

## The Influx of Chinese International Students and Impact on U.S. Private Secondary Schools

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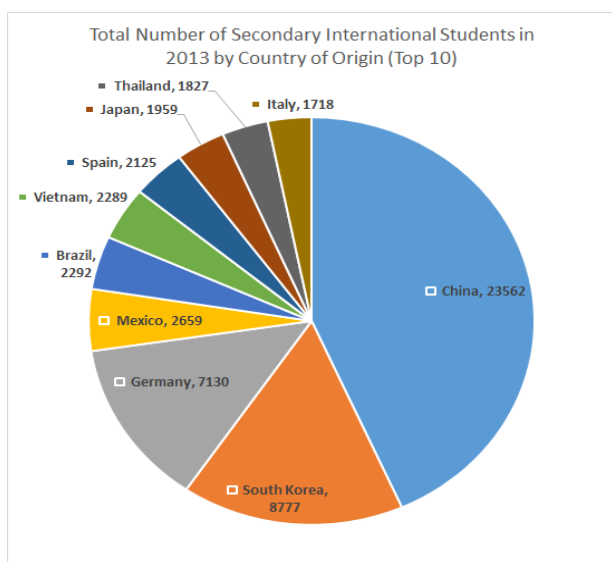
**Abstract:** There are a large number of Chinese international students pursuing secondary education in U.S. private schools in recent years. This research is a timely study focusing on the current phenomenon of the influx of Chinese international population in the U.S. private secondary education. It explores what benefits the Chinese international students have brought to these institutions and investigates what challenges occur at these schools due to the influx of these students from the perspectives of admissions and dorm residence administrators/staff as well as classroom teachers. It collects diverse thoughts from personnel of these schools as well as discusses what some good practices are. It offers tentative suggestions to U.S. private secondary schools hosting significant numbers of Chinese international students.

**Keywords:** Chinese international students, U.S. private schools, influx, benefits, challenges

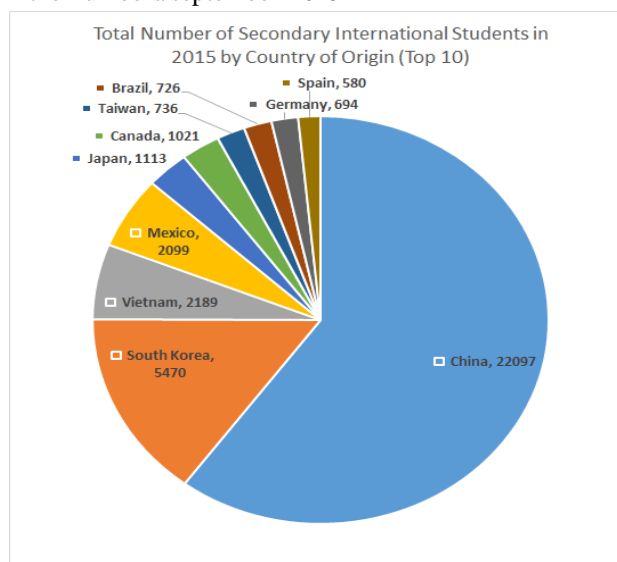
### I. Introduction

With the Chinese economy rising, the pressures for Chinese secondary students and their parents from “Gaokao” (The National Higher Education Entrance Examination in China), the benefits of studying abroad (broaden horizons, better job opportunities, etc.), and various other reasons, there are a significantly outstanding numbers of Chinese youth studying abroad in the United States each year for the past decade ([http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/college\\_bound/2014/07/international\\_students\\_drawn\\_to\\_us\\_high\\_schools.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/college_bound/2014/07/international_students_drawn_to_us_high_schools.html)). As shown in Pie Chart 1, there were 23,562 secondary international students from China in 2013. While Chinese students represent a much larger overall percentage of the top 10 countries of origin comparing to 2015, as is evident in Pie Chart 2, the total number of secondary students from China slightly decreased to 22,097 in 2015.

