conducted for every participant by the author. First, a three-hour-long interview was conducted regarding the participant's decision-making process and their adaptation process to academics and personal life in Korea. After their response from the first interview was analyzed, another two-hour-long interview was conducted for additional questioning and to confirm previous responses. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed by classifying the cases of each interviewee to find the differences and similarities in experiences and processes.

After the interviews, the influential factors in the decision-making processes and adaptation processes were identified and extracted into keywords, and were categorized into different clusters according to how they influenced the participant. The individual stories reported by each participant were stripped down into one keyword. These keywords were then clustered with similar keywords, which were then named according to what influence they

had on the participants. Rational reasons were labelled rational since they were factual and statistical reasons, while emotional reasons were labelled emotional because the participants reported similar influential factors differently according to their own judgements and experiences. Lastly, the correlation between the decision-making process and the adaptation process was analyzed.

Results

Through this research, the decision-making process, adaptation process of ATCS and the factors that influenced these processes were discovered. The decision-making process and adaptation process of subjects whose first choice was met and subjects whose first choice was not met did not show much discrepancy. The key findings compared to previous studies are that academics was the most important factor for ACTS in both making a decision and in adaptation. There were more emotional reasons that influenced their decisions, and emotional reasons stimulated by internal attributed had higher influence over all other influential factors. The process and influential factors did not differ much depending on whether the study destination was the subject's first choice or an alternative. Moreover, the emphasis on academic achievement, ambition and devotion was not different from those of academically talented students who migrated from a knowledge consuming country to a knowledge creating country.

Decision-making Process in Deciding on the Study Destination

During the decision-making process of choosing a study destination, students chose the country first then decided on the university and major almost simultaneously. Those whose first choice of study destination was not Korea had an additional process of compromise before they selected the university and major, but once the compromise was made, the next process was like those whose first choice of study destination was Korea. In deciding the country, university and major, participants reported different rational and emotional reasons. The reasons were similar

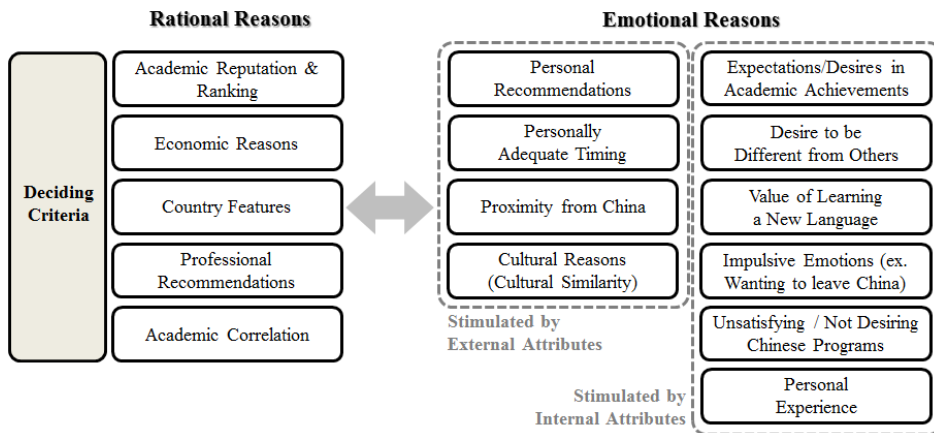


Figure 1. Selecting the Country

between participants whose first choice of destination was Korea and those who were not, but the impact and the importance of each reason were different (see Figure 1).

All subjects' reason behind coming to Korea was a different mixture of reasons from Figure 1. Of the six participants, only two subjects' first choice of study destination was Korea. This was because they had a prior experience in Korea and knowledge about Korean education, which was the most influential factor. Another reason in choosing Korea was due to the living environment and the convenient facilities. The emotional reasons stimulated by internal attributes played the biggest roles in the decision-making process. On the contrary, four other participants who did not choose Korea as their first choice commonly did not have a prior experience related to Korea. The most influential factor for two participants who came to Korea for a graduate degree, after their bachelor's degree in China, was their expectations of academic achievement; while, the most influential factor for two participants who came to Korea for an undergraduate degree was failure in achieving a high score in Gaokao test compared to their expectation. Their emotions influenced them to leave China for a better opportunity, and led them to choose an international destination. These four participants also mentioned the effects of language and tuition fees and their desire to be different from other students who studied in the US or Europe. They convinced themselves that their unique academic experience would be advantageous when they returned to China in the future.

