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A Preliminary Study on the Alumni Work of International Students in Higher Vocational Colleges Based on the Satisfaction Survey

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Abstract: *This paper takes international student alumni affairs workers in universities and international student alumni in higher vocational colleges as the respondents. Through research and interviews, and combined with the actual work, it puts forward the challenges faced by international student alumni work in higher vocational colleges at present: low international activity, insufficient construction of international student alumni associations, and difficulties in long-term tracking of international student alumni. Through the satisfaction survey of international student alumni, the self-evaluation of international student alumni and the evaluation of their alma mater are analyzed, and three suggestions are proposed for the work of international student alumni in higher education institutions from the perspective of improving the effectiveness of talent cultivation and promoting Chinese and foreign humanistic exchanges: cultivating the Chinese sentiment and alma mater sentiment of international students, promoting the construction of international student alumni chapters and platforms, and improving the long-term communication mechanism of international student alumni work.*

Keywords: *Satisfaction survey; International students; Alumni work*

Introduction

Alumni work of international students is an extension of the cultivation of international students in colleges and universities, and an important embodiment of the international development of education in colleges and universities, serving the national "Belt and Road" initiative and the society. Optimizing the alumni work of international students can promote humanistic exchanges between China and foreign countries, contribute to the high-quality development strategy of "One Belt, One Road" and serve the construction of the community of human destiny. According to He Meiying and Zong Jing (2007), international students returning from their studies play an important role in political, economic and cultural exchanges, and the alumni liaison work carried out by foreign universities for international students is worthy of our reference. Wang Xia (2017) took the alumni associations of Tsinghua University, Zhejiang University and Sichuan University as examples and elaborated on the characteristics of alumni work of well-known universities in China.

Deng Wenjing (2018) elaborated the top-level design and specific measures of eight countries, namely, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore, in terms of alumni management of foreign students, from an international comparative perspective, to provide

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reference for the alumni management of foreign students in China. Sun Wen and Du Shaohao (2020) analyzed the legal characteristics of overseas alumni organizations in China's universities to provide a standardized basis and legal support for the construction and development of overseas alumni organizations. Sun Jun (2021) studied the development of alumni work in China since the reform and opening up, and concluded that the core of alumni work has evolved from the initial aim of developing resources for universities to the current goal of social contribution. Alumni work of international students in China has been paid more and more attention by alumni workers of universities and domestic scholars.

Current Situation and Challenges Faced By International Students' Alumni Work in Higher Education Institutions

The number of international students alumni in higher vocational institutions is often less than that in undergraduate institutions due to factors such as the setting of majors, the level of education and the degree of internationalization, and the development of international students alumni work in higher vocational institutions has started late. Especially for those higher vocational institutions that have started to recruit international students from countries along the "Belt and Road" in recent years, the alumni work of international students is still at the initial stage and faces a lot of problems and challenges.

Through research and interviews with international student alumni affairs workers, we found that currently some higher vocational institutions in Jiangsu Province do not have a special international student alumni association, and some universities have established international student alumni associations but carry out fewer alumni activities. The alumni work of international students in higher vocational institutions is currently facing the following challenges: the number of outstanding international student alumni is small and they are not very active internationally; the construction of international student alumni associations in higher vocational institutions is incomplete, the development is uneven among schools, and there is a big gap with undergraduate institutions in the quantity and quality of alumni; it is difficult to follow up international student alumni in the medium and long term, and there is no long-term mechanism for alumni work.

Questionnaire and Analysis of Alumni Satisfaction of International Students

This survey was conducted for the alumni of Suzhou Vocational University who have graduated from the Belt and Road program in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The content of the questionnaire mainly refers to the evaluation of the graduates of Suzhou Vocational University in the annual employment quality report of the class of 2020 (Chinese local students); the questionnaire consists of two parts: self-evaluation and evaluation of the alma mater; the questionnaire is designed in English and subjective questions are added appropriately in order to collect more feedback and suggestions for improvement.

The questionnaires were distributed through "Questionnaire Star", and 50 valid questionnaires were collected in total. The alumni who participated in this questionnaire survey came from the majors of Mechatronics Technology, Automotive Testing and Maintenance Technology, Applied Electronics Technology and Visual Communication Design and Production. Through the comparative analysis of the satisfaction of international

students and Chinese students, we found that the attitudes of Chinese and foreign alumni towards the overall satisfaction, recommendation, learning environment, curriculum and teaching, living service and student management of their alma mater are relatively similar, which reflects the consistency of the evaluation of their alma mater by Chinese and foreign alumni. There are some differences in the "content to be improved", and there are two views on "learning environment" and "student management".

Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation includes an analysis of learning in school and satisfaction with one's development.

