

Chapter 13

Conclusion

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Abstract This concluding chapter identifies a series of common themes discussed across the previous chapters in this book. We follow the life cycle of international students, from the time they begin considering their options for studying abroad to the time they complete their studies. What students seek prior to arrival is a high-quality education and a global experience. Both goals are contingent upon successful integration into American universities, which is the focal inquiry of the second section. This section provides empirical evidence for the academic and social challenges that Asian international students experience, as well as some innovative solutions and strategies suggested by faculty and administrators to support international students. These innovative strategies also exemplify the spirit of the two-way street of learning between American universities and Asian international students. The final section looks ahead, after graduation. In sum, this book highlights that there is a lack of knowledge about and institutional support for international students from Asia. Thus, we hope that this book can inspire higher education institutions to make positive changes to the international student experience.

This book starts with a central thesis: Learning should be a two-way street between American universities and Asian international students, but in reality, a one-way adjustment and adaptation on the part of international students often prevails. This study underscores the significance of two-way learning, not just for Asian international students but also for American students. In particular, some American students come from highly segregated high schools, and for them, college may be the first environment where they meet many students unlike themselves, including foreign students. This lack of exposure to diversity makes two-way learning even more imperative for American students. All the chapters presented in this book feature the

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voices of Asian international students, insights into their experiences, and knowledge about them, so that American universities can learn about and from them, to truly live up to the global learning goals that these international students aspire to and that American universities preach about.

The criticism that internationalization at American institutions of higher education focuses more on revenue than on providing support to international students is not new. What is lacking is a sense of the real experiences and knowledge of international students; the journey that they go through is barely understood. This book provides an in-depth account of international students from Asia who decided to come to study in the U.S. and then reflected on their experiences here in America. The voices that we hear throughout these chapters can inform administrators and educators and help them to design environments and interventions that address the problems highlighted by the authors.

As we analyze the content of these chapters, we find a series of common themes. In this conclusion, we highlight these, following the structure of the book, from the time when the students are considering their options for studying abroad to the time when they complete their studies.

Prior to Arrival: Seeking High-Quality Education and Global Experience

The chapters in this section focused on the processes prior to studying abroad and revealed what international students and their parents look for from their study abroad experiences. They highlighted two major goals that students and their families seek: a high-quality education and a global experience. They view American higher education as the embodiment of both.

For many of these students, a high-quality education is hard to obtain at home, and thus they are looking for alternatives abroad. Several Asian countries, including China, India, and South Korea, have a gruesome, test-oriented educational system, which culminates in the college entrance examination. Students often feel stressed and ill-suited to the educational system in their home country, and they think there are more educational opportunities in America. However, they are often not familiar with the educational system there. Due to their unfamiliarity with, and uncertainty about, the American educational system, Asian international students and their parents often resort to rankings for help. The problem with focusing so much on this metric is apparent. American universities that are not always on the top of the list have to reach out more to international students to let them know the uniqueness of their institutions. Chapter 2 indicates that close to 40 percent of respondents indicated that their parents initiated the idea of study abroad. As such, reaching out to parents in Asia could be an effective way to disseminate information about American universities and help Asian international students make informed decisions. This will become increasingly important as American universities experience greater competition from other universities at home and abroad in attracting international students.

There are other factors that students consider when selecting a university and a program. For many of them, going to the U.S. might be an opportunity to change an educational and career trajectory. This is especially the case for Asian international students, who initially may have been pressured by their parents into a STEM field. As Chapter 3 has shown, they are looking for opportunities to complement their undergraduate degrees or expand beyond them. Universities could therefore emphasize the flexibility of their programs and the opportunities they afford to get students into new fields that really meet their interests and satisfy their needs.