Although students reported similar influential reasons, the sequence of the reasoning was different. Students

who had prior experience in Korea reported their primary reasons as knowledge about Korea and language proficiency. In this primary reason, academic excellence of the Korean university, the living circumstances, other personal preferences and rational reasons were considered simultaneously. In contrast, students whose first of choice was not Korea reported differently. Their primary reason was either failure on their Gaokao test or dissatisfaction with Chinese education. Then, the secondary reason was to look outside of China for alternative opportunities. Their tertiary reason was perceiving Korean universities to be a good opportunity to meet their unique needs. At this stage, participants considered several aspects of the country such as safety, proximity to China, and academic expectations, and decided Korea was an attractive educational site.

After choosing the country to study in, different rational and emotional reasons affected their process of university and major choice (see figure 2). Again, rational reasons were reported similarly among students whose college and major were their first choice and students who chose their alternative. Rational reasons and emotional reasons stimulated by external attributes were not so different between students. On the contrary, more individual and unique stories were reported for emotional reasons stimulated by internal attributes. The rational reasons and emotional reasons stimulated by external attributes acted as a foundation in formulating a list of preferences. However, emotional reasons stimulated by internal attributes were the game changer that guided the students to their final decisions. Students reported different combinations of emotional reasons stimulated by internal attributes with

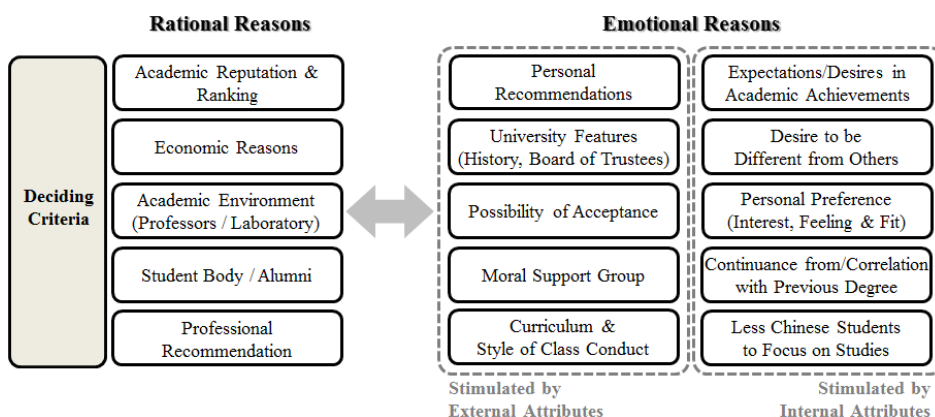


Figure 2. Selecting the College and Major

the only difference being which reasons were more influential.

The major itself also made a difference in students' decisions. All participants chose to come to Korea either because Korea or the university was well-known in that area and to differentiate themselves by gaining unique and special expertise from Korea. In both cases, these were emotional reasons stimulated by internal attributes as the logic behind the decision was dependent on their personal judgement. Overall, the emotional reasons were identified as having greater effects on the decision-making and compromising processes.

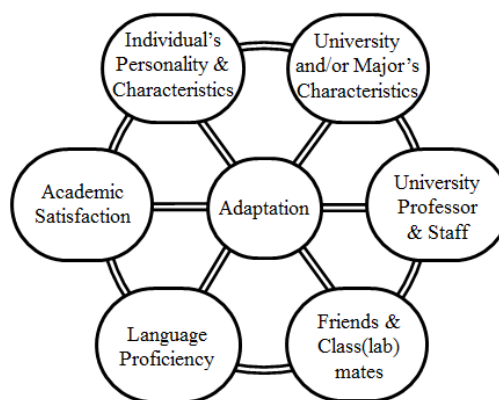


Figure 3. Influential Factors in Adaptation

Influential Factors in Adaptation

Whether participants went through a rough compromising process or not during the decision-making process, all participants in this study successfully adapted to Korea. Depending on whether the study destination was the student's first choice or not, the speed of adaptation was different. For students whose study destination was an alternative, adaptation took a longer period compared to students whose study destination was their first choice. The difference occurred since students whose study destination was an alternative option went through the stages of shock, disappointment and acceptance, which was not reported by students whose study destination was their first choice. Those students knew what to expect based on prior experience.

Participants demonstrated a tendency to perform and

adapt better in their first choice of university and major, while country played a minor role as an influential factor in adaptation. However, rather than the university, the major had a higher influence over students' adaptation as it directly linked their studies and daily lives.

