

Examining The "Super-National Treatment" Of International Students in China: Current Situation, Reasons and Solutions

Dake Liu *

Department of Finance, Jiangnan University, 214122 Wuxi, China

* Corresponding Author Email: 1084210124@stu.jiangnan.edu.cn

Abstract. After the 1990s, globalization has developed rapidly, and the connections between countries have become increasingly closer. Since the reform of the market economic system, China has greatly deepened its openness. The government and major universities have also introduced a series of preferential measures to strongly support the arrival of international friends. Of course, whether these measures are appropriate and effective remains to be discussed. This article mainly discusses the issue of "super-national treatment" for international students in China. How do the Chinese government and universities treat international students? How's the effect? Why should they be treated according to the principle of "super-national treatment"? How should they be treated? Drawing on the experience of other countries, this article gives various reasons and suggestions based on different subjects such as the country, universities, and society. It is concluded that to solve the problems caused by "super-national treatment", it is fundamentally necessary to start from quality control.

Keywords: International students in China; "super-national treatment"; quality; reasons; solutions.

1. Introduction

In today's era of globalization, international students have become an extremely common group in schools. In some universities with a high degree of internationalization, the proportion of international students has even exceeded that of local students. The treatment of international students has naturally become an issue worth considering. Generally speaking, in order to attract talents, the government and schools will adopt a series of preferential measures. In many universities in China, the treatment of international students has far exceeded that of local students. In the context of reform and opening up, the "One Belt and One Road" initiative and the "Going Out" strategy, Chinese universities have taken measures to attract foreign students, improve their internationalization and promote their own development. This is understandable, but they have implemented "super-national treatment" for international students. In fact, it has caused a series of problems.

In China, scholars have paid attention to this issue more than ten years ago. However, until today, there are still few research documents in this area. The argumentation perspective is relatively single, only from the perspective of national and university policies. Some articles also analyze it from the perspective of Chinese culture, but do not combine economic, political, cultural and other perspectives to demonstrate the irrationality of super-national treatment. Since this problem is mainly concentrated in China, there is not much literature on this problem abroad. However, the research on the policies of international students in various countries is still relatively thorough, and it has a high reference value for the research on the issue of super-national treatment of international students in China.

First, this article will use the literature research method to describe in detail the current situation and impact of "super-national treatment" for international students in China. Then it will analyze the causes and essence of this phenomenon from the perspectives of economy, policy and culture. Finally based on China's actual situation, it will use the case analysis method to propose solutions through interpreting the foreign student policies of other countries.

2. The Current Situation of “Super-National Treatment” for International Students in China

2.1. The Meaning of Super-National Treatment

National treatment refers to giving a foreign citizen or enterprise the same treatment in civil rights as its own citizens within the territory of the country, excluding political treatment. National treatment is divided into three situations: treatment that exceeds that of nationals of one's own country, treatment that is equal to that of nationals of one's own country, and treatment that is lower than that of nationals of one's own country [1]. The super-national treatment discussed in this article refers to the treatment given to foreign citizens or enterprises that exceeds that of domestic citizens in terms of civil rights. This phenomenon of "super-national treatment" has almost become one of the principles for Chinese universities to treat international students.

2.2. Current Situation of International Students in China

As China's openness and education level steadily improve, there is a growing number of foreign students coming to China for further study. China has become Asia's first and the world's third largest study destination. As is shown in Figure 1, the number of international students in China in 2011 was approximately 300,000. By 2020, when the epidemic broke out, the number of international students in China had exceeded 520,000, becoming a pivotal group among college students. Among them, students from developing countries in Asia and Africa account for the vast majority because China's economic and educational levels are superior to their home countries. More importantly, the Chinese government and universities' preferential policies for international students are extremely attractive.



Fig. 1 Number of international students in China (Picture credit: Original)

2.3. Current Situation of “Super-National Treatment” for International Students in China

After the reform and opening up, in order to meet the needs of national development and achieve the internationalization of higher education, the Chinese government relaxed controls on studying in China, devolved the right to recruit foreign students to universities, At the same time, it promulgated the "Quality Standards for Higher Education for International Students in China" (Trial) and "Chinese Government Scholarship Management Measures", which will reward international students. The scholarship includes living expenses, tuition, accommodation fees and medical expenses, covering all aspects of life and study [2]. For example, Jiangsu Province has issued the "Study in Jiangsu

Action Plan" and established the Jasmine Study Abroad Scholarship, with the amount ranging from 48,000 yuan per year to 95,000 yuan per year.