**Pie Chart 1: Total Number of Secondary International Students in 2013 by Country of Origin (Top 10)** NOTE: This pie chart is created for this research based on data from Institute of International Education--Charting New Pathways to Higher Education: International Secondary Students in the United States



**Pie Chart 2: Total Number of Secondary International Students in 2015 by Country of Origin (Top 10)** NOTE: This pie chart is created for this research based on based on data from the official website of the Department of Homeland Security <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/sevis-by-the-numbers/september-2015>



Most of these Chinese international students were/are studying at the U.S. private secondary schools as Chinese parents are aiming to have their children study in higher ranking U.S. universities with their beliefs that private secondary schools could better prepare their children for that path (<http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/01/26/464427108/in-california-a-growing-group-of-chinese-teens-are-coming-to-american-high-school>), despite private schools being far pricier than public schools (<http://www.moneycrashers.com/private-vs-public-school-cost-comparison/>). Also, there are more visa restrictions for international students seeking to study at public secondary schools as they must limit the length of their stay to one year and also pay the full cost of attending public school as well (<https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/study-exchange/student/foreign-students-in-public-schools.html>).

As stated in the abstract, this research emphasizes the phenomenon of the influx of Chinese international population in U.S. private secondary institutions. It is an ongoing research project and there are two phases that have been completed at this point. In the first phase, the research focuses on four private boarding institutions from four different regions in the U.S.: the Northwest, Midwest, Northeast, and Southeast (shown in Table 1.). In this phase, I, the researcher, was able to collect data from some admissions administrators/staff from all four of these schools (Table 2) as well as the dorm residence administrators/staff from three out of four schools (Table 3). In the second phase, the research was extended to include one more private boarding school located in the U.S. northeast region (Table 1.). The researcher was able to reach out to the Academic Dean at this school in addition to some teachers working closely with international student populations in a couple of the previous schools located in the Northwest and Midwest regions from phase one (Table 4).

**Table 1: School Overview (Five Private Institutions)**

Research Conducted Phase	Region of the School Located in the U.S.	School Type	Total Number of Students in the School	International Students in the School	Chinese International Students in the School	Annual Tuition Rate
Phase 1	Northwest	Private, Non-Religious, 6-12 <sup>th</sup> , Boarding	510	(9-12 <sup>th</sup> ) 72 (from 16 countries)	(9-12 <sup>th</sup> ) 57	\$58K
Phase 1	Midwest	Private, Non-Religious, Pre-K-12 <sup>th</sup> , Boarding	350	(6-12 <sup>th</sup> ) 82 (from 11 countries)	(6-12 <sup>th</sup> ) 50-55	\$47K
Phase 1	Northeast 1	Private, Non-Religious, 9-12 <sup>th</sup> , Boarding	430	93	23	\$42K
Phase 1	Southeast	Private, Previously religious-influenced, Pre-K-12 <sup>th</sup> , Boarding	1,250	(7-12 <sup>th</sup> ) 200 (from 60 countries)	(7-12 <sup>th</sup> ) 95	\$55K
Phase 2	Northeast 2	Private, Non-religious, 9-12 <sup>th</sup> , Boarding	150 total 9-12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	25% of 150 (~38 students) (From 10 countries)	75% of the Int'l population (~28 students)	\$57K (plus ESL Program fee of \$6K)

**II. Methodology**

Thus far, the two phases in this research have been utilizing qualitative semi-structured interviews. In phase one, four admissions personnel were interviewed from four private schools in four different regions (Table 2) along with three dorm personnel from three of these schools (Table 3). The researcher had previous

contact with the admissions personnel from these four schools and invited them to participate in the interviews. With their help, the researcher was able to get in touch with dorm personnel in three of the four schools. The reason for choosing admissions administrators to interview is that they are the first point of contact for international students and handle international students' admissions, paperwork, and serve as a point of contact between the school and the students' families. Also, as the international students are far from their home countries and families, usually live on the school campuses, and are minors under the age of 18 (generally from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade), the dorm staff members are in charge of their residential life and oversee international students outside of the classrooms.