Although adaptation occurred at different points in time, all six participants successfully adapted to Korea, their university and their major. All participants were satisfied with their academic achievements and have good relationships with Chinese friends and Korean friends. Factors in Figure 3 were reported to be the influential factors that affected adaptation. All six students reported the importance and balance of six factors, although each rated the level of influence differently. All six factors needed to be met to a certain extent for a successful adaptation.

All six participants first mentioned their academic adaptation as the priority. Participants reported as being content in their university and being satisfied with their academic achievements in their major, especially due to the support they received from their advising professors. All participants ranked academic experience as their utmost priority in adapting to Korea over cultural adaptation or social acceptance. Some participants stated that they avoided majors where there were many Chinese students in order to focus on their studies and to perform best academically without distraction. Since the participants performed highly in their academics, they were well and easily accepted by their Korean classmates. Cultural and social adaptation occurred very smoothly after successful academic adaptation.

they could not socialize freely with Koreans and were dependent on someone else such as university staff, Chinese friends and professors to assist them. They also were not well informed about the academic environment they would face, so maladjustment was inevitable due to culture shock. As shown in Figure 4, some participants went through stages of crisis, frustration, depression and disappointment in the beginning. However, they searched for reasons on their own internally to cope and adapt. There were internal affirmatives and external affirmatives, as well as rational and emotional reasons in selecting the university and major from figures 1 and 2, that influenced their decisions to adapt. After they accepted their reality and circumstances, they gradually *decided to adapt* and embrace their reality.

Process of Adaptation and Compromise

Although all participants did adapt in the end, the adaptation process appeared to be different for all six participants. Whether the country, the university and the major were of their first choices or not, academic achievements, language proficiency, cultural awareness and prior knowledge about Korea seemed to have played greater roles in initiating the adaptation process and preventing culture shock.

Participants with prior experience in Korea knew what to expect, so they did not report difficulties in adapting. However, those who did not speak Korean mentioned the difficulties they experienced in the beginning since

Discussion and Implications

In this study, I explained how academically talented students decided to migrate from one knowledge consuming country to another knowledge consuming country, which is out of the ordinary migration pattern of academically talented students, and adapt successfully. ATCS emphasized academic achievements in both their decision-making processes and their adaptation processes. Academic achievements can refer to factual academic achievements such as university ranking and name value, but it can also refer to emotional academic achievements

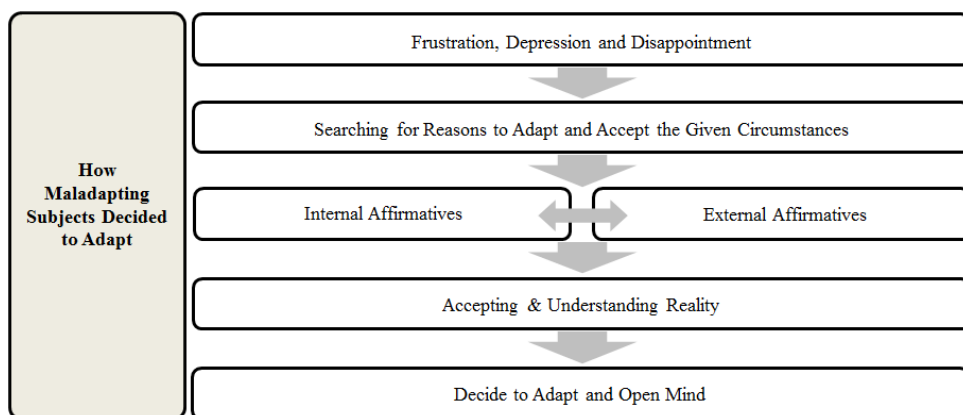


Figure 4. Process of Adaptation

such as being different from other talented students. ATCS wanted to be differentiated from other friends and stand out in their fields within the same academic arena, since their friends, other academically talented students, normally migrated to knowledge creating countries such as the US, UK, Europe and Australia. Studying in another knowledge consuming country was able to satisfy their needs as it was out of the norm, and they were able to gain knowledge and expertise that could not be earned elsewhere.

Decision-making Process in Selecting the Study Destination and Influential Factors

In this research, the author examined the decision-making process, adaptation process and the influential factors of academically talented Chinese students (ATCS) currently studying in Korea in order to find new methods to recruit academically talented students and aid their successful adaptation to life in Korea so as to increase Korean higher education's international presence in the long run.