The percentages of international student alumni actively participating in classroom learning discussions and actively participating in extracurricular learning and practice are 84% and 70%, respectively. The main extra-curricular support that international student alumni would like to see from their alma mater is to provide more practical opportunities (78%), and the main practical activities that they think will help their personal growth and development are corporate practice (50%) and on-campus practical training (44%). International students are 94% satisfied with their development and believe that their abilities have been improved mainly in terms of their understanding of Chinese culture (66%), Chinese language proficiency (58%), professional knowledge (52%) and professional practical skills (38%). 32% of international students believe that their intercultural skills, organizational discipline and time management skills have also been improved.

Song Wei, Yan Xinfeng, and Liu Chunhong (2014) conducted a questionnaire survey on foreign student alumni in Shanghai and found that the main reason for international students to stay in China after graduation was to benefit their career development, and international student alumni believed that China was developing rapidly, had many employment opportunities, and could apply what they had learned in China and gain work experience. This questionnaire survey found that 70% of international student alumni are willing to stay in China for further study or employment. It is inseparable from their yearning, identification and love for China. After studying and living in China for one year or more, international students are attracted by China's technological development, manufacturing technology, convenient transportation (airplane, high-speed rail, subway), online shopping, beautiful and clean environment and good security, and are impressed by the richness and versatility of Chinese culture and the warm, friendly, diligent and united qualities of Chinese people, so they are willing to stay in China for further study or employment.

Evaluation of Alma Mater

The evaluation of alumni of international students on their alma mater consists of three parts: overall evaluation, evaluation of education and teaching, and evaluation of management services. The overall evaluation includes satisfaction with and recommendation of the alma mater. The evaluation of education and teaching includes the evaluation of the learning environment, satisfaction with course teaching and the perceived need for improvement in course teaching. Evaluation of management services includes satisfaction with student management, satisfaction with living services, and perceived areas for improvement in student management and living services.

1. Overall Evaluation

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The overall satisfaction level of international student alumni with their alma mater and their recommendation of their alma mater are 92% and 80%, respectively. Satisfaction with the learning environment at their alma mater is 94%, and the most important aspect of the learning environment at their alma mater that needs improvement is to provide more opportunities for exchange and study at home and abroad (34%), followed by more extracurricular learning activities (e.g. seminars, academic presentations, competitions, etc.) (32%) and more elective courses (32%), with 30% choosing the need to create a good learning atmosphere.

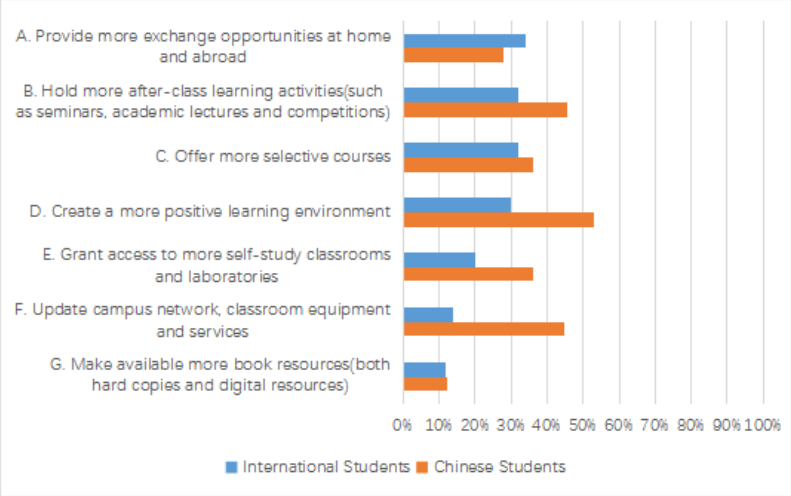


Figure 1. Perceived areas for improvement in the learning environment at their alma mater

It is worth mentioning that Chinese students consider that "more opportunities for exchange and study at home and abroad" is 27.90%, just before "more books and materials" (12.38%). (The data of 2020 graduates are all from the "Survey on Employment of Graduates from Jiangsu General Universities in 2020") International students in China want to have more opportunities to exchange and study at home and abroad than Chinese students because they come from various countries and come to an intercultural environment, so they naturally want to have more opportunities to exchange and study with people from other countries, while Chinese students have relatively fewer opportunities to go abroad for exchange and study while they are studying in school.

2. Evaluation of Education and Teaching

The satisfaction rate of international student alumni with their alma mater's curriculum is 94%, and the most important area for improvement is "providing more teaching experiments and practical sessions" (66%), followed by "enhancing classroom interaction" (28%) and "improving teachers' teaching ability and level" (20%), while "updating course content" and "improving the standard and reasonableness of course assessment" are both at 18%. Suggestions for course teachers mainly included improving teachers' teaching ability and English teaching level, and increasing one-on-one tutoring after class. Some international students suggested that the teaching management should strengthen the supervision of the teaching situation, set up suggestion boxes in classrooms and collect students' opinions every week to ensure that each student's opinion is not ignored and that the problems reflected by students can be solved in a timely and effective manner.