Universities provide more comprehensive care for international students coming to China. Generally speaking, Chinese universities will provide international students with a hotel-style single apartment, tuition exemption, and a monthly subsidy of several thousand yuan, excluding scholarships and grants. Based on this calculation, foreign students who come to China to study can even earn a considerable income. In terms of academic performance, professors' requirements for international students are far lower than those for local students. No exam is required, and they can write less or even no homework to pass the course. The application threshold for international students is not high. They do not even need to pass the Chinese language test to study in Chinese universities. There are also some universities such as Shandong University that have established a "study buddy" system, which assigns a foreign student three local study companions to help them better adapt to China's academic environment and social circle and improve their Chinese proficiency and cross-cultural ability [3].

3. The Impact of "Super-National Treatment"

First of all, in terms of satisfaction, foreign students in China are generally satisfied with the Chinese government's scholarship policy and the treatment of universities. They recognize the school's help in their studies and life, but they think that the distribution and management of scholarships are slightly chaotic. In general, the implementation of the "super-national treatment" principle has received a good response among international students. To a certain extent, this has won a high reputation for China's education industry, attracting more international students to study in Chinese universities. Furthermore, the universities can cultivate more people who have knowledge of China, are friendly with China, and have adoration for China, enhancing foreigners' understanding of China to improve China's foreign relations.

However, "super-national treatment" has also caused a series of problems internally. The first thing to bear the brunt is the consideration of economic conditions. The government and universities provide such generous subsidies to international students that the income of many international students has far exceeded the income of ordinary Chinese, let alone Chinese students. Such a large expense is undoubtedly a considerable burden on the government's finances. In terms of social repercussions, the government and universities spend a lot of money and educational resources on foreign students, which violates the principle of fairness to a certain extent. It will also cause dissatisfaction among the public, especially domestic students, and may even dampen the enthusiasm of domestic students. Finally, there is the issue of the quality of international students. These measures taken by the Chinese government and universities may not be very effective in attracting real talents. Talents who really want to study abroad pay more attention to the school's teaching quality and learning atmosphere, not just these material and spiritual subsidies. Domestic universities are so lax in monitoring and cultivating the comprehensive quality of international students, and it may be difficult to attract high-quality international students. In fact, this is indeed the case. International students' overall quality is significantly inferior to that of domestic pupils. In terms of academic performance, most international students do not listen carefully to lectures and do not complete homework in time. In the end, they often rank at the bottom of their majors. In terms of cultural adaptation, a considerable number of international students have not actively adapted to China's legal and social environment. They still go their own way and bring their past bad habits to China. Crimes such as theft, robbery, rape, and drug abuse by international students occur from time to time, which has brought a series of unrest factors to Chinese society.

4. Reasons for the Implementation of “Super National Treatment”

The principle of "super-national treatment" has brought a series of negative impacts, but its implementation is actually based on international political considerations, the need for the reputation of universities and the origin of traditional culture. The following article will conduct an analysis from the three main subjects: the country, universities and society.

4.1. International Political Considerations

After the reform and opening up and the reform of the market economic system, China needs to integrate with international standards in all aspects. Due to domestic and diplomatic needs, China has gradually relaxed restrictions on international students in China [4]. At that time, China was in desperate need of development. Economically, it urgently needed to attract foreign talents to promote China's development and construction. Diplomatically, it needed to strengthen Sino-foreign exchanges to enhance China's international image and attract foreign investment into the Chinese market. Culturally, it needed to spread the Chinese nation Excellent traditional culture, increase the influence of Chinese culture and enhance China's soft power. Under such difficult conditions, in order to attract foreign students, implementing "super-national treatment" may be an inevitable choice. Today, the world is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century. In order to strengthen diplomatic relations and promote economic and trade cooperation, China has proposed the "One Belt, One Road" initiative. Therefore, to cooperate with this initiative and strengthen exchanges with countries along the Belt and Road, China's education industry needs to improve its internationalization and recruit more international students. In July 2016, the Ministry of Education of China issued the "Educational Action to Promote the Joint Construction of the Belt and Road Initiative", which ushered in a new era of China's educational reform and increased opening to the outside world. In terms of scholarships and subsidies, it is tilted towards students from the countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative. According to Data from China's Ministry of Education, students from countries co-constructing the "Belt and Road Initiative" account for more than 60% of international students in China. Providing more favorable treatment to students from countries co-building the Belt and Road Initiative also has geopolitical considerations.