Research and research procedures were approved by Human Subjects beforehand. Prior to the interviews, consent forms were signed by each interviewee to ensure that their identities would not be released. Six out of the seven interviews were conducted via phone as there was a long distance between the researcher and the schools and there was only one interview conducted in-person. Tables 2 and 3 present the demographic information of the seven interviewees in phase one, such as the job title, race, gender, and years of work experience in education as well as their institutions.

**Table 2: Interviewee Demographics (Admissions administrator/staff from four out of five of the listed schools in Table 1) NOTE: Interviews conducted in phase one in spring 2016**

Region of the School Located in the U.S.	Pseudonym	Job Title	Race & Gender	Years Working in the Field of Education	Years of Working at Current School
Northwest	James (in-person)	International admissions advisor	White Male	Starting late 90's	8 years (starting in 2008)
Midwest	Melissa (via phone)	Director of Upper School Admissions	White Female	12 years	2 years
Northeast 1	Rosina (via phone)	Director of Admissions	White Female	12 years	12 <sup>th</sup> year
Southeast	Jacob (via phone)	Dean of Admissions	White Male	18 years	2.5 years

**Table 3: Interviewee Demographics (Dorm administrator/staff from three out of five of the listed schools in Table 1) NOTE: Interviews conducted in phase one in spring 2016**

Region of the School Located in the U.S.	Pseudonym of the Teacher	Job Title	Race & Gender	Years Working in the Field of Education	Years of Working at Current School
Northwest	Rachael (via phone)	Residential Coordinator	Asian Female	4 years	1 year
Midwest	Sam (via phone)	Director of Residential Life	White Male	16 years	3 years
Northeast 1	Natalie (via phone)	Director of Residential Life	White Female	15 years	1 year

In order to get broader views and better understand the impact of the influx of Chinese international students, phase two of the research aimed to interview some teachers who work with international students closely in the classrooms from the four aforementioned schools. However, there were only a total of six teachers from two (Northwest & Midwest) of the four previous institutions who responded and agreed to be interviewed. Fortunately, there is an academic administrator who is also a teacher from another private secondary school (not one of the four discussed in phase one) in the Northeast region (referred to as Northeast 2 in Tables 1 & 4) who agreed to be interviewed. Therefore, there were a total of seven teachers from three different private schools in three different regions interviewed. Table 4 shows race, gender, subjects and grade levels taught, years of teaching experience, as well as years taught at their current institutions, and some statistics of the student numbers in their classroom. Combining phases one and two, up to this point, there are total five private schools that this study has been able to reach out to (refer to Table 1).

**Table 4: Interviewee Demographics (6 Teacher from three out of five of the listed schools in Table 1) NOTE: Interviews conducted in phase two in summer 2016**

Region of the School in the U.S.	Pseudonym of the Teacher	Race & Gender	Subject & Grade Level Taught	Years of Teaching Experience & No. of Years at Current School	Average No. of Students per Class	Average No. of Int'l Students per Class	Average No. of Chinese Students per Class
Northwest	Valerie (via phone)	White Female (moved to the U.S. at a young age)	<u>11<sup>th</sup> Grade:</u> Humanities (all students); <u>9-10<sup>th</sup> Grades:</u> Humanities (ESL)	14 years; 6 <sup>th</sup> year	15-20 Students	15% of total students	75% of Int'l Students