In all three decision-making process models referencing selecting the destination of study based on previous research (the Jackson Model, the Hanson and Litten Model and the Hossler and Gallagher Model), the phase of university selection started from listing candidate universities then comparing them to make a final decision. However, in this study on ATCS, the subjects displayed a tendency to formulate what they wished or aimed to accomplish in a university, what traits or factors they expected from a university and their personal situations to decide their study destinations before listing the countries or the universities. ATCS listed up their personal preferences and matched them with study destinations that best suited their desires. This difference was suspected to exist since these students chose international migration, and they desired their reasons for selecting a country, a university and a major to be met. Therefore, listing universities came later than listing personal preferences.

Whether Korea was the subject's first choice or not, country was decided first then the university and the major was selected almost simultaneously. For those who could not proceed to their first preference, they made compromises and selected alternative options by comparing the alternatives to their first preference. Key findings from this process were that emotional reasons appeared

to have greater influence, and that the most influential factors were emotional reasons stimulated by internal attributes. The ATCS had specific academic goals they wanted to achieve, which made their personal internal attributes more influential. Similar rational reasons were reported from all six subjects, however, different emotional reasons made students make different choices in university and major.

The ATCS prioritized their personal preferences and their desires that distinguished them from other students. This was distinctive from previous research that listed different rational reasons. Moreover, emotional reasons were mentioned in the previous research, but they were vague and were not explained in detail. Another distinctive difference of ATCS was that they were not influenced by peer group, family or other people. They collected information and listened to opinions from other people, but these only acted as mere references and did not have much influence on their final decisions.

The sequence of college choice did not differ so much from other international students in the previous research. However, the factors that affected their decision-making process were much different from other students mentioned in previous studies. The research subjects in this study were more goal-oriented and more focused in seeking academic success with specific objectives. Another difference from former studies is that the ATCS in this study wanted to pursue academic careers rather than to compete in the job market. Therefore, the emphasis on employment was not reported as heavily, although it was addressed during the interviews by the interviewer. They did not consider employment as important as their current academic achievements.

Subjects chose Korea, their universities and majors differently from other Chinese students. Influential factors such as impulsive desire after failures on the Gaokao test, ill feelings towards Japan, and wanting an academic environment with fewer Chinese friends to focus on their academics were new discoveries in this study. Academically less talented students had previously been reported to study in Korea because they could not get into Chinese universities, or because they expected a low score on the Gaokao test based on their normal performance. It is remarkable that the same factors could apply to ATCS but in reverse (Park, 2013).

Just like Korean students, ATCS also preferred universities with higher academic rankings and reputations but carefully

selected the major to maximize their acceptance possibilities. One subject even considered the power of alumni in selecting the university.

The value of a moral support group had been mentioned in various preceding studies, and that same influential factor partially affected the ATCS in this study as well. Nonetheless, the most remarkable difference was that ATCS preferred not to be with other Chinese students in selecting a major for academic purposes. They mentioned how they did not understand other Chinese students who spent less time studying their major courses or learning Korean language, and just enjoyed spending time and having fun with other Chinese students. Although they had good Chinese friends, the subjects of this study separated themselves from them during studies, and this influenced the selection of their major heavily. Commonly, all research subjects reported to have good Korean friends as well. This was another distinctive difference as they did not report discrimination or ill treatment from Korean friends that was commonly mentioned in previous studies. They appeared to have been well accepted by Koreans and faculty members because the subjects successfully projected their academic competency.

According to this study, Korea was a preferred location to study over Japan. The tense history between China and Japan is still fresh in the memory of many Chinese individuals, and negative impressions still prevail. Korea, in contrast, gives a better impression compared to other Asian countries due to its advancement, convenient, comfortable, and safe living environment, and its proximity to China. Korean companies and the Korean wave did seem to play a significant role in setting a good image. If ATCS were to go abroad within Asia, Korea was nominated as the best option because the culture in Singapore and Hong Kong is too similar to that of China, and Japan is less favored due to its historical background. Korea seemed to have good position and image to recruit ATCS. Positioning Korean education differently from knowledge creating countries such as the universities in the US, UK, Europe and Australia by highlighting unique curricula and projects would help Korean universities recruit more ATCS who want to differentiate their career paths. Korea may be successful in recruiting academically talented international students by differentiating itself from universities of other Asian countries and offering different and unique opportunities and experiences.