4.2. The Need for University Reputation

Since the end of the last century, China has embarked on a massive movement to build world-class universities, mainly represented by the "985 Project" and the "211 Project". In the evaluation of world-class universities, the degree of internationalization is an important indicator. Therefore, Chinese universities, especially top universities, regard recruiting international students as an important task and an indicator that needs to be completed [4]. Compared with traditional prestigious universities in Europe and the United States, Chinese universities have certain gaps in terms of academic level and scientific research capabilities, but the bigger gap comes from the aspect of popularity: in terms of world rankings, the strength of many Chinese universities is actually greatly underestimated. In order to make up for this gap and snatch students from famous universities in other countries, Chinese universities need to provide better treatment. In fact, even the traditional elite schools in Europe and the United States offer a variety of scholarships and low tuition fees to attract high-quality international students.

4.3. Origin of Traditional Culture

Traditional Chinese culture has always paid attention to hospitality. Foreign students are guests coming from afar, so of course they must be treated with courtesy. Of course, this courtesy is not unconditional and unilateral. The Chinese government and universities implement "super-national treatment" for international students. At the same time, they also hope that foreign students can not only enjoy the courtesy, but also actively adapt to China's social and academic environment, study professional knowledge seriously and understand the excellent Chinese culture. After returning home,

they can become a bridge between China and its mother country. Or they will stay in China and contribute to China's development. This tradition of treating guests from afar played an important role in the exchanges between ancient China and neighboring countries. For example, during the Tang Dynasty, when Japan's "envoys to the Tang Dynasty" visited China to observe and study, they received high-level reception from the Tang government. After these people returned, they became an important force in the Sinicization of Japan. In modern China, it can more or less play a similar communication role [3].

5. How Countries Treat International Students

5.1. Australia

For Australia, the international education sector is an important part of its economy. As Australia's third largest source of export revenue, international education has brought substantial profits to Australia and tangible benefits to major educational institutions. Therefore, in the early stages of the development of international education in Australia, international students were regarded as "cash cows" by the Australian government and educational institutions. When studying in Australia, the benefits and subsidies international students can enjoy are extremely limited. "The Development of Australian International Education in the 1990s" clearly states that domestic students should be given priority in the allocation of educational resources.

Back in the 1990s, this narrow view of international students was criticized. Later, with the rise of neoliberal education, the role of international students in Australia changed significantly, from being regarded as "cash cows" to "consumers", "investors" and "technical workers". The Australian government and educational institutions have begun to pay more attention to the quality and experience of education, rather than the economic benefits that the international education industry can bring. Against this background, the Australian government has introduced a series of policies to protect the legitimate rights and interests of international students. For example, as consumers they have the right to lodge a complaint against an education provider. Concurrently, the government also recognizes the potential status of international students as "investors" and "technical workers." In the "Australian International Student Strategy (2010-2014)" and the "2025 National Strategy for International Education", international students are positioned as "investors" who hope to achieve long-term career development through education investment. International students are also regarded as "skilled workers", or potential immigrants, who can enhance social diversity, promote exchanges of different races and contribute to Australia's economic development [5].

5.2. United States

The United States is the largest gathering place for the world's top universities and has the largest group of foreign students in the world. Although the number of international students in the United States is far ahead of other countries, U.S. officials have not introduced a series of policies to attract international students. On the contrary, the U.S. policy on international students is highly politicized and is closely linked to national security and economic issues. After the "911" incident broke out, the United States introduced the "Patriot Act", which set the tone for the immigration policy in the 21st century to this day. This has also affected the recruitment of international students by colleges and universities to a certain extent. Although the U.S. government has changed several times in the past 20 years, and the Association of International Educators (NAFSA) has repeatedly lobbied the U.S. government, any legislation related to relaxing restrictions on international students has reached a deadlock [6]. After the Trump administration came to power, it adopted tough anti-immigration policies, including border control, refugee application restrictions, green card policy adjustments and crackdowns on illegal immigration. International students have also been greatly affected. Especially since the outbreak of the new crown epidemic, the living space of international students has been further compressed. For example, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced in July 2020 that due to the coronavirus discovered in the 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, Students at schools

that move to online education will not be eligible to retain their student visas and may be subject to deportation proceedings. But even such a strict policy has not stopped a large number of international students from going to the United States to study [7].