Northwest	David (via phone)	White Male	<u>11<sup>th</sup> Grade:</u> Humanities; Social Science; Comparative literature	8 Years; 8 <sup>th</sup> year	15-20 Students	9-10 <sup>th</sup> : 0 11 <sup>th</sup> : 1-2 12 <sup>th</sup> : 4-5	90% of Int'l Students
Northwest	Steven (via phone)	White Male	<u>9-12<sup>th</sup> Grades:</u> Theater; <u>11<sup>th</sup> Grade:</u> Social Studies; History Literature; <u>12<sup>th</sup> Grade:</u> Law & Society (Elective)	20 years; 17 years	15-20 students	2-3 Int'l students in average; 6 in the given year	80%-85% of Int'l Students
Midwest	James (via phone)	White Male	<u>9-10<sup>th</sup> Grades:</u> Intermediate American Studies; <u>11-12<sup>th</sup> Grades:</u> Social Science; American Government; Economy; Ethics	47 Years; 7 <sup>th</sup> Year	10 students	50% of total students	90% of Int'l Students
Midwest	Grant (via phone)	White Male	<u>9<sup>th</sup> Grade:</u> World Literature; <u>11<sup>th</sup> Grade:</u> American Lit; <u>Senior seminar:</u> English	12 <sup>th</sup> year; 4 <sup>th</sup> year	10-12 students	50% of total students	75-90% of Int'l Students
Midwest	Melody (via phone)	White Female (Moved to the U.S. at a young age)	11-12 <sup>th</sup> : English; Philosophy; AP English; American Lit.	11 years; 9 <sup>th</sup> year	5-12 students	30-40%, sometimes 50%; but 0-1 in AP English, at most 2	Majority
Northeast 2	Sally (via phone)	White Female	Academic Dean & <u>9-12<sup>th</sup> Grades:</u> History	36 Years; 28 years (also the 12 <sup>th</sup> year as academic administrator)	9-12 students	15% of total students (3-4)	75% of Int'l Students (2-3)

### III. Findings

#### From Interviewing Admissions Administrator/Staff and Dorm Administrator/Staff:

##### 1. Benefits from Chinese International Student Population

Financially

- International boarding student tuition is over \$40,000 per year on average, which adds more to the school's budget as private schools are usually tuition-driven.
- Helps the local economy as these international students shop often at local businesses, sometimes purchasing luxury products.

Culturally

- Adds to the diversity on campus and the local community and helps promote multiculturalism and cross-cultural communication on campus and the local community.
- Encourages all student populations to become global citizens.
- Some schools have curriculum drawn from Chinese students' backgrounds.

**2. Challenges from the Large Number of Chinese International Student Population**

Parents' Expectations:

- Excessive Chinese student populations on campuses make Chinese parents concerned that too many Chinese peers dilute the American experience. On the other hand, some American parents start to question why there are so many Chinese international students.
- Many parents pay top dollar for their children to study in the U.S. and automatically expect that their children will be able to attend an Ivy League or other top-notch university, which is not realistic.

Integration:

- Chinese students feel more comfortable with other Chinese peers in the American classrooms, so they intend not to step out of their comfort zone and become "segregated", making it more difficult to integrate with the American domestic students.

Misconduct:

- When it comes to misconduct, some international students typically tend to break a school's general rules. Other countries may not have particular rules, such as a dress code, being punctual, turning off the lights after dark, or social media infractions. In addition to the above, Chinese students are also sometimes caught smoking or cheating on a test/plagiarism.

Peer Pressure:

- Other Asian students (from Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, etc.) feel that there is a struggle with the overwhelming Chinese culture and feel that their cultural identities are being overlooked.

Students' Hesitant to Share Anxiety & Learning Disabilities:

- Some Chinese students who have anxiety and/or LD (Learning Disability) are too nervous to seek out help from the school.

**From Interviewing Classroom Teachers:**

**1. Benefits from Chinese International Student Population in the classrooms**

- Eye-opening opportunities for domestic students.
- Adds to diverse conversations with different perspectives in classroom discussions.
- Teachers could also learn new knowledge from international students through what they share in the class or individual meetings with the teacher.
- New ways to learn about China and Chinese culture from the Chinese international students.