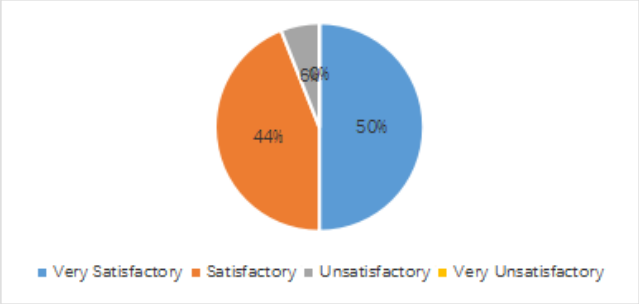


Figure 2. Satisfaction with teaching in the curriculum of the alma mater

Regarding corporate internship, 26% of the international students did not have corporate internship experience (mainly those who came to China with academic qualifications), and among the 74% of international students who had corporate internship experience (mainly those who studied in school for one year or one and a half years and had corporate internship), 58% were satisfied with corporate internship in general, while 16% of international students were not very satisfied with corporate internship. Among the feedback on teaching and corporate internship, international students alumni made many suggestions, such as increasing practical teaching sessions and providing corporate internship opportunities for all students as much as possible, so that they can also learn about Chinese corporate culture and working atmosphere. Some alumni also suggested that they would like to have the opportunity to continue their internship in overseas branches of Chinese companies and continue to attend the online courses of the school after finishing their studies.

3. Evaluation of Management Services

International student alumni were 96% satisfied with the student management of their alma mater, and the most important areas for improvement in the student management of their alma mater were the provision of financial aid and work-study (60%), followed by club activities, extracurricular activities and holiday social practice (50%), and mental health education and services of the student work department at the university level (32% and 28% respectively).

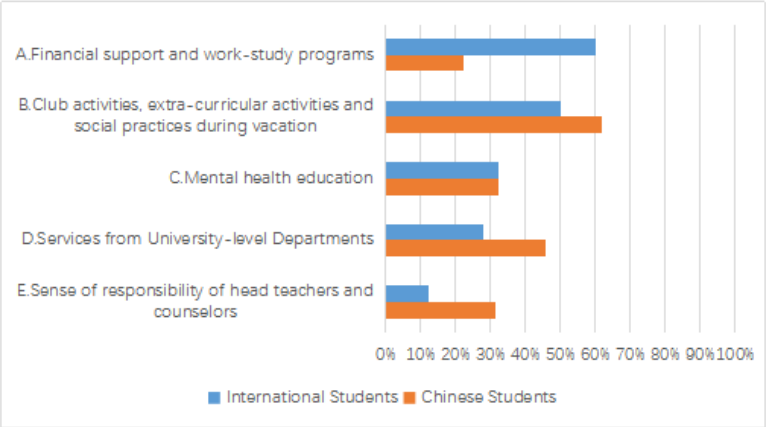


Figure 3. Perceived areas for improvement in student management at their alma mater

International student alumni were 98% satisfied with the living services of their alma mater, and the area that they felt needed the most improvement was the dormitories (50%), followed by the cafeteria (36%), and the laundry and university infirmary at 26% and 22%, respectively. International students believe that the

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dormitories need to be regularly painted and disinfected on a regular basis, the laundry equipment should be updated, the cafeteria menu should be changed on a regular basis, it would be better to provide a kitchen for them to cook their own food, and they hope that the university infirmary will improve its outpatient services.

Measures and Suggestions for Alumni Work of International Students in Higher Education Institutions

Under the guidance of the higher authorities, based on the advanced concept of alumni work and alumni work experience at home and abroad, with the support and cooperation of the government, school, enterprises and society at all levels, combined with the questionnaire survey of international students alumni, evaluation of employers and the actual situation of the school, the alumni work of international students in higher education institutions can be promoted from the following specific approaches.

Cultivating Positive Feelings for China and Alma Mater Affection Among International Students

Alumni work runs through the whole process of talent cultivation in universities. The study experience of international students during their study period directly affects their satisfaction with their own development and evaluation of their alma mater. Before the international students leave the university, the outstanding international students graduates are selected, and the international students alumni liaison members are selected and awarded certificates. After returning to their home countries, international student alumni still have strong feelings for China and their alma mater, consciously maintain the international image of China, establish the brand awareness of the university, promote their alma mater to those who intend to study in China, and play a role in the field of international exchange and cooperation and university recruitment.