5.3. United Kingdom

The UK has a long history of education and has many famous schools. In recent years, the number of students studying in the UK has grown rapidly. However, the current policy on international students in the UK is ambiguous. First of all, the British government is currently gradually reducing national higher education funding. Therefore, British universities are more dependent on tuition fees, especially tuition fees from international students, which has led to the fact that tuition fees for international students have not been capped since the 1980s. Secondly, the British government aims to increase the number of international students, simplifying entry and graduation visa requirements, and providing additional funding to international students through scholarships. In terms of immigration policy, the British government implements a tiered visa system for international students. When introduced, international students have the right to work during their studies (20 hours per week during semesters and full-time during holidays), and students can apply for a post-graduation work visa for up to two years after graduation. The impact of such a system is primarily restrictive rather than encouraging. In fact, the UK wants to limit the number of immigrants through strict immigration policies and attract the "brightest and best" talents to stay. British policy is a contradictory state. They want to attract international students, but they also exclude immigrants [6].

Through the analysis of the international student policies of Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom, the three major destinations to study abroad, it can be seen that they attach great importance to the economic benefits and international talents brought to them by the international education industry. They will provide scholarships, protect the rights and interests of international students, and simplify visa and entry requirements, etc. Each university will have different methods to attract international students. But they are different from China in several points. First, these three countries all clearly put their own national interests and the education of local students first. To some extent, they even regard international students as a tool to promote their own economic development and promote their own values [8]. Secondly, the purpose and target of their scholarships are very clear, and they can effectively screen out outstanding talents. Finally, they pay more attention to attracting international students through high-quality educational services. This is the biggest difference between China's international student policies and theirs.

6. Suggestions on the Treatment of International Students in China

6.1. Raise the Threshold for International Students in China

At present, China's international education has gone through the stage of extensive development based on quantity and has initially established the reputation of higher education. Then the next step is to focus on improving the quality of international students coming to China. The most important thing to improve the admission requirements for international students is language proficiency. Nowadays, many Chinese universities recruit international students without even requiring students to have Chinese proficiency. For the international students themselves, this is not conducive to improving their understanding of China and will seriously affect their study and life. For the government and universities, recruiting such international students is essentially a waste of resources. Standards must also be raised in cultural achievements, practical abilities, cross-cultural abilities, etc. These are the reflection of the comprehensive quality of international students. In order to guide colleges and universities to raise the admission threshold, the government can organize experts to design the basic requirements for international students in China and establish a more specific indicator system, so that universities can formulate their own admission standards for international students according to the situation. After all, the standardization of enrollment is an important prerequisite for student quality assurance [9]. After students are recruited, they can study preparatory

courses in advance. The main purpose is to strengthen the adaptation of international students to Chinese society, rule of law, and culture, so that their academic performance and comprehensive abilities can be on par with local students. Only those who meet certain standards are eligible to enter the university.

6.2. Strengthen Social Management and Cultural Education for International Students

Although China is already a major country for overseas students in the world, international students still make up a minority among the overall students. Their learning efficiency, practical ability, and adaptability to the surrounding environment are often ignored by the universities that recruit them, resulting in a series of social and legal problems [9]. Some universities may pay too much attention to this issue, sacrificing the interests of local students to meet the needs of international students. Both views are undesirable. A more appropriate approach for colleges and universities is to establish and improve institutionalized and systematic education and management processes for international students and work hard on the quality of education. Some aspects should be managed according to the methods of Chinese students. For example, the two should not have too much difference in the academic performance and graduation assessment. They should also be treated equally in the school rules and regulations. Some aspects need to be treated differently, such as the regular opening of some courses on Chinese language, ancient Chinese culture, customs and etiquette and the current situation. Regular exchange activities also require to be carried out between Chinese and foreign students to promote exchanges between them on a voluntary basis. For such cases, consciously deepen international students' understanding of China's national conditions and excellent traditional culture, enhance their cross-cultural abilities and ultimately cultivate international talents who have a sufficient understanding of China [10]. For the government, it is also necessary to improve the Ministry of Education's assessment mechanism for the internationalization of universities to guide universities to establish an effective international student management mechanism.