We often assume that international students are wealthy. For some, this is the case. However, it is deeply problematic to assume that international students are uniformly wealthy. As shown in Chapter 3, many Indian students, have contracted loans to pay for their education, which is a source of anxiety for these students. Chapter 4 also shows that Chinese students are well aware that they are unlikely to get financial aid, and the anticipation that their family will have to pay for everything is a great challenge and source of stress for them. Merit-based scholarships are extremely limited for international student, who are often not eligible for need-based scholarships. If American universities could provide greater support for some of these less financially able students, we could diversify international students by socioeconomic status and potentially increase the quality of the international student body.

Another common theme in these chapters is the students' desire for a global experience. Chapter 3 employed the concept of cosmopolitan capital to describe the desire of female Indian MBA students for knowledge about global business trends and access to colleagues and alumni from across the globe, and they think American universities are the best place to achieve this. In a similar vein, Chapter 4 showed that prospective Chinese students enthusiastically anticipate being international citizens through their study abroad. However, this goal is not necessarily within reach, and Chinese students expressed concern that some universities already enroll too many Chinese students, which makes it challenging to interact with students from different backgrounds to have a real global experience. University leaders want to make sure that their campuses are indeed diverse but, more important, that they should develop programs and experiences that can deliver on the global learning the Chinese students came here for. Chapter 4 suggested having Asian Americans act as cultural bridges between Asian international students and other American students, due to their shared cultural ancestry to a certain extent. This would require universities to have more synergistic activities that would enable connections and collaborations among different units.

In sum, what students are seeking prior to arrival is a high-quality education and a global experience. Both goals are contingent upon successful integration into American universities, which is the focal inquiry of the second section. Without successful social integration, the initial goals of gaining a quality education and a global experience will be compromised.

While on Campus

This section provides empirical evidence on the academic and social challenges that Asian international students' experience, as well as some innovative solutions and strategies suggested by faculty and administrators to support international students. These innovative strategies also exemplify the spirit of the two-way street of learning between American universities and Asian international students.

Language and cultural barriers are omnipresent for international students, especially for those from non-English-speaking countries. Korean students struggle in the classroom, but this is also a problem for students from China, as mentioned in various chapters in this section. These language barriers have ripple effects on the students' experiences at multiple levels, both academically and socially. Students are keenly aware that they tend to be passive and quiet in the discussion-oriented American classroom, which negatively influences their academic performance. Chapter 10 reported that Chinese students are aware of this challenge, so they try to avoid writing-intensive courses.

As much as international students are aware of these challenges and barriers, faculty and staff are not sure how to cope with them. For example, Chapter 10 mentioned a faculty survey at Michigan State University that showed that only 24% of the faculty felt prepared to teach and evaluate international students, and 66% were interested in learning how to do this better. As Chapter 7 shows, Korean students reported that their professors were not aware of the linguistic and cultural challenges they faced but concluded instead that the students had not worked hard.

Once they become aware of the challenges that these talented students face as they pursue their studies, universities need provide greater support to faculty to help them handle these challenges. For example, universities need provide their instructors with classroom techniques to help international students understand writing, class, and teamwork expectations and encourage assignments that allow for collaboration between domestic and international students. Chapter 5 provided a great example of a semester-long ethnographic project, in which pairs of East Asian international students and American students teamed to explore each other's culture. As a result, students gained cultural knowledge, and stereotypes of Asians were replaced by more differentiated views. Chapter 9 detailed how professors capitalized on students' multilingual and multicultural resources to facilitate teaching and learning. As one of the professors remarked in an interview, they were "teaching to their [students'] strengths." The significant space given to students' own languages and cultures encouraged them to make meaningful connections between the subject matter and their own cultural backgrounds. These strategies may not be appropriate for all courses; nonetheless, they show respect for, and recognition of, Asian international students' cultural and linguistic assets. This is especially needed, because, as Chapter 8 reported, even in elite MBA programs in the U.S., where learning about and enacting globalization remain one of the core program missions, Asian international students find little appreciation for the knowledge they bring with them. This reveals the deep-seated institutional expectation of one-way learning.

Therefore, as reported in Chapter 9, the American faculty's efforts to recognize the knowledge and assets of international students are nothing short of a paradigm change, from one-way learning to two-way learning.