While international students are in school, their alma maters should improve education, teaching and management services; improve teaching management mechanisms and scholarship systems; promote the construction of English-taught courses and online teaching platforms; reasonably arrange teaching practice and internship sessions, supervise teaching practice and international students' evaluation systems, reflect the characteristics of higher education institutions and focus on the effectiveness of talent cultivation. International students join Chinese student associations or set up new associations and clubs to enhance their sense of belonging and happiness on campus. Include Chinese culture courses in the curriculum, introduce Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions, deepen their knowledge and identity of Chinese culture, and cultivate international alumni who know China and are friendly to China, alma mater plot and alumni awareness.

Promote the Construction of International Student Alumni Associations and Platforms

The 2020 Annual Meeting of Foreign Student Education and Management Research Committee of Jiangsu Higher Education Society clearly put forward seven initiatives for foreign student education and management in Jiangsu in 2021, the seventh of which is to conduct research on the construction of international student alumni associations and promote universities to focus on improving the effectiveness of international student education and cultivation. These seven initiatives put forward clear requirements on the quality of enrollment

work, quality of education and cultivation, quality of online teaching and quality of student management work, and the seventh article specifically emphasizes the construction of international student alumni association, which points out the direction for the improvement of quality and efficiency of international student cultivation and the construction of alumni association in Jiangsu universities.

The department in charge of international student management and the university development office and alumni association work together to accelerate the establishment and update of the international student alumni information database. The institutions of higher education that have not yet established international student alumni associations actively promote the construction of international student alumni associations and establish international student alumni associations, build alumni association websites and international student alumni communication platforms in accordance with Chinese laws and regulations, the constitution for the establishment of alumni associations and the guidelines for the establishment of international student alumni chapters. The activities of international student alumni should be carried out within the legal framework to ensure the institutionalization, systematization, legalization and informatization of the management of international student alumni chapters.

Improve the Long-term Communication Mechanism of International Students' Alumni Work

Through international student alumni chapters and alumni network platform, quarterly or annual alumni activities and webinars are held to implement the concept of lifelong learning and long-term service mechanism, strengthen the contact between the alma mater and international student alumni, and carry out collaboration and communication in education, research and culture. According to the discipline (knowledge system) and industry (industry and job competence) of each major, outstanding international student representatives and distinguished alumni are invited to return to the university or through the online platform to provide guidance and assistance to current international students. Through special lectures, university-enterprise cooperation, corporate lectures, job fairs and corporate internships, we provide academic and career guidance and training for international student alumni to promote their better employment. Pay attention to the career development of students after employment, the correlation between the knowledge and skills acquired in school and the needs of career development, etc., and implement various improvement measures.

Zhang He (2016) compared the development line and direction of alumni surveys in five countries, namely, the UK, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany and the US, in different socio-cultural environments since the last century, to explore the experiences and insights that can be learned. Tang Xianwen (2018) proposed that colleges and universities also need to conduct research on the development of different industries and talent needs of international students' host countries and regions, and implement them into the talent cultivation of international students in colleges and universities. Higher education institutions can carry out surveys on the employment situation and satisfaction of alumni including Chinese students and international students at the school level, and use a combination of questionnaires, interviews, corporate feedback, and mediumand long-term follow-up observations to comprehensively grasp the overall talent cultivation quality of the school, the quality of enrollment and employment work, and the career development of the alumni group. Strengthen the liaison with international student alumni and improve the medium and long-term tracking service mechanism

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of international student alumni development.

Concluding Remarks

The cultural background, education, purpose of study, Chinese language level, cross-cultural experience and cross-cultural adaptation ability of international students coming to China all have an impact on self-evaluation and evaluation of their alma mater. Therefore, the satisfaction survey or employment survey for international student alumni can be more systematic and comprehensive in questionnaire content design and more scientific and standardized in survey analysis instruments. The interview and questionnaire data of this study are small, and the collection of questionnaires through WeChat has certain limitations. In the future, emails, phone calls, SMS, letters, school websites, alumni publications, alumni communication platforms, etc. can be chosen to carry out a comprehensive use of questionnaires, interviews, corporate feedback and medium and long-term follow-up observations.

In 2018, the Ministry of Education's Quality Standards for International Students in Higher Education (Trial) proposed that international student education should "gradually realize the convergence of teaching and management of Chinese and foreign students" and "promote the convergence of management and services for Chinese and foreign students". Huang Hua and Ma Rong (2019) argued that the convergence management of international students in higher education institutions is currently facing challenges, and "higher education institutions should insist on adhering to Chinese sentiment and global vision in convergence management". Considering the different cultural backgrounds, Chinese language levels and cross-cultural experiences of international students coming to China, they should also improve the cross-cultural awareness and ability of international student managers and international student alumni affairs workers, innovate the ideas and methods of international student alumni work, and deepen the convergent management and research of international student alumni work.

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