**2. Challenges for teachers in teaching and/or classrooms from the influx of the Chinese International Student Population**

Institutional "miss" perceptions:

- One teacher expressed that "international" teachers are "stigmatized" institutionally or considered "lower" as they are teaching "ESL".
- A teacher critically pointed out that some of his colleagues consider international students less academically competent.
- Another teacher boldly expressed that his institution's claim of diversity at some level is not far enough especially when speaking of integrating and engaging international students.

Plagiarism/Academic Honesty Behavior:

- Compared to other international students, Chinese students tend to have more issues with "borrowing" without citing the sources. Also, there are cases in which Chinese students copy each other's answers when doing assignments. Most teachers do not want to generalize but almost every single teacher interviewed reported such issues.
- A few teachers understand that Chinese students were taught to have "perfect" answers through memorization of "proved" sources under the Chinese education system. In the beginning of their study in the U.S., even when Chinese students were caught with plagiarism, they did not realize the seriousness of this kind of misconduct until being educated multiple times or disciplined based on school policy.

Gender Related Study Habits/characteristics of Chinese International Students:

- Most teachers tried to not make generalizations and stress that each student is different. In fact, more than three teachers noted that Chinese female students are more motivated to learn than Chinese male students. Comparatively, Chinese male students have less self-control due to parents being far away in China and play more computer games in their spare time.
- In the beginning when first coming to the U.S., Chinese female students tend to be more "shy" than



Chinese boys in class discussions but very expressive in written assignments. A teacher suspects that this might relate to how girls and boys are educated differently in Chinese culture.

Different Classroom Participation/Engagement Styles of Chinese International Students:

- Usually in the beginning, Chinese students seem to be quieter. They do engage with teachers, but usually non-verbally in the beginning. For example, they will look at the teacher's eyes and nod in agreement; they will constantly take notes, but will be very hesitant to share opinions verbally and voluntarily unless being called upon.

Interactions between Domestic Students and (Chinese) International Students:

- Teachers usually have to group Chinese and domestic students; otherwise, international students and domestic students will just sit with people from their own culture. If there were more Chinese students in the classroom, they would tend to speak Chinese to each other.

#### **IV. Discussions and Reflection**

In this particular research, I noticed that most of the female teachers only share positive examples when asking about the challenges they face in the classrooms; in contrast, male teachers are more open to talking about challenges. There is no intent to make any gender assumptions, but it seems to be the trend when interviewing participants who are teachers.

Moreover, 90% of teachers being interviewed in this study are very conscious not to make generalized statements. They usually would add "I try not to be generalized...", "If generally speaking...", "I don't want to make a generalization..." before making claims. Additionally, almost all interviewees seem to more often refer to their colleagues' examples or examples from what they've heard but are less likely to share their own examples when discussing challenging experiences. However, when discussing positive experiences, the interviewees are more likely to share their own instances.

Besides, when interviewing administrators who are Deans or Directors, they are very careful about their wordings when answering questions. In addition, when asking the administrators that I have interviewed in the research to refer some other staff or teachers to be interviewed, most of these administrators chose either not to respond or indirectly refuse to make such a referral.

What's more, a couple of female teachers reported that they immigrated to the U.S. at a young age. One of them is more empathized and understandable of international students' challenges and situations, while the other teacher is more critical and strict with international students as she claimed that "if I can do it, you can do it." Furthermore, multiple teachers labeled ESL classes as "sheltered" courses. I was wondering what kind of implication was behind this term, which I should have clarified with them. But I was afraid my question might offend my interviewees or stop them from further sharing, so I did not seek clarification.

Additionally, the researcher's positionality is very important and I believe it is necessary to let the interviewees know what positionality the researcher is taking in order to get more authentic answers from the interview participants. For example, through contacting interviewees via email with my picture attached to the email address and with part of my name being "Chinese", a few of my interviewees assumed that I might be an "international" student myself, so they were only sharing positive experiences when discussing Chinese student related issues as they might have concerns about my feelings. Therefore, in my later interviews, I had to clarify that I am not an international student but an immigrant from China and emphasize that I appreciate if they could be critical when discussing related issues despite the fact that I was from China.