Academic challenges aside, social challenges are sometimes more personal and defining. Given that acquiring global experiences is one of the cornerstone goals of studying in the U.S., as reported in the first section, achieving this goal is no easy feat. Asian international students report that they often lack a sense of belonging, as shown in Chapters 7 and 8. For example, Chapter 8 reported on a study of Chinese students in elite American MBA programs, who are supposed to be more motivated than other international students and socialize with diverse friends, as this is a key global skillset and part of their learning goals. However, Chinese MBA students experience a loss of voice and status: from being elites to outsiders. This is because they have reached high academic and social status in their own countries, but when they get to an American classroom, they soon begin to feel inadequate. This sense of inadequacy results from, and is reinforced by, the expectation that learning is one-way, and they have little to contribute to the learning of American students. Sometimes, discrimination could only exacerbate this sense of inadequacy. Without conscientious efforts on the part of institutions to prevent it, discrimination against international students, based on national origins, can prevail. Chapter 6 described the struggles of Pakistani graduate students to challenge and negotiate the negative constructs surrounding their national and religious identity within the context of the War on Terror. The author argues that these students experience the Duboisian notion of double consciousness in viewing their contested identities from the host culture's perspective. These chapters all call for proactive institutional efforts to facilitate teamwork and promote social interchanges between international and domestic students.

Students experience extends beyond campus; their lives revolve around other spaces in the community as well. In Chapter 10, we learned about the many changes that happened in Lansing to accommodate the needs of the high number of Chinese students who were suddenly attending the university. Clearly, economic factors were a driving force, as these students became important consumers. The changes, as we saw in that chapter, were not entirely harmonious. This chapter highlighted how universities could try to forge collaborations with the community to prepare them for a greater influx of international students.

After Graduation

The last two chapters of the book looked ahead after graduation, addressing international students' plans for the future regarding whether to stay in the U.S. or return to their home country and featuring alumni as they reflect on the extent to which their American education prepared them for the job market. Both of these are highly significant issues, yet they remain largely understudied.

Chapter 11 examined the expected stay rates among doctoral international students from China, India, South Korea, and Taiwan. The stay rates are phenomenally high, especially among Chinese and Indian students; however, it is worthy of note that they are all doctoral students. Similar national data on master's or bachelor's degree earners among international students are lacking. International doctoral students are predominately in STEM fields, and with the shortage of American domestic students in STEM, and the availability of research and academic opportunities in the U.S., international doctoral students' stay rates are likely to be higher than those of lower-degree earners. However, it entails quality national and longitudinal data to confirm this. Although the stay rates among Chinese and Indian doctoral students are high, Chapter 11 also noted that the trend is declining, driven by students' home countries' active efforts to attract talent back home.

Chapter 12 provides a rare examination of how well international alumni felt their studies in an American university prepared them for a job in the U.S. The questions revolve around the soft skills they acquired. It is of particular interest whether, and to what extent, they have overcome the cultural and language challenges they experienced while at college. The findings in Chapter 12 showed that, while they do feel they acquired some of these skills, they also believe they could have been better prepared, not surprisingly, in communications and conflict resolution and in knowing how to define clearer goals and develop stronger social capital. This is not surprising, as we saw in the previous chapters that many international students face challenges to their integration into campus social life. This is really an acute issue, as it not only influences international and domestic students' social experiences but also dampens international students' career opportunities later.

Chapter 12 documented a leadership program that has had a positive impact on international students' perceived preparation for their current job. In addition, such a program can be a great opportunity for a university to begin to develop closer relationships with its international alumni, which is often a population neglected by professionals working in alumni relations. This proves to be increasingly unfortunate, as the international student population is on a steady increase and as these students take on increasingly important roles, both domestically and globally.

In sum, this book highlights that there is a lack of knowledge about, and institutional support for, international students from Asia. Thus, we hope that this book can inspire higher education institutions to make positive changes to the international student experience and, better yet, to develop long-term relations with international students as alumni. These students have walked a path toward the U.S., and we should build a path toward them as well.