6.3. Reform the Scholarship Evaluation System

At present, the scholarships and various subsidies provided by the Chinese government and universities to international students are too generous. Under the influence of the epidemic, China's economy has been in recession in recent years, and the incomes of ordinary people and civil servants have declined. If such high subsidies are still provided to international students as before, the national finance may be overwhelmed, which requires the government and Universities use this funding more efficiently. In fact, the government and universities also lack standards and levels in the distribution of scholarships. The management of scholarships is relatively chaotic, and international students do not even know how they get this subsidy. Therefore, when it comes to the issuance of scholarships and subsidies, both the government and universities need to have clear assessment standards, define basic subsidies and additional subsidies specifically for outstanding students and distribute them separately. The better the students, the higher the scholarships and subsidies they will receive. This can stimulate the enthusiasm of international students for learning and enhance the overall level of international students.

In general, to solve the problems caused by "super-national treatment" and improve the level of China's international education, it is fundamentally necessary to strengthen quality control, including the quality of education in colleges and universities and the quality of international students. The quality of education in colleges and universities has been widely recognized internationally, so China does not need to use "super-national treatment" to attract international students, and education funds can be used more efficiently. Only by establishing a series of screening mechanisms and assessment standards to make the selection and training of international students more transparent and traceable, can Chinese universities cultivate more outstanding international talents, which can further attract more outstanding international students to China for further study.

7. Conclusion

In the post-epidemic era, with the international situation tense and the domestic economy declining, the "super-national treatment" of international students in China has become an issue that cannot be ignored. Although the implementation of "super-national treatment" involves considerations of political, educational, cultural and other factors, but this principle has caused a series of problems, certain changes must be made to the treatment of international students. The government and universities must strengthen control over the quality and training programs of international students and use financial allocations more efficiently. This does not only involve one university or one country in China but is a worldwide problem. How to deal with the relationship between international students and the host country? How to attract international talents to serve the country? This is worth pondering.

References

- [1] Xu Jingwei. Some thoughts on the treatment of foreign students in China. *Legal Expo*, 2020, (14): 231-232.
- [2] Zhang Chuanjian, Ma Lichao. Evaluation of the implementation effects and governance strategies of the scholarship policy for international students in China. *Shanghai Education Evaluation Research*, 2023, 12(06): 19-23+40.
- [3] Li Xiaoyang. But the bright moon shines in the ditch-the "super-national treatment" of foreign students causes trouble. *Interpretation of social hot spots*, 2019, 198+200-209.
- [4] Wen W. Inbound international student policies in China: a historical perspective. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 2018, 7(2): 174-183.
- [5] Min H, Bob L, Ian H. Australian policy on international students: pivoting towards discourses of diversity. *Australian educational researcher*, 2022, 50(3): 21-22.
- [6] M. CS, Emma S. The politics of the great brain race: public policy and international student recruitment in Australia, Canada, England and the USA. *Higher Education*, 2018, 75(2): 231-253.
- [7] Joseph T M, Shannon W. Direct and Indirect Effects of Restrictive US Immigration Policies on Pharmacy Education. *American journal of pharmaceutical education*, 2021, 85(6): 8534-8534.
- [8] Yuting Z, Yu L. Higher Education for International Students in China: A Review of Policy From 1978 to 2020. *ECNU Review of Education*, 2021, 4(4): 873-889.
- [9] Zhou L, Alam M G, Rasdi M R. Marketing Strategies for Internationalization in China's Higher Education: An Ally or Barrier for Sustainable Development. *Sustainability*, 2024, 16(1).
- [10] Benjamin M, Wai Y W L. Learning to 'tell China's story well': the constructions of international students in Chinese higher education policy. *Societies and Education*, 2021, 19(5): 545-557.