Last but not least, building rapport with interviewees is very essential and it is important to ensure interviewees that the research is confidential and their personal information will not be released in order to have them feel that it is safe to share opinions.

#### **V. Limitations & Next Steps**

After analyzing and comparing all the data, I, the researcher, realized the interview participants shared more challenges than benefits of this influx, which struck me to wonder that there might be possible biases as these administrators, staff, and faculty were mostly White, monolingual, and coming from a middle class SES background. If I were to interview a more diverse pool of participants, for example, school employees who are racial minorities and/or speak another language in addition to English, I might receive different feedback. Also, if I were to interview Chinese international students and listen to their perspectives, I may better understand this phenomenon with a more holistic view. Therefore, I plan to recruit administrators, staff, and faculty who come from diverse backgrounds in the aforementioned schools as well as their Chinese international students and interview them to collect broader data for further analysis.

#### **VI. Conclusion & Tentative Suggestions**

Due to the exceeding numbers of Chinese international students in U.S. private secondary schools, most of these schools, which are well-established in Chinese markets, are trying to reduce the numbers of Chinese students and are making efforts to open new markets to recruit from other countries in order to keep the

international student population more diverse. Thus, this study suggests that in the upcoming years, the percentage of Chinese international students will still be more outstanding than the international populations from other countries; however, the total enrollment numbers of Chinese international students will most likely be decreasing year-by-year to a certain degree. In spite of this potential trend, with the current stage of the influx of Chinese international students in U.S. private secondary institutions, there are some tentative recommendations to offer in order to help schools better handle this phenomenon.

Towards Multicultural/Global Curriculum:

- Schools should emphasize multicultural curriculum rather than having international students adapt “purely American perspective” curriculum or separate ESL and domestic students by following different curricular, so that both international and domestic students are included in the same curriculum.
- Multicultural/global curriculum can be formal as a lesson plan or informal as instructional strategies, which means its format can be flexible. For example, teachers can have a set-up written curriculum geared towards both international and domestic students; but they can also utilize international students’ experiences or perspectives as live curriculum and strive for both international and domestic students to exchange thoughts and reflect as well as compare their own and their peers’ viewpoints in classrooms.

Towards the Large Number of Chinese International Students:

- Admissions intentionally decreasing the numbers from mainland China and trying to recruit more international students from other countries in order to make the international population more balanced and the entire population more diverse.

Towards Integration & Engagement:

- Teachers should recognize different engaging and interactive styles of international students, especially in the beginning stage when international students enroll in American classrooms. Teachers should be patient and give international students time and space to adapt to American classroom and campus styles.
- More cultural events for both international students and domestic students to create more opportunities for them to engage with each other instead of just clubs merely seeking participation by international populations.
- Rather than forcefully having domestic and international students talk to each other, schools could develop some cultural context or discover common interests of both groups. For example, have both domestic and international students play video-games, watch popular movies, surf online and seek out certain topics, play sports together, etc.
- Inviting international students to be present at faculty meetings, to have their voices heard.
- Providing more volunteer opportunities for international students to get them more involved and recognize their accountability. For instance, encouraging international students to serve as dorm or library assistants.

Towards Common Misconduct:

- Schools should introduce academic-cultural differences at orientation and introduce school rules as well as consequences for misconduct, such as the dangers of plagiarism and the importance of citation and paraphrasing.
- Teachers in classrooms should occasionally emphasize to students that plagiarism is unacceptable and explain why the cited texts should be given credit rather than just “copying & pasting” without indicating the sources.

If these suggestions are pursued, there might be some positive changes in the ways that international students interact with others, as well as some positive changes in student conduct and overall student life experiences. I also believe that schools are capable of achieving improved interactivity between domestic and international students as long as an effort is made to do so. This would benefit all students and the overall campus atmosphere, so schools should boost their efforts in providing an environment to students that encourages multiculturalism and inclusion of all student populations.

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