Learning the Korean language seemed to be a double-

edged sword. Some students valued learning a new unique language, while some thought it was less important than their academic achievement. This seemed to vary depending on the disciplines; students in the Liberal Arts, Social Sciences, Business, and Education fields thought that language was important for academics while the two Engineering majors did not find language to be a vital necessity in their classrooms. Different curriculum for different disciplines is recommended to recruit ATCS. Some majors may not require Korean language proficiency, so promoting these factors may be helpful in recruiting more ATCS. At the same time, ATCS were highly interested in how the curricula were formulated in the areas of their interest. Therefore, during university exhibitions, exact and detailed description of classroom conduct and curriculum would be helpful in attracting ATCS.

The importance of the economical/financial situation was less highlighted compared to preceding studies. Participants reported that China's living standards have developed up to a similar level to Korea, and that Korea is relatively more affordable than North America, Europe and Australia. At the same time, most of the participants received funding during their graduate programs.

Ambition or goal-oriented behaviors as a scholar were reported less in this study, unlike the research findings of Furukawa in 2011 on academically talented students. The students in Korea understood other scholars would consider them less academically talented than students who studied in the US or Europe. They knew that the competition with those students would be tough, and that it would be an obstacle that they needed to overcome in the future. Therefore, fewer comments about their ambition to become faculty were made. However, all subjects showed confidence that they were unique, and that they would be able to achieve their career goals in the future with the academic achievements they have made.

Since personal experience and language proficiency affected students' process of deciding on a country to study in, expanding ways to teach Korean in China and promoting various methods for young students to visit Korea, such as study tours, could be helpful to recruit more ATCS.

Most of the subjects mentioned that they searched online for university information from the students already enrolled there. An online international communication channel operated by the international office could be

beneficial in disseminating strategic information about the university. Moreover, since ATCS emphasized personal fit with the university, it might be wiser to identify the ideal student characteristics that each university expects from its students. This may help students choose which university to attend and to adapt better after enrollment.

Finally, ATCSs wanted to feel the international atmosphere of coming to a Korean university. However, that was difficult since there were many Chinese students. That is one of the reasons why they chose majors where there were less Chinese students. Recruiting more international students from other nationalities rather than focusing on China only is recommended to add to the diversity of the atmosphere at the university. In addition, providing more opportunities for ATCS to mingle with Korean students is recommended. This may act as another promotional factor to recruit more ATCS.

The differences in students' decision-making processes did not seem to have much effect on their adaptation processes. Academic satisfaction, language proficiency, support from their peer groups and faculty, characteristics of the university and/or the major and individual student's personalities made the difference.

Adaptation Process and Influential Factors

Oberg's Culture Shock Theory and Berry's Acculturation Strategies were all displayed by the research participants in this study. Subjects without prior knowledge about Korea and/or Korean language experienced the honeymoon, crisis, recovery and adaptation of Oberg as they were thrown into academics immediately upon arrival, and the luxury of being astonished by a new culture did not happen as much. One subject suffered from the crisis phase for approximately two years. All participants passed the phase of crisis, recovery and adaptation after getting adjusted academically first and then socially. Nonetheless, there was a difference in the recovery phase. According to Oberg, the newcomer learns how to function and be independent (Oberg, 1960). However, the subjects of this research reported that they searched for reasons to adapt and accept reality. They also mentioned the internal and external affirmatives which influenced them to accept, then decide to adapt. What was unique was that subjects in this research *decided to adapt* rather than naturally and gradually adapted through experience. On the other

hand, students with prior experience in Korea and had knowledge about Korean higher education, especially since they spoke Korean, did not suffer much from culture shock. Their adaptation can be well described by Berry's theory. These participants showed both the assimilation and integration alternatives. They were open-minded about the new cultural experiences and remained balanced between adjusting to the new culture and maintaining their original culture. Therefore, providing adequate and realistic information prior to students' arrival may help to create a smooth landing by managing students' expectations. Administrators can be more considerate of how details and information could affect the international students' daily adaptation.

An interesting result seen in ATCS, yet different from the past studies, is that students reported to have adjusted academically before adapting culturally and/or socially, and that their preference was academic adaptation over any other adaptation. Even during maladaptation due to language barrier, loneliness and culture shock, ATCS focused on studying to excel and prove themselves. This naturally led the ATCS to perform successfully academically and earn the respect from Korean students and their professors. This academic adaptation gradually led ATCS to adapt culturally and socially without much effort. Academic achievements helped them overcome and withstand the indifference of other students, loneliness and maladaptation and enter the inner circle.

The momentum of academic adaptation differed according to the student's Korean language proficiency. Naturally, the more the student spoke fluent Korean, the faster the adaptation occurred. However, if the language did not interfere with the academics, maladaptation did not last nor disturbed the adaptation process.

None of the six participants preferred to be with Chinese students in an educational environment. They were as comfortable being with Korean friends as much as they were comfortable with Chinese friends. They had two separate groups of friends: a Korean friend group and a Chinese friend group that they spent time with separately. All six of the research subjects displayed a tendency to distribute their time amongst both friend groups, and none of the subjects reported being avoided by or discriminated against by Korean students. This was shown to be another distinctive difference from the findings in previous studies. The six research participants put value on having Korean friends and strived to maintain good

relationships. They also did not report difficulties in making Korean friends, which is another difference of ATCS in this research from previous studies.

All the interviewees expressed that the personalities and the characteristics of the professors were the utmost important factor in their academic achievement and adaptation to the academic environment. Additionally, supportive university staff also made a difference in participants' adaptation.

Lastly, the most interesting finding was that all six participants were very satisfied with their universities. Whether they were admitted to their first choice of university or not, after settling in, affection for their university sprang, just as it tends to be with Korean students, and a feeling of belonging to the school was displayed. Academic ranking was no longer important after admission and adaptation.

All the six participants did report some level of maladaptation due to several difficulties. However, individual students' personalities and characteristics seemed to be more important in succeeding academically and adapting successfully to their lives in Korea. All the interviewees were independent, ready to overcome obstacles, positive, open-minded, understanding, motivated and had strong control over themselves. External attributes had limited influence for these ATCS. During hardships, all six interviewees relied on their inner power as a thrust force to pull through, had thoughtful reasons to stand by, and tried different methods to overcome the obstacle by themselves rather than blaming it on someone else or being too dependent on others, which seemed to be the key to successful adaptation. They did not sink into depression or lethargy nor give up in exerting effort to overcome challenges. During the periods of maladaptation, participants experienced frustration, shock and disappointment, but the ATCS sought out internal and external reasons to understand, embrace and adapt. All participants thrived and successfully adapted.

Limitations

All the interviewees were introduced through the network of Student Union of Chinese students in Korea. They were all active members of the Student Union. From their active participation, one can already expect them to be well-adapted students with stable lives. Therefore, all the interviews were rather pleasant without

problems or complaints. However, it can be suspected that if the interviewees were selected amongst isolated Chinese students, more negative stories may have been shared.

Qualitative research relies greatly on the interview participants. All interviewees had outgoing and active personalities. It can be suspected that they excelled academically and in adapting to an unfamiliar environment because of their outgoing personalities. All six interviewees had no problems opening up and telling honest and genuine stories to the interviewer. The answers may have been different regarding adaptation experiences if they were less active or were introverted.

Not all the top prestigious Korean universities nor all the faculty departments were represented. This might have decreased variety in the results and findings.

Long-term research was attempted, yet there was an issue of memory loss. On some questions, students showed difficulty in remembering the past vividly. At the same time, the students provided all the information in this study orally based on their memory only. The study could have been more insightful had there been other resources such as diaries or cross-referenced interviews from friends and professors to refer to in order to enhance credibility. Also, some of the interviewees had difficulty in remembering experiences of difficulties since they had become well-adjusted and adapted happily.

During the interviews, many interviewees pointed out that Chinese students with better language proficiency had a tendency to be happier, as it was easier to communicate and adapt in Korea. Five among the six interviewees were fluent enough in Korean to express all their emotions. Therefore, they may not have suffered from as many difficulties compared to those who spoke poor Korean.

This study was based on qualitative research. However, the findings may have been more insightful if a quantitative study was conducted as complementary measures.

Suggestions for Future Studies

The six interviews provided a good understanding of different cases, but a survey focused on a larger number of ATCS could give a broader scope of the research question. This would lead to better and more in-depth understanding of ATCS' decision-making processes,

adaptation processes and influential factors in general to complement this qualitative research.

This study was initiated to find a method to recruit ATCS to Korea, and the results displayed the distinctive characteristics of ATCS. This study can be a starting point for more studies which could be conducted to classify different clusters of ATCS and form separate strategies targeting them only. Moreover, each rational and emotional reason could be further researched along with how emotional reasons are stimulated either by external attributes or internal attributes.

At the same time, further studies could be conducted regarding the process of compromising in choosing alternative choices since it was very briefly dealt in this study.

Since major influential factors of ATCS were identified in this study, similar studies on other nationalities would be beneficial to form international student recruitment strategies targeting different countries.

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